https://www.momjunction.com/articles/physical-development-in-babies_00453778/

Rolling through the Milestones

Are children tiny learning machines (Woodfield, 2004)? Yes, is the obvious answer, but it doesn't mean all children learn and develop at the same time. However, unfortunately, we as parents, are all guilty of pushing our children to reach milestones in their development, they are not yet ready for. It would appear that there is a race amongst parents to see whose child can perform the quickest. Yet, we are missing a fundamental fact; children are not performing monkeys, and do not perform on command.

I think as parents, we are all aware what physical milestones our babies should be achieving within the first year of their lives. My personal experience as a first-time mum, meant studying my Bump, baby and beyond book countless times, so I had an idea of what to expect my baby to be doing and by what stage (Public Health Wales, 2015). It is understood that the relationships babies build contribute to their development, as well as the environment they are exposed to (Raising Children Network, 2019). As parents it is our job to offer stimulating opportunities to support our baby's physical development, enabling them to engage in their surroundings (Woodfield, 2004).

Physical development can include two areas. Firstly, the physical growth of an infant, including the weight they gain and their height. Secondly, development, including gaining control enabling them to complete minor or major tasks (Health, Social Care and Children's Services, n.d). The physical aspects of my child's development were

the most obvious to observe, from learning to support their heads to taking their first steps. However, these physical factors cannot be separated from other elements. The whole person approach means that all types of development must come into consideration, such as emotional, social and psychological (Woodfield, 2004 pg. 4-6).

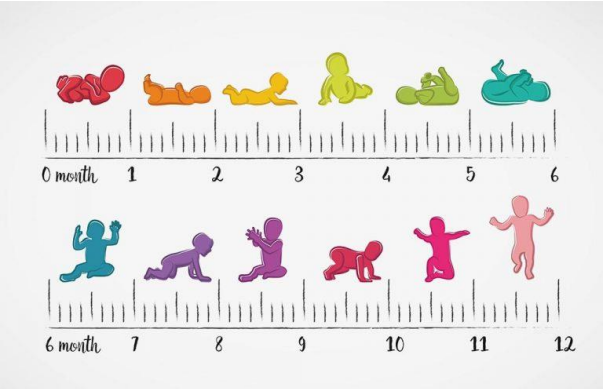
Motor Skills

Babies develop from head to toe, this is also known as cephalocaudal development, this happens both in the womb and once born, which is why newborn babies have very little control over their bodies, and often their movements are involuntary reflexes (Morin, 2020). For infants to be able to control their body parts, they will need to first develop their motor skills.

There are two types of motor skills, gross motor skills and fine motor skills. Gross motor skills involve large muscle groups which enables babies to hold their head, sit up and walk. Whereas, fine motor skills involve small muscles, such as those in the hands, feet, lips and tongue (Help me grow, n.d). Usually, motor skills develop from the center of the body outwards, which is also known as proximodistal direction (Woodfield, 2004 pg. 6-7). Therefore, infant's development tends to work in a sequence. Firstly, they can support their necks, then control their arms and finally be able to use their fingers (Oswalt, n.d). The development of gross motor skills can be displayed through infants reaching physical milestones. The stages in which infants tend to follow are:

- Holding their head up
- Pushing up on their arms
- Rolling over
- Sitting unaided
- Crawling
- Standing
- Walking

(Public Health Wales, 2015).



https://parenting.firstcry.com/articles/baby-milestones-chart-0ne-to-12-months/

Gesell's maturational theory of development

Many theorists have observed different stages in development. However, the theorist most relatable seems to be Gesell's maturational theory of development. It suggests that individuals develop through similar stages which can be predicted; although the rate of their development will differ from each individual child (Gesell Program in Early Childhood, 2020). Health practitioners are still working to this principle today (School work helper, 2019), particularly health visitors. During the first few years of a child's life the support of health visitors is a blessing, their continual checklists, growth charts and informative advice becomes a comfort. This comfort develops from two areas: firstly, the comfort of knowing that the infant is growing and developing correctly and secondly to know as parents we are giving them the best start in life. Although, this is also an opportunity for health visitors to identify any delays in the infant's development, making further referrals where needed (Local Government Association, 2017). Infants may experience a delay in physical development because of numerous factors, including genes, maturation and environment.

