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Physical, Mental, Emotional and Social Development in ChildrenInfants grow at a very rapid rate during the first one and a half years of life.

Development is not only physical, but mental, emotional, and social. This development provides a strong background for further development in life. Physical development refers to a babys increasing skill at utilizing various body parts. During development, there are three basic developmental rules: Rule one states, that babys develop in the head region first, followed by the upper body, followed by the trunk portion, and lastly the legs and feet. For example, a baby can hold up their heads first before they can grab an object with their hand. The second rule refers to motor skills. Motor skills are the childs ability to control movement.

The two basic classifications in motor skills are large motor skills and fine motor skills. Large motor skills deal with all the large muscles, whereas fine motor skills deal with smaller muscles in the body. The third developmental rule is brain development. As the brain develops a child responds more and more to sight and sound, which prepares them for further development (Langer, 172). At birth an infants vision is limited by the immaturity of the brain, beyond 7-12 inches an infants world is a total blur. Infants eyes unlike ours do not contain a fovea (Langer, 86).

A fovea is the area of the retina in which the images are focused. Their eye movements are very slow and are jerky at times. They are able to see color but prefer the sharper contrast of black and white. Although babies cant see small objects that are far away, they can see large objects that are up close. An adults perfect vision is estimated to be 20/20 and infants vision is

estimated to be around 20/600 (Langer, 204). By the end of the first year a babys vision nearly matches that of a grown adult (Langer, 204). Newborns actively use their senses from the time that they are born.

When they are little, a childs attention span is very limited. In the first two months, they can only focus on an edge of an object, however by the end of the second month they can scan an object as a whole. This is important because it shows that a babys attention span is very limited and they are not able to focus on an object for a long period of time (Cole, 53).

At the time of birth newborns can hear soft voices as well as loud voices and can also notice the difference between different sounds that are made. Infants are not able to listen or hear selectively. When babies hear speech they tend to open their eyes wider and look for the speaker. Infants love the sounds of children since their voices are higher in pitch. This is why they like to hear baby talk which is used by most adults all over the world (Baldwin, 121).

In the first two weeks after birth, infants have developed some reflexes. Babies begin to explore their grasping reflex where they can hold tightly to an object. Many of these behaviors evolved because they are important for a childs survival, without these a child would not be able to physically develop properly.

The absence of reflexes in a newborn are signals of possible problems in brain development (Baldwin, 136). Newborns are brought into this world having some sort of reflexes in order for them to adapt to their surroundings. One of the most basic reflexes is the rooting reflex. This reflex helps an

infant turn its head to any object that stimulates a cheek, such as a baby bottle for feeding. A newborn also will have a very strong grasping reflex.

If you place your finger in a babys finger, generally anywhere from one-week old and on, a baby will have a very strong grip. Motor skills also allow a baby to sit, crawl, stand, and walk. Some motor skills such as sitting up come a lot earlier than walking.

Cognitive development relates to the reasoning and logic of an infant. Jean Piaget among all researchers dedicated his life to a search for the ideas behind cognitive development. He was the first person to chart the journey from the simple reflexes of the newborn to the complex adolescent (Piaget, 47). Piaget believed that all childrens thinking progresses through the same stages, in the same order without skipping, or building onto previous stages. He also believed that the thinking of infants is different from the thinking of children and the thinking of children is different from that of an adolescent (Piaget, 88).

To explain how infants move to higher standards of understanding and knowledge, Piaget introduced four stages of cognitive development: sensorimotor (0-18 months), pre-operational (2-7 years), concrete operational (7-11 years), and formal operational (over 11 years) (Piaget, 160). The first 18 months of development is the sensorimotor. In this stage infants develop schemas or basic units of knowledge. During this stage infants can form schemas only of objects that are present. They cannot think about absent objects because they cant act on them.

