

HOW CHILDREN GROW

Here is a simple way of understanding how children grow.

- **0—6 months—“Trusting you or not?”** Human babies are born very dependent on adults to get their needs met. **So** we parents need to be **DEPENDABLE**. Being dependable means that the child sees us as trustworthy. They need a lot of holding, being talked to and strokes.
- **6 –18 months—“I want to explore!”** Toddlers want to explore the world. This is very tiring for parents, but a world of wonder for the child.
- **18 months—3 years—“I am learning to think”.** As well as learning to think, children want to test out the world, so “NO” is a common word for the child. Patience and firmness, backed up by clear limits (which are consistent) are needed. Children also start to play **WITH** other children (not just alongside them).
- **3—6 years—How I get on with others.** Children start to learn about their own and other people’s needs. Clear requests will be needed, rather than vague statements (e.g. Instead of saying, “Don’t be so untidy”, it is better to say, “Pick up your clothes now, please”, or use an “I” message.
- **6—12 years—“I’m doing it!”** Children learn a lot at school and from friends about “life” and its “rules” and what is OK or not OK to do. Some household rules still need to be firm, others can be negotiated.
- **12—18 years—“Preparing to leave home”.** One way of looking at early adolescence is to see it as a repeat of the first two or three years of life! If you do a sum—take 12 years off the age of your child and try responding the same as you would have to a baby or a 2 year old! So, a 12 year old, may go through some dependence again (they go through a big growth spurt and start at secondary school). So they may need quite a lot of reassurance. And, for a 14 year old you are into the word “NO” and “WHY” again. Patience and clear limits are needed again!

It might seem rather early at 12 years old, but this is also the beginning of a child getting ready to leave home as a responsible adult, who can make his \ her own way in the world. How this is done, partly depends on parents providing the safety and security that clear limits can provide, so the child can explore the adult world and learn to make responsible decisions.

For further information and advice on parenting issues, please check these websites:

Parent Network – <http://www.parentnetworkscotland.org.uk/> - providers of courses tailored specifically for today’s parents.

BBC – www.bbc.co.uk/parenting - This site offers advice not just on parenting but also preparing for parenthood throughout the pregnancy.

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