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## **UNIT 2 BASIC CONCEPTS IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT**

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### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In the earlier Unit, you have read that each child has different experiences during childhood. The variety of experiences accounts for some of the differences among children. What other factors are responsible for differences among children? These and related issues are the concern of the field of Child Development. In this Unit, you will read about the scope and importance of the discipline of Child Development.

#### **Objectives**

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- explain the scope of the discipline of Child Development;
- differentiate between development and growth;
- explain the stages of development;
- describe the different areas of development; and
- discuss the significance/importance of the study of Child Development.

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### **2.2 SCOPE OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT**

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Think of a fertilized ovum in the womb of the mother. Is it not astonishing how the single celled organism develops into a human baby in nine months? This baby has complex systems like the respiratory system, the nervous system and the skeletal system which are a part of the equipment for survival. The newborn child responds to touch and is able to see, smell and cry. These

capacities will help her to adjust to the surroundings which are very different from those in the womb. Despite these abilities the infant is dependent on the caregiver for nurturance. This child who is totally dependent on the caregiver will slowly learn to sit, then stand and then walk. She will also learn to feed and clothe herself and express her needs verbally. Gradually, the child will become more independent and her interests will widen. She will make friends and participate in activities with them and help with tasks at home. She may also get involved in income generating activities. She may choose a vocation and take courses to prepare for it. This child will grow into an adult who will be economically independent, get married and have children. How does this transformation come about from a single cell organism in the mother's womb to a person who is a competent adult and an involved citizen?

What makes you the person you are? How is it that your own brothers and sisters are different from you — not just in the way they look but also in their behaviour? Why is it that one child is popular in the neighbourhood and has many friends while the other prefers to play alone? What makes one child a leader in her group while the other is timid and stays close to the teacher all the time? Do all children develop various skills and abilities at the same time? Are all three year old children similar? What should be expected from a four year old child? Is there a pattern in development by which one can expect a three year old to behave differently from a five year old? Such questions are the concern of the field of Child Development.

**The discipline of Child Development is concerned with the changes in the behaviour of children over time and explains why and how they occur. Thus it aims to describe and explain development in the areas of physical, social, emotional, language and cognitive functioning. However, childhood experiences have an impact on the ways of thinking and behaviour in adulthood. Thus the student of Child Development is concerned with growth and behaviour that affects the entire lifespan. This course is, however, limited to understanding the development of children from birth to six years.**

### **2.2.1 Development and Growth**

The terms 'development' and 'growth' have been used in the foregoing discussion. Can you tell what is the difference between the two? **The term 'development' has been used to refer to changes in the body, thinking capacities and social and emotional behaviour.** Can we call all such changes 'development'? Let us understand this through an example. When a three month old child becomes hungry, she begins to cry. Once she is fed her behaviour changes. She becomes quiet again. Such a short behavioural change is not termed 'development'.

**The term 'development' is used for changes in a person's physical and behavioural traits that emerge in orderly ways and last for a reasonable period of time. The three main characteristics of these changes are that they are progressive, orderly and long lasting.**

The term 'progressive' implies that these changes result in acquisition of skills and abilities that are complex, finer and more efficient than the ones that preceded them. To understand this, let us consider the advancement that takes place from crawling to walking and from babbling to talking. Walking requires the child to move upright and balance one foot after the other. This requires greater coordination of the muscles and is more complex than crawling. Walking is also useful since it frees the hands for other activities and increases the range of vision. Similarly, talking grows out of babbling and is certainly more complex and effective in communicating with others.

The term 'orderly' suggests that there is an order in development. Every development is built upon the previous one and cannot occur before it. Thus, a child has to be able to crawl before she can walk and walk before she can run. Similarly, the adult's ability to handle complex situations is built upon the child's capability of doing simpler tasks. The ability to take decisions in adult life develops out of the childhood experiences of selecting which game to play or which book to read. Development, therefore, is a process through which a person learns to function with greater ease and competence.

