



Domains of Child Development
as organized and described in
Battelle Developmental Inventory – 2nd Edition NU

Overview of Developmental Domains

Children develop as a whole, but developmental skills are often grouped into domains. In relation to child development the word “domain” refers to areas associated with specific skills. Domains are often titled and skills grouped in varying ways on developmental checklists as well as in resources for professionals and parents. For the purpose of this document, domains and skill groupings will be titled in the same manner as in the Battelle Developmental Inventory, Second Edition – Adaptive, Personal-Social, Communication, Motor, and Cognitive.

Interrelatedness of Domains

The domains of development are interlinked and interrelated so that a child’s progress in one domain influences the progress in other domains of development. Although skills within domains are interrelated, it is important to note that the process and rate of development varies within and across domains. It is commonly noted that development in one domain might be predominant over skills in other areas. For example, a motor skill such as walking might seem to be dominant for a time followed by a period of language development.

Within each separate domain are subdomains which further specify the skills associated with the domain. Subdomains further clarify and group the skills in the domains. Skills on developmental checklists as well as assessments such as the BDI-2NU are based on developmental milestones and typically expected sequences of development.

Adaptive Domain

Adaptive skills are those in which the child uses the information and skills acquired in the other domains. As adaptive skills develop there are increases in a child's participation in personal care and daily routines. Adaptive skills also include a child's ability to enter a new environment or situation as well as engage in a familiar/desirable activity with minimal prompting.

- **Subdomains:**
 - Self-care – Skills include feeding, dressing, toileting, and drinking independently
 - Personal Responsibility – Child's ability to assume responsibility for actions, put away toys, initiate activities, avoid common dangers
- **Examples of relationships to other domains:**
 - Understanding the steps in daily routines, responding to adult actions, and anticipating next steps in routines are related to cognitive skills of imitation, memory, cause-and-effect, and problem solving.
 - Development of self-care routines is impacted by a child's motor development.
- **Variables:**
 - Expectations for self-care and following routines vary among cultures and among families.
 - A child's previous medical or health problems might also impact his/her opportunities to develop self-care skills.



Personal-Social Domain

Personal-Social skills are those which allow a child to engage in meaningful social interaction with adults and peers and to develop his/her own self-concept. Milestones in this domain are centered on children gaining better understandings of their own emotions and the emotions of others. Engaging in play activities is an important aspect of the development of personal-social skills because it is through play that children learn how to interact with others. As personal-social skills develop there are increases in a child's understanding of relationships, self-awareness, empathy, and coping strategies.

- **Subdomains:**

- Adult interaction – Skills include response and initiation of social interactions with adults, helping adults with simple tasks, identifying familiar people.
- Peer interaction – Abilities in forming friendships, interacting in small groups, sharing toys, taking turns
- Self-Concept and Social Role – Development of self-awareness and pride, coping with his/her own feelings as well as aggression or teasing from others

- **Examples of relationships to other domains:**

- Development of personal-social skills is a key factor in school readiness and significantly impacts the development of skills in other domains.
- Delays in the development of personal-social skills impede a child's opportunities to benefit from participation in group activities.
- The development of personal-social skills is impacted by a child's skills in other domains. For example, a child who has not developed communication skills or who has difficulties with motor tasks might experience difficulties in social interactions such as playing in small groups.

- **Variables:**

- Depending on their cultural and/or family experiences, children may vary greatly in their understanding of personal-social interactions. Opportunities to interact and play with other children might be limited for some children based on family schedules and obligations.
- Previous experiences of interacting with siblings, as well as adults and other children in a variety of environments have significant impact on a child's personal-social development.



Communication Domain

Skills in the communication domain relate to a child's ability to both understand and use language. As communication skills develop there are increases in a child's ability to respond to adult directions. There is also an increase in a child's expression of his/her wants and needs, varying with age and ranging from crying and fussing to using spoken sounds and words.

- **Subdomains:**

- Receptive Communication – Skills include responding to sounds and words, associating pictures and objects with words, and responding to questions with either nonverbal or verbal responses.
- Expressive Communication – Skills relate to the ability to relate information to others by gestures, sounds, words, and sentences. This domain includes a child's ability to use language during social contact. The production of speech sounds is also included.

