

# Family Education Packet

## Child Development

Information and resources to help ensure your children are safe, healthy, and successful learners.



## Missouri's Early Care & Education Connections

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### What Do I Need to Know About Early Brain Development?

Children’s early years are important for their long-term health and development. The first five years are key to building a strong foundation for future health, learning, and life success. The brain grows quickly from birth into early childhood, and changes into adulthood.

With this knowledge, it is important to promote healthy brain development even before pregnancy. A healthy diet and nutrients like folic acid support a healthy pregnancy for a growing baby. However, during pregnancy, there are many risks to an unborn baby’s growing brain, and it is important to understand these risks and take necessary precautions.

Infections can be a risk to brain development, and vaccinations prevent pregnant women from getting infections that can harm their unborn baby’s brain. Additionally, exposure to toxins, smoking, and alcohol use can also affect brain development. In considering mental health risk factors, pregnant mothers experiencing trauma or mental health conditions can affect their unborn baby’s growing brain. Due to this, regular prenatal care during pregnancy is important to prevent complications.

When babies are born, they are ready to learn. They depend on their parents or guardians, family members, caregivers, and early educators to develop the skills they need to thrive. After a baby is born, their brain continues to grow, but is still vulnerable. The baby or young child’s growing brain is vulnerable to traumatic head injuries, infections, or toxins, like lead. Also, long term negative effects on brain development occur when children experience prolonged stress and trauma.

For infections, vaccination after the baby has been born can prevent dangerous complications from these infections, such as brain swelling. Access to healthy foods and safe places to live and play also supports healthy brain development and can help mitigate some of the impact of stress and trauma on the child.

Positive relationships and interactions with caregivers develop the brain connections that children need to thrive and can mitigate any trauma they experience. Regular interactions with children, like talking, reading, and playing all positively support their brain development.

Learn more about early brain development by scanning the QR code below or visiting:  
[www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/early-brain-development.html](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/early-brain-development.html)



The Missouri Early Learning Standards (MELS) provide a description of the skills children can build from infancy to kindergarten and can act as useful guidelines for parents to encourage healthy cognitive growth.

**Approaches to learning:** This skill area is all about children’s attitude toward learning and the skills they need to learn. Every child learns in their own way. Recognizing and strengthening children’s approach to learning can encourage curiosity, creativity, persistence, initiative, reasoning, and cooperation. Children with these abilities have a solid foundation for future learning.

**Social and emotional development:** Children’s social and emotional development is all about their self-esteem and the behaviors they have while interacting with others. This skill area is the foundation for how young children feel about themselves and how they relate to others. Children with healthy social and emotional skills can form and keep relationships, express, and manage their emotions or feelings, and explore their world.

**Language and literacy:** The language skill area includes listening and speaking, taking turns in conversation, communicating needs, sharing thoughts and feelings, and more. The literacy skill area includes understanding how books work – the print is something you read, letters represent sounds and sounds combine to make words.

**Mathematics:** This includes skills in numbers, measurement, etc. Children increase their understanding that numbers represent quantities.

**Science:** This includes skills in patterns, basic problem-solving, and observation. Children’s natural curiosity promotes scientific thinking and helps them use their senses to explore their environment.

**Physical development:** This skill area is essential to healthy growth and success in school. Physical well-being is all about good health, including nutrition, sleep, and check-ups. Motor development is all about small and big movements, such as turning pages, holding a crayon, crawling, running, or bouncing a ball.

**Nutrition:** Healthy nutrition and physical exercise support healthy brain development as well. To help children build these healthy habits while they are young, teachers and caregivers can

model healthy nutrition and exercise habits. These positive interactions and attention to health will build resilience in children for long-term success.

Learn more about the MELS by scanning the QR code below or visiting:

[dese.mo.gov/media/pdf/missouri-early-learning-standards](https://dese.mo.gov/media/pdf/missouri-early-learning-standards)



## How Do I Know My Children are Reaching Developmental Milestones?

### Tracking Your Children's Milestones

You can use the CDC's "Learn the Signs. Act Early." tools to track and learn more about developmental milestones for your children's age to stay in tune with their developmental health. It is important to track your children's development. This makes sure that any developmental delays are found early so your children can receive the intervention and support they need. Download your free milestone tracker by scanning the QR code below or visiting:

[www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/milestones/index.html)



### Interactive Developmental Milestones Tool

In addition, you may view the Early Connections interactive developmental milestones resource by scanning the QR code or visiting:

[earlyconnections.mo.gov/families/development-milestone](https://earlyconnections.mo.gov/families/development-milestone)



## How Do I Access Developmental Screenings and Monitoring for My Children?

You may work with an early childhood professional or a health care provider to observe your children to see whether they meet typical developmental milestones. This is developmental monitoring. A developmental screening checks your children's development to provide a snapshot of motor, cognitive, language, and social and emotional skills. A screening will help identify possible delays that may need further evaluation. It is completed by a health care

provider, parent educator, or early childhood professional in collaboration with you as a parent or guardian.