'Growth' refers to physical increase in the size of the body. Increase in weight, height and the size of internal organs is growth. Growth refers to a quantitative change, a change that can be measured. However, we do not merely grow in size. If that were so, a newborn baby would simply be a bigger baby at the age of 20 years. Something else happens along with increase in size. There is a change in form and an increase in the complexity of body parts and their functioning, thinking abilities and social skills, among many others. In other words, we do not merely grow, but also develop. Development thus refers to both quantitative as well as qualitative changes. It includes changes not only in structure but also in function. Development may be defined as orderly and relatively enduring changes over time in physical and neurological structures, thought processes and behaviour that every organism goes through from the beginning of its life to the end. Growth is only one aspect of the larger process of development. Development continues even when physical changes are not visible. Physical growth slows down considerably after adolescence but development does not. There is development in the complexity of thought and social skills, as also in the use of language.

### 2.2.2 Stages of Development

**The human life span has been divided into the stages of infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood.** You will become familiar with these words in the text. In these stages there are characteristic differences in the thought processes and skills of individuals. Let us now briefly read about these stages.

**The period from birth to two years of age is referred to as the period of infancy.** In this period the child is totally dependent on the caregiver for the fulfilment of her needs. After birth, this is the period of most rapid growth and development. The child's skills and abilities increase. By the end of infancy she is able to walk, run, communicate her needs verbally, feed

herself, identify family members, recognize herself and move about confidently in familiar surroundings.

**The period of childhood is from two to twelve years of age.** Development at this stage, is not as rapid as during infancy. During this period the child refines the skills she has acquired during infancy and learns new skills as well. This is the period when coordination of the parts of the body improves. During childhood she also learns the ways of behaviour that are considered appropriate by the society. The child meets many people outside the family and forms attachments with more people. As the child grows and her thinking capacities mature, she realizes that she can do many things. She can play on a swing, make a house from sand, draw, paint or sing a song. This gives her a feeling of confidence. During this period she becomes more independent, though adult guidance is constantly needed.



Confidently exploring the world around her

**The period of childhood is divided into two stages: the period of early childhood (2-6 years) and middle childhood (7-12 years).** The period of early childhood is also referred to as the **preschool age** because at this age the child is learning skills that will help her to do tasks associated with schooling. The preschooler has enough vocabulary to ask questions about things and people. She learns about numbers, colours, shapes and the reasons for everyday events. All these concepts develop from actually seeing things: and doing various activities. Doing a task is important for learning about it. She learns to make friends and values relationships with people. Children's ability to imagine grows dramatically during this period. This can be seen in their play. They enjoy playing games that require them to pretend and make-believe. Preschoolers cannot play together for long. After some time they start playing independently again, though they may be with each other.

The child in the age group 6-12 years has matured a great deal and is expected to behave more responsibly than the preschooler. Parental expectations of the child increase. The child moves out of the home to help the family members in their work and may even go to school all by herself. Middle childhood is the period when the child becomes involved in learning skills that will help her to take up a vocation later on. The child's store of information grows at a fast pace. Her thinking develops rapidly and her interest in the outside world grows by leaps and bounds. There is active interaction with children of the same age. They are able to cooperate with each other during play and are able to follow the rules of the game. Playing team games is a development of this period.

**The next stage is referred to as the period of adolescence (12-18 yrs).** The beginning of this period is marked by puberty. Puberty refers to the stage around 11-14 years of age when there is a spurt in physical growth. This results in a rapid increase in height and weight and the emergence of secondary sexual characteristics. Examples of these are the development of facial hair in boys and development of breasts in girls. The onset of puberty is earlier for girls than for boys. These rapid physical changes need emotional readjustment.

At this age the peer group becomes very important and the adolescent follows the rules and the codes of her group. Feelings of loyalty and pride to the group are very strong. At times the values of the peer group may become more important than those of the family. There are conflicting expectations of the adolescent. Sometimes she is expected to behave as an adult and at other times she is treated like a child. During this stage she also thinks about a vocation or prepares for her role as a married person in adulthood. During adolescence thinking develops further and becomes more complex. The individual can understand and deal with varied situations. She can think of abstract problems and work out their solution! All this helps her to prepare for the roles and responsibilities she will be expected to carry out as an adult.

