

Additional Information: Identifying Social Emotional Developmental Age

As with all development, social-emotional development follows a predictable developmental progression. To progress, the child will have some mastery at earlier phases. If mastery is not achieved at an earlier phase, it will likely show up as a delay. Children often overuse a particular coping mechanism, emotional response or relationship strategy, which can be difficult for evaluators to tease out, and can be distracting if it is a well-developed splinter skill. Look for breadth and depth of skills.

By 3 months:

Babies are born relationship ready and in their first three months of life are actively trying to make sense of their world. Before they can even speak, babies communicate with their facial expressions, voices and body language. As caregivers and babies get to know each other, babies will depend on their caregivers to recognize their cues and respond to their needs in a sensitive, timely and consistent way. This is the beginning of a trusting relationship that will extend to the wider world in later years. Babies' relationships and experiences lay the foundation for their mental health now, throughout their childhood, and well into their adult years.

Social-Relational (Relationships to Persons)

- Smiles responsively
- Looks at caregiver's face
- Coos responsively
- Localizes to familiar voices and sounds
- Shows interest in facial expressions
- Exhibits interest in the outside world when in an alert state (gazes at object and people and localizes to sounds, adjusts breathing in response to the sound of voices)

Emotional (Emotions and Feeling States)

- Remains in a calm and focused state for at least 2 minutes
- Expresses contentment or discomfort
- Smiles responsively

Coping

- Makes smooth state transitions (eg. sleep to drowsy to awake)
- Briefly calms self (eg. sucks on hand, looks away)
- Can be calmed and soothed when picked up and comforted (most of the time, within 20 minutes)

By 6 months:

With loving, nurturing early relationships baby is beginning to understand his physical and social surroundings and learning to discover his world. He knows who his caregivers are and who he can trust to respond to his needs. This is the start of the attachment relationship and will be dependent on how well caregivers provide consistent, responsive and appropriate care. As baby continues to learn about his world and to make sense of the things around him, his caregivers need to continue to provide loving and responsive relationships to help guide him through those experiences.

Social-Relational (Relationships to Persons)

- Imitates some movements and facial expressions
- Engages in socially reciprocal interactions
- Recognizes primary caregivers
- Seeks social engagement with vocalizations, emotional expressions or physical contact
- Watches faces closely, makes eye contact

Emotional (Emotions and Feeling States)

- Responds to affection with smiling, cooing, or settling
- Demonstrates a range of emotions that includes happiness, excitement, sadness, fear, distress, disgust, anger, joy, interest and surprise.
- Expresses anger, frustration or protests with distinct cries and facial expressions.

Coping

- Uses comforting. Recovers from stress when comforted by a caregiver
- Recovers from distress within 15 minutes with your help

By 9 to 12 months:

By the age of one, baby is learning more about her world and may even have an opinion about things she likes or dislikes. She is beginning to get around by crawling, walking by holding onto furniture or perhaps even on her own with no support. She is curious to learn about the things around her and can now actively explore. Baby can now understand simple language and words like “no,” “bye,” or “shoes.”

Social-Relational (Relationships to Persons)

- Distinguishes between familiar and unfamiliar voices
- Shows some stranger wariness
- Protests separation from caregiver
- Initiates interaction with you (eg, reaching for you, raises arms to be picked up)
- Engages in back-and-forth, two-way communication with vocalizations and eye contact
- Mimics other's simple gestures
- Follows other's gaze and other's pointing
- Looks to caregiver for information in novel situations
- Offers object to initiate interaction (12)
- Looks at familiar people when they are named (12)
- Plays peek-a-boo or pat-a-cake (12)
- Gives object to seek help (12)

Emotional (Emotions and Feeling States)

- Pleasure and excitement (eg, smiling joyfully during interactions, turning away, looking scared or crying when a stranger approaches too quickly)
- Demonstrates affection, and preference for caregivers' closeness
- Intentionally communicates feelings to others (eg., protest in anger, fear, joy) (12)
- Looks to caregiver to share emotional experiences (12)
- Responds to other people's emotions (displays a serious face in response to sadness in caregiver, laughs when caregiver laughs) (12)

Coping

- Has strategies for self-soothing (eg., well-established thumb-sucking, transitional object, avoiding or seeking behaviors, seeking out a caregiver).
- Rejects by gesture or pushing away things that are unwanted.
- Uses vocalizations to get assistance
- Recovers from distress within 10 minutes by being involved in social interactions

By 15 to18 months:

Baby is starting to understand more of what he hears and is enjoying the use of language. He enjoys hearing short stories and simple songs. He will point at pictures in books and try and sing along to songs he is familiar with. Baby enjoys reading the same books and hearing the same songs over and over; he enjoys knowing what will happen next in the book or song. Repetition helps him memorize simple songs which will help him build his vocabulary.

