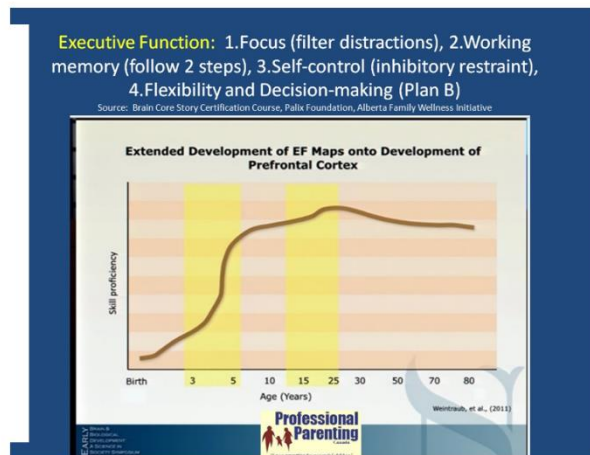
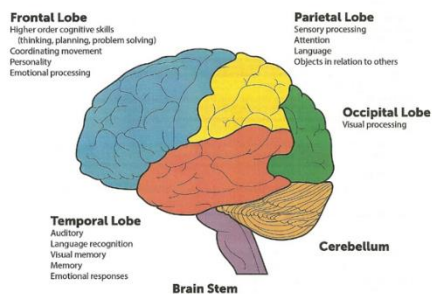


Child Capabilities: What to Expect at Each Age and Stage

By Judy Arnall, BA, CCFE and Bestselling Author

Babies – 0-1 - Sensory input and output. Brain stem, Cerebellum, Occipital Lobe. Crawling, Walking.
 Toddlers – 1-2 - Emotions and gross motor exploration. Temporal Lobe. Talking.
 Preschoolers – 3-5 - Perception is reality. Imagination grows. Parietal Lobe. Toilet Learning.
 School-Agers – 6-12 Concrete Operational. Tangible, consequential learning. Frontal Lobe. Reading, Writing and Arithmetic.
 Puberty – 13-19 Abstract and Theoretical Understanding. Prefrontal Lobe. Essays and Mathematics.

Diagram of Brain Functions



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Infants 0 to 6 months Sensory Input/Output stage

Physical

Sleeps 15 - 20 hours in 24 hour period
Settles into a predictable pattern of eating, sleeping, fussing and eliminating at 3-6 months
Can hold head steady while sitting at 4 months
Holds up head and supports weight with arms at 3 months
Follows objects and will turn head to look at sounds at 2 months
Can transfer objects from hand to mouth at 4 months
Teething at 5 months
Crying peaks at 2 months but remains main form of communication
Eats every 2 hours
Sits with adult support at 6 months

Cognitive

Awareness of sensory input and output; feels cold, so cries
Doesn't think; just experiences and responds to sensory input
Makes strange or becomes scared of certain faces or sounds

Social/Emotional

Smiles at 2 months
Beginning to develop trust and attachment to at least one adult/caregiver

Babies 6 to 18 months Attachment stage

Physical

Can roll, crawl around 7 months
Supports her own weight when held standing
Can pull up on tables or chairs to stand at 10 months
Walk around 12 months
Slithers down stairs backwards at 1 yr
Take off clothes at 18 months
Run and climb at 18 months
Sleeps 12-14 hours per night with several daytime naps
Imitates sounds and babbles
Says 10-20 words at 18 months
Eats with hands at 1 yr; spoon at 18 months
Most front and side teeth in at 1 yr
Pincer grasp develops

Cognitive

Explores environment and items with all five senses (mouth, ears, eyes, touch, and hearing)
No understanding of danger
No understanding of limits

No self-control to not do something
Points to interests
Develops object permanence at 1 yr; knows something exists even if it can't be seen
Realizes that he is a separate person around 1 yr
May understand common words when accompanied by gestures at 1 yr (bye, Mama, ball, shoes)
Uses words or gestures to express wants by 1 yr
Is curious; repeats activities to learn
Short attention span of a minute; is easily distracted

Social/Emotional

Feels happy, sad, mad, surprise, disgust, joy, distressed and scared
No control of expressing emotions
Builds security, and attachment with attentive adults
Dislikes strangers beginning at 8 months
Experiences separation anxiety when left by loved adult around 10 months
Fears beginning at 1 yr; animals, thunder, vacuums, theatres

