

## **4 Overview of the development of the infants and young children**

Early infancy and early childhood are periods of remarkable mental and physical growth and development, and the formation of the child's fundamentals. However, since individual children differ considerably, there is a need to maintain a grasp of the child's overall development, including each child's developmental stage and living environment.

### **1 The relationship between children and adults**

Children are born immature, both physically and mentally. They are protected and nurtured by the adults around them. During that process, ample interaction between adult and child allow the child to continue growing and developing optimally into the future, as well as to acquire what is necessary to live as a human being. Of particularly critical importance is the formation of trust in others and empowerment of the self. Through having their lives protected by adults, and through being loved and trusted by them, children in turn grow to love and trust adults. Through the interaction with adults, children gain emotional stability, grow to want to respond to adults' expectations voluntarily, and gradually begin to act with empowerment. Children begin to express spontaneous interest in familiar objects, events, and people, and engage themselves with them. Within that process, children begin to express their feelings clearly and do things on their own will: the budding of selfhood. Children then gain confidence in their own activeness as empowered individuals to make choices, decisions, and actions, and go on to develop language skills, thinking ability, and self-control.

### **2 The development of children themselves**

Children's development progresses through the interaction between children and the people, natural objects, events, and occurrences in their environment.

In particular, interaction with people plays a central role. Throughout their early infancy and early childhood, children seek to interact with, and to be responded to and understood by, the adults around them. In turn, they try to understand adults as they themselves were understood by adults. This relationship with adults becomes the foundation for the children to gradually develop interactions with other children, and in social settings.

Through interacting with their peers, children convey their own thoughts to their friends as well as listening to, and understanding, what their friends are saying. At the same time, children come to realize that they do not always get their own way. They gradually learn the necessity and means for assertiveness and self-restraint. When there is a difference of opinion, or when difficulties arise, it is sometimes important to reach a compromise or yield to the other party through controlling one's feelings or, at times, foregoing one's own wishes. Going through a variety of experiences with their peers is essential for children's social, emotional, moral, and intellectual development.

It is also important to recognize that there are individual differences in children's development; that the progress and manifestation of each child's development will differ according to the child's physiological or physical qualities as well as the environment they are brought up in.

### 3 Supporting children's life and development

To promote a child's development, there is a need for more than direct approaches by adults. There must also be spontaneous and active approaches from the part of the child. A child's activities can be broadly categorized into those relating to "living," such as eating, excretion, rest, and adjusting of clothing, and those relating to "play." The latter are what are central to the child's empowered activities.

Children's play manifests in close relation with their development, while their development is also stimulated and enhanced by their play. Therefore, it is critically important to provide early childhood care and education through play, and there is a need for the teacher to maintain a grasp of each child's physical and mental state to support children's development while living and playing with them.

In addition, even in situations where certain children are behind in their development, or are having difficulty adjusting to kindergarten life, one needs to realize that those children are making efforts in their own way. It is therefore important to appreciate that effort and refrain from imposing a general set of characteristics for each age group or developmental stage, instead providing the kind of early childhood care and education that is fully attentive to the developmental features and challenges of each individual child.

### 4 Main characteristics of development

#### (1) Infants under six months

The newborn adapts to the dramatic change from within the mother's body to the outside environment, and subsequently goes through remarkable growth and development. The younger the infant, the greater the gain in weight and height. Infants gradually put on body fat, and their bodies take on a rounded shape. Vision, hearing, and other senses develop dramatically, and infants begin to gain an awareness of the world around them.

While infants at this stage are full of the potential for development, they are incapable of meeting their needs without help from adults. However, infants do have the ability to express their needs through facial expressions, such as smiling or crying, and through moving their body. When certain familiar adults respond to these expressed needs, and make direct approaches that are appropriate and affirming, an emotional bond is formed between the child and the adult. This is the first step for interpersonal relationships, and expands into the ability to accept oneself, love others, and trust people.

Infants around three months of age will, when in a good mood, gaze at things intently, or look around at their surroundings. When there is a noise or a voice nearby, infants will look in that direction. They begin to kick vigorously, and when lying down, can move their head at will. Lying down on their stomach, infants can raise their head, and follow moving objects with their eyes. When a small rattle is brought against their hand, three-month-olds can grasp it for a short time, or wave it around. Smiling goes from merely being a physiological reflex to take on social significance, such as smiling when entertained. Emotions begin to differentiate into pleasure and displeasure, in response to how their demands are met and how the adults approach them.



Infants can make sounds, such as “ah,” “ee,” “ooh,” “boo-boo,” and “coo-coo.” While nursing, infants may touch or caress the bottle. Satiated, infants may drift off to sleep looking totally at peace, nipple still in the mouth.

