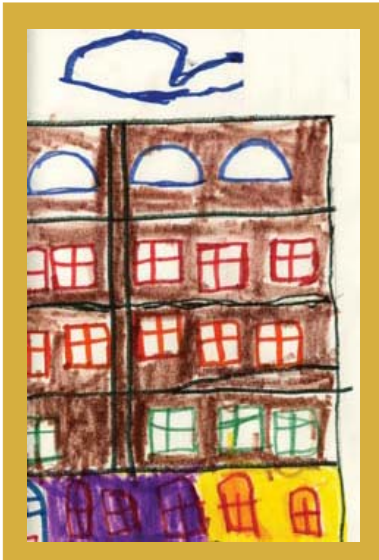


# Children's Developmental Benchmarks and Stages:

## A Summary Guide to Appropriate Arts Activities



The following chart offers information about children's developmental stages from birth to age eight, and includes examples of arts activities that children can do and that adults can do with children at different stages of development. The examples provided take into consideration the different domains of children's development (e.g., cognitive, linguistic, physical, and socioemotional). They are intended to illustrate the types of activities that are appropriate for young children and should be used by organizations as a reference tool. Organizations are encouraged to expand the examples before sharing this chart with parents. (Consult the References and Appendix sections of this report for information on resources that can be used to expand the examples.) The Task Force recommends using *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs*, a resource guide from the National Association for the Education of Young Children, as well as *Prekindergarten Music Education Standards* from MENC—The National Association for Music Education as supportive guides.

**Note:** All children grow and develop at different rates. It is important to recognize that children's developmental growth varies, and these benchmarks suggest a range of actions that are considered normal. Adults should follow children's cues as a signal for determining their developmental needs. Adults concerned that a child is not developing appropriately should check with the child's pediatrician.

Excerpted from *Young Children and the Arts: Making Creative Connections*, a Report of the Task Force on Children's Learning and the Arts: Birth to Age Eight and a product of the Arts Education Partnership, pp. 6–13. Visit <http://aep-arts.org>.

## Young babies

Stages	Ages	Examples of What Children Do During This Stage	Sample Arts Experiences That Promote Learning	What Adults and Children Can Do Together in the Arts
<p>When babies are awake, they can be nurtured through sights, sounds and gentle touches.</p> <p>Babies should stay calm and in a regular routine (e.g., don't let babies cry for long periods of time).</p>	birth to 3 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sleeping, sucking, grabbing, staring, listening, crying, and making small movements.</li> <li>• Use facial expressions such as smiling and frowning to express their needs.</li> <li>• Respond to voices, both loud and soft tones, by turning their heads and moving their arms and legs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stimulate eye movement and auditory development through contrasting images (e.g., black and white or colored objects) and voices (speaking or singing).</li> <li>• Increase awareness of space, movement, and sound by hanging mobiles, playing soothing music, and making animated faces. Babies discover that they can change what they see, hear, and touch.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Watch for babies' cues and signals, such as a response to music and objects (cues include smiles and reaching).</li> <li>• Allow babies to hear soothing music, birds singing, water babbling, and other soft sounds.</li> <li>• Hang mobiles within a foot of the eye line. Sing, talk, and read books to babies.</li> <li>• Use gentle movement when holding babies (e.g., rocking and swaying).</li> </ul>
<p>Holding, cradling, and hugging will nurture babies and develop their sense of touch and space.</p> <p>Young babies show pleasure by looking intently, joyful smiling and laughing, arm and leg movements, and other gestures.</p>	3 to 8 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respond to people's voices by turning their head and eyes.</li> <li>• Vocalize with some intonation and begin making repetitive sounds.</li> <li>• Respond to objects and people they can see and touch, and voices and music they can hear.</li> <li>• Make meaningful noises, coo, and babble.</li> <li>• Respond to friendly and angry tones of others' voices.</li> <li>• Will begin to be able to roll over and sit upright by the end of this stage.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Continue previous experiences as well as the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage recognition of new aspects in the environment by touching objects, and hearing adults name them, and observing functions.</li> <li>• Stimulate innate sense of discovery through music and movement, through shaking a rattle, or swaying to the notes of a violin, flute, or guitar (or other music).</li> <li>• Build vocal skills through stories and songs; encourage expression by making faces, gestures, and sounds.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Continue previous experiences as well as the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begin to place rattles or appropriate toys with textures and sounds in babies' fists.</li> <li>• Encourage babies to reach and sway arms.</li> <li>• Use appropriate soft and colorful materials for babies to touch (e.g., blankets or toys).</li> <li>• Use vocal sounds to express feelings, such as happy and surprised.</li> <li>• Encourage babies to laugh and smile by rhyming, singing, and using pat-a-cake type gestures.</li> <li>• Use nap time to read nursery rhymes and sing lullabies.</li> </ul>

