

What to look for between the milestones...

The next time your little one, or the little ones in your classroom or therapy practice, achieve a new milestone like sitting up by themselves or learning to walk - don't be so quick to rush to the next thing. Instead, pause for a bit to notice what happens between the milestones.

1 || Notice how they use their newfound skill.

Once babies gain a new skill, watch to see how they use it. How do they explore the new position? How does it change the way they interact with their surroundings? What kind of movement experience are they getting from the skill that will provide a foundation of balance, strength, and coordination for the next developing skill?

2 || Watch for repetition of the movement or skill.

When a baby repeats an action, notice what purpose this repetition may be serving. Is she getting sensory input telling her about the position of her arms (e.g. Banging two objects together)? Is she getting a social and cognitive benefit from the action (e.g. Waving elicits a "Hello!" from every stranger in the grocery store)? Is she getting practice with the coordination of a new motor skill?

**Stereotypical, repetitive, or rigid behaviors that cause a child to withdraw from his environment or interfere with social interactions and daily routines are cause for concern and should be addressed with a medical professional.*

3|| Look for variety and experimentation in movement and positioning.

Even though you may see some repetition of actions or movements, it's also amazing to watch the tiny variations in how babies use new skills and how they move their bodies from one play session to another. Watch as they invent new ways to transition into or out of positions. Watch as they use already-mastered skills in new ways.

4 || Observe how (and whether) they're able to transition into and out of positions.

Rather than just placing your baby in a position, sit back and observe. Can he roll onto his tummy to play and then back onto his back? Can she push up into a sitting position and then get back onto her tummy or into quadruped? Can he pull up to stand and then lower back to the floor?

5 || Notice perseverance and independence.

Rather than swooping in and saving baby from every little mishap, try to hold back and act as a spotter, softening the fall when necessary rather than preventing it. Babies are built to fall and get right back up again - and if we step back a little bit - they will!

6 || Observe what other skills are developing alongside motor milestones and how one skill influences another.

Research has shown that motor skill development is linked to the development of other skills - including language. It's fascinating to watch other skills like babbling and following simple directions unfold right alongside motor milestones. And it's even more fascinating to consider how these skills and the different systems of the body impact each other.

7 || Watch how the environment shapes and changes the performance of skills.

The way the environment is set up and the objects that are present in the environment can have a heavy impact on which skills kids demonstrate and how they demonstrate them.

Specifically - the size, social aspects, and sensory features of a space can impact how kids move and play and even whether they move at all! The familiarity of the play space and play materials, as well as the complexity and variety of toys and materials are also important considerations.