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Healthy Minds: Nurturing Your Child's Development from 12 to 18 Months

What do we really know about how a young child develops? What can parents do to best support their child's healthy development and growing brain? Some of the answers are in this series of *Healthy Minds* handouts. Each handout is based on findings from a report* from the National Academy of Sciences that examined the research on child and brain development to establish what is known about the early years. The information we offer is age-specific, summarizes key findings from the report and suggests how you might be able to use these key findings to nurture your own child's healthy development.

Key Findings from the Report Include:

- Your relationship with your child is the foundation of his or her health development
- Your child's development depends on both the traits he or she was born with (nature), and what he or she experiences (nurture).
- All areas of development (social/emotional/intellectual/language/motor) are linked. Each depends on, and influences, the others.
- What children experience, including how their parents respond to them, shapes their development as they adapt to the world.

How it looks in everyday family life:

Sixteen-month-old Carlos wants juice and his mom doesn't know it. He is sitting in his high chair banging his cup and pushing the cartons of milk away when his mom, Marta, tries to pour some for him. They both are very frustrated. Marta takes Carlos out of the high chair and announces lunch is over. Carlos marches to the refrigerator and starts banging on the door. Marta is about to tell him to stop banging, but instead asks, "Do you want to open the refrigerator?" Carlos smiles and shakes his head "Yes!" Marta opens the door and Carlos points to the drinks on the shelf. Marta then points to each carton and asks, "Is this what you want?" Carlos shakes his head no until he gets to the juice. Then he jumps around and says, "juju!" Marta pours him juice as he happily plops himself on her lap.

This shows how all areas of Carlos' development are linked, and how his mother's response encourages his healthy development. Carlos has learned to count on his mom as someone who helps him as he struggles to communicate what he wants. This signals strong **social and emotional development**. He uses his **intellectual ability** to make a plan to get what he wants, and uses his **motor and language skills** to carry out the plan as he walks to the refrigerator and bangs, points and uses sounds to get his message across.

Despite her frustration, Marta takes the time to watch and listen to Carlos. This encourages Carlos to feel like a good communicator and reinforces his sense of self-esteem by letting him know that he is worth listening and paying attention to.

Relationships are the foundation of a child's healthy development.

Charting Your Child's Healthy Development: 12 to 18 months

The following chart described many of the things your toddler is learning between 12 and 18 months and what you can do to support your child in all areas of his development. As you read, remember that children develop at their own pace and in their own way. Understanding who your child is, what his strengths are and where he needs more support, is essential for promoting healthy development. If you have questions regarding your child's development, ask your pediatrician.

What's going on:	What you can do:	Questions to ask yourself:
<p>Toddlers are great communicators. They are learning new words every day, and use them, along with their gestures, to let you know what they are thinking and feeling. For example, they take your hand, walk you to the shelf and point to what they want and say, "Book".</p> <p>Toddlers understand a lot more than they can say. By 12 months they will probably follow a 1-step instruction such as "Go get your shoes>" By 18 months they will likely follow 2- and even 3-step directions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage your child to use his words, sounds and gestures to communicate, even if you think you know what he wants. • Play games that include instructions and see how many he can follow. • Read with your toddler. It helps him learn new words and concepts. It also helps him develop a love of books and reading. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does your child communicate what he wants; what he's thinking and feeling? • How does your child like to read with you? What are his favorite books?
<p>Toddlers are beginning to do pretend play, a major developmental milestone. They continue to imitate what they see around them, for example, using a child-size broom to sweep the floor. But now, they are beginning to understand symbols and ideas—not just concrete things they can see and feel. For example, they begin to use objects in new and creative ways. A spoon can become an airplane or a toothbrush. Pretend play helps develop important intellectual skills and creativity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer toys that represent objects in your toddler's world, such as a play kitchen with plastic food, a mini-grocery cart or a toy telephone. Join in his play; help him develop his own stories by letting him be the director. • Give your child different objects and watch the many ways he uses them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of play does your child enjoy most? How do you see him pretending? • What kind of play do you most/least enjoy with your toddler? Why?
<p>During this stage of development, toddlers motor skills are taking off. They begin to walk and run, which opens up a whole new world of watchfulness for you. As you try to keep your toddler safe, remember that while they understand "Stop!" or "Don't Touch," they don't have the impulse control yet to stop themselves the next time the temptation appears. Since they are better at doing things rather than stopping what they are doing, "Walk slowly" works better than "Don't run."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create lots of low, safe places in your home where your child can crawl under furniture, cruise around a coffee table or stand on his own. Help a child who's walked up the stairs to get down safely. • Think of ways to divert your child away from a forbidden object so you don't have to say "no" all day long. If he's fixated on the TV remote, maybe a toy with buttons and twisty knobs could be a substitute. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does your child use his motor skills? Is he a very active child who uses his whole body, or does he prefer to explore with his fingers and hands? • How is your child's need for physical activity the same or different from yours? How does this affect you and your relationship with your child?

* The report, From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development, was a 2 ½ year effort by a group of 17 leading professionals with backgrounds in neuroscience, psychology, child development, economics, education, pediatrics, psychiatry and public policy. They reviewed what was known about the nature of early child development and the influence of early experiences on children's health and well-being. The study was sponsored by a number of federal agencies and private foundations.

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