

Dr. Gesell's original and extensive research with more than 10,000 children has provided doctors, educators, and parents worldwide with fundamental knowledge of child behavior between birth and sixteen years. As Dr. Gesell and his associates have pointed out, "When the time comes, the child is normally ready for what he may need to do at that time. And he is never ready until his nervous system is ready."

Gesell stages of development show that behavior advances in a spiral pattern, going from one extreme to the other. The figure below shows these alternations as they typically occur for the average child in the early years of life. If your child isn't doing all of these things - or if you've been observing these behaviors for a while now - don't worry. Although these are typical behaviors for these ages, every child is an individual, developing at his or her own pace.

The Spiral of Development

Disequilibrium

4½ Years:

- Sometimes acts like a four, sometimes like a five
- Insecure
- Emotionally changeable

3½ Years:

- Needs to succeed/have own way
- Insecure
- Disobeys
- Clumsy – stumbles often
- Objects to eating, dressing routine

2½ Years:

- Goes to extremes
- Can't make a choice
- Hates change
- Bossy, demanding, determined

18 Months:

- Difficult, impatient
- Frustrated when s/he can't communicate, cries or tantrums when not understood
- Can't make body do what s/he wants
- Can't do what s/he is asked, if s/he doesn't want to do it

Equilibrium

5 Years:

- Quiet and secure
- Wants to be good and usually is
- Likes the tried and true, not the new and strange

4 Years:

- Self confident, loves to be silly
- Wiling to try anything, wild
- Laughs and cries loudly
- Brags, swears, and even lies

3 Years:

- Happy with the world
- Likes to obey
- Controls body well
- Proud of ability to feed and dress him/herself

2 Years:

- Pleasant, friendly, calm
- Talks more easily
- Controls body well
- Can cooperate