**After the age of 18 years the individual is referred to as an adult.** There may be different criteria for considering a person an adult. One may be the ability to support oneself economically and another may be getting married and starting a family. But individuals from some families continue to remain financially dependent on their parents till early twenties. In others, both marriage and work may have to be taken up before adulthood. There are also social and legal definitions of adulthood. For example, an Indian can vote in the elections at eighteen years. Legally, girls may get married at 18 years and boys at 21 years of age. However, adulthood typically involves either working or preparing for one's livelihood. By now physical changes are complete and the person is mature. **It is important to remember that these divisions of the life span are not rigid. It is not as if the child suddenly changes from an infant to a preschooler or from a child to an adolescent. Change is a gradual and continuous process and transition from one phase of life to another will be different for every individual.** You will read in detail about the periods of infancy and early childhood in this Course.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) Read the sentences given below carefully and fill in appropriate words in the blanks.
  - a) Development implies..... as well as ..... changes while growth refers only to changes that can be.....
  - b) The three main characteristics of changes that can be termed development are ....., ..... and .....
- 2) Fill in the blanks with appropriate words.
  - a) After birth, infancy is the period of ..... growth.
  - b) The period of childhood is divided into preschool years from ..... to ..... years and middle childhood from..... to ..... years.
  - c) ..... is characterized by the appearance of secondary sexual characteristics.
- 3) Explain the meaning of the term 'Child Development' in the space provided below.

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### 2.2.3 Areas of Development

The various developments that take place during the life span of an individual can be classified as: physical and motor development, social development, emotional development, cognitive development and language development.

**Physical development** refers to the physical changes in the size, structure and proportion of the parts of the body that take place from the moment of conception.

**Motor development** means the development of control over body movements. This results in increasing coordination between various parts of the body. As a result of physical and motor development, the child acquires many abilities. These developments will bring about the change from an infant who at the time of birth is capable of only lying on her back to one who learns to roll over, hold her head, sit, walk, run and climb stairs. The improving coordination between the eye and the hand movements will help her to eat food without smearing it on her face. Gradually she will learn to wear clothes, draw, skip, paint, ride a bicycle and type. As she grows she will refine the skills already acquired as well as develop new ones.



Photo by Visually Us from Pexels; pexels-visually-us-1729927; accessed: 11<sup>th</sup> Aug, 2021

### As their motor abilities develop children take on new challenges

**Language development** refers to those changes that make it possible for an infant, who in the early months uses crying for communication, to learn words and then sentences to converse fluently. How the child learns to speak grammatically correct sentences is amazing! At first the child indicates her need for water through crying. Then she learns to say 'water'. A little later she says, "Mummy water" and finally she speaks a complete sentence, "Mummy, I want to drink water". She will be about three years by this time.

**Cognitive development** refers to the emergence of thinking capabilities in the individual. We can see how the child's thinking develops and changes from one age to the next. The infant is not born with the reasoning and thinking abilities of adults. In fact, the infant acts as if an object that is removed from her sight does not exist anymore. Gradually she learns that objects and people are permanent and they exist even if she cannot see them. Between three to six years of age the child can understand concepts such as colours, tall and short, heavy and light, fast and slow. Exploration of the surroundings and the child's questions regarding the 'why' and 'how' of things result in an increasing store of information. Her thought develops but she is still unable to see a situation from another person's point of view. For example, she is unable to understand why another child cannot climb the tree when she can. She thinks that everybody else should be able to do what she can and feel the way she does. She believes that all things have life and feelings like her including the sun, stone, pencil and table. A ten year old has learnt to reason and analyze but this ability is limited to real life concrete situations. She cannot usually think in abstract terms or predict future events. The capacity for abstract thinking develops fully during the period of adolescence. She can now handle complex situations. **Thus, at each stage of a person's life, the ability to think is qualitatively different and more developed compared to the earlier stage.**

