

Laying Foundations: Social and Emotional Development in the Earliest Years

Three Stages of Infancy

WestEd's Program for Infant Toddler Caregivers describes three stages of infancy. As young children move through these stages, they work with the important adults around them to address three issues that anchor their social and emotional development: security, exploration, and identity. These three issues are a part of development in all three stages, but each one takes particular importance at a particular stage. As children grow, develop new interests and new skills, they thrive in environments where adults are flexible to their changing needs. As you read the case studies on the following ages (and consider the interaction that you described in the pre-activity to this audio conference), consider how the adults support children at different stages in feeling secure, exploring their environments and establishing a sense of identity.

Young Infant (birth to eight months): SECURITY

Young infants primarily need to feel that their needs are met, and that the important people in their lives are taking care of them. They need to know that adults are available to meet their needs, keep them safe, and help them understand the world. Young infants begin to develop attachments to the adults who regularly take care of them.

Mobile Infant (six to eighteen months): EXPLORATION

Typically, children at this stage are learning to use their bodies to move in purposeful ways. With their growing skills, mobile infants have an intense desire to discover and explore their environments. Children with special needs that limit physical mobility are still active explorers. Mobile infants need adults to give them space to move and explore, while remaining available to provide security and comfort when needed.

Older Infants or Toddlers (sixteen to thirty-six months): IDENTITY

Children at this stage are learning independence, and as they are feeling the power of making their own choices, they are growing a powerful sense of identity. Older infants and toddlers need adults to provide safe environments to express themselves. Adults support children in this stage by allowing room for self expression and setting appropriate boundaries and limits on behaviors that are unsafe or inappropriate.

Adapted from: **WestEd Center for Child and Family Studies in collaboration with the California State Department of Education.** *The ages of infancy: Caring for young, mobile, and older infants* (Child Care Video Magazine from the Program for Infant Toddler Caregivers). Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education.

The Early Head Start National Resource Center @ ZERO TO THREE



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Heart Start: The Emotional Foundations for School Readiness

In 1992, ZERO TO THREE: National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families published a series of monographs that pointed to the social and emotional development of infants and toddlers as the precursors to success in school. The authors identified seven characteristics of children who are best prepared to thrive in the school environment (ZERO TO THREE, 1992):

1. **Confidence** – A sense of control and mastery of one’s body, behavior, and world; the child’s sense that he or she is more likely than not to succeed at what he or she undertakes and that adults will be helpful.
2. **Curiosity** – The sense that finding out about things is positive and leads to pleasure.
3. **Intentionality** – The wish and capacity to have an effect and to act on that desire with persistence, a characteristic that is related to a sense of competence and being effective.
4. **Self-Control** – The ability to modulate and control one’s own actions in age-appropriate ways; a sense of inner control.
5. **Relatedness** – The ability to engage with others based on the sense of being understood by others and understanding others.
6. **Capacity to Communicate** – The wish and ability to exchange ideas, feelings, and concepts with others, a characteristic that is related to a sense of trust in others and a sense of pleasure in engaging with others, including adults.
7. **Cooperativeness** – The ability in a group activity to balance one’s own needs with those of others.

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A Few Other Terms

Attachment:

The emotional bond that develops between a parent or caregiver and an infant.

Reciprocal communication:

A mutual communication, where an adult talks or communicates with an infant and waits for him or her to reply. Both the infant and the adult take an active part in the interaction.

Self-Regulation:

The ability of the child to gain mastery in controlling bodily functions, managing powerful emotions constructively, and keeping attention focused (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000).

Temperament:

A behavioral style. Temperament seems to be consistent over time, and governs children's responses to various interactions and stimuli.

Use this space to write down other terms you hear that you want to learn more about:

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