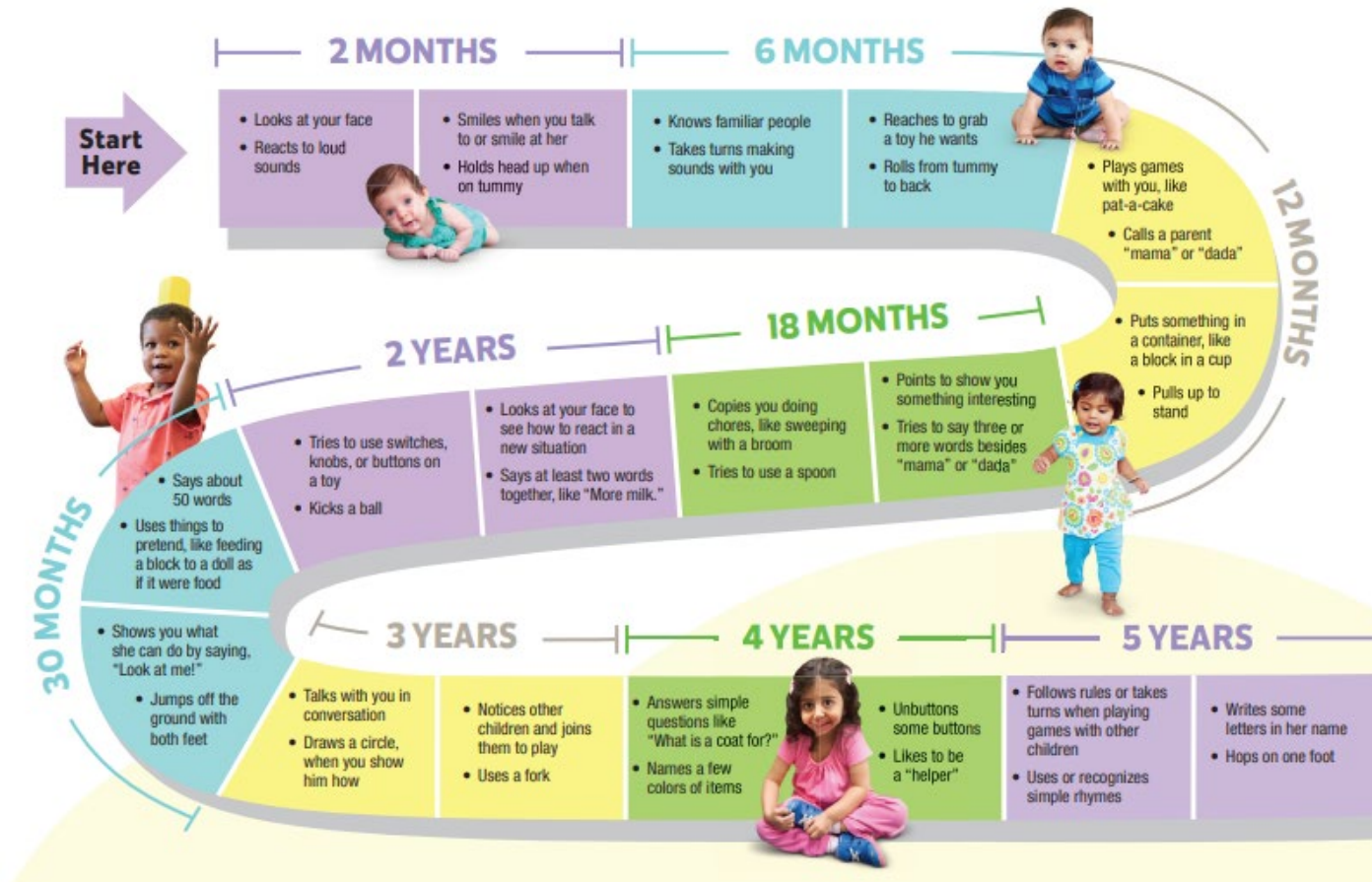
Your local Missouri Parents as Teachers (PAT) Parent Education Program can provide developmental screenings for your children. The Missouri PAT Parent Education Program services are provided by your local school district. To connect with your local program, enter your home address in the Program Locator. You may access the Program Locator by scanning the QR code below or visiting: <https://parentsasteachers.org/program-locator/>



## Development is a Journey

# Your Child's Early Development is a Journey

These are just a few of many important milestones to look for. For complete checklists for your child's age visit [www.cdc.gov/Milestones](http://www.cdc.gov/Milestones) or download CDC's free *Milestone Tracker* app.



Source: CDC (Centers for Disease Control)