



STRENGTHENING FAMILIES: COLLABORATING WITH FAMILIES OF YOUNG CHILDREN IN ASSESSMENT AND SAFETY PLANNING LEARNING COLLABORATIVE

APRIL 2025 DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES: BEHAVIORAL, PHYSICAL, COGNITIVE



The ability to assess for the safety of children birth to five, and create sufficient safety plans that shield from danger, requires the Child Welfare Professional to have a deep understanding of factors that make the child vulnerable. Part of the Safety Intervention Standards, Appendix 2, outlines said factors, specifically highlighting the assessment of behavioral, physical, and cognitive milestones. The age-related benchmarks have been around for decades and there is no shortage of resources and checklists for this assessment. However, to apply critical thinking the expectation is to go beyond a checklist and consider the implications the child's ability to meet, or not meet, milestones have on their safety.

Understanding developmental milestones is crucial for Child Protective Services (CPS) as it helps identify potential signs of abuse or neglect and ensures children receive appropriate care and support.

Part of deciphering what is relevant to the role of Child Protection Services related to milestones is being able to understand WHY these areas of development are important.

Keeping track of the developmental milestones of birth to five is significant due to massive growth and there are more in this age group than any other age range. There is also a very specific breakdown by month and year to track progress. The information for behavioral, physical, and cognitive milestones comes from years of data collection through the Center of Disease Control and Prevention and the American Academy of Pediatrics and is not static and data is always being collected and milestones adjusted if needed.



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The assessments of developmental milestones for children birth to five allows the following:

Early Intervention:

Knowing what to expect at different ages allows CPS and families to identify potential developmental delays or concerns early on, enabling timely intervention and support.

Recognizing Neglect:

Delays or lack of progress in reaching milestones can indicate neglect or inadequate care, prompting CPS intervention.

Assessing Child's Needs:

Understanding a child's developmental stage helps CPS assess their specific needs and ensure they receive appropriate services, whether it's specialized education, therapy, or other support.

Preventing Abuse:

Knowledge of child development can help parents and caregivers understand their child's needs and abilities, reducing the risk of frustration and potentially abusive behavior.

Supporting Families:

CPS can provide resources and support to families to help them understand and meet their child's developmental needs, fostering healthy child development.

Screening and Assessment:

Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (.gov) recommends that developmental screenings be conducted to identify children who may be at risk for developmental delays or disabilities. These screenings can help determine if a child needs further assessment and support.

Collaboration with Professionals:

CPS may play a key role is the inclusion of other professionals to support development, including early childhood specialists, therapists, and educators, to ensure children receive comprehensive support based on their individual needs.



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Reflection on Content

How are you preparing before assessing child functioning of children birth to five? Are you prepared to ask questions surrounding development that goes beyond if the milestone has been completed?

Action Item

Check your behavioral, physical, and cognitive milestone knowledge and resources to ensure they are correct after the CDC's modifications in 2022. Identify any particular areas in which you plan to engage a parent/caregiver in further conversation and consider how you ask questions about milestones in a way that gauges protective capacities.