

YOUTH SUCCESS MOVEMENT

Milestones

How to tell it is working — and what to do if it is not

Nothing to buy · Nothing to administer · Just watching

For parents of children from birth to five



*A milestone is not only a
checkpoint. It is an instruction.*

This is not a test

What They Are

There is nothing to buy, nothing to administer, and no score at the end.

A milestone is simply...

the thing most children can do by a certain age. Not what yours should do. What most do.

Every age is a guide

not a deadline. Children arrive at these on their own schedule, and one late skill is rarely anything at all.

It works both ways

If a milestone is missing, it does not only raise a question. It tells you exactly what to work on next.

Watching is not worrying. It is the cheapest early warning system there is.

About one child in six has a developmental delay of some kind. The single most important thing about those delays is that catching them early changes what can be done — because the early years are exactly when a brain is most able to be helped.

Notice. Do not audit. And do not panic over one wobble.

Start with the free one

We do not publish our own general checklist. A good one already exists, it is free, and it lives on your phone.

CDC — Learn the Signs. Act Early.

Free milestone checklists and a free Milestone Tracker app, covering two months through five years. Illustrated, quick, in English and Spanish, on iPhone and Android. If your child is missing markers for their age, it tells you what to do next.

cdc.gov/act-early

It covers four areas

- Social and emotional
- Language and communication
- Cognitive — thinking and problem solving
- Movement — large and small

What it does not cover — and what the rest of this deck adds

The official list tells you whether your child is talking. It does not tell you whether they understand a story, which kind of question they can answer, or whether they can tell you what happened in their own words. Those are the markers that predict reading — and the rest of this deck is those.

Use theirs for development. Use ours for reading.

What school will measure

What School Measures

In Wisconsin there is no whole-child readiness test. Here is what your child will actually meet — and what it misses.

The reading screener

From 4K through third grade, every child is screened for reading. It covers phonemic awareness, letter sounds, decoding, alphabet knowledge and oral vocabulary.

Below the 25th percentile counts as at-risk, which triggers a closer look and, from 5K, a written reading plan. Many districts also run their own screening at registration.

What it does not look at

- Whether they understand a story
- Which kind of question they can answer
- Whether they can tell you what happened
- Whether they notice when it stops making sense

Four of the five things on it are word-level. Oral vocabulary is the one your everyday talking builds.

Two rights almost no parent uses

You must be sent the results within 15 days — not just an overall score, but a score in each skill area and a percentile. Read the breakdown, not the headline. And if you suspect your child has characteristics of dyslexia, you can request a closer diagnostic assessment in writing, and the school has 20 days to provide it.

Do not prepare your child for the screener. Drilling letters aims at the part school already does well.

Know what it measures. Do not let it decide what you build.

Birth to one

Birth to One

Long before words, watch for the back-and-forth.

WHAT YOU SHOULD SEE

- Turns toward your voice, and toward sound
- Takes turns making noises with you — you, then them, then you
- Answers to their own name by nine to twelve months
- Points at something to show you, not only to ask for it

Worth a word with the doctor

- No babbling by nine months
- Does not answer to their name by twelve months
- Not pointing at all by twelve months
- Little interest in faces or people

Turn-taking arrives before words. That is the thing to watch.

One to two

One to Two

Understanding runs ahead of talking. Watch what they understand.

WHAT YOU SHOULD SEE

- Around fifty words by eighteen months
- Two words together by two — “more milk”, “daddy gone”
- Points to things in a book when you name them
- Brings you a book, or a thing, to share it

Worth a word with the doctor

- No words at all by fifteen to eighteen months
- No two-word phrases by two
- Loses words they used to have
- Does not respond when you name something familiar

A child who understands but does not yet talk is usually fine. Watch both.

Two to three

Two to Three

The first real sign of comprehension: can they tell you what happened?

WHAT YOU SHOULD SEE

- Two and three word sentences
- Answers “what is that?” and “what is he doing?”
- Tells you what happened, roughly in order
- Asks questions constantly

Worth a word with the doctor

- Family cannot understand them by three
- No pretend play
- Cannot answer “what is that?” for familiar things
- Tantrums beyond about twenty-five minutes, or cannot be calmed at all

Talking about something that is not here is the marker that matters most.

Three to five

Three to Five

Now you can hear the engine running — in the answers they give.

WHAT YOU SHOULD SEE

- Tells a story with a beginning and an end by five
- Uses joining words — because, if, but, although
- Understood by people outside the family by four
- Guesses what happens next, and explains why someone did something

Worth a word with the doctor

- Cannot tell a simple story by five
- Not understood by strangers by four
- Cannot answer any “why” question
- Snores most nights, or sleeps with their mouth open
- A history of many ear infections

“Because earlier it said...” is the sound of comprehension working.

A milestone is an instruction

If One Is Missing

This is the part people miss. A marker that is not there tells you exactly what to work on.

Not pointing to show you

Follow their gaze and name what they look at. Point at things yourself and wait. Peekaboo and face games.

Few words by eighteen months

More back-and-forth. Say something, wait for any sound, answer it. Name everything. And get hearing checked.

Cannot tell you what happened

Retell the day together at bedtime. “What happened first?” Wordless picture books where they do the telling.

Cannot answer “why” by five

Move up one rung. Ask why about films, about people in the street, about anything — and wait ten seconds.

Which is why watching is not the same as worrying. What you notice tells you what to do next.

Every gap points at its own answer.

If something is genuinely worrying you

When To Act

You do not need to be sure, and you do not need anyone's permission.

You can ask for a free evaluation yourself — no doctor's note needed.

It is federal law, it applies in every state, and most parents never find out it exists. Asking costs nothing, and most children who are evaluated turn out to need nothing at all.

Under three

Call your county or state early intervention program — in many places it is called Birth to 3. Say you have concerns about your child's development and would like an evaluation.

Three, four or five

Contact your local school district and ask for the special education office — even if your child does not attend school there yet. Put the request in writing.

And two things worth mentioning at any visit

Whether your child snores most nights or sleeps with their mouth open, and whether they have had a lot of ear infections. Both are common, both are treatable, and both turn up years later as trouble with reading or attention.

Acting early is ordinary. It is not an alarm.

One step at a time

Start This Week

Two minutes a month is enough to know whether it is working.

Today

Download the free app.

CDC Milestone Tracker — iPhone or Android, English or Spanish. Two minutes, and it keeps the general list for you.

This month

Ask one question at each level.

“What is he doing?” then “what happens next?” then “why did she do that?” Note the hardest one they managed.

Every month

Write down one thing they said.

A word they used, a connection they made, a question you did not expect. It is a better record than any checklist.

If you are ever concerned about how your child is developing, you can ask for a free evaluation yourself — no doctor’s note needed.

Before your child turns three, call your county’s early intervention program — often called Birth to 3. From age three, contact your local school district and ask for the special education office, even if your child does not attend school there.

Watching is not worrying. It is how you know what to do next.