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UNDERSTANDING HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Infant Development
Toddler Development
Preschooler Development
Middle Childhood Development
Adolescent Development
Adult Development



UNDERSTANDING HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

As a Direct Service Worker (DSW) you may work with families who have infants, children, adolescents, and adults still living at home. The more you understand about how individuals grow and develop the better able you will be to provide appropriate support.

In this section we will look at how individuals typically grow and develop. You will learn about:

- ▶ Infant Development
- ▶ Toddler Development
- ▶ Preschooler Development
- ▶ Middle Childhood Development

- ▶ Adolescent Development
- ▶ Adult Development

A good starting point when you work with anyone who has a disabling condition, is to follow this rule: **Always see the person and then the disability.** As much as possible, engage with the person in the same way you would if a disability were not present. All people need love, opportunity, and support to develop socially and emotionally.

INFANT DEVELOPMENT (Newborn – One Year)

During this stage children grow from babies to toddlers. The most important development that happens for babies is that they make their earliest connections with others. In addition:

- ▶ they learn the first aspects of language
- ▶ they learn to crawl and possibly walk
- ▶ they become familiar with their environment



Helpful Hints

➡ **Make sure the baby is surrounded by safe and interesting things.** Provide pictures and mobiles for the child to look at. Provide music, the sound of your voice, or a rattle for the child to listen to. Provide soft toys for the baby to feel and teething rings or plastic cups for the baby to hold and bite.

➔ **Crying is the baby's way of getting your attention.** *It lets you know that he/she needs something. Go to the child and try to figure out if he or she is hungry, wet, or needs to be held and comforted. You cannot "spoil" a baby by responding to his or her needs; you are simply teaching that the world is a safe and consistent place. You are helping the baby develop a sense of trust.*

➔ **Helping babies learn new things.** *To develop language skills, talk with the baby, imitate sounds, and carrying on cooing, gurgling, and single sound conversations. To support physical development, you can help the child learn to crawl, walk, sit-up, and grasp objects.*

➔ **Learn to "read" the baby.** *As you get to know the child you will be better able to understand what he or she is communicating. If a child turns away or seems upset – it may indicate over-tiredness, over-stimulation, or perhaps that the environment is too noisy.*



Helpful Hints for Safety (from the Centers for Disease Control):

- ➔ *Never shake a baby.*
- ➔ *To prevent Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) place the baby on his/her back to sleep.*
- ➔ *Place the baby in the correct car seat whenever he/she rides in the car.*
- ➔ *Prevent the baby from choking by cutting food into very small pieces and by keeping small objects that could be swallowed, away from the baby.*
- ➔ *Prevent scalding by always testing water temperatures and never carry hot liquids or foods near the baby.*



Working with a family as they support a new baby can be fun and exciting. You may be an important link between the family and the services they need. If parents have concerns or questions about parenting or about disability, be sure to pass these on to your Supervisor.

TODDLER DEVELOPMENT (1 – 3 years old)

Not only do children begin to take their first physical steps at this stage, they also take their initial steps toward becoming an independent person.

- ◆ They want to explore their world and try new things
- ◆ They may seem adventurous and “into everything,” however, they may also experience times when they are clingy and shy.

- ◆ Their language skills develop quickly. Reading to children is always important; particularly when they are developing language.
- ◆ They move towards eating more independently, helping with getting dressed, picking up their toys, and getting along with others.



Helpful Hints

- **Play with the child.** *This will help in building the child's communication skills, social skills, and motor skills, and will prepare him or her to play with others. Children enjoy a variety of activities at this stage such as building things, using play-doh, doing puzzles, singing simple memory songs, and generally doing things that combine movement and learning. Follow the child's lead during play and build on what they are doing. Focus on the child's needs and interests.*

➔ **Begin setting limits.** *Talk with the child's parents to find out what rules are used to provide guidance for the child. Rules should make sense and be important – things like “being gentle” and “not hurting others”. If you need to provide direction try to phrase your statements in a positive way.*

Rather than saying, “Don't make a mess,” say, “Remember to pick up your toys”.

➔ **Misbehaviour.** *If a child does misbehave when you are with them, try to figure out what happened and what the child was feeling at the time. Sometimes children misbehave when they are upset. If you can determine the cause of the upset without becoming upset yourself, you can remain calm and provide effective guidance to the child.*



➤ **Maintain the family's routines.** *When children have routines the world becomes a more understandable and predictable place for them. Find out when the child typically has snacks, meals, playtime, naptime, bedtime, and so on. The more you can maintain familiar routines the more comfortable the child will feel.*

➤ **Prepare for outings.** *If you are going into the community with the child bring along a snack or toy that the child enjoys. This will help you to comfort the child. Go out at a time of day when the child is typically comfortable – not when he or she is tired or hungry.*



Keep Toddlers Safe

If you are in the child's home:

- *ensure that sharp or dangerous objects are out of reach*
- *that cleaning products and medicines are locked up*
- *that electric outlets have plug-covers*
- *that the child is never left alone near water*
- *that stairs are blocked off*
- *that the kitchen does not have cords hanging off the counter or easily accessible appliances that toddlers can play with*
- *that toys are safe*

If you are taking the child out in a vehicle:

- **never leave the child alone in the vehicle.** *A good rule of thumb is to never leave a toddler unattended.*

PRESCHOOLER DEVELOPMENT (3 – 5 year olds)

As children grow into early childhood they continue to change **physically**, **emotionally**, **intellectually**, and **socially**.