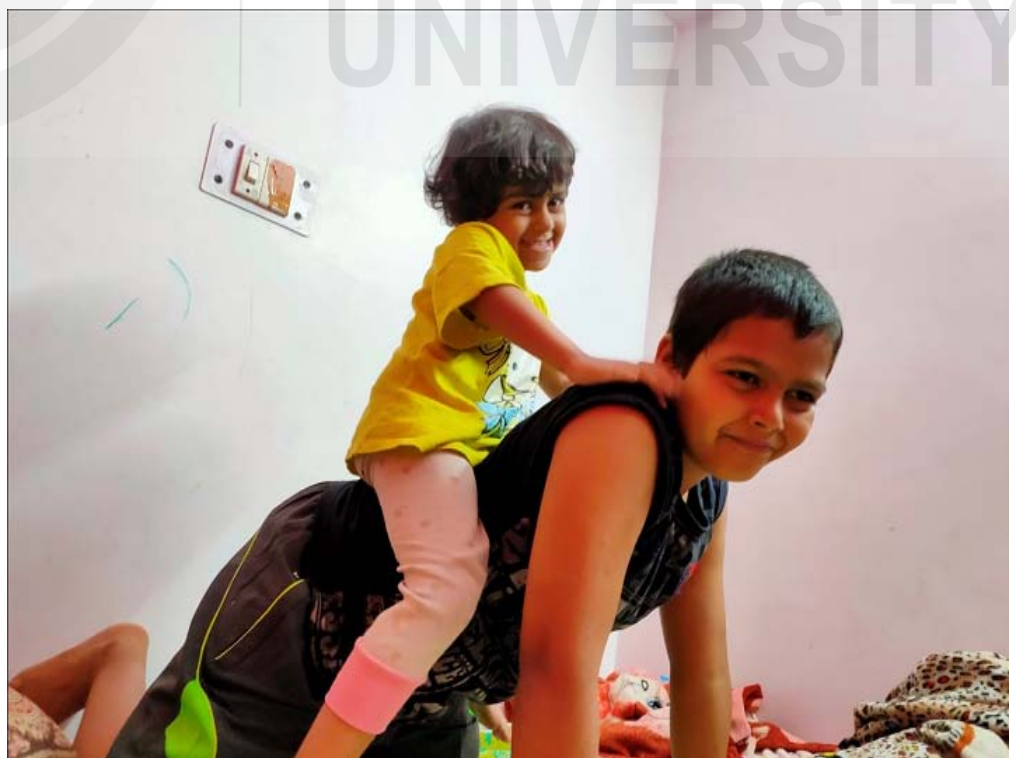
In everyday use you would have often heard the term 'intelligence'. How are the terms 'cognitive development' and 'intelligence' used in Child

Development? Cognitive development is the process of mental development from infancy to adulthood. Cognition refers to the process of ‘coming to know’, which is accomplished through the gathering and processing of information. It includes perceiving, learning, remembering, problem solving, and thinking about the world. Intelligence is a term difficult to define. Nevertheless, according to a well known definition, it refers to the individual’s ability to “act purposefully, think rationally and deal effectively with the environment”. The two terms are often used interchangeably.

Related to the development of thought is the child’s awareness of right and wrong, just and unjust. The infant has no notion of right or wrong but learns it through socialization. Parental rules about what can be done and what cannot be done are understood and become a part of the child’s values.

**Social development** refers to the development of those abilities that enable the individual to behave in accordance with the expectations of the society. It is concerned with the child’s relationships with people and her ways of interaction with them. The infant instinctively reaches out to the person who approaches her with love and affection. Gradually she learns to recognize her mother and other caregivers and forms attachment to them. Later she will form relationships with others. As an infant, her actions are centered around her own needs.

Not before the children are seven or eight years of age will they be able to form stable relationships based on give and take. This is also the time when children make friends and can even identify a best friend. When the child comes in contact with other children and adults, she finds out how to behave in a manner that is acceptable to them. She learns the ways of eating, dressing, talking to elders and other things that are a part of her culture. She will know that it is not right to snatch a toy, hit a child or play out of turn.



Learning to trust one’s brother



Slowly she learns to cooperate, to be helpful and generous. The ability to understand another person's point of view and a concern for others will help her to form satisfying relationships with people during adolescence and adulthood.