By about four months of age, infants are able to hold their head up. From about the fifth month onward, they start moving their hands and feet more vigorously, such as in attempting to grab things in front of their eyes, or bringing their hands to their mouth.

Expressions of physiological pleasure and displeasure gradually take on social and psychological qualities, such as crying as if with feeling, or gazing at an adult’s face, smiling, and making “ah” or “ooh” sounds. Furthermore, infants begin to recognize the voices of familiar people, turn their heads toward sounds, look at approaching objects, and follow slowly moving objects with their eyes. Once past four months, infants can move their arms, wrists, and legs at will, and begin to enjoy activities that involve their whole body, such as rolling over or wiggling around on their stomach.

Sleep and wakefulness become clearly defined. Infants are active when awake, looking toward sounds, staring at things, following things with their eyes, and making babbling sounds.

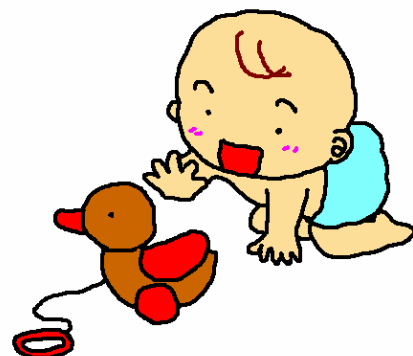
## (2) Infants from six to fifteen months

Once past six months, infants begin to recognize the faces of familiar people, and respond enthusiastically to being played with. From about the sixth month, infants become more susceptible to infections, as they begin to lose the immunity they were given by their mother at birth. The development of physical-motor skills and posture during this period, such as sitting, crawling, and standing, transforms the way infants play and live; in toddler-hood, these skills develop into the ability to walk upright. Their hands also develop in dexterity and strength, and these small children begin to use their hands more and more. Furthermore, children begin to understand language, and as their diet changes from baby foods to toddler foods, children undergo the transition from early infancy to early childhood. From about the seventh month, infants are able to sit on their own, and gain the use of both hands while seated.

Stranger anxiety becomes pronounced in this stage. At the same time, infants actively try to engage the attention of familiar people, such as by imitating gestures like squeezing or waving the hands. Being tenderly accepting of, and responsive to, these feelings is critical for children’s emotional stability. Within this kind of relationship with adults, infants’ babbling becomes even more varied and vigorous.

By about the ninth month, infants can do things like crawl and hold things in both hands, knocking them together or banging them on the floor. With a foundation of emotional stability built on a strong trust relationship with familiar adults, infants begin to engage vigorously in explorative behavior. Expressions of emotions, particularly facial expressions, take on even more clarity, and infants show an interest in familiar people or desired objects, trying to get close to them. Furthermore, infants begin to understand simple words, and try to communicate their wishes and needs through gestures and the like.

By around one year of age, children start to pull themselves up to a standing position and begin walking with support. They become even more interested in what lies outside of them, and enjoy activities such as pushing carts. Their babbling also takes on conversational inflections, and children gradually begin to speak a few familiar words.



### (3) Fifteen to twenty-four months

Children begin to walk, use their hands, and use language. During this period, their physical-motor development is remarkable, and their bodies seem to slim down gradually. Children catch many infections diseases during this period. Infections disease make up the majority of their illnesses at this stage.

Children can now walk without holding on to anything, and have increased physical-motor function, such as pushing and throwing. Their living space has expanded and, building on the secure relationships that have been nurtured, children begin to make spontaneous approaches to familiar people and the things around them. During that process, they acquire the many behaviors that are necessary to live their lives. For example, children imitate the actions they find interesting in familiar people, and incorporate them into their behavior. Children steadily expand their repertoire of actions: picking things up with their fingers, turning pages, buttoning, unfastening, scribbling, rolling things, using a spoon, and holding a cup. Through the mastery of these new behaviors, children acquire the feeling that they are able to do things, and gain confidence and enhanced spontaneity. They also begin to understand what adults are saying, and call out to people, or vigorously use baby talk indicating refusal, or attempt to communicate through pointing or gestures what they cannot say in words. In this way, the wish to communicate their thoughts to familiar adults gradually builds. At about eighteen months, children start formulating two-word sentences, such as, “din-din, please (dinner, please).”

Children also engage more vigorously in interacting with people through things, such as rolling a ball back and forth, as well as in struggling for possession of things. Children can also use objects to represent other things. Thus children deepen their interpersonal skills, as well as their capacity for symbolization, which are essential for their subsequent social and linguistic development. This kind of direct approach to their environment expands from familiar people to include objects, and the adults are often made to feel as if the child is always into mischief.

