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Thinking of children's need developmentally

Many adopted and care experienced children have gaps in their development as a result of their in-utero and early life experiences. Rather than having a disorder, they may be functioning like much younger children in some ways. If we can understand this, we can meet them where they are and address their needs as we do for younger children



An example of developmental gaps is play. Play is developmental. Initially children's play is entirely self-directed; they explore the world and the adult gets alongside them and comments on their play, joining in as invited. At this early stage we do not expect children to play cooperatively or imaginatively or to join in games with complex rules. Many adopted and care experienced children have not fully learnt how to play, because in early development they missed out on the input that helps play to develop

- Nurture
- Stimulation
- Language input
- Safe spaces
- Adults who are attuned

We can think about children's needs using the framework of child development and the ages and stages of typical development. (See diagram below)

Child Development Chart – First Five Years

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AGE	Social Smile	Reacts to sight of bottle or breast	Lifts head and chest when lying on stomach	Looks at and reaches for faces and toys	Reacts to voices - Vocalises coos, chuckles
6 m	Distinguishes mother/ main caregiver from other	Comforts self with thumb or pacifier	Turns around when lying on stomach	Picks up toy with one hand	Vocalises spontaneously - social
9 m	Pushes things away he/she doesn't like		Rolls over from back to stomach	Transfers toy from one hand to another	Responds to name - turns and looks
			Sits alone steady without support	Picks up object with thumb and finger grasps	Wide range of vocalisations (vowel sounds, consonant- vowel combination?)
12 m	Plays social games, peek a boo, bye bye	Picks up a spoon by handle	Crawls around on hands and knees	Picks up small objects - precise thumb and finger grasps	Word sounds - says Ma-Ma or Da-Da
	Plays patty cake		Walks around furniture or crib without holding on		Understands words like "No", "Stop", or "All gone"
18 m	Wants stuffed animal or blanket in bed	Lifts cup to mouth and drinks	Stands without support	Stacks two or more blocks	Uses one or two words as name of things or actions
	Gives kisses or hugs	Feeds self with spoon	Walks without help	Picks up two small toys in one hand	Talks in a single word
	Greets people with "hi" or similar	Insists on doing things by self such as feeding	Runs	Scribbles with crayon	Asks for food or drink with words
2 y	Sometimes says "No" when interfered with	Eats with fork	Kicks a ball forward	Builds towers of four or more blocks	Follows simple instructions
	Shows sympathy to other children - tries to comfort them	Eats with spoon, spilling little	Runs well, seldom falls		Uses at least 10 words
	Usually responds to corrections - stops	Takes off open coat or shirt without help	Walks up and down stairs alone	Turns pages of picture books, one at a time	Follows two part instructions
2.5 y	"Helps" with simple household tasks	Opens door by turning knob	Climbs on play equipment, ladders, slides	Scribbles with circular motion	Talks in two-three word phrases or sentences
	Plays with other children - cars, dolls, building	Washes and dries hands	Stands on one foot without support	Draws or copies vertical line	Talks clearly - is understandable most of the time
3 y	Plays a role in "pretend" games - mum-dad, teacher, space pilot	Dresses self with help	Walks up and down stairs one foot per step	Cuts with small scissors	Understands four prepositions - in, on, under, beside
3.5 y	Gives direction to other children	Toilet trained	Rides around on a tricycle using pedals	Draws or copies a complete circle	Combines sentences with the words "and" "or" or "but"
	Plays cooperatively with minimum conflict and supervision	Washes face without help	Hops on one foot without support	Cuts across paper with small scissors	Identifies four colours correctly
4 y					Counts five or more objects when asked "How many"?
	Protective toward younger children	Dresses and undresses without help except for shoelaces			Understands concepts -size, number and shape
4.5 y	Follows simple rules in board or card games	Buttons one or more buttons	Skips or makes running "broad jumps"	Draws recognisable pictures	Follows a series of 3 simple instructions
	Shows leadership among children	Usually looks both ways before crossing road/street	Swings n swing, pumping by self	Draws a person that as at least 3 parts (head, eyes, nose etc.)	Read a few letters (five+)
5 y		Goes to the toilet without help		Prints first name (four letters)	Tells meaning of familiar words

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As part of information gathering, teachers and educational staff caring for the child may talk to parents about any experiences the child may have missed out on and how the child's needs have or have not been met in the following areas:

Physical needs

- Sleep, eating and drinking
- Safety and protection from danger
- Toileting
- Supervision
- Pain and illnesses attended to
- Exposure to alcohol and drugs

Emotional needs

- Love and other positive feelings displayed towards the child
- Corrective feedback given gently
- Help with managing feelings
- Modelling of having and managing emotions

Socialisation needs

- Interacting with adults
- Supervision and boundaries
- Opportunities to interact appropriately with other children
- Modelling of social skills

Language needs

- Being spoken to
- Being responded to
- Being listened to
- Being read to

Cognitive needs

- Learning to play
- Stimulation
- Interaction
- Scaffolding
- Challenge

For many adopted and care experience children the details of their early lives are not fully known. We are often hypothesising, working backwards from the child current difficulties. You can map your hypotheses about what was present and what was absent for the child. This approach will help support you in understanding what is needed. For example, if the building blocks of play or socialisation or cognition are missing then we need to fill these in by providing the opportunities we would offer to younger children.