



# understanding YOUR CHILD

*From the time we are born we grow and change, developing mentally, physically and spiritually. We learn through the things we see, hear and experience. Knowing what to expect as your child develops and understanding why your child is behaving a certain way can make your task as a parent a little easier. This will leave you more time to enjoy and support your child so they can reach their full potential.*

## Every child is unique

Most parents have a good understanding of the physical changes that take place as a child develops. However the emotional, social and intellectual sides of development are often less well understood.

Below is a brief overview of common behaviours for children from birth to adolescence. These are guidelines only, as children's development can vary a lot, particularly when they're very young.

### 0–6 months

From birth to six months of age, babies communicate by crying. As they get older and start to recognise their parents, they learn to cry in different ways to express different things – such as being hungry, tired, scared or need changing.

Babies watch things and use touch to try and make sense of their new world such as shaking noisy toys, watching objects and faces or putting things in their mouth. You can help them learn by introducing new things they can see, touch and feel.

It's never too early to start reading to children. Not only does it help them to develop language skills, children find the sound of a parent's voice soothing.

### 6–12 months

At this age, babies like lots of attention and will make a lot of noise to get it. They will also reward the attention with lots of smiles.

They begin to respond to familiar voices and may be fearful or shy around new people.

## 12 months–2 years

By 12 months, most children can say a few words. At two years of age, most children are able to make simple, two-word sentences.

Being close to their family and giving and receiving lots of hugs is very important for children of this age.

At this stage, children will also begin to respond to simple requests except perhaps the one about keeping still while you are trying to dress them!

### Parenting tips

- when your baby cries, respond quickly and consistently and they will cry less when they are older
- develop a pattern of regular eating, sleeping and play times that suit both you and your child

## 2–3 years

During this time, toddlers begin to realise they are individuals. There are many ways they will explore and express their independence like saying “no” and refusing to do as you ask. It can be a very frustrating time for both child and parent. The occasional tantrums (kicking and screaming) are what lead to this period being called the ‘terrible twos’.

While toddlers are beginning to learn about taking turns, it is sometimes easier to keep them happy playing alongside, rather than with, other children.

The combination of curiosity and a lack of understanding about danger can make this a challenging time for parents.

### Parenting tips

- if your child has a temper tantrum, try to work out what’s wrong and distract them with a toy or object. Children of this age are easily distracted
- encourage your toddler’s newfound independence by letting them do things by themselves like eating, dressing or making simple choices, like “Do you want orange juice or apple juice?”
- tell your toddler often what you like about them

## 3–5 years

At this age children love to talk and ask lots of questions. They will talk to their family, friends, themselves and sometimes even an imaginary friend.

They’re very affectionate, begin to share and start to make friends.

It’s not until children reach this age that they begin to have an awareness of right and wrong.

### Parenting tips

- share stories about your culture with your children (for example, an island legend, bible story or traditional story)
- encourage your child to ask lots of questions by listening and giving them answers

- read to your child regularly
- take your child to play groups to make new friends and prepare them for school

## 5–7 years

This is an exciting time for children and their parents. Children have high energy levels, like to build and create things and have a great imagination. It is also a time when children need lots of support. Starting school can be a big step which they often find tiring and sometimes scary.

Children want to be treated like adults, worry about being liked and become more sensitive about being called names. Many also become competitive and don’t like to lose.

It’s important to be patient as children this age can be slow to follow instructions.

## 7–10 years

As children continue to learn and grow, they become increasingly sociable and outgoing. Suddenly, being popular and successful are very important.

While children are less reliant on their parents, they still worry about things such as personal safety, loss of parents and family.

Parental guidance and support is very important and has a major influence on school achievement.

## 10–12 years

This can be a difficult time for children. The physical changes that begin around this age often leave them feeling awkward, self-conscious and shy.

It’s normal for children to start to question their parents’ values and decisions. Strong mood swings are quite common, and they show less interest in family activities.

Your role as a parent is very important at this stage, as all children want to be listened to and taken seriously.

Children worry about other’s opinions of them and so it’s important that you find ways to build their self confidence.

### Parenting tips

- set reasonable limits that your child understands
- encourage your child’s efforts, rather than pressuring them to win or reach a goal
- if your child shows interest in something new, support that interest
- give your child a chance to learn new things

## Teenagers

The teenage years deserve a magazine all of their own! Many of the other articles in this magazine relate to the issues faced by teenagers. You can get further information from the resource section of this magazine.

The magazine, *Parenting: The Teenage Years New Edition* (English only) produced by the NSW Department of Community Services is also available at [www.community.nsw.gov.au](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au)