**Emotional development** refers to the emergence of emotions like anger, joy, delight, happiness, fear, anxiety and sorrow and the socially acceptable ways of expressing them. As the child grows up and becomes aware of acceptable ways of behaviour, a variety of emotions also emerge. As an infant she expresses only discomfort and delight. As she grows older, expressions of joy, happiness, fear, anger and disappointment appear. She learns to express these emotions in a healthy manner. For example, initially the child hits out when angry. Gradually she learns to control this and expresses anger in other ways.

**Personality** is a word that we often use while describing a person. What is personality? If you have observed children and adults over a period of time, you would have noticed this: every individual has a characteristic way of thinking, feeling, relating to people and reacting to situations which she displays in a wide variety of situations and settings. Each child has a unique personality. What the child thinks about herself is an important part of her personality since it determines how she interacts with others. A child who feels confident and happy is likely to be affectionate with others. Personality thus refers to a person's characteristic ways of relating to others and distinctive patterns of thinking and feeling about oneself and other people. It emerges out of the child's experiences and achievements in the areas of physical, motor, cognitive, language, social and emotional development.

**Interrelationship among various areas of development:** We have till now described development in various areas separately. This may make you think that development in each area occurs independently of the others. But this is not so. Development in each area affects development in the others. Development of physical skills makes the infant mobile, increases her range of activity and helps her to explore her surroundings. This also helps in cognitive development. Language development helps the child to communicate better. It also allows her to interact with more people. This interaction has a significant influence on her social development. The increasing complexity of thought and social interaction helps her to understand concepts of right and wrong and good and bad. When we observe or talk about a child, we have to study her as a whole person. The child is a complete person with the experiences and skills in one area influencing the development in others. The effect of each area of development cannot be separated out easily. We do not know any child well until we know her in all spheres of functioning.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) The following are some examples of children's behaviour. Under what areas of development would you categorize them? Write in the space provided below.
  - a) The child is able to hit a ball with a bat.

- .....
- .....
- .....
- b) The child of five years of age begins to understand why a stone sinks and a blade of grass floats on water.
- .....
- c) The child shares toys with friends.
- .....
- d) The four year old child can recognize colours.
- .....
- e) The child becomes taller with age.
- .....
- f) The child greets people whom she meets.
- .....
- g) The child learns names of objects.
- .....

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## 2.3 IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT

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The discipline of Child Development helps us to understand children's behaviour at different ages and to guide them. Let us see how this information is helpful to us.

### 2.3.1 Describing Universal Patterns of Development

From the various examples you have been reading and from your observation of children, you would have realized that there is a sequence in development. Every child first communicates with sounds and gestures. Then she learns words and uses them to express herself and finally uses complete and grammatically correct sentences. There is a similar sequence in the emergence of abilities in all areas of development. The sequence or pattern is common to all children, that is, each child passes through these sequences in the same order. **In every area of development, a specific ability emerges at a particular age in most children.** Thus, children usually learn to sit by six months of age, speak the first words around the first birthday and achieve the ability to think in abstract terms around 12 years of age. **There is, thus, a universal pattern in development.** Furthermore, no child can crawl before she can sit and no child can learn to relate to people before she learns to relate to the primary caregiver. That is, in each area of development, the emergence of one ability is dependent on and follows the previous one.

At the same time, it is important to remember that when we speak of sequences in development as related to age, the age specified is the *average*

*age*. Though all children go through developmental sequences, they do so at different rates. **This results in individual differences in the ages at which children acquire a particular ability.** Therefore, while we say that children begin to walk around twelve months of age, one child may begin to walk at nine months, another at 10 months and yet another at 15 months. Similarly, when we say that the ability for abstract thinking emerges around 12 years, one child may achieve this earlier while another may do so later. Thus, in fact, there is an age range within which a particular ability is acquired by children. Therefore, in this Course whenever we speak of ages of emergence of abilities, these are to be regarded as average ages. Only when a particular child's development lags considerably behind this average should it be a cause for concern.

