Babies & Toddlers in a New Country
A Developmental Guide for Parents
New to the United States

Developed by
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University of Central Florida

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Content was adapted from:

Dear Parents,

Welcome to our country! I can only imagine that these are challenging times for you as you begin to learn the customs and ways of the American culture. There is always so much to learn when one moves to a new country. This is especially true when you have very young children under the age of six that require services and resources to ensure that they are developing well.

While at first it may feel overwhelming to be in a new country with very young children, it is our hope that you will meet new friends and professionals that will help you locate the services that you, your family and your children will need. My graduate students at the University of Central Florida and I have developed this guidebook, **Babies & Toddlers in a New Country: A Developmental Guide for Parents New to the United States**, as a way of helping you understand the developmental milestones that children from birth through the age of five experience.

We know how much each of you cares about your very young child and we hope that the information in this guidebook will be helpful as you monitor your child’s development during the first few years. Please keep in mind that not all children develop in the same way or at the same pace. We also recognize that parents know their children best and hope that you use this booklet as a guide while your child is developing during these earliest years.

(Continued on p. 4)
This guide provides you with important information in the following areas related to your child’s development during the first five years of life:

- Physical characteristics
- Language and communication
- Learning characteristics
- Social and emotional characteristics

At the end of this guidebook is a listing of agencies in our community that provide specialized information and services for children under the age of five. If you have concerns about your child’s development, please consult a pediatrician and/or one of the programs listed in this booklet.

I wish to extend my gratitude to the students in my graduate-level course, Social Work Practice with Children from Birth through Age 5 and Their Parents, for their help with this development guidebook. A very special thank you to Ms. Jennifer Powers, Coordinator of the Immigrant and Refugee Services Program at Catholic Charities, and to her wonderful staff who helped my students understand the many challenges that immigrant and refugee families with young children face. Ms. Powers embraced the development of this guidebook completely and provided a great learning opportunity for my students!
Most importantly, the printing of this resource guide in three different languages (Spanish, Creole, and Arabic) would not have been possible without funding from The Learning Institute for Elders at the University of Central Florida, Inc. The English version of this guide will soon be published on the UCF School of School Work website at http://cohpa.ucf.edu/socialwork/.

It is my hope that you and your child will make a new and happy life in our country. May the lives you build for your family here be filled with good health, peace and happiness.

Warm wishes,

Dr. Ana M. Leon
Professor, University of Central Florida
Physical Characteristics

- As a newborn, your baby may sleep for 16 or more hours.
- Your baby may wake up about every 2-3 hours during both the day and night, especially to eat.
- Some babies lose weight during the first few days but by 2 weeks they are back up to their birth weight.
- In the first few months, your baby’s eyes may seem to cross when trying to focus on you or a toy.
- Your newborn’s head and neck muscles are still developing, she/he cannot hold up her/his own head.
- It can take 4-6 months for your baby to develop a consistent sleeping and eating routine.

- By 3 months, many babies show better head control and support. They lift their head and chest during tummy time, sit with support, and have a more consistent eating and sleeping routine.
- It will not be long before your baby begins rolling. By 3 months, you may notice that your baby is trying to roll from side-to-back or back-to-side.
- By around 4 months, your baby’s first tooth may come in and your baby will likely have complete control over his/her head. He/she begins reaching for things and may begin to roll over.
- During the first 6 months, infants begin to intentionally bring toys and their own hands to their mouths.
Babies have one way to tell you what they need: by crying. Check on your baby every time she/he cries. You will soon learn to understand your baby’s crying and the best ways to soothe your baby.

In the beginning, your baby may cry up to three hours total in a day. Soon crying will begin to decrease.

By 3-4 months, you and your baby “talk” to each other. You speak with soft words and your baby answers with squawks, gurgles and coos, or moves his/her arms and legs.

Your baby might even laugh out loud.

By 4-6 months, your baby is making lots of sounds, smiling and laughing, and recognizing familiar faces.

**Physical Characteristics**

- At 5 months, your baby’s grip is getting stronger and she/he may be able to hold a bottle.
- Babies can focus on and intentionally grab a toy. They enjoy being in an upright position most of the time to see and interact with their world.
- By the 6th month, your baby has likely doubled his/her birth weight and may be quite skilled at rolling from tummy-to-back and back-to-tummy. Your baby might be able to sit with little or no support and begin to show signs that he/she is going to crawl.