Social-Relational (Relationships to Persons)

- Seeks and enjoys attention from others, especially from others
- Engages in parallel play with peers
- Presents a book or toy when he or she wants to hear a story, or to play
- Repeats sound or action to get attention
- Enjoys looking at picture books with caregiver

Emotional (Emotions and Feeling States)

- Demonstrates affection with kisses (without pursed lips)
- Closeness (eg uses facial expressions, gestures, and vocalizations to reach out for a hug, kiss, or cuddle, or uses imitation such as talking on a toy phone while you are on the real phone)
- Demonstrates cautious or fearful behaviors such as clinging to or hiding behind caregiver
- Tells you how to be protective (eg, says “No!” and runs behind caregiver)
- Pleasure and excitement (use looks and vocalizations to invite another person to share excitement over something; shares “jokes” with other children or adults by laughing together at some provocations)
- Anger (deliberately hits, pinches, yells, bangs, screams or lies on floor to demonstrate anger; occasional uses cold or angry looks)

Coping

- Demonstrates self-comforting strategies and starting to exhibit frustration tolerance (eg, can wait for food, can seek out help, points to desired object) (18)
- Assertive curiosity: explores independently and uses ability to communicate across space to feel close to you while exploring or playing on her own, looks for hidden objects
- Moves across room or to a person to get needs met, or to get away from the unwanted

By 24 months:

Baby is growing into an independent toddler. She is mastering things on her own and seeks less help from her caregivers. She is beginning to engage in imaginary play. As she watches and observes her surroundings, she will begin to imitate the actions of others and try to role-play. She might pick up a broom to “houseclean,” or play “mom” with her dolls, etc. She is beginning to use simple sentences with the words she knows and is beginning to communicate and use language more easily. She notices her peers around her and enjoys their company but may need help mastering her social play skills, like sharing and turn taking.

Social-Relational (Relationships to Persons)

- Imitates other's complex actions especially adults and older children (helping set table, postures and gestures)
- Enjoys being with other young children
- Takes pride and pleasure in independent accomplishments
- Plays in proximity to other young children
- Notices and imitates young children's play
- Responds to being corrected or praised

Emotional (Emotions and Feeling States)

- Exhibits embarrassment and pride
- Exhibits shame in response to correction (understanding basic rules and correction)
- Exhibits empathy (eg, starting to offer comfort when someone is hurt)
- Attempts to exert independence frequently
- Starting to name or understands words for basic emotions

Coping

- Uses imitation to deal with and recover from distress (yells after being yelled at) (18-24)
- Recovers from small hurts on own
- Can understand limits, but may tantrum
- Starting to use pretend and make-believe play to deal with distress
- Starting to use words in sentences to express limits, needs, desire like “no, mine!”
- Looks for assistance from caregivers for help, asks for help or gestures for help
- Uses gestures to communicate feelings that are more complex, such as walking away, crying or throwing

By 36 months:

Toddlers are confidently exploring the world, and when given the chance, are socially engaged with other children and adults. They are beginning to understand the children's stories read to them and are talking about their own personal experiences and the events they are involved in. They are also engaged in more complex imaginary play, from watching and imitating people around them to pretending to be characters they hear about in the books read to them.

Social-Relational (Relationships to Persons)

- Actively forming friendships with peers when given the chance
- Shows affection to peers without prompting
- Becoming aware of peers and increasingly sympathetic toward them when they are upset. Shows concern for crying peers by acting
- Can wait for a turn in playing games
- Engages in associative play with peers
- Shares accomplishments with others
- Helps with very simple household chores
- Starting to tolerate taking turns, but still learning to share with facilitation by adult
- Shares without prompts with a preferred peer

Emotional (Emotions and Feeling States)

- Expresses full range of emotions including pride after success, shame response, and empathy
- Expresses distress or anger with words
- Shows pride in new learning and new experiences
- Expresses affection openly and verbally
- Expresses feeling through pretend play and make-believe

Coping

- Uses pretend play to recover from stress and deal with distress (eg, pretends to eat cookie when could not have one)
- Using more language to communicate wants and how feeling
- Using language to start to express feelings: happy, scared, sad or mad.
- Tries to defend self

Resources

Infant Mental Health Promotion, The Hospital for Sick Children (2014). *Hand in Hand - Growing Together Every Day: Developmental Support Planning Manual*. Toronto: Author.

The Interdisciplinary Council on Development and Learning, Inc. (2017). *Functional Emotional Developmental Capacities: Basic Chart* [PDF file]. Bethesda, MD: Author. Retrieved from <http://www.icdl.com/dir/fedcs/functional-emotional-developmental-levels-basic-chart>.

Provence, Sally, et al. (2016). *IDA-2 Infant-Toddler Assessment* (2nd ed.). Austin, TX: Pro-Ed, Inc.

ZERO TO THREE. (2016). DC: 0-5: *Diagnostic Classification of Mental Health and Developmental Disorders of Infancy and Early Childhood*. Washington, DC: Author.