Understanding Child Development

Every child is different, but children of the same age have many things in common. If you know some of the ways in which children grow, develop, and learn, you will be better able to respond to children, plan your day and arrange your environment for play and learning. It helps to know that toddlers have difficulty sharing or that swear words and “bathroom humor” are common for a 4-year-old.

Development follows a pattern

There is a certain pattern to how children develop. For example, children first learn how to roll over, then how to sit up. They learn how to creep and crawl before they learn how to stand and walk. And then of course, they are ready to learn how to run, hop, and skip! It all follows a predictable order.

Children develop at different rates

But even though development follows a specific pattern or order, the timing of each new skill may vary. For example, some children learn to walk early at 9 months, while others may start walking at about 12 months old.

Sometimes children move more quickly or more slowly through different developmental areas. For example, they may be an early crawler, but slow to talk.

Individual differences

Personality influences development too! Some children are more active and outgoing. Others are timid, shy, and more cautious about trying new things. Some children are easily distracted or frustrated. And you will find that some need very little encouragement, while other children will need a lot of support.
When you have a concern

Supporting children’s development also means being their advocate. There may be times when you suspect that a child is not developing as they should. When you have a concern, it is important to discuss your observations with parents and refer them to specialists and resources that can help. Immediate intervention can make a tremendous difference for a child. In Iowa, families can request a free evaluation and assessment from Early ACCESS. With parent or guardian permission, you may also make a referral to Early ACCESS on the child’s behalf.

Early ACCESS
1-888-425-4371
www.iafamilysupportnetwork.org/early-access-iowa

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICE

Developmentally Appropriate Practice or DAP is a term you will hear often in the early care and education field. It means that we try to use activities and practices that are suitable for a child’s age or stage of development.

For example, young children don’t like to sit still and they have a very short attention span. If we follow developmentally appropriate practice, we use activities that allow them to move around and learn through “hands-on” play. And we avoid large group story times and activities where children have to sit for a long time.

Find information about specific developmental milestones from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Search for “Ages and Stages” at our Extension Store.

store.extension.iastate.edu

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