

Watch Me Grow!

Narrator: Let's talk about one of the little miracles of being human. Have you ever noticed how quickly children grow and develop? One day, we have them nestled in our arms and, just a few months later, they're already crawling.

During their first three years, children grow and develop more rapidly than at any other time of their lives. As we watch them grow, it's fascinating to see how each child develops in their own individual way. And at this stage in the life of a child, the parents and the environment that surrounds them play an important role in their social-emotional development. Interactions inside and outside of the home allow children to learn the customs, values, and language of their own culture. To help them along their individual paths, we need to understand how they develop.

Let's talk about two important principles of child development. The first principle is that development follows a predictable and gradual sequence. The second principle is that development proceeds from the simple to the complex. Sound complicated? It really isn't. Let's talk about this in more detail.

Okay, the first principle: growth and development follows a predictable, gradual sequence. Development typically follows a predictable order, and in general, we can predict this order or sequence. For example, babies learn to hold themselves up with their arms when they're on their tummies before they learn to roll over. They learn to roll over before they sit and they sit before they crawl and they crawl before they walk. All this development happens gradually, little by little.

Every child's development doesn't follow the same rhythm, just like there are no two children who are exactly the same. Some children walk at a year and others at 18 months. Here, we can see an 8-month-old who seems to prefer holding himself in a standing position than crawling. Babies show us their preferences at an early age. Every stage of the child's development is based on the one that comes before. Each skill is built on others.

For example, let's look at gross motor skills; that's using the large muscles that help you move around. A baby begins to build and gain control of the muscles of their head and neck. And later, they develop the muscles in their backs that allow them to turn from side to side while staying seated or pull themselves forward; and then, control of their legs and arms to crawl and walk. Each step of development emerges from what came before.

When we talk about child development, we often refer to different developmental domains, or areas of development. These domains are: physical development, growth and development of the body; social-emotional development; cognitive development, which is brain development and the ability to think and reason; and then, language development.

While each domain has a different name, it's important to remember that you really can't separate them from one another. They're all interrelated. For example, a baby begins to push a larger rolling toy because he's strengthened the muscles in his legs, but also because he understands that he can make something happen. In this case, physical and cognitive development are related.

Development doesn't progress at the same rhythm or pace in all domains simultaneously. A 9-month-old child might crawl all over the place in an infant classroom, but not make many sounds while playing

with other friends or adults. They're making great gains in the motor area while moving at a different pace in the language domain. Another same-age child might already be using the words "Dada," "Mama," "no," but not be crawling. They're enjoying themselves just being seated. Even though it doesn't seem like it, these two children likely have similar and typical development, despite their differences.

So, we've talked about the first principle, that development typically unfolds in a way that is predictable and ordered and that all areas of development are interrelated. Now, on to the second principle. Okay, the second principle: growth and development proceed from the simple to the complex. An example? Well, a child will learn to pick up a block with one hand before learning to stack various blocks to make a tower. To illustrate, let's talk about fine motor development, tasks that require a more delicate set of controlled movements.

During the first month of life, a baby has their fists closed. Approximately two months later, they discover their hands and begin to observe them; and later, they attempt to reach for things. Later, they use their hand and palm to pick things up and, eventually, they bring things to their mouth or pass them from one hand to another. Finally, they'll refine this ability, beginning to use their thumb and forefinger in a pincer grasp to pick up very small things, like a piece of corn. And when you least expect it, they'll be picking up everything they find in their path. These simple abilities will later serve as the foundation for activities like picking up a puzzle piece or using a pencil or eating with utensils.

Life is full of change, and small children change constantly and develop day by day. "Typical" development simply refers to what a majority of children do at an "expected" age. We can use the basic principles of child development to better understand what we can expect to see as a child develops, helping us to have reasonable expectations for each individual child. Remember, each child develops in their own way and each baby is unique.