HEALTH BASICS

Developmental milestones record - 5 years

A record of skills a child may show around age five.

WHAT IT IS
A snapshot of development around age five

WHERE IT COMES UP
Five-year checkups, school entry, and developmental reviews

WHY IT MATTERS
Helps identify strengths and areas needing further assessment

WHAT IT IS NOT
Not a diagnosis or intelligence test

WHO TO ASK
A pediatric, primary care, school, or developmental service

HOW IT IS CHECKED
Developmental history, observation, and structured screening tools

Overview

A developmental milestones record for age five is a checklist or written summary of skills a child may demonstrate around their fifth birthday. It may appear in a health record, parent-held booklet, school-entry form, or developmental app.

Developmental milestones are everyday abilities that emerge as children grow. They cover communication, learning, social interaction, movement, and practical tasks. A record helps families and professionals notice a child's progress over time.

It is not a pass-or-fail test. Children do not gain every skill on the same day or in the same order. Language, culture, opportunities to practise, health, and the setting in which a child is observed can affect what is recorded.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or CDC, describes milestones as skills that at least 75% of children are expected to show by a given age. That definition makes the checklist useful for discussion, but it does not make it a diagnostic test.

How it works

The record is usually completed using information from you, observations of the child, and sometimes reports from nursery or school. The person reviewing it may ask for examples rather than relying on a single performance during an appointment.

Around age five, examples of developmental milestones include:

These are examples, not a complete curriculum for a five-year-old. Reading fluently, writing full sentences, or doing formal arithmetic are not required to complete a general developmental milestones record.

A child may show a skill at home but not during an appointment. They may be tired, shy, anxious, hungry, or unfamiliar with the language being used. The record should therefore reflect what the child usually does, not only what happens on one day.

A milestone checklist is also different from a validated developmental screening tool. A screening tool uses structured questions and scoring that have been studied in groups of children. Screening can indicate whether a more detailed assessment may be useful, but it still does not provide a diagnosis.

- Following rules or taking turns during games
- Singing, dancing, or acting for others
- Helping with simple household tasks
- Telling a short story with at least two events
- Answering straightforward questions about a story
- Having a conversation with several back-and-forth exchanges
- Recognizing or producing simple rhyming words
- Counting to 10
- Naming some written numbers and letters
- Using time words such as "yesterday" or "tomorrow"
- Paying attention for about 5 to 10 minutes during an activity
- Writing some letters from their name
- Buttoning some buttons
- Hopping on one foot

Why it matters for your health

A five-year milestone record gives a broad picture of how a child communicates, learns, plays,

moves, and manages everyday tasks. It can help you prepare for a routine health or school-entry discussion.

The record may identify areas in which support could help. For example, a hearing assessment may be appropriate when spoken language is unclear or instructions are often missed. An eye examination may be relevant when a child has trouble seeing books, pictures, or objects at a distance.

It can also document strengths. A child may have advanced language skills while finding fine-motor tasks, such as buttons or pencils, more difficult. Another child may move confidently but need more support with conversation or group play.

Development is best considered alongside the child's health, family history, education, and daily environment. One unchecked item usually provides much less information than a pattern across several skills or a change over time.

Using more than one language does not cause a language disorder. A multilingual child's knowledge should be considered across all the languages they use. They may know different words in different languages and may not demonstrate their full communication ability when assessed in only one.

What can go wrong

A record can be incomplete or misleading. Skills may be marked absent even though the child has not had a chance to try them. Expectations may also fail to account for physical disability, communication methods, cultural practices, or limited access to early education.

A pattern of missing milestones can sometimes relate to a developmental delay. This means that skills are emerging later than expected in one or more areas. Possible related conditions or situations include:

A checklist cannot distinguish among these possibilities. Assessment may involve hearing and vision checks, observation, questionnaires, educational information, and evaluation by speech and language, occupational therapy, psychology, or developmental services.

Missing one skill is generally a reason for routine discussion rather than emergency care. Arrange follow-up if you remain concerned, if several skills are not developing, or if difficulties affect communication, play, learning, movement, or daily activities.

Contact a pediatric or primary care service promptly if a child loses skills they previously used. This is called developmental regression and needs medical assessment.

Seek emergency help for a sudden loss of movement or speech, severe breathing difficulty, a

seizure lasting longer than advised in the child's emergency plan, loss of consciousness, or another acute medical emergency. These are not milestone-record issues, but they should not wait for a routine developmental appointment.

- Hearing loss or impaired vision
- Speech sound or language disorders
- Autism spectrum disorder
- Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder
- Developmental coordination disorder
- Intellectual or broader developmental disability
- Neurological or genetic conditions
- Stress, disrupted education, or limited opportunities to practise skills

What you can do

Record examples of what the child does in ordinary settings. A brief note such as "tells me what happened at school in order" is more useful than a simple yes-or-no answer.

If you are uncertain about an item, ask the child's teacher or childcare provider what they observe. Different settings can reveal different skills.

Useful actions include:

You do not need to repeatedly test or drill a child to complete the record. Everyday play, conversation, drawing, dressing, and shared reading usually provide enough information.

Do not compare scores from different milestone checklists as though they use the same standard. Checklists from health services, schools, and commercial apps may include different items and age ranges.

- Bring the completed record to routine health or school reviews
- Note when a skill was first noticed, if known
- Record languages and communication methods used at home
- Keep relevant hearing, vision, therapy, or school reports together
- Ask whether a structured developmental screen or assessment is appropriate
- Ask what support is available while waiting for an assessment
- Request a hearing or vision check when those abilities are uncertain

Common questions

Does missing one milestone mean there is a developmental disorder?

No. A single missing skill does not establish a disorder. The overall pattern, opportunities to learn the skill, and how the child manages daily life are more informative.

Is the record an intelligence test?

No. It does not measure intelligence or predict a child's academic future. It records selected everyday skills at a point in time.

Should every five-year-old complete a formal developmental test?

Not necessarily. The type of review offered at this age differs between health systems and schools. A structured screen or detailed assessment may be considered when a concern is raised.

What if the child refuses to demonstrate a skill?

Record what they usually do elsewhere and explain that they did not demonstrate it during the review. A clinician or educator may gather information from other settings rather than treating refusal as inability.

Does bilingual development make milestones later?

Learning more than one language does not itself cause a language disorder. Vocabulary and communication should be considered across all languages. An assessment may need an interpreter or a professional familiar with multilingual development.

Can the record diagnose autism or ADHD?

No. It may identify behaviours worth discussing, but these conditions require a fuller assessment using developmental history, observations, and information from more than one setting.

What if all milestones are recorded as present?

No further action may be needed beyond usual health and school follow-up. The record is a snapshot, so new concerns can still be raised later.

Sources

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Milestones by 5 Years



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