

# Imitations as part of child development



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## Imitations

One of the most common forms of learning used by infants, children, and even adults is imitation. Imitation is the action of learning from someone or something by observing their actions and behavior. Many people overlook the fact that this starts in infancy. There are some common signs that are evident when they are just born, but a little after a year is when infants start to repeat the actions of adults, children, and what they see on TV.

Researchers are trying to make the fact that many of infants' behaviors are imitative more known. They believe that people will be more aware of their actions and behaviors around their children or what they expose their children to. The researchers point out that many of the actions and behaviors that infants have are imitative because they can't learn any other way. The infants' actions and behaviors that match adults cannot be learned because other people have not reinforced or matched the infant's behaviors and actions. Also, infants imitate more than one behavior or action and it is unlikely that the infant automatically knows that they are supposed to do that behavior or action. Plus, their imitation of a specific behavior or action cannot come from increased general arousal because that would affect more than one imitation. Because infants' matched behaviors and actions are not from learning, a fixed behavior or action, or from increases arousal, they are from imitations (2009).

The importance of a child's imitations has become more evident throughout the years. Because of this, it has not only changed the way researchers see infants, but it has changed how they see adults. Researchers now know that child's imitations affect their social development, motor and

speech/language skills, and their cognitive development. Because of this, they are now making it more known to be more cautious and aware on how your actions and behaviors are being represented. They are doing this by informing parents and adults that what they are exposing their children to are going to affect their social development, motor and cognitive development as they get older.

### Social Development

Imitation is vital for every child as they are learning. Not only are they learning language and different behaviors and actions, they are learning how to socialize. Imitating their parent's behaviors and actions are their first exposure to social experiences. Depending on how they build their relationship with their parent, will affect how they build relationships with others. Not only is it important that they are imitating positive behaviors and actions, it is important they are receiving positive reactions from their parents in order to build relationships. It is proven that infants that have well imitation skills are more likely to have better communication skills. Because of this, infants being imitated by others is just as important as them imitating other people. It helps them create a social orientation, which is the way a person has certain behaviors, actions, and relationships with people. Just before turning one, infants can tell when other people are imitating what they are doing. They start to pay more attention and react positively to the person who is imitating them, and don't react to people who just look at them and don't imitate. When infants get an increase in social attention they increase in imitation recognition. Around a year and a half of age, infants start to repeat certain actions and test whether the other person is imitating

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them or not (Contaldo, Colombi, Narzisi, Muratori, 2016). Infants develop the two faces of imitation early on, which are imitation, and being able to recognize when someone is imitating them. The two faces of imitation are linked to joint attention, understanding intentions, and social reciprocity. Social reciprocity helps infants realize that other people can act like them, just how they act like other people. This is seen as the starting point for cognitive and social development.

### Motor Control and Speech/Language Skills

Imitation plays a big role in motor control development and speech/language development. Imitation is one of the most effective and common ways to obtain these controls or skills. As infants and children start to speak, they obtain their speech/language by hearing certain sound and words, not from getting instructions on how to do it (2008). Within the first year of being born, infants start to show different types of imitative communication that are non-verbal. Some examples are matching eye contact and taking turns with vocals with the one interacting with them. As they get a little older they start to point and make noise at things. When they do this, the infant is trying to match what they hear the people around them say or do. Already at the age of 10 months, children start to understand a few words. As children get older they start to say words that they are used to hearing and use them in the right context. For example, when they see a door they start to say hello or bye because that's what they are used to their parent saying. Parents forget that their children listen to everything they say. Especially when it comes to yelling or cursing. If they hear that a lot when they are younger they are more likely to do it when they are older.

Imitation is not only important for speech and language skills, but it is important for motor skills. Many motor skills start to get easier and quicker after the age of 2. But that does not mean that the time before that is not important. The gross motor skills that infants obtain are crawling, balancing, walking, and any other uses of functionally moving the body in a big way. The negative or positive stimulus when an infant or child does an action is very important when acquiring new skills. When a child develops motor skills through imitation, the stimuli has to be positive. Positive stimuli will help motivate the child when learning new things. Another way to help the child to learn something new is by helping them. For example, when learning to walk, you should physically move the child's foot for them and say, "like this". It is also important to do things many times, so they can acquire the certain motor skill. The main point of the imitation of motor skills is so that the child can functionally use their motor skills. Continually showing a child how to do something will increase how fast they will learn that skill. So, it is important to be engaged and involved when teaching your child new skills.

### Cognitive Development

According to the Cognitive Development Domain, cognitive development is, "the process of growth and change in intellectual/mental abilities such as thinking, reasoning and understanding" (2018). Infants' cognitive development comes from their social, language, and motor controls, and the experiences they've had. They are accustomed to the relationships they have with people, objects they are exposed to, and the environment around them. The most vital and influential out of all of these are the people that are around them the most. These people have to make sure the infants have

positive personal and emotional relationships with people and the world around them. These people are the ones that are mainly being imitated. So, it is important that these people are a good example to imitate. Imitations in cognitive development has many advantages. Imitating other people's actions helps learning about instrumental actions and social routines. Therefore, these behaviors can be carried across many generations. Infants and young children's ability to imitate others is important because that is how they obtain new knowledge. Newborns ability to imitate is only possible if they have knowledge about their own bodies, what they are able to do, and how they can affect others. It is proven that children learn more efficiently when they observe people rather than trial and error. Research shows that children are selective imitators. Meaning they decide whether or not to imitate. They decide based on who they are watching and the outcome of what that person is doing. A child is more likely to do something if the outcome is positive (Wang, Bu, Li, Wang, 2018) so it is important to stay involved and react positively, so they will continue to do what they were doing.

The people and things that infants and children are exposed to affect their social development, motor and speech/language skills, and cognitive development. So, it is very important that parents are aware and involved in their child's lives. Parents and caregivers should do their best to make sure their children are surrounded with positive behaviors, situations, and constructive models. Along with finding positive solutions to places, activities, or people that your child might be around. It is also important to provide positive reinforcement and talk about the good things your child is

doing. Many people just focus on their child's behavior and forget about their own. It is important to think about your behaviors and actions and ask yourself if you would want your child to be doing that. This also goes along with people and things around them. They can catch on to bad behaviors by matching other children or seeing it on TV. Overall, it is very important to be a positive role model because everything they learn and do starts with you.

## References

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