**Language & Communication**

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- By 3-4 months, you and your baby “talk” to each other. You speak with soft words and your baby answers with squawks, gurgles and coos, or moves his/her arms and legs.
- Your baby might even laugh out loud.
- By 4-6 months, your baby is making lots of sounds, smiling and laughing, and recognizing familiar faces.
Cognitive Characteristics

- Your baby usually explores the environment by looking around.
- By 3 months babies can follow moving objects with eyes.
- Your baby can recognize familiar faces, voices and smells.
- By 3 months, you and your baby know each other well. Your baby will appear bright and alert and trust that you will meet his/her needs.
- By 3 months your baby has very limited memory & can only remember for 3-4 seconds.
- At 4 months, your baby may know you from a stranger.
- At 4 months, your baby may know you from a stranger.
Learning Characteristics

- Your baby learns by playing, looking, talking and being held by you.
- By 3 months, you and your baby know each other well. Your baby will appear bright and alert and trust that you will meet his/her needs.
- At 4 months, your baby may know you from a stranger.

Social & Emotional Characteristics

- Your newborn will grasp your finger when placed in her/his palm. Your baby can see your face and knows your voice. When awake and wide-eyed, your baby will turn to your soft voice and look at your face.
- Babies like to hold their arms and legs close to their body for comfort and rest. Hold and rock your baby close to your body – your baby will feel safe and loved.
- At 3 months, your baby’s face may tell you she/he is happy, sad, upset or surprised.
Learning Characteristics

- By 6 months, babies are interested in the world. They want to touch and put objects — or anything they can pick up — in their mouth. This is part of your baby’s learning about his/her environment.

- Babies learn to trust when you hold them often, respond quickly to their cries and care for them.

Social & Emotional Characteristics

- At 4 months, babies enjoy play and may cry when playing stops. Your baby will reach for you and may cry if you are out of sight.

- By 5 months, your baby may recognize his/her name and turns when his/her name is called.

- At 6 months, your baby may have a strong attachment to a special toy or blanket.
Physical Characteristics

- By 7 months, your baby can move objects from hand-to-hand.
- Around 7 months, your baby will likely require little or no help to sit up and can turn while in a seated position.
- Between 9-12 months, your baby may be very good at crawling.
- She/he may start to pull to a standing position using furniture.
- Most babies in this age group have between 1 to 8 teeth.
- They should sleep around 8-10 hours a night and might take 1-2 naps a day.
- Your baby can use his/her hands to hit or bang objects together.
- Babies at this age can pick up a small object or toys using their thumb and index finger.
During the 9-12 month period, your baby may be able to bring his/her bottle to their mouth.

You may also notice that your baby can more easily drink out of a sippy cup.

By 12 months, your baby’s birth weight has likely tripled.

His/her birth height may have doubled.

Always remember that all babies develop at their own pace!

Some babies begin to stand on their own and may walk alone or with little assistance. Not all babies are walking by their first birthday.

Babies at this age can feed themselves food like baby crackers.

Your baby is beginning to favor one hand over the other.

Babies around this age do some amazing things — enjoy your baby and help your baby safely explore his/her environment.
By about 10 months, your baby may start putting together some sounds to form words and imitate speech sounds (for example, they may say “ma ma” and/or “da da”).

Your baby may enjoy music, singing and looking at pictures while being read stories.

Although your baby may not be able to have a conversation with you, she/he builds language by interacting with you. Talk to your baby often.

By 12 months, your baby uses “ma ma” or “da da” to identify the correct parent.

Children at this age understand simple instructions.

Your baby can put objects in and out of larger containers like a box.

He/she may be able to match shapes like circles or triangles.

Your baby helps in the process of being dressed by sticking out his/her arms and legs.
Babies are increasing their understanding of spoken words.

They may regularly use gestures, such as pointing, waving bye-bye and holding up arms to be held.

Some children this age may use some words/sounds to try and communicate.

Your baby may begin to differentiate between hot and cold.

Babies can mimic what others do.

Your baby builds vocabulary by learning about people and objects in her/his environment.

Because your baby is developing language during this stage, it’s important that you talk to your baby often — even if she/he doesn’t understand what you’re saying.
Cognitive Characteristics

- Babies this age begin looking for objects when hidden. This shows that they understand that objects still exist even when they cannot be seen.
- Your child begins to pay more attention to objects when they fall.
- Babies begin to understand the function of objects (for example, toothbrushes are for teeth and telephones are for talking to people).
- Your baby points at things with his/her index finger.

