

**DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE, CHARACTERISTICS AND NEEDS  
EARLY CHILDHOOD: BIRTH THROUGH 5 YEARS OLD**

**DEVELOPMENTAL  
STAGE AND  
CHARACTERISTICS**

- **Intense Quest for Learning**
- **Learns through Senses and Experiences**
- **Concrete Thinker:** incapable of thinking abstractly, especially birth through 3 years old
- **Reality Based:** incapable of distinguishing between fantasy and reality, especially birth through 3 years old
- **Egocentric:** don't understand that others have rights or feelings unlike their own; do not understand concept of sharing birth through 3 years old
- **Strong Sense of Order:** intense need for an ordered environment and consistent routine and discipline
- **Strives for independence beginning at about 2 years old**
- **Most important stage of social, emotional, intellectual, physical, and spiritual development**
- **Core of personality is formed now, especially social and spiritual development**
  
- **(T) Research indicates TV and computer screen time interferes with normal brain development at this critical stage. AAP and other child development experts recommend zero screen time from birth through 2 years old, and limited to one to two hours of screen time per day after 2 years old.**

**NEEDS FROM PARENTS**

- Parents understand child development basics.
- Parents understand how development impacts learning.
- Parents and other involved adults provide good role models for character development, self-esteem, and self-confidence.
- Parents provide consistent discipline based on logical consequences that child can understand.
- Intellectually stimulating and language-rich environment that follows interests of the child.
- Freedom of movement to explore indoors and outdoors, and to develop small and large muscle control.
- Parents know how to turn everyday occurrences into learning opportunities that emphasize real experiences, limited fantasy, and encourage independence.
- Parents and other involved adults follow and understand recommendations on screen time.
- Parents' knowledge of child development leads them to evaluate educational options available for their children.

**NEEDS FROM EDUCATORS**

- Educators demonstrate a basic understanding of human development from birth to age 5 and its application to learning.
- Early learning environments begin their work with the end in mind; preparing from the first day to support parents in their endeavor to give children what they need for healthy development.
- Early childhood instruction starts with the basics. Teachers add more detail and higher-level ideas just ahead of children's skill levels.
- Employ early childhood educators and caregivers who provide intellectually stimulating and language-rich environments that include hands-on and real life learning that promotes independence, and follow the interests of individual children.
- Freedom of movement to explore indoors and outdoors, and to develop small and large muscle control.

**NEEDS FROM COMMUNITY**

- Community leaders understand that good child and youth development equals a thriving community.
- Communities develop an overall plan to address their needs and build on their strengths—especially as they relate to the inclusion of young people in civic life.
- Provide fun, educational, and cultural opportunities for parents and their children.
- Organizations that interact with young children (Y's and youth sports, etc.) understand what children need to thrive at this age and employ adults who can be good role models for character development, self-esteem and self-confidence.