

Developmental Milestones: 12–36 Months

You and Your Foster Child

Children go through many changes from ages 12 to 36 months, and no two toddlers develop at the same pace. One toddler may reach a milestone early, another later. Infants born prematurely tend to reach milestones a little later.

It is also not unusual for toddlers to regress in one skill or another from time to time. Around age 2, for example, sleep problems may develop from certain fears, such as being afraid of the dark.

Use these milestones as a general guide. What matters most is that your toddler progresses from one stage to another at a fairly steady pace. Reaching a milestone earlier or later usually does not indicate whether a toddler will be advanced or delayed later in life.

Milestones during ages 12–36 months

The following is a general guide to some basic milestones for physical, cognitive, language, and social and emotional development reached during ages 12–36 months.

12-24 months

Physical development milestones:

- A toddler's teeth will come in quickly.
- Toddlers are able to crawl faster and better.
- They can pull themselves up and stand while holding on to furniture, and they can get back down on the floor themselves.
- They like to take objects from one place to another.
- Toddlers can sit in a chair that is their size.
- They like to use crayons and markers, and they use their entire arm to color.
- They are able to feed themselves with cutlery and cups, but they are messy.

- They can stack two to four blocks.
- They are able to remove a few articles of clothing.

Cognitive development milestones:

- Toddlers like to play games that involve finding hidden objects.
- They like to look at picture books and can identify things in the pictures.
- They engage in behavior that shows knowledge about the purpose of household objects. For example, they might use a fork to pretend to eat.
- They can label objects.
- They demonstrate an understanding of shapes.
- The show early problem-solving skills, trying out different solutions to problems.

Language development milestones:

■ Toddlers use one word to mean a whole sentence, such as "kitty" to mean the cat jumped on the sofa. Later, they start using two words to mean a whole sentence.

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- They are able to follow short directions, such as, "Please get your cup."
- They pay attention to the person speaking to them.
- They can point to at least three body parts when asked where they are.
- They have a spoken vocabulary of 25–50 words that adults can understand. They understand another 5–50 words that are used often.
- They begin to understand greetings and manners when prompted, such as "Hi," "Bye," and "Please."
- They begin to understand the give and take of conversation.

Social and emotional milestones:

- Toddlers have less stranger anxiety and become more open to new people.
- They will play by themselves for brief times.
- They give their caregivers affection.
- They play alongside—but not with—other toddlers.
- Their budding independence results in resistant behaviors. They tend to want to do things themselves.
- They may begin to throw tantrums, especially when they are hungry or tired.
- They are increasingly interested in new things. This can lead to dangerous activities, such as wandering off and climbing.

25-36 months

Physical development milestones:

- Most teeth have come in, including some molars.
- Toddlers are able to run easier and better with fewer tumbles.
- They are able to walk backwards.
- They can walk upstairs without help, but they take one stair at a time.
- They drink well from a cup, use a straw, and feed themselves with a spoon.
- Some toddlers show an interest in learning to use the toilet during the second year, but they still might have accidents.
- They can wash their own hands.
- They are able to grasp a cup, unbutton and unzip clothing, and are better able to hold markers and crayons.
- They can stack four to six blocks.

Cognitive development milestones:

- Toddlers start to engage in symbolic play. For example, they might take an empty paper towel roll and pretend it is an airplane.
- They can sort things by class. For example, a toddler can put farm animals in one pile and toy cars in another.
- They are able to play by themselves a little longer.
- They explore cause and effect, such as pulling a dog's ears makes it growl.
- They understand where people are and comment on the fact that they are away. For example, "Mommy is at work now."
- They are able to inform their caregiver when something hurts and where it hurts.

Language development milestones:

- Toddlers take more pleasure in reading if it is interactive—naming animals, for example, or turning the pages.
- They understand that language is essential to getting what they need.
- They can name most of their toys.
- They have a vocabulary of about 50–300 words and quickly learn new ones.
- They understand more words than they can speak, which can be frustrating and result in some stuttering speech.
- They make longer, fuller sentences and are understood about 70 percent of the time.
- They use "I" and "me" when referring to themselves.
- They frequently ask questions to learn about the things around them.

Social and emotional development milestones:

- Empathy emerges, such as when toddlers understand the emotions of others and respond appropriately. They may try to comfort a caregiver, for example.
- Their limited verbal skills may result in continued displays of aggression and tantrums when they are upset.
- They have difficulty waiting and taking turns.
- They are able to help with simple chores, such as setting or clearing the table.
- They understand when their caregivers are pleased or displeased with them.
- They are still protective of their belongings and are not completely ready to share.
- Toddlers have difficulty choosing between options and often want both.
- They have a high level of negativity and often use the word "no."
- They are very routine oriented and like things to be arranged in a certain order.

When to seek professional help

Remember, these milestones are a general guide. Some toddlers reach them early, some later, and not all toddlers will show all of the behaviors on the lists. However, you should consult with your child's pediatrician or other health care professional if you observe:

- Your toddler does not achieve a majority of the milestones within a reasonable period of time after the end of a stage.
- Your toddler suddenly stops making consistent progress over several weeks.

Pediatricians and other health care professionals can diagnose developmental delays if present and suggest the appropriate steps to take. It is important to intervene early to improve the outcomes of toddlers who do have developmental delays.