## Crawlers and walkers

Stages	Ages	Examples of What Children Do During This Stage	Sample Arts Experiences That Promote Learning	What Adults and Children Can Do Together in the Arts
<p>Crawlers and walkers are able to see and begin to know how things work.</p> <p>They experiment with their world and use their senses to understand everything by touching, seeing, hearing, etc.</p> <p>They also need extra attention and supervision (especially as they begin to crawl and walk). They need someone to talk to them about what they see and hear.</p>	8 to 18 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience new senses of adaptation and anticipation (e.g., through hide-and-seek, peek-a-boo).</li> <li>• Become more deliberate and purposeful in responding to people and objects.</li> <li>• Comprehend simple words and intonation of language (such as "all gone," and "bye-bye").</li> <li>• Begin speaking and actively experiment with their voice.</li> <li>• Can follow simple instructions, especially with visual or vocal cues.</li> <li>• Hold large crayons, move them between hands, and make marks on paper.</li> <li>• Can place blocks one on top of the other.</li> <li>• Demonstrate continuous vocabulary growth up to 30 words.</li> <li>• Crawl, pull self up, walk, climb, and may begin to run.</li> <li>• Actively show affection and express positive and negative feelings.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Continue previous experiences as well as the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage imitation of voices, sounds, and movements.</li> <li>• Expose them to different sounds and movements that others make.</li> <li>• Allow exploration of the different sounds they can make with their voice or by clapping their hands.</li> <li>• Teach motor skills by using simple musical instruments such as toy drums and xylophones.</li> <li>• Teach repetition of patterns in voice, movement, and sounds as well as texture and colors in images and objects.</li> <li>• Develop balance by simple dance movements while sitting or standing.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Continue previous experiences as well as the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move to different play areas to see nature, people, and images. Talk about what the children see.</li> <li>• Play music and move the children's feet, legs, and hands to the beat.</li> <li>• Explore shapes and colors of everyday objects (e.g., clothing, cereal boxes, etc.). Talk about what is around them and make up songs to go with what they see and hear.</li> <li>• Hang pictures at eye level. Name, describe, and point to items in the pictures.</li> <li>• Use character voices and gestures when reading stories.</li> <li>• Provide opportunities to explore safe and appropriate media in visual arts (e.g., finger-painting with water, drawing with crayons).</li> </ul>

## Toddlers

Stages	Ages	Examples of What Children Do During This Stage	Sample Arts Experiences That Promote Learning	What Adults and Children Can Do Together in the Arts
<p>Toddlers move quickly and with greater skill during this phase. They begin teaching themselves and learn from watching other children.</p> <p>Words become associated with movement and accompanying body sensations.</p> <p>Identity becomes an important issue during this stage, tied to increasing independence.</p>	18 to 24 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Copy others' actions and voices, speak in two-word (short) sentences, name objects, and can look at books on their own.</li> <li>• Build thoughts, mental pictures, and verbal labels associated with learned concepts.</li> <li>• Can stand on tiptoes, catch a ball with arms and chest, and walk up and down stairs.</li> <li>• Unbutton large buttons, and unzip large zippers.</li> <li>• Begin to match and sort and learn where objects belong.</li> <li>• Show curiosity and recognize themselves in a mirror or photograph.</li> <li>• Demonstrate vocabulary growth up to approximately 200 words.</li> <li>• Use words to express feelings.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Continue previous experiences as well as the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children learn to make aesthetic choices such as what color to paint the sky and what songs they like to sing.</li> <li>• Encourage imagination and pretending by prompting children to move like a cat through a jungle or dance like an imaginary character to music.</li> <li>• Build vocabulary through drama, role playing, and acting out stories (with puppets or pictures). Acting out stories also generates questions and allows for multiple answers.</li> <li>• Learn about feelings through songs, poems, and stories.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Continue previous experiences as well as the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Activities with items as simple as a paper plate, nontoxic paint, and play-dough are appropriate. Allow children to explore and experiment with materials (with supervision).</li> <li>• While listening to music, dance and move while holding their hands.</li> <li>• While dressing children, pretend socks are puppets or animals.</li> <li>• Recreate children's favorite stories or routines.</li> <li>• Build a library of books and take weekly trips to the local library.</li> <li>• Show and tell stories from photographs.</li> <li>• Have simple musical/percussion instruments available to play.</li> <li>• Visit children's museums and appropriate child-friendly exhibits and performances.</li> </ul>
<p>Toddlers become increasingly coordinated in their movements and gestures at this time.</p> <p>Language development increases rapidly, and they begin counting up to five.</p> <p>They develop an interest in other children and being near them.</p> <p>They begin developing an interest in pretend play.</p>	24 to 36 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop symbolic thought and build mental concepts or mental pictures.</li> <li>• Make first representational drawings.</li> <li>• Engage in self-directed imaginative play.</li> <li>• Listen, repeat, and experiment with words on an increasing basis. Speak in sentences with three or more words.</li> <li>• Understand self in relation to others.</li> <li>• Can paint with large brush and tear paper.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Continue previous experiences as well as the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop problem solving skills and empathy by predicting what will happen next and pretending to be favorite characters in books, stories, or songs.</li> <li>• Help to develop analytical skills by listening and responding to music, poems, drama games, and looking at visual art and describing the details.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Continue previous experiences as well as the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to build on experiences in music, drama, dance, and art and make arts-based activities a daily routine.</li> <li>• Incorporate singing, storytelling, and dance into daily experiences (e.g., eating lunch, nap time, and saying good-bye). Identify shapes, textures, and colors in foods and clothing.</li> </ul>

