



Northamptonshire
Mental Health
Gateway

Northamptonshire
Young Healthy Minds
Partnership



Emotional Milestones

in the Early Years
from birth - 5 years

Understanding Emotional Milestones

Dear Parent/Carer,

We hope you will find this leaflet helpful. The early years are an important time in your child's development, including their emotional development.



It is the time when your child is establishing strong emotional ties with the people who are most important in their lives. It is a time too, when they are beginning to find out about themselves, their world, their feelings and those of the people around them.

We generally know what the early physical milestones are for very young children, for example their first step and their first word because we can see and hear them but the emotional milestones are less clear cut. By paying attention to our children's behaviour, we can gauge where their emotional development is 'at' and this helps us to understand how they are feeling and how they understand their world. This in turn helps us to better "tune in" and respond to what they need and to know that our feelings affect their feelings too.

This is why we've prepared this leaflet. It provides an overview of the important emotional milestones. As with all milestones they are a guide only. Children are individuals and develop in their own way. They do not necessarily move through the milestones in a continuous progression but can move back and forth through the stages or stay for a while at a particular level. This is particularly true of the emotional milestones.

We hope you enjoy reading it and find it informative. If you would like to find out more, please talk to the person who gave you this leaflet, or refer to the back page.

The Emotional Milestones of Young Babies

Birth to
6 Months

- After the time been born, young babies are getting used to life in the world and are learning to bond and develop trust with their main carers.
- Young babies smile, cry, grasp, cling, suck, make eye contact and sucking movements with their mouth, and reach out to let you know they need care and loving.
- Young babies love face to face contact and being talked to – this helps them feel wanted and important and strengthens the bond with their main carers and others.
- Young babies feel secure and cry less when held and cuddled. This will not spoil them but help them feel loved and safe.
- Young babies tell you when they need quiet time and calming by turning or looking away or when they are restless in your arms.
- As young babies develop they gradually are able to feel comfortable on their own for slightly longer periods and begin to entertain themselves.



The Emotional Milestones of Older Babies

7 to 18
Months

- Older babies gain pleasure from exploring their immediate world around them by touching, holding and putting things in their mouth.
- Older babies enjoy looking at you and what is happening around them.
- As their closeness to their main carers strengthens, older babies can become wary of people with whom they are familiar but don't see as often (e.g. grandparents) as well as with strangers. Closeness and attention from their main carers reassures them.
- Older babies are learning that they are a separate person from their main carers by exploring the immediate world around them.
- Older babies can make connections between the look on a person's face and the tone of their voice e.g. happy face and soft tone, anxious face and sharp tone.
- Older babies are beginning to manage their feelings by soothing themselves with thumb-sucking and other habits as well as distraction through play as they learn their main carers are not always instantly available.
- When main care givers respond quickly, consistently and sensitively, older babies learn more quickly about their feelings and how to manage them.



The Emotional Milestones of Toddlers

18 months
to 3 years

- Toddlers are becoming more independent and wanting their own way. They show extremes of behaviour from very independent to dependent, aggressive to calm, helpful to stubborn. These changes can happen quickly.
- Toddlers only understand the world from their point of view.
- Toddlers like to test the boundaries set by their main care givers to gain the reassurance that the boundaries (limit setting) are still there.
- Tantrums and other reactions to anger and frustration are common in toddlers.
- Toddlers respond well to comfort shown by cuddles, holding, stroking, patting, calming and gentle tones and being in a quiet, comforting place.
- Toddlers express their feelings and are learning to manage their feelings through play.
- Toddlers are beginning to name feelings, e.g. happy, sad, angry, scared and to show interest in others' feelings. Songs, games, stories and imaginative play helps toddlers to know more about feelings and the feelings of others.
- Toddlers are learning to link 'cause and effect' and are better able to remember from previous experiences the reason and causes for how they feel. This is helped when their main carers can simply talk and explain about feelings at the time.
- Talking with toddlers before difficult events such as changes or separations helps them to manage their feelings and to feel secure and comforted.



The Emotional Milestones of Young Children

3 to 5
Years

- Young children are starting to play more with other children and may still get upset when left.
- Young children are becoming more confident and still like to seek the attention of their main care givers.
- Young children are starting to express their feelings in words more as well as through actions.
- Young children are beginning to show awareness of other people's feelings and that these might be different from their own about the same situation.
- Young children are literal and magical in their thinking. They believe that wishes do come true so it is important for adults to use words carefully when speaking about important things.



For further information:

If you would like to find out more or talk about what you have read in this leaflet below here is a list of useful contacts:

Local Health Visiting team: Every family with children under five has access to a health visitor. Their role is to offer support and encouragement to families through the early years from pregnancy and birth to primary school. They can be contacted through your GP's practice. The HealthVisitor has links with specialist professionals such as Community Paediatricians and Child and Adolescent Primary Mental Health Practitioners.

The Pre-school, Nursery or Children Centre practitioner: The staff of your child's early years setting would be happy to discuss questions related to your child's development. They know who else to talk to if you might find this helpful as well, such as their link Educational Psychologist.

Parentline is one of many useful organisations. A confidential phone line for parents. Parentline is there for any parent, any time. Free, confidential.
Tel: **0808 800 2222**

Families Information Service provides information, advice and guidance on childcare, activities and family support services that families can access.

For more information please visit www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/fis



Northamptonshire Young Healthy Minds Partnership

Northamptonshire practitioners
can request this leaflet free of
charge from:

Health Promoton Resources
hpresources@northants.nhs.uk



**The information contained in this leaflet can be
made available in other languages and formats upon
request such as Braille, large print and audio cassette.**

This leaflet has been produced by a group of professionals: (health visitors: Paul Howard and Diane Dinch; educational psychologist: Alison Gardner; child and adolescent primary mental health worker: Annie Waldsax) who are members of the CAMHS Mental Health Promotion and Early Intervention work stream in Northamptonshire. As well as referring to their own expertise, the authors of this leaflet also referred to [The Solihull Approach \(2nd Edition\)](#); [Personal, Social and Emotional Development - Birth to Five Years - Training Materials \(DfES 2006\)](#); [The Early Years Foundation Stage \(DfES 2007\)](#) and Dr S Greenspan's [Socioemotional Development of Infants and Children](#).