- ◆ **Physically**, children become increasingly able to run, jump, skip, climb, and slide. Fine motor skills such as drawing, colouring, and using safety scissors are also developing. They are more responsible for their physical care so during this stage they like to dress, eat, bathe, and go to the bathroom on their own.
- ◆ **Emotionally**, children at this age become more sure of themselves, and will stick up for themselves. They can

tolerate more frustration and they begin to develop rules of their own.

- ▶ **Socially**, they begin to enjoy cooperative play (taking turns) and the company of other children. They are concerned if other children feel sad or upset. They enjoy the company of parents and care-givers and may want to mimic or be like them.
- ▶ **Intellectually**, children develop more competence in speech and will ask endless questions. They are highly imaginative and they are beginning to know the difference between fact and fiction.

Helpful Hints

➡ **Encourage children to play with others.** *If you support a child with a disability, encourage the child to play with brothers, sisters, and other children – the same as you would if the disability were not present. During play, children are using their senses, building their skills, having fun, problem solving, talking, cooperating, and making choices.*

➡ **Encourage children to try new things.** *Support children if they become frustrated with activities. Help them to problem solve by asking what they could do differently. Never ridicule, shame, or use physical punishment if children make mistakes or fail at something. Build self esteem by telling children **specifically** what they are doing well.*



➤ **Including children with disabilities.** *If other children are having a difficult time including the child with a disability, show them what the child likes and show them how to play with him/her. Give the child with a disability a toy or something they can share with others. Then step back and let children play together.*

You will need to work in partnership with parents to ensure that you are setting appropriate expectations and limits for the child.

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (6 – 11 years)

Once children begin school their lives change considerably. They experience extensive physical, social, and mental growth. Middle childhood is marked by increased independence from the family and increased focus on the demands of school, friends, and independent recreational activities. Socially, children develop a clearer understanding of their place in the world. They are able to describe their experiences, thoughts, and feelings and they want to be liked and accepted by friends, classmates, and teammates. Your role may include a number of tasks and should be determined in discussion with your supervisor and the family. If you support a child remember the following:

Helpful Hints

➤ **Remind them to be friendly to others.** *Support them to phone or email friends, encourage the family to have other children over, and have interesting and exciting things for children to do in the home.*

➡ **Supporting children to get involved.** *Parents may ask you to introduce activities that will help their children to get to know a broad range of children. School is one place to meet other children, but there are also, church activities, sports activities, and community and neighbourhood activities. Always look for ways to expand the child's circle of friends.*

➡ **Support Children to have a Sense of Responsibility.** *Parents may ask you to assist their children to begin taking on responsibilities around the home. These could include household chores such as setting the table, cleaning their room, and taking out the garbage. They may begin handling an allowance or caring for pets. These activities prepare young people with disabling conditions to manage responsibilities in later life.*



ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT (12 – 18 years)

During adolescence, young people experience physical changes, develop a unique personal identity, become more independent, and are focused on peer relationships.

- ▶ **Moving towards a unique identity.** Individuals develop an increasingly unique sense of “self” during this period. They often believe that their thoughts and ideas are distinctive and not understood by others. Interests, skills, academic performance, self confidence, aptitudes, and personal likes and dislikes, all serve to create an increasingly unique identity.



Helpful Hints

In consultation with family, do the following:

- ➡ Provide adolescents with freedom and support in exploring their world
- ➡ Provide opportunities to “fit in” by giving them room to be like their peers
- ➡ Provide clarity on issues – but allow them to solve problems for themselves
- ➡ Show respect and concern for the changes they are experiencing
- ➡ Offer them high expectations and support to meet their personal goals

- ♦ **Moving towards independence.** Adolescence is characterized by a movement away from the family towards a more independent life. In early adolescence, some young people face the realization that their parents are not perfect and they may respond with rudeness and challenges to parental authority. Towards the end of adolescence these characteristics begin to change. The young person is able to see various points of view, can compromise, and can examine personal experiences.

**Helpful
Hints**

In consultation with the family and your resource coordinator, be prepared to:

- ➔ Support the family to envision the adolescent as an increasingly independent person
- ➔ Support the family to provide information about safe sex, drug and alcohol abuse, and recklessness with vehicles

- ♦ **Moving towards physical maturity.** Puberty occurs in early adolescence. This is a significant developmental milestone as it marks sexual maturity and the ability to have children. In early adolescence there is often intense concern with body image and young people may make frequent comparisons with peers, but this decreases in the later stages of adolescence.