Conclusion:

The first year in a child's life is such an exciting time for families, to watch your baby grow and develop is a fascinating concept that is treasured by so many parents. What they don't tell you, however, is time goes by so quickly and before you know it the crawling begins and they become unstoppable. So, how many of us reminisce back to this stage in our child's life and regret wishing their lives away?

First Day of School

How many of us, as parents can say we enjoyed our child's first day of school or nursery? The thought of having free time, and free childcare was a dream. But it soon became apparent the reality was quite frankly, the opposite. From personal experiences I believe the first day of nursery affected both myself and my child, but indeed, one maybe

https://www.parents.com/toddlers-preschoolers/starting-preschool/separation-anxiety/overcoming-separation-anxiety/

more than the other. I'm sure you can work out which one of us that was. However, despite the emotional distress for both of us, attending school aids in all aspects of a child's development and can have a positive impact on their emotional well-being.

Social and Emotional Development

Social and emotional development work in congruence with each other. The development of these factors, mean that children are able to establish who they are, understand what their feelings mean and how they interact with others (Help me grow, n.d).

Infants display social and emotional development through numerous ways:

- Making different facial expression, such as smiling
- Responding to their name
- Exhibit a shyness to strangers
- Begin to form a personality

(Stanford Children's Health, 2020).

It is also not uncommon for infants to express their feelings through, what we would call 'naughty' behaviour. This often comes down to the inability to communicate what they are feeling (Health, Social Care and Children's Services, n.d).

Attachment Theory

Through the first years of a child's life, they develop attachments. Bowlbys (1958) theory of attachment suggests that children build significant emotional bonds with one individual in particular, which is usually the mother.

Ainsworth (1970) and Bowlby (1988), both found that insecure attachments or break down in attachment could have a detrimental effect on a child's development causing significant implications to their cognitive, social and emotional development, as well as leading to future behavioral problems. Parents, like myself who already question whether it is best they leave their child in daycare, are now questioning it even more.

However, a healthy attachment is the child's ability to trust their prime caregiver to respond to their needs, whilst using them as a base to investigate their surroundings (Passer, Smith, Holt, Bremner, Sutherland, Vliek (2009). Unfortunately, the difficulty

for us as parents, is going from supporting our children in all the daily aspects of their lives, to trusting a stranger to do the same.

Supporting Development

As parents it is our role to support our child's development. From the moment babies are born, they are establishing who they are by the care they are given and we as parents are responsible for providing a strong caring relationship in order for our child to feel safe, supported and encouraged (Zero to Three, 2010). By creating these strong relationships from an early age will aid them throughout their life to build friendships, solve problems and cope with challenges they may face (Parlakian, 2003). However, shortly after your child starts school, you realise that you are not the only person your child will rely on for support in their development.

School/Nursery Support

Attending school/nursery for the first time can be very daunting for a child, leading to many anxieties and worries. Teachers within the early years have to work with the Statutory Framework for the EYFS in mind, where it states the importance in providing experiences and support to aid children to develop "a positive sense of themselves and of others; respect for others; social skills; and a positive disposition to learn"(Department for Education, 2017). Other children can also be a supporting comfort when beginning school. Through social development children learn to make friends, becoming sensitive to their needs as well as learning how to play co-operatively (Department for Education, 2017).

Separation Anxiety

https://www.news-medical.net/health/Separation-Anxiety-Disorder-Management.aspx

It is very common for infants to experience some sort of separation anxiety at some point in their lives, due to the attachment they have built with their primary caregiver. However, by the time children hit the age of three, they have an understanding that their parent will be returning to collect them (OSSE, 2016). This does not necessarily

mean they will not get upset and act out due to the separation, but that they will most probably overcome it within a short period of time. From personal experience when leaving my child in daycare for the first time, and possibly a few weeks after meant lots of tears, clinging around my neck but also such excitement when he realised I'd come back to pick him up.

Conclusion

Evidently, social and emotional development are closely linked throughout a child's development. The development of emotional factors enables a child to understand who they are and what feelings mean. This is aided through the attachments they develop with their primary caregiver, the social interactions they have at nurseries and the separation anxiety they also experience throughout various situations. Together these factors intertwine allowing a child to learn and develop, which helps prepare them for the next stages of their childhood. Unfortunately, for parents, I do not think we are ever prepared for our children to grow-up.

6 stages of play

https://discountplaygroundsupply.com/blog/our-guide-to-the-6-different-stages-of-play/

As parents we all know the importance of play for our children, indeed if you were ever to visit my house, you would be greeted with mountains of toys, in an unorderly fashion. Perhaps you could say my son fits the category of an 'overstimulated child'. But, I take the importance of play quite literally and like to ensure my child has a variety of toys to choose from. Which regularly results in my child emptying everything all over the floor and playing with the empty box.

