

Child development (4) - nine to 12 months

Your baby is moving around now and the pace of life has quickened somewhat. They are 'talking' and making recognisable sounds, and they will love it when you talk to them and repeat single words. Your baby may be clingy and wary of strangers, but they are forming special relationships with family members too. Their unique personality is becoming much clearer to you.

Social and emotional development

It is usually in these three months that your baby begins to understand their special relationship with you, and with relatives and friends. Developmental characteristics include:

- They start to know that when you go away, you will come back again, and that you are still there even when they can't see you - no wonder 'peek-a-boo' and 'hiding' are favourite games.
- They still think that if they can't see you, you can't see them.
- They start to understand they are a person, and can recognise themselves in the mirror.
- They have developed some definite ideas about likes and dislikes - they may kick and resist change or other restrictions to their freedom.
- They smile and babble and try to engage you in conversation.
- They can copy simple hand games like 'clap hands' or 'bye bye'.
- They are clingy and wary of strangers.

Moving around

The big breakthrough in motor development is that they will move on their own. They might pull themselves along with their arms, roll around or crawl on all fours. Safety is an important issue now. You need to baby-proof your house and make sure all dangerous or breakable items are out of reach. Developmental characteristics include:

- They will start to pull themselves to standing and support their weight by holding onto you or furniture.
- Some babies walk by themselves during these months, although many won't walk for some months yet.
- They can pick up an object with their thumb and fingers.
- They poke, point with a finger and transfer objects from one hand to the other.
- They can't control putting things down and may have to drop the object to release it from their grasp.
- They can sit on their own for quite long periods.
- They will be feeding themselves in the high chair, although they may often be more interested in squishing and feeling the food rather than eating it.
- They can drink out of a spouted cup by themselves.

Talking

Your baby understands the idea of conversation and, even though they may not have any recognisable words, they will 'chat' with the right voice inflections. Your baby:

- May be saying simple words like 'mum-mum' and 'dad-dad'.
- Recognises several words.
- May shake their head for 'no'.
- Isn't making the huge variety of sounds anymore, because their sounds are becoming more specific to their own language.
- Loves music and rhymes, and will bounce and sway to the rhythm.
- Loves the repetition of songs - this helps them learn that language in itself is a musical thing.

Suggested activities

Children of this age still like being with people best of all, but they are starting to have some interest in toys that do something, like move or make a noise. Suggestions on encouraging and supporting your baby's development include:

- Make them a kitchen cupboard of their own so they can open and shut the door.
- Give them pots and spoons to bang.
- Sing songs and repeat phrases.
- Bounce them while singing songs.
- Look at simple books with clear pictures in them.
- Play 'hiding' games.
- Talk to them a lot.
- Sit them on the floor and surround them with toys to play with.
- Encourage them to push a trolley or toddle-car.
- Cuddle and roll on the floor with them.

Signs that suggest a developmental problem

All children are different and develop at different rates, so if your baby doesn't do all the things listed in this article, it may be because they are working on some different area of learning and development. However, if your baby is very different from other children, or if you are worried about their development or it seems to go backwards, seek the advice of a health professional. Signs that could suggest a developmental problem include:

- Doesn't show pleasure when seeing familiar people
- Doesn't show anxiety when separated from main caregiver
- Is not sitting by nine to 10 months of age
- Is not starting to move around by any means
- Is not interested in new objects
- Babbling has not become more complex
- Doesn't babble in 'conversation' with others.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Maternal and Child Health nurse
- The Maternal and Child Health Line is available 24 hours a day Tel. 132 229.

Things to remember

- The big breakthrough in motor development is that your baby will move all on their own.
- Your baby understands the idea of conversation and, even though they may not have any recognisable words, they will 'chat' with the right voice inflections.
- They will be feeding themselves in the high chair, although they may often be more interested in squishing and feeling the food rather than eating it.

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