

onwards. It may even clasp on to her fur with its hands while it is still in the process of being born. In our own species, by contrast, the newborn is helpless and can only make trivial movements of its arms and legs. Not until it is one month old can it, without assistance, raise its chin up off the ground when lying on its front. At two months it can raise its chest off the ground. At three months it can reach towards suspended objects. At four months it can sit up, with support from the mother. At five months it can sit up on the mother's lap and can grasp objects in the hand. At six months it can sit up in a high chair and successfully grasp dangling objects. At seven months it can sit up alone without assistance. At eight months it can stand up with support from the mother. At nine months it can stand up by holding on to furniture. At ten months, it can creep along the ground on its hands and knees. At eleven months it can walk when led by the parent's hand. At twelve months it can pull itself up into a standing position with the help of solid objects. At thirteen months it can climb up a set of stairs. At fourteen months it can stand up by itself and without supporting objects to help it. At fifteen months comes the great moment when, at last, it can walk alone by itself, unaided. (These are all, of course, average figures, but they act as a good rough guide to the postural and locomotory rates of development in our species.)

At about the point where the child has started to walk unaided, it also begins to utter its first words a few simple ones at first, but soon the vocabulary blossoms out at a startling rate. By the age of two the average child can speak nearly 500 words. By three it has tripled this figure. By four it can manage nearly 1,600 and by five it has achieved 2,500. This astonishing rate of learning in the field of vocal imitation is unique to our species and must be considered as one of our greatest achievements. It is related, as we saw in Chapter One, to the pressing need for more precise and helpful communication in connection with cooperative hunting activities. There is nothing like it, nothing even remotely approaching it, in other closely related living primates. Chimpanzees are, like us, brilliant at rapid manipulative imitation, but they cannot