Social & Emotional Characteristics

- By 9 months, your child enjoys playing games with you (simple singing games).
- Your child may respond when called by name.
- Children look at parents’ reactions to know what emotion to show in a given situation.
- By 12 months your baby may dance to music and may try to sing familiar songs/rhymes.
- At this age instead of crying, children may point to let you know what they want.
- Your baby may have special feelings for a specific toy or object (a blanket or baby doll) — this helps with separation anxiety.
Physical Characteristics

- Children show better control in feeding themselves and scribbling with a crayon.
- Your child can turn the pages of a book.
- If your child is not yet walking, she/he will likely master this skill by a few months after her/his first birthday. Some children are walking well and begin to run by now.
- Your child can throw a ball overhand.
- Children are starting to gain muscle tone and lose baby softness.

Language & Communication

- Children understand what is being said to them.
- Your child may begin to say words that are recognizable.
- Your child will point to objects.
- Your child can follow simple instructions.
- Your child is able to repeat words.
- Children are able to say simple words such as “baby” or “ball.”
- Your child enjoys simple rhymes, songs and stories.
As long as it is safe, children should be allowed to play and explore in different areas.

Routines in eating and sleeping are very important for your child.

Your child may still be putting things in his/her mouth.

Children drag toys behind themselves while walking.

Your child can carry large toys while walking.

Children can climb up and down from furniture.

Children can remember things that happened one day earlier and repeat it later.

They require close supervision as they still don't fully understand their limits or know what is safe for them to do.

Your child has a very short attention span, but your child can sort items by shapes or colors.

Your child can name or point to body parts and familiar pictures, and she/he can make animal sounds.

Children can find objects even when hidden.
13-18 Months Old

Cognitive Characteristics

- Children have “temper tantrums” as they cycle through emotions quickly and are learning how to respond to them.
- Your child will learn appropriate responses to emotions by watching your emotions and responses.
- Children at this age want to do things by themselves, but they also imitate the behaviors of others.
- By 14 months your child can follow simple instructions.

Social-Emotional Characteristics

- Your child may not share toys well.
- Your child mostly plays alongside others and may sometimes include another child in the play.
- Your child becomes excited when other children are around.
- Your child may become upset when you leave, even when she/he is being cared for by someone familiar.
- Children begin to experience some new emotions including jealousy, shame and pride.
- Children’s emotions are generally very intense but do not last long.
**Physical Characteristics**

- Children at this age are good at walking. They can now run, climb and dance too. Some children may jump or walk backwards.

- Children enjoy playing with a ball. They can throw and may kick the ball.

- Children increase their ability to help with daily living skills (for example, get dressed or use a fork/spoon to eat).

- Children may enjoy puzzles, stacking blocks and using simple instruments like drums because they have better control of their hands.

- Children enjoy interactive games, reading and songs.

**Language & Communication**

- Children can use 2 to 3-word sentences. They often say “No,” “Me” and “Mine.”

- Children at this age can identify or match a few common animals with animal sounds.

- Children can name or point to and find objects.

- Your child knows the names of family members.

- Children listen to the conversations of adults and children.
# Learning Characteristics

- Your child continues to learn through play and should spend much of his/her awake time playing and exploring.
- Children are learning by reading books with mom and dad. They’re interested in picture books.
- Children can play simple pretend games. They may use toy cars as a phone.
- Children learn by copying adult behavior. They want to help put away dishes or clean up their toys.
- Children learn about their body and are curious about their body parts.

# Cognitive Characteristics

- Children can follow directions that have one or two steps.
- Children show more goal-setting and planning during intentional play. They can look for hidden objects, match pairs or sort toys.
- Children can solve simple problems, like giving mom a toy so they can hold hands and climb the stairs.
- Children begin to participate in pretend play.
Social & Emotional Characteristics

- Some children get angry and frustrated easily at this age. They may hold their breath, hit, bite, scream or throw themselves on the floor.

- Children can wave, give hugs or blow kisses to show they care about other people.

- Children now want to play with other kids, but they often play alongside other children. They may have one to two friends and may occasionally hit, bite or pull hair when they become upset.

- They tend to have difficulty with sharing or taking turns.

- Children at this age are ready to attend play groups.
Physical Characteristics

- By 2 ½, your toddler can build a block tower, successfully stacking six blocks.
- Children can also brush their teeth with help and wash their hands.
- At this age, they can also walk smoothly, and some children can jump with both legs off the ground.
- Children are able to open doors and turn several pages in a book at once. They can scribble and draw lines.

Language & Communication

- Children at this age are able to use three to four words in one phrase.
- They regularly use eye contact and engage in simple conversation with others.
- Children also start to use “what” or “who” questions and their ability to pronounce words improves.
Physical Characteristics

- By the end of their 2nd year, some children can also jump from a bottom step with their leading foot.
- They can jump in place.
- Children at this age can walk 10 steps backwards.
- Your child can put objects away and show where they go during clean up.

