

## Helping my child get to the next step

It can be very easy to want to do everything for a disabled child – feed them, dress them – but one of the most important things you can do to help your child with disability to get to the next step is to look for ways for the child to do things for themselves!!! You can prevent your child from learning new things by doing everything for them and “overprotecting” them.

Instead of always feeding the child yourself, look for ways for the children to feed themselves!

You might need to give your child **more time** – to teach them new things. A great deal of **patience is needed** and the child should be given lots of **encouragement along the way**.

**You might need to use your imagination to help your child to get to the next step, like:**

- Making a cup with 2 handles for easier drinking?
- Finding clothes that are easy to put on?
- Modifying equipment for cooking, gardening to make it easier to use?
- Building a ramp into your fale?
- Train him or her to use a stick, crutches or cane?

**Break down the barriers to independence and inclusion!**

Before you work out how to help your child to get to the next step, first you must find out what your child can do now! Can your child hold its head up? Sit up? Use her hands?

Children develop skills in steps. They must learn to move their legs before they can learn to crawl or walk. The list below describes the order in which a child usually learns new things. Look on this table and find out what things can your child do now, and what is the “next step” that you can help your child to get to. Think of fun activities and games to help your child practice this next step.



**Age: From Birth to 1 Month most babies can.**

- Move their arms and legs around a lot
  - Move their arms out quickly when there is a loud noise like a clap hands close to the baby's head
  - Turn their head when the mother strokes the baby close to his/her mouth
- Turn their head to the side when they are put on their belly



**Head Control** is the beginning step – a child cannot look about, sit, crawl or stand without having nice strong neck, shoulder and back muscles.

We can play games while (we sit the child between our legs on the floor facing another person) clapping, singing with toys etc...or the child lies on his belly with a pillow under his chest and we make sounds and hold things up to look at, to reach and to listen to.

**Age: From 3 months most babies can...**

- Hold their head up when they are pulled up on their backs with both their hands held
- Close their hand around a person's finger when it is put in their hand
- Make some other sounds as well as crying; Smile at people they know

**Age: From 6 months most babies can...**

- Roll from their back to their belly
- Put something from one hand to another
- Make many different sounds and laugh
- Look around at people and things



**Sitting** requires balance and a nice strong back.

We can encourage these to develop by...

- Playing with the child on his back...
- Rolling over, reaching towards things, marching his legs, encouraging him to reach for his feet.
- Sitting him between our legs and playing with things in front...
- And encouraging him to 'prop' with his arms as he learns to sit by himself.

**Age: From 9 months most babies can...**

- Sit down alone;
- Pick things up with their thumb and first finger;
- Respond to their name by turning their head or looking
- Act differently with a stranger than they do with their family



**Age: From 12 months most babies can...**

- Hold onto something and pull themselves to stand up;
- Play with things and put things in and out of a container;
- Understand “No”;
- Try to put on a hat



**Age: From 18 months most young children can...**

- Walk without falling and are starting to run;
- Point to parts of their body – head, nose, ears and eyes;
- Say some words like Mama, Papa, and other simple words;
- Wave bye bye and clap hands

**Age: From 2 years most young children can...**

- Jump;
- Match things together – eg, spoons, cups;
- Ask for food and drink;
- Talk with 2 words together – eg, “my spoon”;



**Age: From 2 ½ years most young children can,,,,,,,**

- Stand on their toes,
- Kick a ball;
- Use one hand more confidently more than the other;
- Know a boy and a girl;
- Can take off their own clothes by themselves



**Age: From 3 years most young children can...**

- Throw and catch a ball;
- Pick up small things with their fingers;
- Talk in 3 word sentences;
- Join in play with other children

**Age: From 4 years most young children can...**

- Climb trees;
- Can draw a stick person;
- Ask many questions;
- Understand many things and can take turns

**Age: From 5 years most young children can...**

- Climb steps and skip;
- Draw a simple house with doors and windows;
- Can tell their own name;
- Can use the toilet and wash without help



**Remember** often children with disability need lots and lots of help and encouragement to develop mobility or they will never achieve and will lie on the floor getting bent and twisted.

**Gentle Exercise** of all limbs assists in flexibility and helps the little child gain control of its arms and legs, singing while you gently.

- Move the limbs up and down.
- Stretch the arms and legs
- Move the parts of the body in the way that children without a disability can move that part.

**For example;** marching the legs, rotating the hips, flexing the feet etc...but be gentle, **not harsh and tough**...and make it fun! (If you are able to get advice from your local clinic, hospital, physiotherapist, special education

teacher or community based rehabilitation worker then please do...these people can help you with support and ideas)

## THE DEVELOPMENTAL SEQUENCES

Developmental sequences are the steps babies and young children go through during their development. These help us to find out by observing the child what they can do, and how we can identify what is the next learning step. These sequences cover all areas of development; physical, communication and language, social and behaviour, self-care, attention and interest, play, and learning and intelligence.

Patric Moon, physiotherapist with Callan services for people with disability in Papua New Guinea had developed the following physical developmental sequences...

Patric says...as a child grows it goes through the following pattern of movements (or positions). Children with disability often stop in one of the steps of this sequence, or never get beyond the first step because of their brain damage.

If you watch a child grow, you will notice he/she develops in two ways; from head to toe, and from the centre of the body to the outside parts of the body (head and trunk before the hands and feet). Therefore for a child to progress in this sequence, the first thing he/she must have is head control.