- **Examples of relationships to other domains:**

- Language development and effective communication capabilities are highly dependent on other developmental domains. Communication capability includes a wide range of social behaviors and skills, making acquisition of communication milestones a complicated process.
- The development of communication and language concepts has considerable impact on not only personal-social interactions but on the ability to understand and complete many learning tasks.
- Communication difficulties might impact a child's pre-academic skills in tasks such as discriminating letter sounds, comprehending stories, and following directions.



- **Variables:**

- Learning language and communication is a universal experience for children across cultures. Infants and toddlers learn the languages of their families, cultures and communities through the natural interaction of caregiving and everyday experiences.
- Children develop communication skills as they interact with other children and with adults who play and talk with them.
- Children who lack experiences with a variety of materials and toys as well as those who lack interactions with adults and peers are often missing the foundation skills for interpreting the communications they hear in the environment.
- As with other domains, the family's culture, dynamics, and schedules impact the development of communication skills.



Motor Domain

Skills in the motor domain are related to a child's ability to control and use large and small muscles of the body. During infancy, motor abilities typically develop in a specific sequential order. However, it is important to note that the rate of motor development differs among children (e.g., standing, walking). As a child's motor skills develop there are likely to be increases in his/her interest in and attention items in the environment.



- **Subdomains:**

- Gross Motor – Skills included are those related to large muscles for walking, running, jumping, and coordinated movements such as throwing and walking up and down stairs.
- Fine Motor – These skills require the control and coordination of small muscles in the arms and hands. Development progresses toward increasingly complicated tasks that involve precise movements such as cutting with scissors and tracing.
- Perceptual Motor – Skills require the integration of fine motor and perceptual skills that are needed for tasks such as stacking blocks, copying, manipulating small objects. The development of skills progresses toward drawing and writing. Activities focus on motor imitation.

- **Examples of relationships to other domains:**

- The child's ability to use muscles impacts interactions with and use of materials in the environment, therefore impacting development in adaptive skills which require standing, balancing, and coordinating movements.
- Adaptive skills such as eating (holding utensils) are interrelated with the use of small muscles and fine motor skills. Personal-social skills are interrelated because children's play is usually active and requires use of large muscles as well as balance.
- Play activities, as well as learning tasks, often require the use of fine motor and perceptual motor skills for engaging in activities such as building with blocks, completing puzzles, and drawing.

- **Variables:**

- Like the skill development in other domains the variables for motor development are related to family and cultural characteristics as well as the child's experiences.
- In some cases medical and/or health problems impact motor development.



Cognitive Domain

The cognitive domain is generally associated with a child's ability to learn, remember, and solve problems. Cognition refers to intellect or mental abilities and involves processing and using information. The skills in the cognitive domain, along with language skills, are those usually associated with readiness for academic activities.

- **Subdomains:**

- Attention and Memory – Skills include visual and auditory attention, recalling information such as familiar songs and rhymes, and finding hidden objects and pictures.
- Reasoning and Academic Skills – Skills relate to critical thinking and include perceiving and analyzing information and using logic to solve problems. Scholastic skills such as matching, identifying numerals and letters, and counting are also included.
- Perception and Concepts – Skills focus on examining differences and similarities. Development of skills in this area begins with an infant's sensorimotor interactions and proceeds toward development of concepts related to time, sequence, and weight.



- **Examples of relationships to other domains:**

- Communication and cognitive domains are closely related because they both involve understanding and expressing information.
- The cognitive domain includes abilities in attention and memory which are key skills in accomplishing independence in self-care routines.
- Children who experience delays or difficulties in the development of cognitive skills might have difficulty processing and understanding the expectations associated with social interactions and group activities.

- **Variables:**

- Stimulation, adequate nutrition, and parental nurturance are important factors in brain development and therefore also in developing cognitive competence.
- Environment can be viewed as two-fold when considering its impact on cognitive development. One aspect of environment is that of activities and accomplishments that are culturally valued by the family. A second aspect of environment is the availability of stimulating materials and activities, such as toys which enhance creativity and problem solving.
- Both physical nourishment and social-emotional nurturance are critical factors in a child's cognitive development.



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