"Playing is a natural and enjoyable way for children to keep active, stay well and be happy" (nidirect, 2020). Play has often been described as the centre of learning and development which enables children to develop many skills, including confidence,

social skills, communication and caring for others (Raising Children, 2019). In the early years of life, learning for children must be fun and engaging with many opportunities for them to lead their own play.

Parents, like myself have probably been the product of their child's design at some point in their lives, whether this be crawling round the house on all fours pretending to be a horse or having your hair ripped out playing hairdressers. The reality is, we do all that is possible to support our child's development and ensure they are happy during the process.

Barriers

Unfortunately, there are many barriers, which can limit children's play time. One being the environment a child can play in for example, many parents have stated that they are unable to access safe and stable environments for their children (Smith, 2017). Regrettably, we live in a changing world and the powers of the media have made the dangers of the outdoors apparent to parents. But, children learn through experience therefore (Estyn, 2014), wrapping them in cotton wool, can often cause more damage for their development than good.

6 Stages in Play

Play is fundamental in a child's social development. There are 6 stages of play during infancy, which are integral to a child's development. All children experience these stages; however, it is not uncommon for children to experience delays in some of the stages (Health Service Executive, 2019). The stages begin at birth and continue through to the age of 4 and beyond. The stages of play are as followed, including a brief explanation to aid in your understanding:

https://www.verywellfamily.com/types-of-play-2764587

- Unoccupied play (Birth-3months) – when babies begin to kick around for no reason.
- Solitary Play (Birth – 2 years) – when children play alone, still exploring their surroundings.

- Spectator/On looker Behavior (2 Years) – watching others play, but not joining in.
- Parallel Play (2+ Years) – playing next to another child, but yet to interact with eachother.
- Associate Play (2-4 Years) – playing together but with different ideas.
- Cooperative Play (4+ Years) – playing together, with the same ideas.

(Pathways.org, 2020).

Throughout the stages of play, children are developing their own identity, becoming more independent in their surroundings and also discovering how to make friends (Health Service Executive, 2019). Play supports children to respect others and understand the meaning of friendships, by listening to other's ideas, sharing ideas and negotiating to reach a similar goal (Shafer, 2018).

Social Learning Theory

Bandura's (1977) social learning theory stressed that social factors were the key to children's learning and development. He believed that children learn through observing and modelling others behaviour, attitudes and emotional reactions (Culatta, 2020). Children often learn how to complete tasks by observing, repetition and following simple instructions (Raising Children Network, 2018). Bandura closely links to the spectator stage of play, where children watch other children play, before getting involved themselves. When children have learnt to play together, it means they have developed and are still developing their social skills by interacting and engaging in activities.

Policy

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states under article 31, that all children have the right to play (Unicef, n.d). The Welsh Government displays article 31 within the curriculum, with emphasises on the importance of play within the foundation phase (Welsh Government, 2018). This proves that play, is essential in a child's future development. Under the Children and Families (Wales) Measure, the Welsh Government have also stated the importance of offering children with play opportunities within local authorities (Welsh Government, 2014).

Conclusion

Play is paramount to a child's development, specifically social development. Children are like sponges; they absorb all information and experiences we provide them. Through development they then learn how to process and demonstrate what they have learnt. The observations I have made through my child's development, and remembering my own experiences, is how the types of play have evolved.

Playtime Learning

https://craftwithcartwright.co.uk/encouraging-development-through-play/

The increased use of technology has reshaped our lives dramatically, which has had a consequential impact on children's play. Gone were the days when play involved rolling around in mud, now it appears sitting in front of a computer screen brings much more joy to children. However, from a personal perspective, when I reflect on my own childhood, I cannot fault it. There was constant exploring, imagining and most importantly, laughter. I can only wish that my child looks back at his childhood and thinks the same.

Indeed whilst, the thought of a child being fixated on technology is often met with disapproval, technology has been proven to have a number of benefits for a child's development (Roxby, 2013). That being said, having witnessed the consequences an excessive use of technology has on young family members, such as, a total disregard for their surroundings and their inability to hold a conversation, I have decided that as my child gets older, I would not want this to be the same for him. Instead, I believe the encouragement of a child's imagination, their creativity and the opportunities to experience new situations through play is integral.