**These age ranges around which most children acquire a certain skill are called norms of development (also called milestones of development).** Norms help us to evaluate whether or not the child is developing at a rate considered normal for her age. For example, the average age for beginning to walk is one year, but because of individual differences in the rate of development, this may happen any time between 9 and 15 months. But if the child does not begin to walk even after 15 months, the parents must look into the reasons for the delay.

The term 'optimal' is often used in connection with development. What is meant by optimal development? This means that growth and changes are at an expected rate. In other words, the child's development is following the norms. Under normal circumstances, when there are no special problems, optimal development will take place. As you have just read, because of individual differences in the rate of development, a wide range of skills and abilities will fall within the range of optimal development.

### 2.3.2 Explaining Individual Differences in Development

Though there is a pattern of development which is common to all individuals, no two children are alike. They vary in their likes, dislikes, preferences, interests, skills and abilities and in the way they talk, look and behave. **Individual differences refer to variations in children's personality, skills and attitudes.** In a family one child may be very quiet and do all the tasks given to her while the other may always demand her own way. Some children enjoy singing songs and others may not like music. Some children run very fast and some can jump higher than others. You have just read that there are individual differences in the ages at which children acquire a particular skill.

**The understanding of individual differences helps us realize that every child is different and should not be compared to others.** However, if a child is aggressive and usually fights with her friends, it is not enough to say, "That is the way she is." An effort should be made to understand why she behaves that way. The child may be aggressive just to get the attention of adults, the lack of which is giving her a sense of insecurity. In such a case it is the attitude of the adults which is making the child behave as she does.

### 2.3.3 Understanding Human Behaviour

**Many attitudes and ways of behaviour of adults have their roots in childhood experiences.** The way an individual reacts to success and failure, faces challenges and relates to others can be accounted for by the experiences in the early years of life. A child who felt that she did not get adequate love and attention from parents may as an adult feel that nobody likes her. A child who is scolded harshly for the smallest mistake may grow up into an adult who fears to take the initiative.

**It is also important to remember that behaviour varies from one context to another.** Therefore, before arriving at any conclusion regarding a child, it is important to understand the entire situation and to observe her in different contexts.

*Take the case of Mohan who is four years old and attends a nursery school. In school Mohan is a quiet and shy child. He does not have any friends and does not speak a single word in the four hours that he is in school. He does not initiate any activity and prefers to play by himself. However, he does what the teacher asks him to do. But the same child is different once he reaches home. He narrates the experiences of the day to his mother, plays with his elder brother and sings songs heard in the school.*

Thus, we see the contrast in the behaviour of the child in the two contexts. If one had observed Mohan only in the school situation, one would have concluded that he is a shy child. This would not have been completely true. Observing him both at home as well as in the school is necessary to draw a conclusion. Why the school is not encouraging Mohan to express himself, also needs to be studied.

### 2.3.4 Application in Day-to-Day Interactions with Children

**A description of universal patterns in development and an explanation of individual differences in relation to norms provides an understanding of children which is useful in our day-to-day interactions with them. It provides an awareness of what children can do and a sensitivity to deal with them and support in their development.**

The norms indicate the average age ranges for emergence of abilities. This helps parents and professionals to ascertain whether or not the child is developing within the age range considered normal for various abilities.

With knowledge about the norms of development, the caregiver, crèche worker, educator, preschool teacher can plan activities for children that would be of interest to them and in accordance with their abilities. A two year old does not have the physical ability to hop on one foot. Forcing her to do so or ridiculing her when she cannot, may create feelings of incompetence. If this activity is given to a five year old, she will learn to do it in a very short time. Expecting children to do tasks which they are not yet maturationally ready to do can result in feelings of inadequacy and inferiority. At the same time, children like to face challenges. They enjoy activities that are slightly more complex than those they have mastered but which are not so difficult that they cannot do them despite repeated attempts. So once the five year old

masters hopping, she would enjoy doing something more difficult such as learning to skip.

The knowledge of Child Development helps to choose suitable activities for fostering development of children. You will read in detail about the activities that can be done with children to foster development in all areas in the Units that follow.