The key to the sensorimotor intelligence is the emergence of what Piaget called the object concept, or the concept of object permanence (Piaget, 78). According to Piaget, a very young infant does not seem to recognize that objects have a permanent existence outside of his or her interaction with it. Early in infancy, from birth to around four months of age, babies will naturally look at a toy, follow it with their eyes and try to grasp it.

As soon as the object is out of sight babies mentally think it know longer exists. They do not have the concept of knowing its there, if its out of sight. Infants will begin to develop object permanence at around four months. Also, at this time they are beginning to learn that a disappearing object may still exist. Infants between 4- 8 months not only begin to turn their heads to follow a moving object, but continue to look along its path after it has vanished, however they will not search for it. From about 8-12 months infants for the first time will search manually for an object that disappears out of their sight. When children reach this stage they can follow all the visible movements of an object (Cole, 306). Social and emotional learning is an important concept for parents to be aware of.

A nurturing environment can build pathways that encourage emotional stability, while repeated stress may create many problems in further development. Infants learn from the people around them. Infants learn how to handle a situation through what other people are doing. During the first hour after birth an emotional tie begins between the baby and those surrounding him or her. From an early age infants are receptive to the people around them.

They prefer to look at children and more at attractive faces (Cole, 307). Infants also socially communicate through their feelings, not only by crying and screaming, but more subtly. Turning away and sucking their thumbs can be an indication that they want to be left alone. A baby that is smiling and looking around is generally showing signs that they want to interact with others. Not responding to an infants emotional sign can slow down their social development.

Its at this point that they also develop a sense a trust. This strong sense of trust is the foundation for a lifetime. Without this a baby may have problems communicating with others later on in their development. Often at the age of five through seven months infants also develop a fear or shyness of strangers.

This is completely natural and often is a result of the development of object permanence. Infants at this age will sometimes cling to their parents and not want to be touched by people who they see as being unfamiliar (Westman, 23). From 0-4 months babies show the majority of their emotions through crying. They have many cries in which they show different emotions. Over time parents can tell the difference between cries and know what the child wants from each cry. From 4-8 months infants begin to express a wider range of emotions. Pleasure, happiness, fear, and frustration are shown through gurgles, cools, and wails.

They also show movements such as kicking, arm waving, rocking and smiling. From 8-18 months a child develops a sense of self. They begin to recognize their image in a mirror and start to become more and more

independent. Babies at this stage have a wide range of emotional states. One minute they might be happy and playing and the next minute they will be kicking and screaming in anger (Westman, 54). Moral development begins early in an infants life.

An infant enters this world as an immoral being. Moral development depends on the type of training and attention an infant gets through its parents. If the child is disciplined at an early age, they will grow up knowing the difference between right and wrong.

Children most likely will first learn to respond to the words such as no and hot. If a parent ignores a child and lets them think that his or her bad behavior is acceptable, then they may grow up having no morals taught through their parents. Building onto Piagets work, Lawrence Kohlberg believes that there are three stages to moral development. The stages are pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. According to Kohlberg, moral development begins with pre-conventional thinking in which children obey in order to avoid punishment. What determines a childs position in these stages is not whether they choose whether what they have done is right or wrong, but by what reasoning he or she uses to make the choice. Kohlberg believes that all children go through all three stages of moral development in succession and that if one stage is skipped, development can be stunted (Power, 33).

There are many factors that also contribute to the development of a child. Growing up in a healthy living environment, strong education, always using positivity as a means of motivation, and unending love and dedication to a

child are all ways to ensure proper development. A few things that can slow down the development of a child are, low birth weight, premature birth, neglect, and drug use. Birth weight is an important factor associated with an infants overall development and health. Children who were born under 5 pounds are more likely to have serious medical problems and to also have developmental delays (Baldwin, 99). In doing significant research I have come a conclusion that is not uncommon to most, if not all, of the developmental psychologists I studied.

Like the professionals I researched, I also believe that a childs development is the single most important stage in life. In order for a child to grow up healthy and strong, he or she must develop physically, mentally, emotionally and socially. Arbib, M. A. & Hill, J.

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