Toddlers 18 months to 3 years Sensory-motor stage

Physical

Energetic and active
Needs meals or snacks every 2 hours
Spills and drops
Can run and climb
Can walk stairs with help
Opens doors
Needs help with dressing underwear, socks and shoes; can use shirts and pants
Can pick up items or throw toys into a bucket
Can vacuum and sweep and wipe with a cloth
Sleeps 12-14 hours with 1 or 2 naps
Can drink out of a sippy cup
Can turn door knobs and open twist lids at 3 yrs
Can walk down stairs holding a railing at 2 yrs
Feeds self but messy; can use spoon and perhaps fork
Can push a ride-on toy with feet
Loves to push and pull and fill and empty containers
Loves physical sensation of materials; goop, playdough, food, sand, water etc.
Can scribble on paper
Can throw a big ball with both hands

Cognitive

Can recognise logos and pictures
Recognises self and loved ones in photos and mirrors
No understanding of time or "Hurry"
Can understand that "No!" is a powerful word, but doesn't understand the meaning of "not doing something."

No idea of danger
No understanding of tomorrow or yesterday; lives in the moment
Understands more words than she can speak
Can say 2 word sentences; "More milk"; "All gone"; "Me go"
Problem solves through trial and error; puzzles, shape-sorters
Doesn't know which objects are breakable or which are not
Earliest memory from 2-3 yrs; remembers moments out of the ordinary
Can't connect their actions with outcomes; doesn't understand consequences
Labels objects, animals, people, and body parts with names
Short attention span of a few minutes
Understands simple directions; "Go get your coat" but may be too engrossed in play to comply
No understanding of ownership, money or sharing
Explores their world through five senses; needs to touch and taste to learn
Points to most common objects by name at 2 yrs
Adults can understand 25-75% of their speech
Mixes up "him", "me", "them"
Can make simple choices between two offerings
Enjoys repetition of movies, books, rhymes, daily routines and habits
Very little Executive Function: self-control, planning, focus or working memory

Social/Emotional

Feelings are intense; feels empathy, frustration and pride
Has a favourite cuddly toy that comforts
Affectionate to loved ones; loves to cuddle, kiss, pat, sleep with and enjoys being carried
Excited to see new things
Becomes stiff or floppy with body when protesting
Beginning to play with other children, but mostly plays parallel side-by-side with others
Tantrums frequent as feelings overwhelming
May be contrary, "No!" to exert control
Want independence to try things and wants to cling to attachment person to build security
Hoards possessions and people; "Mine!"
Feels secure in repetition, routines and familiarity
Strongly attaches to comforting adults
Separation anxiety most intense
Expresses anger and frustration physically and not with words
Very aggressive; hitting, pushing, biting, and throwing are normal responses
No self-control to not touch or do things
Honest
Night terrors peak at 2 yrs
*Compliance 0-20% successful in a respectful, non-punitive parent-child relationship

Preschoolers 3 to 5 years Preoperational stage

Physical

Can jump, kick, swing, skip, hop, run and throw balls

Shows intense facial expressions
Can empty wastebaskets, bring in groceries, mop a floor and spray clean surfaces, vacuum, pick up socks and library books, set table, help with recycling
Sleeps 12 hours - drops daytime naps
Active and energetic and moves body; more coordinated
Can hold a pencil and scissors
Can fully dress and undress self; can close and open buttons
Can cut food with knife and use fork, and cups; learns to pour
Can ride a tricycle at 3 yrs and bike with training wheels at 5 yrs
Less physical and impulsive than toddlers but can still be overcome with emotion

Cognitive

No understanding of what causes death or safety considerations
Can't imagine logical outcome of certain actions (operations) on objects or people. Can't foresee consequences.
Imagination intense; magical thinking
Animism: May have imaginary friends, or pets; stuffed animals are "real" to them
Can't see other's point of view at 3 yrs but can at 5 yrs
Doesn't understand lying as inappropriate, but as wishful thinking; tells tall tales
Beginning to connect outcomes with actions (consequences) at 5 to 6 yrs
Asks a lot of questions; wants to know how things work, including how babies are made; says "What's that?" a lot
Manipulates objects to learn characteristics
Stop putting things in their mouths to explore
Needs to play; gets lost in play and not distracted by other things
Adults can understand 75% of speech
Can say words for everything and 3 word sentences at age 3, and complete stories at age 5
Understands 300 - 1000 words
Knows name and age
May count and know colors
Can understand between edible and non-edible substances; dirt, shampoo
Unaware of traffic safety
Can sing, rhyme and tell jokes
Able to join in adult-guided problem-solving
No time sense or ability to plan; can't understand adults need to adhere to time schedules; dawdles
Has nightmares and night terrors
Longer attention span of about 15 minutes
Can follow simple directions; "Put the toy in the box" but compliance still at 40% of the time
Can recite past experiences but not in the right order
Begins gender role identification at 5 yrs
Beginning Executive Function skills at 3 yrs and increasing until 6 yrs

