

Cognitive Development in your toddler

By Kerry Mc Arthur, ECD Coordinator

Psalm 139:14

*I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.*

We are all created unique, God-designed to be different for a reason. The world would be boring if everyone was the same and this we in see how quickly our own children or children in our care grow up.

Toddlers develop at a rapid pace. We are amazed by how quickly they pick up things and explore the world around them. Their development happens on so many levels, from physical to mental, and it is sometimes difficult to keep track of all the developmental milestones. One of these milestones is broadly referenced as cognitive development.

Before you can understand the importance of cognitive development it is important to understand



what cognitive means and how it impacts a child.

Cognitive Development is the child's ability to learn and solve problems. For example, a two-month-old baby learning to explore the environment with hands or eyes or a five-year-old learning how to do simple math problems.

During this phase children learn to use language and symbols to interpret the world around them, which blends into fantasy or pretend play. Their focus shifts to one aspect or object instead of a general focus on the area around them. Memory is activated and becomes part of categorizing, problem solving and reasoning. Social interactions become an integral part in the learning process.

Russian researcher Lev Vygotsky believed that cognition advanced through social interactions and problem solving. Vygotsky's work demonstrates that with the support of an adult or more skilled peer, a child's ability improved, as long as the interactions were not too advanced for the child's skill level at the time. He also made note that children would begin to talk to themselves when faced with challenging tasks. This then becomes our internal thought or inner speech which in turn is the foundation of skills including attention, memorisation, impulse control, planning etc.

Milestones you can expect

12 – 24 Months

By the time a toddler is two they should be demonstrating some of the following developmental milestones (this is by no means a complete list):

- Recognising themselves in the mirror
- Often says 'no' to requests e.g. bedtime
- Enjoy dancing to music
- Enjoy messy activities
- Be willing to give or release a toy

- Play with a ball cooperatively
- Imitate chores
- Show jealousy
- Begin to recognise distress in others and comfort them

You can help to develop their social and problem-solving skills by including your toddler in family activities they would normally not be part of like joining the family at the dinner table, play matching games and develop and stick to a bedtime routine including hugs and kisses. Take turns drawing to encourage sharing. Encourage playdates and interactive play time with children their own age.

2 – 3-Year-old

- Understands simple stories
- Their imagination will become more vivid
- Learn to match familiar items to pictures
- Are able to complete simple puzzles and peg boards
- May begin to play "house" and know where and how certain objects are used
- Follows simple rules and instructions
- Starts to learn how to dress themselves
- Plays with others not just next to them
- Recognises basic colours and are able to match items to colour



Footprints into ECD continued

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One way that you can assist this development is by encouraging imaginary play and hiding games. Play hide and seek and treasure games. A 2-3-year old loves to help, so allow them to do so safely, make it a game and during the clean-up session use simple instructions. Car games are fun to play and can incorporate find the colour, numbers and letters. Make it a competition which will include counting when adding points.

Remember above all that every child develops at their own pace. While there are times that you need to consult your doctor, most of the time even if your toddler is a little behind, they will catch up and you must allow them to do so without pressurizing them unnecessarily.



In line with these several changes to Early Child Development (ECD) in South Africa will take place, including:

- ECD will now fall under the responsibility of the Department of basic Education (DBE), historically registration, management and ongoing certification has been handled by the Department of Social Development (DSD);
- Providing a comprehensive package of ECD services (birth registration, social assistance, parenting support and quality learning);
- Standardising guidelines, norms and standards for ECD and setting the employment targets in the sector over the next five years;
- Developing a plan to take care of the first 1,000 days of human life, from pregnancy until two years of age, in which the pregnant mother will get good nutrition, be encouraged to stop smoking and drinking alcohol and undertake antenatal care visits from an early stage. The baby should receive good nutrition, exclusive breastfeeding, immunisation and growth monitoring;
- Promoting different models for delivering home and community-based ECD.

NEW DEVELOPMENT IN THE ECD SECTOR

During the State of the Nation Address earlier this year our president announced various focus areas on the Early Childhood sector. Preparation is in place to make two years of early childhood development compulsory for all children. This compulsory enrolment will apply to all South African children between the ages of four and five and will take place before the child enters grade 1.

How this will all be achieved is uncertain at present and there are various meetings happening across the country as we speak. We will hopefully have direction soon. As soon as ACSI has access to this information a full document will be made available which will include information on registration, ongoing compliance and legislation.