

Age-Anchoring the Three Child Outcomes: Birth–36 Months

Based on the Larimer County Age-Anchoring Tool

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<https://ectacenter.org/eco/pages/childdevelopment.asp>

Introduction

Age-expected skills and behaviors are in the broad range of what is expected for a child's chronological age.

[Age anchoring](#) is the process of examining a child's functional abilities, skills, and behaviors to determine how close that functioning is to expectations for their chronological age. Age anchoring provides essential context for how a child's functioning fits into developmental progression. Comparing a child's functioning to age expectations is essential to apply the [COS Definitions: 7-Point Rating Scale Criteria](#).

This document presents age-expected skills and behaviors children develop from birth to 36 months, aligned to the [Three Child Outcomes](#).

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Office of Special Education Programs
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The University
of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill

Birth–3 Months

Outcome 1: Positive Social Emotional Skills (including social relationships)

- Fixates on human faces and maintains gaze with caregiver
- Turns head and eyes in the direction of caregiver’s voice
- Is comforted and appears to enjoy touch and being held by a familiar adult
- Draws attention to self when in distress

Outcome 2: Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills

- Lifts head while on tummy
- Grasps finger if placed in palm
- Clasps hands together and hands to mouth
- Kicks legs while lying on back
- Makes cooing noises

Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Behaviors to Meet Needs

- Opens hands more and rest them in open position
- Produces different cries for different reasons
- Holds small objects or toys when placed in hand
- Turns head to either side when lying on back
- Follows moving object in range of 30 degrees either side of midline (with object held 10–12 inches away from face)
- Lifts and rotates head when lying on tummy or when held at shoulder
- Is startled or upset by sudden, loud noises
- Kicks feet in bicycle motion when lying on back
- Responds to human voice more readily than any other sound
- **Rooting:** reflexive turning of mouth toward hand rubbing cheek
- **Primary Standing:** moving legs into extension for weight bearing when held upright (standing height) with feet contacting surface
- **Walking:** reflexive stepping when held upright with feet contacting surface, lifts feet alternatively in walking-like motion

4–6 Months

Outcome 1: Positive Social Emotional Skills (including social relationships)

- Anticipates being lifted or fed and moves body toward adult when approached
- Smiles spontaneously to human contact, smiling in play, and smiles at self in mirror
- Vocalizes to express pleasure and displeasure sounds in addition to crying or cooing
- Can stop unexplained crying
- Enjoying games with others (“Where’s Your Nose?”, “So Big!”)
- Vocalizes in response to babbling behavior, vocalizations and speech produced by an adult

Outcome 2: Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills

- Reaches for objects
- Looks to place on body where being touched
- Tries to cause things to happen (kicking a mobile and smiling)
- Drops ball and observes it fall or bounce
- Develops more precise imitation skills of facial movements and sounds
- Secures an object partially hidden by cloth
- Pushes up through extended arms while on tummy
- Repeats arm movements to keep a toy activated, keep caregiver singing, or other causal event
- Examines hands, objects, and own reflection in a mirror

Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Behaviors to Meet Needs

- Brings hands together in midline over chest when lying on back (places hands on bottle while eating, playing with own hands held together over chest)
- Reaches for, grasps, or bats at objects (shakes or bangs toys on surface)
- Brings objects to mouth (toys, pacifier, half-filled bottle)
- Moves objects back and forth from one hand to the other

7–9 Months

Outcome 1: Positive Social Emotional Skills (including social relationships)

- Smiles and laughs during turn-taking
- Participates in simple games (pat-a-cake, peek-a-boo)
- Demonstrates anticipation of play activities
- Exhibits anxious behavior around unfamiliar adults
- Uses gestures and vocalizing to protest
- Shouts or vocalizes to gain attention
- Shows anxiety over separation from parents
- Repeats behavior to maintain adult attention (showing off)

Outcome 2: Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills

- Shows desire to get to things that are not within reach
- Sits unsupported while playing with toys
- Plays 2–3 minutes with a single toy
- Reaches for and grasps blocks or other small toys
- Reaches for objects while on tummy

Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Behaviors to Meet Needs

- Holds an object in each hand and bangs them together
- Reaches for objects with either hand, one at a time, when lying on tummy
- Rakes at tinier objects with fingers
- Turns to look when name is called
- Begins to imitate sounds, often in turn-taking, conversational way
- Moves body to music
- Shows desire to get to things that are not within reach
- Rolls in both directions and may use sequential rolling to get somewhere
- Crawls on belly using both arms and legs symmetrically to propel at least 3 feet
- Pulls up into standing position with help, supports weight on legs
- Sits on own and plays once placed into position
- Participates in dressed (pulls off socks, puts on hat)
- Grabs utensils when being fed (spoon, cup)

10–12 Months

Outcome 1: Positive Social Emotional Skills (including social relationships)

- Imitates familiar words in turn-taking
- Show sensitivity to the mood of others
- Performs for social attention
- Responds to a request of “come here”
- Stops when name is called
- Maintaining attention to speaker
- Responds with gesture to “come up” or “want up”
- Waves in response to “bye-bye”
- Says “mama” or “dada” meaningfully
- Uses a word to call a person
- Pushes or pulling an adult’s hand to have a behavior instigated or repeated
- Shows attachment to favorite toy or blanket
- Expresses two or more emotions (pleasure, fear, sadness)
- Briefly stops behavior when told “no”

Outcome 2: Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills

- Points with index finger
- Imitates behaviors initiated by caregiver (plays peek-a-boo, smiles and laughs during turn-taking, names pictures and objects)
- Bangs blocks and other toys together
- Repeatedly throws or drops objects to watch the movement
- Stirs spoon in cup
- Bangs spoon on inverted cup or tabletop
- Demonstrates problem-solving skills (puts objects in mouth and mouthing, touches to instigate or repeat desired behavior from an adult, turns pictures, mirrors, or three-dimensional objects around to examine them, plays xylophone with mallet)
- Sings along with familiar song
- Uses gestures or vocalization (grunts or whines) to protest
- Shouts or vocalizes to gain attention
- Responds to a request to “come here”
- Maintains attention to speaker
- Responds with gesture to “come up” or “want up”
- Waves in response to “bye-bye”
- Says “mama” or “dada” meaningfully
- Imitates consonant and vowel combinations
- Imitates non-speech sounds
- Vocalizes with intent frequently
- Uses words to call a person
- Gives objects on verbal request
- Performs a routine activity on verbal request
- Looks at familiar objects and people when named
- Understands simple questions
- Identifies two body parts on self
- Demonstrates intense attention to adult language

Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Behaviors to Meet Needs

- Points with index finger and activates toys using one finger
- Develops more refined grasp using tips of finger and thumb to pick up much smaller things with precision
- Learns to voluntarily let go of what is being held, may throw objects
- Raises arms up when wanting to be picked up
- Expresses full range of emotion including resistive behavior
- Raises self to sitting position
- Creeps on hands and knees to get around
- Pulls up on furniture
- Cruises along furniture or walks with hands-on help
- Tries to climb to get to higher surfaces, crawls up stairs
- Fusses when uncomfortable in diaper
- Feeds self with fingers or sippy cup and tries to use small utensils

13–18 Months

Outcome 1: Positive Social Emotional Skills (including social relationships)

- Pretends to talk on phone, feed or comfort a doll, clean a spill
- Discriminates between familiar and unfamiliar people
- Shows awareness of the feelings of others
- Initiates familiar turn-taking routines
- Requests assistance from an adult
- Hugs and kisses parents
- Demonstrates functional use of objects (uses a brush, drinks from a toy cup)
- Gives a toy to caregiver spontaneously and upon request
- Has temper tantrums when frustrated
- Sometimes does the opposite of what is asked of them

Outcome 2: Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills

- Explores the environment independent of caregiver
- Turns pages in a book
- Looks at, pointing to, and naming pictures in a book
- Imitates scribbling motions
- Initiates familiar turn-taking routines
- Imitates sounds often, in turn taking conversational way
- Points to two action words in pictures
- Points to, showing, and giving an object
- Hands a toy to an adult for assistance

Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Behaviors to Meet Needs

- Picks up objects of different sizes and weights using either hand and precision with fingers
- Holds a container and removes objects from it
- Places objects into large containers
- Uses a variety of gestures to communicate wants and needs
- Says words for familiar things and people
- Follows simple directions (“Let’s go to the kitchen!”, “Find your shoes!”)
- Can match sounds to objects (doorbell, telephone)
- Stands without support for brief periods
- Walks independently with good quality, needs guidance to ascend and descend stairs on feet
- Climbs up on couch or chair
- Removes loose clothing partially or completely
- Practices using child-sized fork and spoon to eat (non-liquids)
- Tries to help with tooth brushing
- Practices using child-sized fork and spoon to eat (non-liquids)
- Tries to help with tooth brushing

19–24 Months

Outcome 1: Positive Social Emotional Skills (including social relationships)

- Shows a wide variety of emotions (fear, anger, sympathy, modesty, guilt, joy)
- Checks in with familiar adults during play
- Resists change, transitions are difficult
- Shows jealousy of attention given to others, especially own family
- Uses vocalizations and words during pretend play
- Plays alone for short periods
- Recognizes self in photograph
- Uses concept “mine” to denote possessiveness

Outcome 2: Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills

- Identifies six body parts
- Chooses two familiar objects upon request
- Sorts objects by type (kitchen vs. animals)
- Follows two different directions with a toy (put it in here, turn it over)
- Asks “What’s that?”
- Demonstrates symbolic play, using one object as a signifier for another object
- Attempts to repair broken toys
- Chooses one object from a group of five upon verbal request
- Stacks 5–6 blocks
- Uses two-word utterance sometimes combined with gestures, to communicate
- Occasionally uses three-word phrases
- Imitates words overheard in conversation
- Names 5–7 objects upon request
- Uses new words regularly (adding 2–5 words each week)
- Spontaneously names objects, people, and actions
- Follows novel commands
- Tells about personal experiences

Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Behaviors to Meet Needs

- Tries to take things apart
- Enjoys marking or drawing on paper with crayons or other writing tools
- Begins to place objects in containers with smaller openings
- Uses two-word utterances, plus gestures, to express wants and needs
- Can answer questions with “yes” or “no” using head shake, gestures or words
- Expresses need for independence with doing things on own or asks for help when needed
- Follows two or three-step directions
- Likes to imitate adult actions especially to “help out”
- Garners someone’s attention or takes someone’s hand to take them to something they want or want to show them
- Demonstrates more advanced movement and motor skills (running, climbing out of crib)
- Attempts to jump down from step or raised surface
- Positions body more automatically to help put on clothing
- Greater skills with spoon and fork, less spilling
- Tries to wash own hands and face, comb hair

25–30 Months

Outcome 1: Positive Social Emotional Skills (including social relationships)

- Is apt to snatch, push, kick, rather than give and take in polite fashion
- Throws tantrums when frustrated
- Shows facial expression and behavior indicating pity, shame and modesty
- Is sometimes restless, rebellious and very active
- Is sometimes resistant and dawdling
- Separates easily in familiar surroundings
- Desires to repeat favorite activities
- Continues difficult tasks for 3–5 minutes (building with blocks)
- Insists on choices (food, clothing, appearance)
- Seeks and accepts assistance with difficulties
- Invents new uses for everyday materials with assistance (a box as a house)
- Develop fears (large animals)
- Displays understanding of how objects work together (gets dustpan when caregiver sweeps floor)
- Substitutes similar objects (boxes as large blocks)
- Realizes behaviors precede events (if caregiver takes things out the refrigerator and turns on stove, lunch is soon)
- Comforts others in distress
- Addresses others appropriately to get attention (uses names or other forms of address)

Outcome 2: Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills

- Understands simple possessive forms (daddy’s shirt)
- Understands complex sentences (“when we get to the store, I’ll buy you an ice cream cone”)
- Points to smaller parts of the body when asked (chin, elbow)
- Recognizes and identifies general family names or relationships (“Grandma”, “Uncle”)
- Recognizes the names and pictures of most common objects
- Understands word association through function (“What do you drink with?”, “What do you sleep on?”, “What do you brush your teeth with?”)
- Understands size difference (little dog, large dog)
- Follows directions with prepositions (in, on, behind, out)
- Enjoys finger plays (songs and games that use hands)
- Attempts to locate objects discussed by others
- Speaks in two- or three-word sentences (shorthand and imitation is rare)
- Often using personal pronouns (I, you, he, it, me) correctly
- Using regular plurals (cats, dogs, balls)
- Recall parts of a familiar story
- Requests familiar stories
- Changes intonation and tone to communicate meaning
- Understands “one”, “all” (“Give me one block”, “Give me all the blocks”)
- Matches objects with pictures
- Matches simple shapes (circle, square, triangle)

Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Behaviors to Meet Needs

- Opens doors with a handle or knob
- Turning knobs on objects like radio or TV
- Catching ball (by trapping against body) when playing with adult or peer
- Knows where objects are kept
- Puts things away to help clean up
- Uses non-verbal gestures and body language to express needs and feelings (hugs, hands on hips, etc.)
- Progressively more articulate with language to express thoughts and desires
- Walks up steps, alternating feet while holding rail or hand for support
- Sits on riding toys and pushes with feet (or rides tricycle)
- Swings leg to kick stationary ball
- Plays on outdoor play structures (climbing, sliding)
- Attempts to jump with two feet together
- Puts on socks, coat and shirt
- Takes off own shoes, socks, and pants without fasteners or buttons
- Uses fork to spear bite-sized foods
- Knows which faucet is hot and cold
- Washes self in bath
- Interested in trying potty (still mostly wearing diapers)

31–36 Months

Outcome 1: Positive Social Emotional Skills (including social relationships)

- Observing other children at play; may join in for a few minutes
- Playing well with two or three children in group
- Having difficulty sharing
- Showing facial expressions and behaviors indicating pity, shame, modesty
- Sometimes being restless, rebellious, very active
- Becoming resistant, dawdles
- Throwing tantrums when thwarted or unable to express urgent needs
- Objecting to major changes in routines
- Verbalizing play plan for assigned role (“I am mother” “You be baby” “I cook” “You watch TV”)
- Verbalizing play plan and using pretend props which are identified for benefit of adult (“This is our house (box)”)
- Following simple rules
- Taking turns in games
- Listening and participating in group activities with adult supervision
- Enjoying opportunities for pretend play and creating things (crafts, art)
- Altering behavior based on a past event and builds on it (“this didn’t work, so I will try this”)
- Relating an experience today to one that happened in the past (“When Grandma comes over, the dog goes in the crate.”)
- Saying “please” and “thank you” when reminded
- States they are a boy or a girl
- Begins to obey and respect simple rules
- Takes pride in achievements
- Resists change, may want things done the same way
- May be able to participate in games that involve following simple directions and taking turns (“Duck, Duck, Goose”)

Outcome 2: Acquisition and Use of Knowledge and Skills

- Understands concepts of “mine” and “theirs”
- Tells gender when asked
- Sometimes labeling and talking about own drawings when asked
- Gives first and last name when asked
- Uses several verb forms correctly to describe a variety of actions (“playing”, “played”)
- Expands use of prepositions (“under”, “in front of”, “behind”)
- Understands color, size, and shape adjectives
- Shows interest in explanations that involve “why” and “how”
- Uses four- to six-word phrases or sentences
- Makes negative statements (“Can’t open it,” “Don’t touch”)
- Uses contractions (“can’t”, “we’ll”, “won’t”)
- Uses some plural forms correctly in speech
- Uses past tense
- Dictates a story for an adult to write out
- Performs multi-step tasks when playing (takes money, rings cash register, puts money in drawer)
- Uses inductive reasoning (if you do this, that happens)
- Expresses understanding of cause and effect (it’s quiet because you turned off the music)
- Copies a circle
- Draws a simple face
- Matches three colors
- Matches objects by color, shape and size

Outcome 3: Use of Appropriate Behaviors to Meet Needs

- Solves problems and carries out plans for getting something they need or want (while caregiver is distracted, gets forbidden marker out of desk drawer, prepares a simple snack of crackers in a bowl)
- Follows simple rules
- Separates easily from caregiver in familiar environments
- Hops in place on either foot three times without losing balance
- Stands on either foot for three seconds
- Jumps over object (string or rope 2 inches high)
- Walks upstairs alternating feet
- Walks downstairs four steps without support, placing both feet on each step
- Dresses and undresses independently (including unbuttoning buttons, with few exceptions)
- Asserts food preferences and recognizes what is and is not allowed to eat
- Gets drink from fountain
- Follows basic health practices when reminded (washing and drying hands, brushing teeth)
- Verbalizes toilet needs consistently
- Shows daytime control of toileting needs with occasional accidents