Social/Emotional

Feels more complex emotions such as jealousy, pride, envy, sympathy, insecurity and guilt
Begins to express feelings in words rather than body language of tantrums
Whines to communicate displeasure
Imitates adult behaviour
Enjoys silly and non-sense poems, rhymes and jokes
Can be bossy; doesn't understand leadership skills yet
Feels stress when loved ones are angry
Anxious to please loved ones

Power struggles over bedtimes, eating, toileting
Can share, line-up, take turns, compromise, and play cooperatively
Imagination stirs up fears; animals, dark, carwashes, noises
May begin tension outlets; nose picking, masturbation, nail biting
Still some separation anxiety, especially at night
May prefer one parent over the other
Begins to understand that others have different feelings
Honest and blunt; "Why does your house smell?"
Enjoys pretend play and role playing and playdates with other children
Cooperation increasing but still difficult to stop activities that are enjoyable
Can delay gratification for 5 minutes at 4yrs
Tapers off temper tantrums to once a week or less
Tattles
Likes to be independent and may refuse help
*Compliance 40% successful in a respectful, non-punitive parent-child relationship

School-agers - Younger 6 to 9 years Concrete-Operational stage

Physical

Totally potty trained
Can sleep all night from 10 to 12 hours; once asleep, usually stays asleep
Eats regular 3 meals, 3 snacks daily
Can bath alone
Can tie shoe laces
Can ride a two wheeler; can jump rope and rollerblade
Can use all table utensils
Loses all baby teeth by 8 yrs
Can sit still for 30 minutes
Bone growth faster than muscle development
May have nervous habits such as nail biting, hair sucking, masturbation, nose-picking, teeth grinding
Can do most chores with help, direction and reminding; empty dishwasher, take out garbage, sort laundry, water plants, pet care, meal clean-up, recycling, mop

Cognitive

Copycats; love to imitate others
Logical; understands that actions have positive or negative outcomes
Understands operations (consequences)
Questions; asks why and what if?
Experiments by trying on behaviours from outside the family
Rule-focussed; loves rules and making sure everyone abides
Negotiators; loves to make deals
Concrete Learners; understands what they have experienced personally
Black/white thinkers; no gray areas in thinking
Can work on projects and in groups

Comprehends logical and natural consequences
Understands that "No" means "Don't do"
Can recognise ads from the medium; reality from fantasy
Needs help with homework
Understands money as a symbol for exchange - can handle an allowance
Not good enough problem-solvers to stay home alone yet
Loves new experiences and places; field trips, travel
Understands jokes; loves potty humour
Starts reading and writing
Creative in art and crafts
Beginning to understand time and how long is a certain block of time
Can understand the basic mechanics of sexual intercourse and reproduction
Executive Function skills rapidly increasing

Social/Emotional

Protective of belongings and territory
Sore losers in games due to developing self-control
Develops definite gender identity as a boy or girl
May still have fears of dark, animals, sharks, heights, and losing parents
Understands lying as deceit and wrong
Temper tantrums less than once per week if at all; rarely expressed physically
Learning to recognise other's feelings and able to identify and label own feelings
Still hard to see other's point of view over own
Can begin to use calm-down tools on own and express anger in words
Loves to help others and contribute
Friends mostly come from shared interests
Still lack of experience in handling conflict
Good self-control; can wait for 10 minutes or longer
Play is more complex; still enjoys pretend play and loves games
May prefer same gender friends
Not much regard for personal hygiene
Still open and affectionate with family in public
Can begin to reflect on own behaviour and how it affects others
*Compliance 60% successful in a respectful, non-punitive parent-child relationship

School-agers - Older 10 to 12 years

Physical

May be beginning puberty changes; breast growth, menstruation, height increase. Belt of fat develops around the waist
Growth spurts and extreme differences are evident in children of the same ages; girls tend to be ahead of boys
Can mow lawns, do own laundry, dishes, cook with microwave, change bedding, answer phone and take messages, pack own lunch, clean bathrooms, and run to the store.
Ravenous appetite or picky eaters or peculiar tastes develop
Sleeps 10-12 hours