Helpful Hints

Authors Melberg-Schwier and Hingsburger, (2000) list a number of things that young people should understand related to their developing sexuality. (p. 32)

- ➔ *Menstruation, wet dreams, and other body changes*
- ➔ *Risk reduction around sexual abuse*
- ➔ *Sexual feelings, sexual orientation, and sexual safety*
- ➔ *Relationships, marriage, and parenting*

People who have accurate information are much less likely to become victims of abuse. As a DSW you can support individuals and families by helping them to deal with information in a clear and honest way.

- ◆ **Moving towards meaningful relationships, employment, and disengagement from family.** In early adolescence, friendships often take the form of group peer relationships such as cliques, clubs, or teams. In later adolescence individuals begin to think more about the future; they contemplate romantic relationships, work options, and moving away from home.



Helpful
Hints

- ➔ *Encourage the young person to build relationships with others in their personal, community, and work life.*
- ➔ *Encourage the young person to look for employment. Be familiar with school and agency programs that help young people get real jobs.*
- ➔ *The young person may be thinking about moving out of the family home. Encourage him or her to clarify dreams and goals with the family and others who care.*



For many young people graduation from school marks the beginning of what can be a difficult “transition” period from adolescence to adulthood. The more you know about inclusive options for young people with disabilities, the more you can help the family in planning for a fulfilling future.

ADULTHOOD (Ages 18 – 65)

Adulthood signals that time in an individual's life when choice and more control over one's life typically occur. This may or may not be the case for individuals with an intellectual disability.

Adulthood is often thought of as having distinct stages. These are: Young Adult (18 – 25), Mature Adult (25 – 55), Older Adult (55 – 75), and Elder Adult (75 – death). For individuals with a disabling condition the events that mark these stages and the transitions from stage to stage may differ from the general public.

Young Adult:

It is typical in our society for young adults to move from their family home and high school experience, to their own home and either work or post secondary education. For many individuals with a disabling condition it is typical to graduate from high school into human service programs. This situation is less a reflection on the ability and interests of individuals with disabling conditions than it is a comment on the current organization of supports and services. The supports and services offered to young adults are too often rooted in low expectations and limited opportunity for individuals.

- *Ensure that individuals participate as much as possible in making choices about all aspects of their lives.*
- *Ensure that high expectations are in place to increase both competence and self-esteem.*
- *Ensure that individuals experience a wide range of opportunities that are appropriate for young adults. Ensure that these opportunities are as inclusive as possible.*

Mature Adult:

It is typical in our society for mature adults to marry, have children, and purchase a home. It is also common for individuals to establish a career. Again, for many individuals with disabling conditions barriers exist that

restricts their involvement in romantic relationships, parenting, home ownership, and employment. It is more typical for individuals with disabling conditions to still be: living at home with their parents or living in a community residence, attending a sheltered work program, unmarried and without children.

With appropriate supports individuals can live in their own homes, have their own jobs, and develop meaningful relationships. As a DSW you can assist adults to have a fuller life by doing the following:

- ➔ *Ensure that individuals are pursuing personal interests.*
- ➔ *Ensure that self-determination is guiding a person's life.*
- ➔ *Ensure that individuals control as much of their life as possible – choices relating to relationships, vocation, and leisure.*

Older Adult:



It is typical in our society for older adults to retire. Often this is seen as a time to rest and reflect on the accomplishments of life. Individuals with disabling conditions often do not retire or retirement is merely a modified extension of the service they were initially placed in. Currently service providers are striving to create interesting and individualized retirement options.

- ➔ *Ensure that retirement is not just a time for doing less of the same thing someone has always done. Retirement should be a time to initiate new activities – hobbies, travel, relationships.*

So . . .

Human development is complex and the information presented here only begins to touch on the topic. Human development is unique to each person. Not everyone goes through the stages in lock-step fashion. As you provide support to someone through the stages always consider and respect the uniqueness of the person. If the person has a disability, don't assume that they are somehow "stuck" at some earlier level. All people grow, learn, and develop as human beings. Keep in mind the factors that facilitate growth and development:

- ◆ High expectations
- ◆ Opportunities
- ◆ Challenge
- ◆ Support
- ◆ Choice
- ◆ Control

Resources

Berk, L. E. (2001). **Development Through the Lifespan**. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Melberg Schwier, K., & Hingsburger, D. (2000). **Sexuality: Your Sons and Daughters with Intellectual Disabilities**. Boston: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co. Inc.

The following websites may also be useful:

The **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** at www.cdc.gov. This site presents information on health and safety issues related to each developmental level.

Child Development Institute at www.childdevelopmentinfo.com. This site presents brief summaries of the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development indicative of each developmental level.

Keep Kids Healthy at www.keepkidshealthy.com. This site offers information on a variety of safety, discipline, nutrition, and health issues related to children of various ages.

Invest in Kids at www.investinkids.ca. This user friendly site provides information to parents from a 'comfort, play, and teach' perspective.

The following sites have information on adolescent development:

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at www.aacap.org

ETR Associates at www.etr.org/recapp/theories