Language & Communication

- During their second year, children may know and say their full name.
- Children talk aloud to themselves while playing.
- Your child is able to recognize family name categories such as mother, sister, brother.
- Some children can use the words “I,” “he,” and “she” correctly, but others don’t.
- They begin to understand simple time concepts (for example, moon is out at night or sun is out during the day).
Learning Characteristics

- Your toddler will be very cooperative at times but may become easily frustrated at other times.
- Potty-training has either begun at this age or your child is potty-trained by the end of the 2nd year.
- A daily routine creates a safe environment for your child to learn.
- Children are eager to learn how everything works around them.
- They learn how to use an object as a tool.
- They practice their independence by saying “no” and insist on doing things by themselves.

Cognitive Characteristics

- Most children will be able to recognize themselves in front of the mirror.
- They might say “no” often.
- They feel a sense of pride in themselves when demonstrating independence.
- They enjoy listening to stories and love books.
- Children start to recognize distress in others and try to comfort them.
Social & Emotional Characteristics

- Children may demonstrate some difficulties with cooperative play and act aggressively when they want something.
- By 2 ½ children will demonstrate complex pretend play and pretend an object is actually something else. (for example, pretending a plastic container is a car).
- The complexity of play during this stage of development increases from slightly feeding a doll to dressing the doll and putting it to sleep.
- Children usually like toys that move or turn and they love water activities.
- They like playing with and making objects out of sand and play-dough.
- Children this age enjoy painting and listening to music, and they may initiate rhythm and dance.
- Children give hugs and kisses to their parent(s) or caregiver(s), imitate chores and display jealousy.
- Children express more complex emotions, such as empathy, and they use words to express simple emotions, like happy or sad.
Physical Characteristics

- A child’s gross motor skills at this age are more defined, allowing the three-year-old to run, jump and climb stairs using one or both feet for each step.
- Children may stand on one foot for a short period of time unassisted.
- At this age, children enjoy riding a tricycle but need time practicing to pedal forward.
- Children’s fine motor skills are increasing. Their little fingers and their hand and eye coordination allows them to begin cutting simple lines using safety scissors, stringing large beads onto a necklace or building a castle out of an assortment of blocks.
- With some practice they can now hold a pencil correctly, draw circles and copy shapes.

Language & Communication

- 3 year olds are becoming more advanced in their speech and vocabulary. They can speak in short complete sentences.
- They can use longer sentences and participate in conversation, especially on topics of interest to them.
- Children will begin to initiate conversation and ask more questions.
- Children at this age can say their full name and identify the difference between a boy and a girl.
- 3 year-olds take great joy in songs where they can sing and dance along.
3 year-olds ask a lot of questions about their environment — they are very curious.

Their many “who, what, when and why” questions are part of their brain and cognitive development.

3 year olds can hear and recall parts of a story and they enjoy make-believe stories.

They may be able to say the alphabet and count numbers in order to at least 10.

They can recall familiar colors.

They can identify how things are different and how they are the same.

Your 3 year-old loves approval from familiar adults.

3 year olds develop real friendships with peers and enjoy playing with others most of the time. However, children still have some difficulty sharing and taking turns.

3 year olds are very helpful and parents will notice that they ask to help out around the house.

Children in this age group increase their usage of imaginary play.

Playing simple and structured games are fun and enjoyable.
Physical Characteristics

- They can more easily brush teeth, wash and dry hands, and comb hair with little help from an adult. They need little help to put on and take off clothes.

- Children at this age prefer to actively play most of the time.

- They may pedal a bike on their own and may ride a bike with training wheels.

- Your child can now eat most meals with a fork and spoon.

- Your child enjoys but still needs practice catching and kicking a ball.

Language & Communication

- Children this age understand and join in on stories and conversations.

- They can sing songs and remember the words to songs.

- They still ask many questions and often ask “why?”

- The child at this age begins to use more complete sentences to communicate.

- Children at this age can compare and describe objects and recall movies.
**Learning Characteristics**

- At this age, children practice becoming more independent and start to make their own decisions.

- With practice & parental assistance children begin to understand signs and symbols, know the sounds of some letters and can count to at least 10.

- Your child can watch television shows, listen to stories and understand what is happening in the story.

- With practice, children at this age begin to identify and write letters. They can also practice how to use scissors to cut straight lines.

**Social & Emotional Characteristics**

- Children this age are afraid of the dark and “monsters.”

- They enjoy showing off their favorite toys and items.

- They begin to understand danger.

- Your child can feel anger and frustration and may still throw tantrums when frustrated.