Cognitive

Growing out of childhood toys that are becoming boring
Can use a debit card - make own purchases
Needs help with homework and reminding
Can cross a street alone and judge traffic timing at 10 yrs
Can stay home alone briefly if good problem-solvers
Remembers where they left items
Beginning to resist control by others
Still black and white thinking; moral development progressing with increasing sense of right and wrong
Attention span of 1 to 2 hours
Knows difference between real and imaginary in digital and physical world

Social/Emotional

Social relationships becoming more complex with feelings and nuances
Friends mostly come from shared interests; may lose some as interests diverge; sticks to same sex friends
Becoming peer focussed but family ties still stronger
May exaggerate and over-dramatize problems
Certain topics, such as sex, are too embarrassing for discussion with family
Attitude increases as peer behaviour copied
Learns to handle pressure and rejection
Worries and anxiety increase as becoming more self-conscious of self
Sensitive to criticism and correction
May move family affection to private moments
*Compliance 70% successful

Teenagers - Young 13 to 15 years Formal-Operational stage

Physical

Can do all chores that adults do physically and intellectually
Sleeps 9-10 hours but circadian rhythm pushes start later in the night; may be tired from not enough rest
Can clean the entire house
Can cook and bake with oven and stove, and prepare dinner for the family
Appetite increases
Puberty changes; menstruation begins, breast growth, curves appear, penis grows, muscles grow, shoulders and hips widen, body hair grows, voice changes and height dramatically increases.
Girls grow most from 11-16 yrs; boys from 13 -17 yrs
Hormones in full production; acne appears
Can be clumsy because bodies are growing inconsistently
Both genders eat more
Permanent teeth are in by 13

Cognitive

Starting to take full control of homework, school registration and choice
Attention span same as adults; good time for museums, theatres, plays, lectures
Abstract learners: can understand intangible concepts such as algebra, religion, politics, theories and death
Makes mistakes and decisions and learns from them

Can make own phone calls and appointments
Can get around the city on public transit
Are able to understand the rights and responsibilities of owning a smart or cell phone.
Understands values and morals of sexual behaviour
Needs independence and control over decisions
Executive Function skills of self-control, planning, focus and working memory increase to age 25 where they plateau

Social/Emotional

Developing own philosophy, values and belief systems
Takes responsibility for own needs, feelings and behaviours
Interested in adult conversations
Physically separates from family to find out who he is but is still emotionally connected; family still matters more than peers
Can address store and business personnel directly
Craves independence rather than control by others
Experimenting with behaviours and substances to handle stress; exercise, alcohol, drugs, internet, social relationships
Moody
Impulsive;
Interested in sexuality
Abstract learners; can understand concepts that are not tangible such as algebra, religion, and death
Craves and very protective of privacy
Lack of confidence saying "No" to others, especially peers
Very self-conscious
Peer pressure peaks
Bullying peaks
Stops hitting when angry
Expresses individuality in dress, music, art, decor, that reflects own values, tastes, beliefs, and preferences
Explores new identities and roles
Can babysit younger children
*Compliance 80% successful

Teenagers - Older 16 to 18 years

Physical

Have mostly reached adult height, weight and size
Brain still changing especially pre-frontal cortex
Getting wisdom teeth

Cognitive

Become more academically serious
Can obtain first job and drivers licence
Can stay home alone overnight
Critical thinking blooms; interested in world social, political, economic news
Can understand mutual funds, RRSPs and financial products and do taxes, banking
Sense of omnipotence/grandiosity; believes nothing will hurt them
Can take full responsibility for school and homework and future planning
Healthy decision-making, planning and self-control increasing

Social/Emotional

Anxiety, stress, mental health issues may erupt

Searching for identity

Solidifying own values, beliefs and viewpoints

Preparing to live in the adult world of work or post-secondary education and living away from home

Still needs practice in assertiveness skills with teachers, bosses, friends

Needs to prove she is grown-up to herself and peers

Becoming more confident to honor own values and decisions

Can stay home alone overnight

*Compliance 90% successful

Emerging Adults 19 to 25 years

Physical

Same as teenager

Cognitive

Prefrontal cortex finishes development which controls adult ability to plan, make decisions, think critically.

Executive Function of self-control, planning, focus, and working memory fully developed. Gains common sense.

Social/Emotional

Adult stability. Critical thinking over-rides desire for immediate gratification.

* Compliance means that children comply with a directive from parent in a totally non-punitive parent-child relationship. A non-punitive relationship is where no punishments are ever used and instead, active listening, I-statements and problem-solving is used to resolve every discipline issue within an environment of mutual respect and open communication.

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