

Developmental Skills of Children 12–18 Months

Belinda Anderson, M.Ed., M.S., OTR/L



TheraNotes™

Following are developmental skills typically seen in children 12–18 months of age.

Sensory Development

- The baby tries to sing sounds to music.
- The baby demonstrates improved bladder and bowel control by staying dry for longer periods and having predictable bowel movements.
- The baby begins to show discomfort with a soiled diaper.
- The baby enjoys making a mess in various mediums (e.g., food, water, play dough).
- The baby responds to many different sensations of taste, touch, scents, movement, sound, and sight.

Gross Motor Development

- The baby stands alone for 10 seconds or longer while using his arms to play.
- The baby walks without help.
- The baby can stoop and stand back up independently.
- The baby can bend over and look through his legs.
- The baby walks backward and sideways, and begins to run.
- The baby pushes, pulls, or carries a large toy while walking.
- The baby starts to climb into a small chair independently.
- The baby climbs up stairs while someone holds one hand or while holding onto a rail, placing both feet on each step.

Fine Motor Development

- The baby puts a few too many objects into a container before taking them out.
- The baby marks a piece of paper with a crayon and scribbles imitatively.
- The baby stacks two to three cubes.

- The baby turns more than one page at a time in a cardboard book.
- The baby can hold an object with one hand and manipulate it with her other hand.

Language/Social Development

- The baby uses different trial and error problem-solving techniques.
- The baby pretends to do housework or an adult job.
- The baby looks for hidden objects.
- The baby shows an understanding of size and nests two to three boxes.
- The baby says “no” meaningfully and can be resistant to adult control.
- The baby points or gestures to communicate or identify needs.
- The baby begins to experiment with words and verbalizes to indicate needs.
- The baby uses a spoon and cup but still can be messy while eating.
- The baby uses coordinated oral motor movements when chewing food.
- The baby needs and expects routines and rituals.
- The baby plays ball or “give and take” games cooperatively.
- The baby plays symbolically with real objects (i.e., talks on the telephone).
- The baby uses 15–20 words expressively.
- The baby identifies himself in the mirror.

Activities for Children 12–18 Months

Following are activities you can perform to encourage development in children 12–18 months of age.

Sensory Development

- Sing nursery rhymes while your child is waiting for a meal. Have her sing along.
- Place a sheet or drop cloth under a large container. Mix uncooked rice, beans, and pasta in the container. Encourage your child to put her hands in the mixture, scooping, raking, and picking up the mixture. Allow her to pour mixture on her hands and between her fingers.
- Take your child to the park. Encourage her to play on the swings and the slide, and in the sandbox.

Gross Motor Development

- Have your child stand at a table or a hard surface and play with toys or puzzles.
- During floor play, encourage your child to roll, crawl, and walk like different animals.
- Have your child push or pull a large toy or a laundry basket full of toys.
- While sitting or kneeling on floor, have your child toss a tennis-sized ball with one hand at least 2–3 feet. Roll the ball back to him. Repeat.
- Take your child outdoors and encourage him to walk, run, climb, and jump.

Fine Motor Development

- Read your child a book. Encourage her to turn the pages.
- Help your child with scribbling on paper or coloring books.
- Let your child play with pots and pans. Allow her to put her toys in them or bang on them with wooden spoons.
- Show your child two blocks. Stack the blocks and ask her to imitate you. Gradually increase the number of blocks.

- Put raisins into a small container. Pour out the raisins while your child watches. Pick up a raisin with your fingertips and thumb. Place the raisin in the container. Have her imitate you.
- Put cold cereal loops on a straw. Have your child slide them off the straw and then put them back onto the straw.

Language/Social Development

- Play finger games with your child. Use nursery rhymes such as “The 10 Little Indians” or “This Old Man.” Demonstrate the gestures while you sing. Have your child imitate you.
- Have your child imitate doing activities of daily living (i.e., washing his face, putting on a hat, rubbing on lotion) while singing about what you are doing. For example, sing, “This is the way we wash our face, wash our face, wash our face...early in the morning” to the tune of “Early in the morning.”
- Play the name game. Have your child reach for, point at, or obtain common objects that are safe, by asking him, “Where’s the _____” Then reconfirm what the object is. Say, “Yes, this is the _____.” Repeat if he shows interest.
- Encourage your child to help you in putting on and taking off his clothing.
- Make meal time a party! Put on music that is lively and upbeat. Place a drop cloth under the high chair. Give your child a spoon, a small amount of food in a bowl, and liquid in a cup. Give him time to feed himself. Praise him for attempts and successes.
- Encourage your child to speak in two- to three-word sentences (e.g., “I see you!” “Big boy,” or “Time to go _____”).