Children also develop emotionally, and their feelings begin to differentiate: for example, there is a difference between the love they have for other children and their love toward adults, and they begin to indicate envy. During this period, children’s spontaneity and wish to explore are heightened. But children are still very much in need of adult care, and are in a transitional phase toward independence.



#### (4) Two-year-olds

The ability to walk progresses even more, with more enhanced basic physical- motor skills such as running and jumping. Children are able to move their bodies at will, and gain better control of their physical movements. Children at this age love to move their bodies in rhythmic movement or in time to music. At the same time, their manual dexterity improves rapidly as well.

Their vocalization becomes clearer, with a marked increase in vocabulary. They can understand the words necessary for day to day life, and are able to use words to express what they want to do and have done for them.

In the context of these advances in their development, children gain more freedom of movement, their range of movement expands, and they gradually begin to seek relationships with other children.

While children gradually build up resistance to infections disease, infections disease make up the greatest proportion of illnesses at this stage.

The new experiences in their day to day lives heighten children's interest and desire to explore. Children earnestly try to convey the joy, excitement, or discoveries they gained to sympathetic adults or friends, and wish to share these experiences. By having these needs met, children's various abilities are enhanced, and they are able to gain confidence.

Children are therefore full of enthusiasm to do things without an adult's help. However, in reality, not everything goes their own way, nor can they do everything themselves. Children therefore often have their wishes hampered by adults or friends.

However, children at this stage are not yet capable of dealing with such situations well, and sometimes assert themselves through tantrums or defiant behavior. This is proof of a normally developing self. During this period, children not only express interest in familiar people and events, and imitate with enthusiasm, but also acquire the ability to find common factors between objects and events, and to conceptualize. Their capability for symbolization and the ability for observation grow, and they are able to engage in simple pretend play with their teachers.



#### (5) Three-year-olds

By this stage, children's basic physical-motor functions have developed fairly well, and they have achieved a certain degree of independence in such activities as eating and excretion. The children, who until this stage had been quick to rely on adults, and whose activities had centered around their relationship with adults, begin to try to act as independent beings, and their sense of self also becomes more distinct.

Relationships with other children become important for the children's lives, particularly for play. Children gain the ability to share and take turns through their contact with other children. At this stage, although the children themselves may think they "played" with their friends, the reality is often still one of parallel play. However, being allowed to savor the joy of being with their peers, observing their behavior, and imitating them during this period promotes the development of social skills, and leads to a richer understanding of human nature.

Children's powers of attention and observation grow even more advanced, and since they incorporate the behaviors of familiar adults or their own day to day experiences into their



pretend play, the pretend play becomes more organized. The content of the play also begins to take on expansiveness with the application of symbolization and creativity, and their play can now continue for a fairly long time.

During this stage, children also start questioning vigorously: “Why?” and “How come?” Their thirst for knowledge, to understand the names and functions of things, is intensified, and their language skills are enriched even further. In addition, within the real and concrete range of their own actions and experiences, they can now make predictions on the consequences of certain behaviors: “When I do this, this happens.” Thus they are able to act with intent and expectation. They can also understand simple story lines, and are able to predict what may happen, and assimilate the story into their own thoughts.

Furthermore, during this period, children develop the desire to act on their own volition in observance of rules, and begin to volunteer their help to adults. They begin to feel pride and joy in being useful for others.



## (6) Four-year-olds

Children gain better balance with their whole bodies, and can move their bodies with skill. They can also do two different activities at once, such as carrying on a conversation while eating. A solid sense of self is established, and a clear distinction is made between the self and others.

When children begin to observe people and things outside themselves in detail, they also become conscious of themselves as being observed, and a feeling of self-consciousness emerges. Therefore, at times they are not as able to remain totally un-self-conscious as they were before. Also, because they are now able to have a goal in mind when they create, draw, or act, they also experience emotional conflict, such as anxiety or sadness, about things not going the way they want them to. When the teacher fully perceives these psychological workings and provides empathy, or encouragement at times, the children develop the sensitivity to be thoughtful to the feelings and situations of others, just as the teacher was for them. In these ways, children realize that others also have hearts and minds that are invisible to the eye, develop the capacity to understand the feelings of familiar people, and further enrich their emotions.

Children in this stage think that hearts and minds are not limited to people, but that they exist in other living beings and even in lifeless objects. This leads to a childlike imagination and an expanding creativity. They also begin to fear more things that are rooted in the imagination, such as monsters, dreams, and being left alone, in addition to physical phenomena such as loud sounds and darkness.