Cognitive development

Cognitive development is described as the "development of knowledge, skills, problem solving and deposition" (Help me grow, n.d). A continual process which is happening

throughout developmental milestones, through imitation of actions, imagination play and creation. The two main factors to cognitive development are:

- Nature including genetics
- Nurture referring to experiences

(Oakley, 2004). Despite, previous disagreements scientists have recently agreed that these two factors are of equal importance for a child's development (Virtual Lab School, n.d).

Play

Play has often been described as a fundamental learning tool for a child's cognitive development (Ginsburg, 2007). It offers children the opportunity to solve problems, be creative and experiment, all whilst thinking and learning throughout the process (Raising Children Network, 2018). I often find myself, watching my son for hours on end playing out different scenarios, wondering what's going through his little head. Cognitive development can take many forms in play, from role play areas in the foundation phase, to making stories up with their imagination.

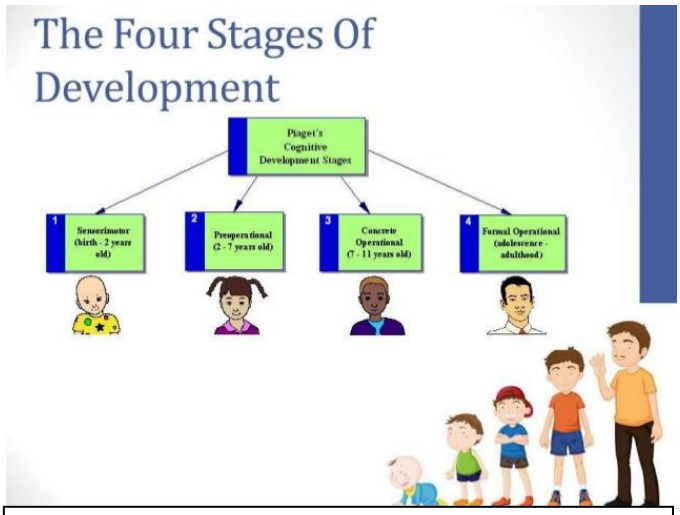
Free play is often the best way for children to develop cognition, as there are no rules set out by adults, and they are able to steer their learning in their own direction (Elkind, 2007). It is often that my partner and I disagree over free play, he likes to intervene when he feels that our son is at risk of hurting himself, however some situations I believe would help him to learn dangers. Through childhood, the complexity of play grows, becoming more cognitively challenging (Santer, Griffiths and Goodall, 2007).

Delays in Development

Unfortunately for children with a disability, play can be limited and can be confined to solitary play, limiting their development and inability to explore their environment through their senses (Santer et al, 2007). To give disabled children the best opportunities, it is down to the adults to source appropriate materials, that meet the child's needs (Santer et al, 2007).

Theory of cognitive development

Piaget believed that children are active participants of their own learning and that their cognitive development followed a series of four stages (Gray and Macblain, 2015, pg. 68-69) in which we move through as we mature intellectually (Arthur, Peterson, 2012 pg. 76-78). Piaget believed that children must progress through each stage of cognitive development and at each level it offered a new level of analysis, organisation and understanding of their environment (Lefa, 2014), as well as stating that at each stage, their thinking and reasoning would differ (Goswami, 2015).



https://www.slideshare.net/ayushigupta547/jean-piaget-theory-of-cognitive-development

Piaget stresses that active engagement is essential for a child's development (Lefa, 2014), which is why play is the perfect opportunity for children to learn. Both teachers and us parents have to ensure that we offer a stimulating and safe environment for our children to explore.

Policy

Flying Start (2014), an initiative introduced by the Welsh Government which aims to provide free high-quality childcare to disadvantaged areas. Through research, it has been found that quality care within the first years of a child's life can have many benefits to a child's development. It can improve cognitive development in the future, with enhanced mathematics, language and reading skills. The quality of the environment can also lead to experiences which provide the groundwork to future development (Welsh Government, 2014).

Conclusion

Whilst the landscape in which play manifests has changed dramatically over the years, it is still very much apparent that play is an integral part of a child's cognitive development. Indeed, as research suggests it is vital that a child moves through the four phases of their cognitive development and it is the responsibility of parents, schools and policy holders to ensure children can achieve this. As stated previously, I believe encouraging play through imagination and creativity is important for my child's

development and using both nature and nurture I will ensure this is the childhood he receives.

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