

How Children Grow and Develop



When observing a child's development, keep in mind these key points:

- ✓ There is a wide range of typical behavior. At any particular age **25%** of children will not exhibit the behavior or skill, **50%** will show it, and **25%** will already have mastered it.
- ✓ Some **behaviors may be typical**—in the sense of predictable— responses to trauma, including the trauma of separation as well as abuse and neglect.
- ✓ **Prenatal** and **postnatal influences** may alter development. Other factors, including culture, current trends and values, also influence what is defined as typical.
- ✓ As a CASA/GAL volunteer, you need to become **aware** of your **values, attitudes** and **perceptions** about what is typical in order to be **more objective** and **culturally sensitive** when assessing a child's needs.

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1. No two children are alike. Each one is different. Each child is a growing, changing person.
2. Children are not small adults. They do not think, feel, or react as grown-up people do.
3. Children cannot be made to grow. On the other hand, they cannot be stopped from growing.
4. Even though children will grow in some way no matter what care is provided for them, they cannot reach their best growth possibilities unless they receive care and attention appropriate for their stage of development from a consistent figure in their life.
5. Most children roughly follow a similar sequence of growth and development. For example, children scribble before they draw. But no two children will grow through the sequence in exactly the same way. Some will grow slowly while others grow much faster. Children will also grow faster or slower in different areas of development. For example, a child may be very advanced in language development but less advanced, or even delayed, in motor coordination.

1. During the formative years, the better children are at mastering the tasks of one stage of growth, the more prepared they will be for managing the tasks of the next stage. For example, the better children are able to control behavior impulses as 2-year-olds, the more skilled they will be at controlling behavior impulses they experience as 3-year-olds.
2. Growth is continuous, but it is not always steady and does not always move smoothly forward. You can expect children to slip back or regress occasionally.
3. Behavior is influenced by needs. For example, active 15-month-old babies touch, feel and put everything into their mouths. That is how they explore and learn; they are not intentionally being a nuisance.
4. Children need to feel that they are loved, that they belong, that they are wanted. They also need the self-confidence that comes from learning new things.
5. Experiences offered to children need to fit their maturity level. If children are pushed ahead too soon, and if too much is expected of them before they are ready, failure may discourage them. On the other hand, children's growth may be impeded if parents or caregivers do not recognize when they are ready for more complex or challenging activities. Providing experiences that tap into skills in which children already feel confident as well as offering some new activities that will challenge them gives them a balance of activities that facilitates healthy growth.