Developmental Skills for Ages 5 to 6 Years

When it comes to child development, there is a wide range of normal. If younger children don't have these skills yet, they should develop them by 6 years of age.

Gross motor (big body and movement) skills

Your child is learning to:

- Run fast, pick up an object from the floor, turn around fast and run back to you without falling.
- Jump forward, taking off with both feet and landing on both feet.
- Jump over an object that is 10 inches high, taking off with and landing on both feet.
- Stand on one leg for 10 seconds without losing balance or holding your hands for support.
- Hop on one foot for 20 feet or more without losing balance.

By age 5½, your child is able to:

- Skip.
- Throw a ball underhand and overhand.
- Hit a target with a tennis ball from 12 feet.
- Catch a large ball from 5 to 20 feet away

Fine motor (play and self-help) skills

Your child is learning to:

- Tell the right side of the body from the left.
- Copy or print letters, numbers and simple words (though you may not be able to read his or her writing).
- Grasp a pencil or crayon with three fingers instead of a fist.
- Complete a puzzle board with 8 to 12 pieces.
- Take a picture with missing parts and make it “whole.”
- Draw a person with at least eight body parts.
- Copy complex shapes, such as designs with two shapes (overlapping circles), an arrow or a diamond.
Self-help skills

Your child is learning to:

• Tie his or her shoes.
• Fasten all clothes.
• Brush his or her teeth (but may need to be reminded).
• Open a milk carton and set up a meal at school.
• Look both ways before crossing the street.
• Buckle his or her seat belt.
• Give his or her name, address and phone number if lost.

Language, social and brain development

Your child:

• Can follow routines and do daily tasks.
• Can follow rules and take turns in a game.
• Plays with four to five kids (with an adult nearby).
• Knows the difference between active ideas (“the dog bit the boy”) and passive ideas (“the boy was bitten by the dog”).
• Understands small numbers (like 3 and 4) and the concepts of “whole” and “half.”
• Can group items by name. For example, “dog,” “cat” and “rabbit” belong to the animal group. Also knows which items in a group do not belong. For example, if you have a knife, fork, car and spoon, the car does not belong.
• Understands directions that have more than one step. Knows concepts such as first, next and last.
• Can tell his or her exact age.
• Is able to name coins.
• Uses the word “because” to explain feelings and actions.
• Takes turns talking.
• Can speak clearly enough that a stranger understands his or her speech about 90% of the time.
• Can say most sounds, but Z, L, R and TH may still be too hard.
• Understands time and money.
• Can remember and describe an activity.
• Understands humor.
• Has flexible thinking. For example, understands that “orange” is a fruit and a color. Knows when something is imaginary versus real.
• Can begin a familiar task by him- or herself and stick with it. Can process abstract information and understand own strengths and weaknesses.
• Is starting to control his or her behavior and understand when it might disrupt others. Examples: Your child will raise a hand to ask questions or stay in his or her seat in school. Your child can stay quiet and listen when needed. He or she can control voice levels and does not push other children.
• Can role-play with dolls and is starting to play “make believe.”
• Knows what to expect during routine events.
When should I be concerned?

Speak to your doctor if your child:

- Often disrupts the life of your family and community.
- Seems to have problems with certain motor skills, self-care skills or language.
- Can’t follow multi-step directions.
- Can’t speak clearly enough for a stranger to understand.
- Can’t take part in conversations.
- Can’t give his or her name and address.
- Can’t focus during structured activities.
- Seems not to hear well.
- Can’t stand or hop on one foot.
- Can’t jump up or forward, lifting both feet from the ground.
- Strongly resists personal hygiene (bathing, brushing teeth, etc.).
- Is very controlling or cannot play in more than one way.
- Is always jumping, climbing and crashing.
- Won’t eat foods with a variety of textures, or will only eat a few foods.

Activities

For gross motor skills

- Running games (like Tag) that require fast stops, starts and changes of direction.
- Hopping and skipping.
- Jumping games: Jump over objects, jump to a spot 2 to 3 feet away, or play Leap Frog.
- Family bike rides.
- Playing catch, basketball and lawn games.

For fine motor skills

- Drawing pictures of people or completing pictures that have missing parts.
- Copying simple words. Writing his or her name.
- Doing puzzles that have up to 12 pieces.
- Playing with building toys or other toys that require hand skills (manipulative toys).
- Playing games that require a pincer grasp: stringing beads, making Cheerio or macaroni necklaces, pincer puzzles and games with tweezers.
- Doing simple crafts that include cutting, pasting and folding.

For language, social and brain development

- Doing tasks in order: what is first, what is next, what is last.
- Talking about feelings.
- Using parents as an example for how to follow the rules in a game, how to behave in social situations and what kind of humor is okay.
- Playing I-Spy.
- Role-playing and other types of make believe.
- Telling time and talking about concepts related to time.
- Talking about his or her day. Ask your child to recall or explain activities.
- Talking about money.
- Putting objects or ideas into a group. Have your child tell you what things go together. For example, “rabbit,” “dog” and “cow” are all animals.

continued
For sensory development

• Playing on swings, slides and jungle gyms at the playground.

• “Heavy work” around the house and yard (lifting, carrying, pushing and pulling). Your child might help you rake, dig, or carry a grocery bag, laundry basket or garbage bag.

Toys for your child

• Balls
• Bikes with training wheels
• Child-size sport sets for bowling, ring toss, T-ball, basketball
• Puzzle boards
• Board games
• Books

• Building toys and other manipulative toys
• Beads or other objects to string or lace together
• Paints, colors, markers
• Play-Doh
• Dress-up clothes or props for playing “make believe”
• Simple crafts