The stages of child development essay

Technology, Development

From when a baby is born the process of development begins. There are many stages, all which can vary in age from child to child. A baby’s reflexes are what start this whole process off.

Primitive reflexes stem from the central nervous system. They are shown in normal infants in reaction to certain stimuli. As a child moves through normal development the frontal lobes inhibit these reflexes.

Primary reflexes develop while a foetus is still in the womb and are vital for it to survive as a newborn. Without, for example, rooting and sucking reflexes, a baby would be unable to feed normally.

Paediatricians routinely carry out reflex tests on newborn babies to assess their neurological health. Some reflexes are well-known and visible, such as the grasp-reflex and the Moro reflex. The Moro (or startle) reflex is usually displayed in the first month of a child’s life. When a newborn baby is startled he will quickly stretch out his arms and legs, and then draw them in to his chest. This reflex tends to display as a reaction to a loud noise or a change in light.

The symmetry and force of response are helpful gauges in examining the newborn’s neurological health. When a baby is just born it is unable to make much independent movement. Gradually a baby learns how to move different parts of its body and to control its muscles. Over time a baby begins to reach certain motor development milestones such as lifting its head up and picking up a toy. The process of acquiring motor skills ranges from simple to complex.

Motor development occurs, for most babies, in a probable sequence. However, each child varies on when they will learn each skill and reach the individual milestone.

The majority of children develop cephalocaudal, or head to toe. To begin with, a baby's head is disproportionately bigger than the rest of its body. According to the cephalocaudal theory, muscular control develops starting with the neck, then the upper body and arms, then lower body and legs. Motor development in the first two months of life includes initial head and neck control, and then hand movements.
The development of motor skills begins in the centre of the baby's body and works outwards. This is called the proximal-distal principle. This principle states that the baby will learn to control its trunk before its arms, and its arms before its fingers, and so on.

A baby will initially move its entire body and then gradually develop the skill to move individual parts, for example the skill of grasping. This process is called the general to specific principle.

Each important ability learned by a baby is considered a motor milestone. Fine motor skills are small, calculated movements of the fingers, hands, wrists, toes, feet, lips and tongue.

Gross motor skill are also acquired as part of a child's motor development. Unlike fine motor skills, gross motor skills involve large muscle groups and whole body movement. Gross movements include standing up, walking,

climbing stairs, etc. The skills are developed and improved throughout early childhood and continue to refine throughout most of adulthood.

A newborn baby’s hands tend to spend most of their time in a closed fist. Like the rest of the body, the baby has very limited control over them. If its palm is touched it will unconsciously tighten its fist. This reflex is called the Darwinian reflex and it subsides when the baby is two to three months old.

From the age of two weeks old, a baby may start waving its arms and bodies at interesting objects but cannot grasp them. By eight weeks of age, a baby starts to be aware and play with its hands.

For the baby, the slow progression from reflexive to controlled movement involves a great deal of effort. Luckily, babies are born with an instinctive motivation to control their bodies and this is what drives their development.

As discussed, babies have no coordination or motor skills when they are first born. Both begin to properly develop from around one month of age. The beginning of motor skills development happen first, for example when a baby learns to hold its head up. For the child to be able to crawl or walk, motor skills and coordination skills have to coincide.

The baby starts working towards this coordination from newborn when he has trained his eyes to look around and to focus on specific objects.

At around nine to ten months a baby can sit up independently. He can usually crawl and pull himself up into a standing position without support. These are gross motor milestones. He will inspect objects by touching them.

He can pick up small objects by this age, such as bits off the carpet. This level of dexterity is an important fine motor milestone.

At around one year of age a child has developed his gross motor skills well enough to stand up without support and may also cruise around the furniture. He also crawls quickly by this age. He will often point to objects and will also cast objects, meaning repeatedly throwing them away deliberately.

At around fifteen months a child will be able to walk unaided and crawl up stairs. He will also have developed the pincer grasp using his thumb and forefinger. This level of dexterity represents an important fine motor milestone.

The correct workings of reflexes, motor and coordination skills are vital in a child’s physical development. The process of reaching developmental milestones, generally, follows a specific pattern. A child failing to reach certain milestones can be the first sign that the child’s health needs assessing. However, every child is different and will develop and different rates.

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