

# Childhood

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will learn how to explain the key stages of childhood development in four parts:

## 1. Physical Development

In infancy, toddlerhood, and early childhood, the body's physical development is quick. On average, newborns weigh between 5 and 10 pounds, and a newborn's weight typically doubles in six months and triples in one year. By two years old the weight will have quadrupled, so a two-year-old should weigh between 20 and 40 pounds. The average length of a newborn is about 20 inches, increasing to 30 inches after one year and 35 inches by two years old.

The size of our brains increases rapidly, too. For example, the brain of a two-year-old is 55% of its adult size, and by six years old the brain is about 90% of its adult size. During early childhood (ages 3 to 6), the frontal lobes grow rapidly. Remember, the frontal lobes are associated with planning, reasoning, memory, and impulse control. By the time children reach school age, they are developmentally capable of controlling their attention and behavior. Through the elementary school years, the frontal, temporal, occipital, and parietal lobes all grow in size. The brain growth experienced in childhood tends to follow Piaget's sequence of cognitive development.

Motor development also occurs in an orderly sequence. Infants move from reflexive reactions (e.g., sucking and rooting) to more advanced motor functioning. For instance, babies first learn to hold their heads up, then to sit with assistance, and then to sit unassisted, followed later by crawling and then walking.

---

## 2. Cognitive Development

Just as there are physical milestones that we expect children to reach, there are also cognitive milestones. It is helpful to be aware of these milestones as children gain new abilities to think, problem solve, and communicate. For example, infants shake their head "no" around 6 to 9 months, and they respond to verbal requests to do things like "wave bye-bye" or "blow a kiss" around 9 to 12 months.

Remember Piaget's ideas about object permanence? We can expect children to begin to grasp the concept that objects continue to exist even when they are not in sight by around eight months old. Because toddlers (i.e., 12 to 24 months old) have mastered object permanence, they enjoy games like hide-and-seek, and they realize that when someone leaves the room they will come back. Toddlers also point to pictures in books and look in appropriate places when you ask them to find objects. This is what the **problem solving skill** looks like

early in life.

Preschool-age children (i.e., 3 to 5 years old) also make steady progress in cognitive development. They make some decisions on their own, such as choosing an outfit to wear. They also begin to enjoy the humor in stories. Because they can think symbolically, they enjoy pretend play and inventing elaborate characters and scenarios. One of the most common examples of their cognitive growth is their blossoming curiosity. Preschool-age children love to ask “Why?”

An important cognitive change occurs in children this age. Between three and five years old, children come to understand that people have thoughts, feelings, and beliefs that are different from their own. Children can use this skill to tease others, persuade their parents to purchase a candy bar, or understand why a sibling might be angry. This is the **self and social awareness skill** in early development! Cognitive skills continue to expand in middle and late childhood (6 to 11 years old). Children at this age understand concepts such as the past, present, and future, giving them the ability to plan and work toward goals. However, children’s attention spans tend to be very limited until they are around 11 years old. After that point, it begins to improve through adulthood.

---

## 3. Attachment

Psychosocial development occurs as children form relationships, interact with others, and understand and manage their feelings. In social and emotional development, forming healthy attachments is very important and is the major social milestone of infancy. Developmental psychologists are interested in how infants reach this milestone. They ask such questions as: How do parent and infant **attachment** bonds form? How does neglect affect these bonds? What accounts for children’s attachment differences?

A famous study done with monkeys showed that feelings of comfort and security are the critical components to maternal-infant bonding, which leads to healthy psychosocial development. This led to the idea of the **attachment theory**, or the affectional bond or tie that an infant forms with the mother. An infant must form this bond with a primary caregiver in order to have normal social and emotional development. In addition, the research suggested that this attachment bond is very powerful and continues throughout life. To form this attachment, the caregiver must be responsive to the child’s physical, social, and emotional needs; and the caregiver and child must engage in mutually enjoyable interactions.

Researchers identified three types of parent-child attachments: secure, avoidant, and resistant. The most common type of attachment—also considered the healthiest—is called **secure attachment**. In this type of attachment, the toddler prefers his parent over a stranger. The attachment figure is used as a secure base to explore the environment and is looked to in times of stress. Securely attached children have caregivers who are sensitive and responsive to their needs.

With **avoidant attachment**, the child is unresponsive to the parent, does not use the parent as a secure base, and does not care if the parent leaves. The toddler reacts to the parent the same way she reacts to a stranger. When the parent does return, the child is slow to show a positive reaction. It’s possible that these children have a caregiver who was insensitive and inattentive to their needs.

In cases of **resistant attachment**, children tend to show clingy behavior, but then they reject the attachment figure’s attempts to interact with them. Resistant attachment is the result of the caregivers’ inconsistent level of response to their child.



### TERMS TO KNOW

### Attachment

A long-standing connection or bond with others.

### Attachment Theory

The affectional bond or tie that an infant forms with their mother.

### Secure Attachment

The preference of a child for a parent over a stranger.

### Avoidant Attachment

When a child shows no preference for their parent.

### Resistant Attachment

When the child is physically clingy but rejects interaction.

---

## 4. Self-Concept

Just as attachment is the main psychosocial milestone of infancy, the primary psychosocial milestone of childhood is the development of a positive sense of self. How does self-awareness develop? Infants don't have a self-concept, which is an understanding of who they are. If you place a baby in front of a mirror, she will reach out to touch her image, thinking it is another baby. However, by about 18 months a toddler will recognize that the person in the mirror is herself.

Children from 2 to 4 years old display a great increase in social behavior once they have established a self-concept. They enjoy playing with other children, but they have difficulty sharing their possessions. By four years old, children can cooperate with other children, share when asked, and separate from parents with little anxiety. Children at this age also exhibit autonomy, initiate tasks, and carry out plans. Success in these areas contributes to a positive sense of self. Once children reach six years old, they can identify themselves in terms of group memberships: "I'm a first grader!" School-age children compare themselves to their peers and discover that they are competent in some areas and less so in others.

Development of a positive self-concept is important to healthy development. Children with a positive self-concept tend to be more confident, do better in school, act more independently, and are more willing to try new activities.



### Self and Social Awareness: Skill Reflect

Think back to your childhood. When do you remember developing self awareness? How has that skill developed since then?



### SUMMARY

In this tutorial, you traced some of the **physical development** and **cognitive development** that occurs during childhood. In particular, you considered how young children form **attachment** to their caregivers and how older children develop their **self-concept**.

Good luck!

Source: THIS TUTORIAL WAS AUTHORED BY SOPHIA LEARNING. PLEASE SEE OUR [TERMS OF USE](#).



## TERMS TO KNOW

### **Attachment**

A long-standing connection or bond with others.

### **Attachment Theory**

The affectional bond or tie that an infant forms with their mother.

### **Avoidant Attachment**

When a child shows no preference for their parent.

### **Resistant Attachment**

When the child is physically clingy but rejects interaction.

### **Secure Attachment**

The preference of a child for a parent over a stranger.