- 4 year olds understand what actions cause certain feelings and they tend to care about others.
Social & Emotional Characteristics

- Your child at this age likes to play with other children and may also have imaginary friends — this is normal for this age.
- Children this age are able to form positive relationships.
- Your child can take turns and share but may still act bossy towards other children.
- Children this age develop a sense of humor and love to tell jokes that may not make sense.
- Your child has an imagination and likes to pretend during play.
- Children imitate parents or other adults, especially during play.
- They understand and listen to simple rules most of the time.
5 Years Old

**Physical Characteristics**

- Your child is able to hop, possibly skip and somersault.
- Your child is likely to be fully potty-trained by this age.
- Children show improved coordination and rhythm, and they have control over daily physical activities.
- Their increase in coordination and balance skills allow them to more easily ride a bike, swim or jump rope.
- Your child can dress and undress dolls and use buttons and zippers.

**Language & Communication**

- Your child can speak clearly and her/his speech is recognizable by others.
- Children enjoy being read to and can act out stories.
- Your child can retell events and stories using full sentences with details.
- Children this age can use correct grammar most of the time.
- Children enjoy songs and rhymes and can understand jokes.
- Your child may be able to communicate her/his phone number, address and birth date.
At this age with practice, parental assistance and day care/preschool provider support your child may be able to:

- Recognize numbers, colors and letters.
- Count objects and may be able to count to higher than 10.
- Handwrite a few letters and numbers.
- Tell the difference between what is pretend and what is real most of the time.
- Remember parts of stories told by others.
- Recognize some money coins and their value.
- More easily memorize important information like their phone number.
At 5 years, children are better able to understand complex emotions. They begin to understand guilt and regret.

5 year olds are very easily embarrassed by their own actions.

They are also developing their ability to better control their emotions.

Children this age are able to use problem-solving skills and coping skills to cope with emotional situations with a little help from parents.

Children begin to understand societal rules about appropriate emotional reactions.

Children this age are more likely to agree with and understand rules. They can apologize when a mistake is made.

They are aware of their own gender & the gender of others.

Your child can more easily tell the difference between what is real and make believe.

Your child enjoys participating in games and plays with peers. He/she enjoys imaginative play such as dress-up and acting out fantasies.

Your child can show compassion and concern for others. Your child wants to make and please friends.
Speech and Language Services

**Florida Speech**
Offers a variety of services that include childhood speech and language therapy.
1525 South Alafaya Trail Suite 101
Orlando, FL 32828
407-384-2767

**Orlando Day Nursery**
Serves children from one to 12 years old.
The program accepts School Readiness–funded children.
626 Lake Dot Circle
Orlando, FL 32801
407-422-5291

Early Intervention Services

**Early Head Start**
Provides programs for low-income families with infants, toddlers and pregnant mothers.
Orange County – 407-532-4357
Osceola County – 321-219-6204
Seminole County – 321-832-6409

**Children's Medical Services: Early Steps**
Helps children who are struggling with movement, learning, interaction, behavior and adaptive development.
601 West Michigan St.
Orlando, FL 32805
407-317-7430, Ext. 2121
The Howard Phillips Center for Children & Families
Provides dignity and healing for children, families and individuals who face overwhelming challenges like child abuse, sexual trauma, developmental disabilities and lack of access to medical care.
601 W. Michigan St. Orlando, FL 32805
407-317-7430

Nemours Children’s Clinic
Nemours takes a whole-child approach to children’s health care, treating your whole child (not just the condition).
1717 S Orange Ave Ste 100, Orlando, FL 32806
407-650-7000

Freedom Ride, Inc.
Provides therapeutic horseback riding for children and adults with physical, mental and emotional disabilities, as well as learning disabilities and AIDS.
601 West Michigan Street
Orlando, FL 32805
407-293-0411

Conductive Education Centers of Florida
Services for children with motor disabilities
3377 Forsyth Rd
Winter Park, FL 32792
407-671-4687

Developing Positive Changes
Specializes in treating individuals with behavioral disorders.
407-575-4236
Healthy Start Coalition of Orange County
www.healthystartorange.org
Healthy Start Coalition of Orange County’s mission is to improve maternal and child health to ensure that all babies have a "healthy start."

600 Courtland Street, Suite 565
Orlando, FL 32804
407-741-5240

Helpful Online Resource
www.zerotothree.org

Early Learning Coalition of Orange County
www.elcoforangecounty.org
The Mission of the Early Learning Coalition of Orange County is to provide unified leadership, support and guidance to ensure that the children of our community have the opportunity to reap the benefits of developmentally appropriate, research-based school readiness and VPK programs, respecting the role of parents as their child’s first teacher.

1940 Traylor Blvd.
Orlando, FL 32804
407-841-6607
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