Through exploring their environment, observing other children at play, and experiencing things for themselves, children gain knowledge on the characteristics of the various things around



them: natural objects, including dirt and water, and play tool, for example. In these rich interactions, children acquire the ability to relate to them and play with them. In that process, children begin to feel the joy and fun of being with peers, and develop a stronger relationship with other children. At the same time, children feel all the more competitive, and fights can develop more frequently. On the other hand, at this stage, children are increasingly able to gradually control their own feelings by themselves, or forego their own wishes, when they encounter unpleasant situations with their peers.

## (7) Five-year-olds

Children have pretty much become independent in the basic habits of day to day life. They seem sure-footed, and even convey a sense of trustworthiness. Their physical-motor skills have developed even further, and they love to engage in physical activity. They can now do things like jump rope.

Their inner world also undergoes further growth, and children form the basics of making judgments on the basis of reasons they arrived at on their own and that they feel are fair, instead of something being “bad” just because an adult said so. Children also begin to be able to think before they act, and begin to acquire the capacity to be critical of self and others, as well as the ability to express in words what they feel is unjust: “No fair,” or “That’s wrong.” Helping out, at home and otherwise, also increasingly involves a purpose, and furthermore, they can think about what might happen as a result. Children can now put up to some degree with things they don’t like, and they feel happy and proud about being useful to others.

At this stage, the presence of peers takes on even more importance. Several children may work as a cohesive group toward the same goal, with each of them understanding what they have to do and the need to observe rules. For the first time, they begin to exert the function of a group. In the group, interaction by way of verbal expression is very important. This provides a place for hands-on learning of the verbal skills to express well what they feel and think, and the ability to listen to what others are saying.

Children also acquire the capacity for word play and playing with a shared image in mind. In addition, even when they conflict over what they want to do, or a fight erupts, they are not as quick to rely on an adult, instead trying more to resolve the issue on their own. In short, the children acquire the skills that are fundamental to social life, such as forgiveness and respect, and gain the self-awareness and confidence of being part of the group of friends.

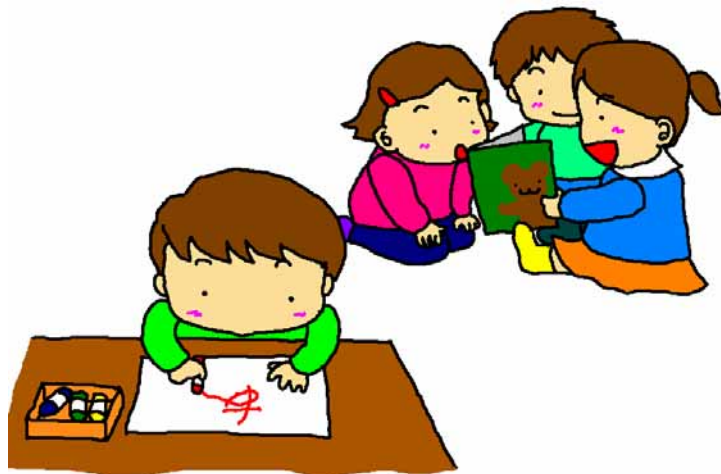


## (8) Six-year-olds

Manual dexterity takes on even more finesse, and children are better able to coordinate their fingertips with the rest of their body. Whole-body movements also become more fluid, and children frisk about with lively cheer. They are full of energy, both mentally and physically, and their wish to try everything knows no bounds. This is because, through past experience, they have acquired the confidence that they can do certain things, and the ability to make predictions and look ahead, so that they can think of how much more fun it would be if they were to do things in this new way.

When they reach this stage, children begin to value their own will, and the will of their peers, more than obeying what adults say, and begin to try to stick to their position. They revel in secret games like playing exploration with their peers. Often, in these activities, the members in the group do not all do the same thing. Instead, roles are generated, and each of the children acts in a way that accommodates their preferences and personalities. In this way, groups of children increasingly engage in organized, cooperative play, which goes on for longer periods of time. Pretend play in particular takes on an intricate flow, and children prefer play with a variety of differentiated roles, and try to pursue the play to their satisfaction even when they encounter some degree of difficulty. Therefore, as a consequence of the children maximizing on their knowledge and sharing ideas from different angles, and exercising creativity, their play may expand and develop.

Through these experiences, the children realize for themselves that they have become more grown up, and begin to try to act like big kids themselves. As a result, they express a keen interest in writing their letters or reading books, and as they strive to learn everything, their thirst for knowledge grows even more. Their verbal facility also increases, and they are more likely to argue. At times, their critical thinking can be aimed at adults as well. They are also likely to be embarrassed about doing childish things like crying in public, and may restrain themselves from doing so. But at times, they may seek affection from adults to calm themselves, or to fuel up on energy for subsequent activities.



### < Reference >

Children and Families Bureau, Ministry of Health and Welfare (1999) *Guidelines for Nursery Care at Day Nursery*