HEALTH BASICS

Developmental milestones record - 3 years

A developmental milestones record documents skills a child shows around age three.

WHAT IT IS
A dated record of developmental skills around age three

WHERE IT COMES UP
Health visits, developmental reviews, and childcare discussions

WHY IT MATTERS
Helps identify progress, concerns, and possible support needs

WHAT IT IS NOT
Not a diagnosis or pass-fail test

WHO TO ASK
Pediatrician, family clinician, health visitor, or developmental service

HOW IT IS CHECKED
Observation, caregiver questions, and validated screening tools

Overview

A developmental milestones record notes the skills a child shows around their third birthday. It may be part of a health record, childcare review, parent-held record, or developmental questionnaire.

A milestone is a skill that most children can do by a certain age. Milestones cover several areas, including communication, learning, movement, play, social interaction, and everyday tasks.

The record is not a test that a child passes or fails. Children do not all gain skills on the same day or in the same order. Health, opportunities to practise, language exposure, and the setting in which a child is observed can affect what gets recorded.

One missing item does not establish a developmental condition. The overall pattern matters more than a single entry. Clinicians also consider whether skills are progressing, whether a child uses them in different settings, and whether anyone who knows the child has concerns.

How it works

A three-year record is usually completed through observation and questions. A parent or

caregiver may describe what the child does at home. A clinician or childcare professional may observe play, movement, communication, and interaction.

Examples of milestones included in the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention checklist for age three include:

This is a summary, not a complete assessment. Different health systems may use different milestone lists or age ranges.

The date and context can be useful. For example, a child may speak freely at home but remain quiet in an unfamiliar clinic. A record can note what was seen directly, what a caregiver reported, and whether the skill appears regularly or only occasionally.

Developmental monitoring means following skills over time during everyday care. Developmental screening is different. Screening uses a structured, validated questionnaire or tool to identify children who may benefit from further assessment. It does not make a diagnosis.

If screening or observation raises a concern, a more detailed assessment may follow. Depending on the concern, this could include:

The exact process differs by country and local service. A milestone record should be interpreted alongside the child's medical history, family observations, and previous development.

- Joining other children in play and settling after a caregiver leaves
- Having short back-and-forth conversations and asking questions
- Saying their first name and being understood most of the time
- Describing an action shown in a picture or book
- Drawing a circle after being shown how
- Threading large items, using a fork, and putting on some clothing
- Avoiding a hot object after being warned
- A hearing or vision check
- Speech and language assessment
- Physical or movement assessment
- Review by a developmental or child health service
- Information from nursery, preschool, or other caregivers

Why it matters for your health

A record creates a picture of development over time. It can show steady progress, highlight a skill that needs another look, or help families and professionals agree on what support may be useful.

Early recognition matters when a child has difficulty hearing, communicating, moving, learning, or interacting. Assessment may identify practical support, such as hearing care, speech and language therapy, physical therapy, or help within preschool.

The record can also prevent unnecessary concern. A skill that was not seen during one appointment may be clearly documented at home or at a later visit.

What can go wrong

The main limitation is treating the record as a diagnosis. A checklist cannot by itself confirm or rule out developmental delay, autism, a language disorder, hearing loss, vision problems, or a movement disorder.

Records can be incomplete. A child may not cooperate during a short appointment, and caregivers may interpret a question differently. Skills may also look different across languages and settings. Growing up with more than one language does not itself cause a language disorder; communication should be considered across all languages the child uses.

Some patterns deserve follow-up. These include skills that are not progressing, several missing milestones in one or more areas, or concerns raised consistently by caregivers or childcare staff. Loss of a skill the child previously used is called developmental regression and should be discussed promptly with a clinician.

Most milestone concerns are suitable for a routine appointment rather than emergency care. Ask for earlier review if skills have been lost or there is a marked change in communication, movement, behaviour, or awareness.

Seek emergency help for an acute change accompanied by signs such as a seizure, severe weakness, difficulty waking, serious breathing trouble, or loss of consciousness. These are medical emergencies rather than features of the milestone record itself.

What you can do

Keep brief, dated notes about skills you notice. Specific examples are more helpful than general labels. For instance, record the words used in a short conversation, how the child joins

a game, or which clothes they can put on.

Videos may help show a skill that is difficult to observe during an appointment. Keep them private and ask whether the service accepts or needs video evidence before sharing them.

If an item is unclear, ask what the wording means and whether the skill should happen regularly. You can also ask:

Mention any loss of previously acquired skills. Also share relevant information about hearing, vision, sleep, movement, communication in every language used, and how the child manages everyday activities.

If development is progressing and nobody has concerns, no special action is needed because of the record alone. Continue ordinary health and developmental follow-up offered in your area.

- Is this record based on observation, caregiver report, or both?
- Would a validated developmental screening tool add useful information?
- Is a hearing, vision, speech, or movement assessment appropriate?
- When should this skill be reviewed again?
- How can nursery or preschool observations be included?

Common questions

Does missing one milestone mean a child has developmental delay?

No. One item may be absent, unobserved, or misunderstood. Clinicians look at the overall pattern, progress over time, and information from different settings.

Is the record the same as developmental screening?

Not necessarily. A milestone record may be an informal checklist. Screening uses a validated tool with standard questions and scoring. Neither one alone provides a diagnosis.

Is it an autism test?

No. Some recorded skills involve communication, play, and social interaction, but a general milestone record is not an autism assessment. Concerns about social communication or repetitive behaviour require appropriate screening or evaluation.

Does using more than one language affect the record?

A child's words and communication should be counted across all languages they use. Multilingual exposure does not itself cause a language disorder. An assessment should consider each language and, when needed, use a trained interpreter.

What if a child will not demonstrate a skill at the appointment?

Tell the clinician what happens in familiar settings. Notes, examples from caregivers, and information from childcare can help. The skill can also be reviewed later.

Should the record be compared with another child's record?

Direct comparison is usually not useful. Development has a normal range, and records may use different questions. The child's own progress and functioning are more informative.

Sources

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