

Children can fall behind as early as nine months^[1]

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Source: Guardian

Format: Article

Publication Date: 17 Feb 2010

AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

Children who do not reach key developmental milestones at just nine months old are far more likely to struggle at school, according to an important study published today.

The Millennium Cohort Study of nearly 15,000 children says that babies who were slow to develop their motor skills at nine months were significantly more likely to be identified as behind in their cognitive development, and also likely to be less well behaved at age five.

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Academics from London University's Institute of Education analysed the progress of 14,853 children, born in 2000 and 2001, from birth to five. The children's cognitive development was assessed at the age of five through a series of vocabulary, spatial reasoning and picture tests, and their results compared with those from separate assessments years earlier.

The results at five were strongly linked to the babies' abilities in tests for gross motor development, such as crawling, and fine motor development, such as holding objects with their fingers, at nine months. The researchers also found that children who are read to every day at three are likely to be flourishing in a wide range of subjects by the age of five.

Children who failed at nine months to reach four key milestones in gross motor development, relating to sitting unaided, crawling, standing and taking their first walking steps, were found to be five points behind on average in cognitive ability tests taken at age five, compared to those who passed the milestones. This equates to the difference between being in the middle of the ability range in the cognitive tests, and being below average.

Ingrid Schoon, professor of human development and social policy at the institute, who led the research, said: "Delay in gross and fine motor development in a child's first year, which affects one in 10 children, was significantly associated with delayed cognitive development at age five. Delay in gross motor development also has a significant impact on the child's behavioural adjustment at five."

The report said: "This finding highlights the importance of early screening for developmental delay at ages under one year, as a tool to promote positive child development."

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- reprinted from the Guardian

Tags: child development^[2]

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