## Toddlers (cont'd)

Stages	Ages	Examples of What Children Do During This Stage	Sample Arts Experiences That Promote Learning	What Adults and Children Can Do Together in the Arts
	24 to 36 months (cont'd)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete a form puzzle with large knobs.</li> <li>• Begin to turn pages one at a time.</li> <li>• Can repeat representative gestures and motions such as "Itsy, Bitsy Spider," or "I'm a Little Teapot."</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote physical development and self-confidence through dance and creative movement. Children learn how to use different parts of their body to express themselves.</li> <li>• Drawing, painting, games, and songs promote different concepts such as loud and quiet, hard and soft, light and dark, etc.</li> <li>• By stringing beads or drawing on paper, hand coordination is developed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tell and act out family stories about grandparents, aunts and uncles, and others.</li> <li>• Assist children in using brushes and paint and mold objects with clay.</li> <li>• Create simple costumes for drama and theater activities (e.g., dress-up in old clothes).</li> <li>• Take children to child-friendly museums, libraries, and live performances to introduce them to different aspects of their community.</li> </ul>

## Preschoolers

<p>Preschoolers' strengths and motor skills along with their more adult-like body proportions allow greater opportunities to explore the world.</p> <p>Children can count to five and higher during this stage.</p> <p>They start to play with other children and are more likely to share.</p> <p>They are generally more cooperative and enjoy new experiences.</p>	3 to 4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask many questions, mainly those that begin with "why."</li> <li>• Talk about things and make up stories.</li> <li>• Print large capital letters using pencil or crayon.</li> <li>• Cut figures with scissors, and may be able to print first name.</li> <li>• Push and pull a wagon.</li> <li>• Attempt to get dressed on their own.</li> <li>• Gain a sense of direction and relationship to others' space.</li> <li>• Begin to show social skills and manners.</li> <li>• Can match shapes, colors, and patterns.</li> <li>• Can draw faces with some detail.</li> <li>• With direction, can play group games such as "Ring Around the Rosey," and musical chairs.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Continue previous experiences as well as the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contribute to the child's ability to learn causality. New problems pose questions and encourage children to seek their own answers and act on choices.</li> <li>• Help develop language skills by reciting poems and finger plays. Number skills are developed through music (e.g., counting rhythm and beats when playing a musical instrument).</li> <li>• Dance helps to build motor control, body relationships, and directionality.</li> <li>• Spatial acuity is developed through drawing, sculpting, and other visual arts.</li> <li>• Social skills are encouraged by group activities such as learning dance steps or singing songs.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Continue previous experiences as well as the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pantomime characters from books read with children. Ask them to guess characters.</li> <li>• Imitate movements made by objects (such as cars) and other people (such as drivers).</li> <li>• Construct collages using paper, glue, scissors, and magazine cut outs. Talk with them about the collage or create a story together.</li> <li>• Hum tunes to familiar songs and allow children to add the lyrics that go with the melody.</li> <li>• Allow children to observe themselves in the mirror while dancing or acting out a story.</li> <li>• Bring small groups of children to interactive performances and exhibits.</li> </ul>
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## Preschoolers (cont'd)

Stages	Ages	Examples of What Children Do During This Stage	Sample Arts Experiences That Promote Learning	What Adults and Children Can Do Together in the Arts
<p>Preschoolers learn greatly from interaction with others. They begin to understand that they have feelings and opinions that are different from others.</p> <p>Children at this stage are more likely to understand and remember the relationships, concepts, and strategies that they acquire through firsthand, meaningful experiences.</p> <p>They have longer attention spans and enjoy activities that involve exploring, investigating, and stretching their imagination.</p>	4 to 5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can copy simple geometric figures, dress self, and use more sophisticated utensils.</li> <li>• Use language to express thinking and increasingly complex sentences in speaking to others. Express their own feelings when listening to stories.</li> <li>• Enjoy using words in rhymes and understand nonsense and using humor.</li> <li>• Can be very imaginative and like to exaggerate.</li> <li>• Say and begin writing the alphabet.</li> <li>• Can identify what is missing from a picture (such as a face without a nose.)</li> <li>• Can identify basic colors.</li> <li>• Have better control in running, jumping, and hopping but tend to be clumsy.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Continue previous experiences as well as the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen nonverbal, cognitive skills by encouraging children to describe people in their world using pictures, body movements, and mime.</li> <li>• Provide creative outlets for prereading skills through activities such as making up stories, reciting poems, and singing songs with puppets and stuffed animals.</li> <li>• Children begin to make observations by role-playing human and animal characters in a variety of imaginary settings.</li> <li>• Memory is strengthened by repeating stories, poems, and songs.</li> <li>• By using clay or other art supplies, children learn to make choices and how to make things happen.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Continue previous experiences as well as the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discover with children how the body can move to music and the difference when there is no music.</li> <li>• Create music with children using empty containers as drums. (Empty plastic containers filled with beans and rice can serve as maracas, for example.)</li> <li>• Make a patchwork quilt with scraps of materials sewn together with yarn. Create and illustrate stories based on the quilt.</li> <li>• Encourage children to assume roles of family members or literary figures in improvisations. Base them on children's experiences, family customs, books, or songs.</li> <li>• Recreate drawings from favorite books.</li> </ul>

## School-age children

<p>School-age children are able to make conscious decisions about art, music, dance, and theater and respond to them with feelings and emotion.</p> <p>They learn to compare and contrast different sounds, pictures, and movements.</p> <p>They become increasingly skilled at creating their own art, songs, stories, and dance movements.</p> <p>Since children learn in an integrated fashion, it is vital that their learning experiences incorporate multiple domains of development including cognitive, physical, and socioemotional.</p>	5 to 8 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have good body control for doing cartwheels and better balance for learning to ride a bike.</li> <li>• Play jump rope and hop scotch.</li> <li>• Can build inventive model buildings from cardboard and other materials.</li> <li>• Begin spelling, writing, and enjoy telling stories to other children and adults.</li> <li>• Become increasingly independent and will try new activities on their own.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Continue previous experiences as well as the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children will learn many ways of using their own language to tell stories. This can be encouraged by telling folktales and stories through pantomime, drawing, and music.</li> <li>• Through the artistic process, children learn what works and what doesn't. They also learn how to think about making choices when experiencing music, dance, theater, and art.</li> <li>• Children develop higher levels of thinking by learning to look at others' artwork or performances and developing an opinion.</li> <li>• When discussing music, art, dance, and theater, children can talk in terms of likes and dislikes. This builds judgment and analytical skills.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Continue previous experiences as well as the following:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Represent familiar actions like making pizza and doing chores in creative movement and dance activities. Allow the child to choose movements and ask the reasons for those choices.</li> <li>• Write and recite poetry and paint pictures that depict themes such as nature, school, and family. Ask questions and encourage discussion.</li> <li>• Exhibit children's artwork, and hang it so others can look at and respond to it.</li> <li>• Make scrapbooks or portfolios to keep favorite stories, photos, and artwork.</li> <li>• Collect tapes and recordings of music and encourage children to select favorites.</li> <li>• Encourage improvisation and stories, and provide materials that offer imaginary props.</li> </ul>
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