Research findings provide information about the needs of children at different ages and this information helps to plan health, nutrition and educational programmes. In this Course you will read about the services for children in our country and learn how to organize child care services.

At the conclusion of this Section it is important to keep one aspect in mind.

**While talking about development one can only talk about possibilities.**

One can never say that a certain development will definitely happen because a child has a particular experience. For example, we cannot say with certainty that a child who has not had a satisfying relationship with her parents in her early years will grow up into a person who finds it difficult to relate to others. We can only say that there is a likelihood of such a thing happening but whether it happens or not will depend on many other factors. These are the child's temperament and the opportunities she gets to form satisfying relationships with other people later on. Of two children who are often ridiculed, one may develop into a shy, withdrawn person while the other may take it as a challenge and strive to prove her worth. **This is because each child will bring her personal characteristics and past experiences to bear upon how she handles the present situation.** Earlier experiences add up and influence the child's perceptions of the present situation. All of this means that one can never predict with absolute certainty that a certain experience will result in a particular development. An individual can take different paths in the course of development.

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## 2.4 IMPORTANCE OF THE PERIODS OF INFANCY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

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The periods of infancy and early childhood have been acknowledged as the most significant in the life of an individual. What are the reasons for this?

**Firstly**, as you have read in the earlier part of the Unit, **the rate of development in all area — physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional — is the most rapid during these years. In this period it is possible to learn skills which become difficult, and at times impossible, to acquire at a later age.** A considerable amount of learning takes place in this period. This learning prepares the child for adulthood.

What is the reason for rapid development in all areas during these early years? The reason is that development in different domains is related to the development of the brain and the rate of brain development is most rapid during the early years. At birth, the brain of a healthy newborn is about a quarter of the size of the average adult's brain. The brain doubles in size by the end of the first year. It keeps growing and by age 3 it reaches to about

80% of adult brain size and by age 5 it reaches to about 90% of adult brain size – i.e, it is nearly full grown. Thus, from birth to age five, a child's brain develops more rapidly than at any other time in life. What causes the development of the brain? The brain is made up of cells called neurons. Most of the neurons in the brain are created before the child is born (though some areas of the brain do continue to grow new neurons throughout life). So, the development of the brain after birth is not due to creation of new neurons, but due to the formation of connections between the existing neurons. This point of connection between the neurons is called synapse. The greater the number of synaptic connections, the richer the brain. During early childhood, these connections are made at an amazingly rapid rate — at least one million new neural connections every second – which is far more than at any other time in life.

What causes the development of synapses? As the child explores, interacts with people and experiences her surrounding environment, the nerve cells/neurons in the brain get stimulated. After being stimulated, the nerve cells form synaptic connections amongst themselves and this enables them to survive. Those nerve cells which do not get stimulated die off soon. In fact, maximum synaptic connections are formed during the first three years after birth, as the child explores the environment and gathers new experiences. Therefore, it is very important to stimulate nerve cells during the early years of the child's life when formation of synaptic connections between the nerve cells is taking place at a very rapid rate and maximum brain growth is occurring.

The **second reason** for the significance of the periods of infancy and early childhood arises from the first. Since development is proceeding at a very fast rate, unfavourable experiences such as lack of adequate food, nurturance and care, unhealthy living conditions, sickness, lack of interaction with adults or exploitative working conditions will hinder development to a considerable extent. In the same way, favourable experiences will foster development. **Thus both favourable and unfavourable experiences will have a strong impact during this period.** The early years are therefore critical periods for the development of many abilities. It is, therefore, important that the child has a minimum of harmful experiences. The rate of growth of synaptic connections mentioned above is possible only when the child receives a favourable environment to grow and develop. If the environment is not supportive, fewer synaptic connections are formed. Love, nurturance and care are central to development in all areas. **Development is not a result of the mechanical act of feeding, bathing and physical care but rather of a feeling of total well-being that arises from growing up in an atmosphere of love and warmth with opportunities for learning.** **The third reason** for the significance of the periods of infancy and early childhood **emerges from the fact that research has shown that the first few years of life influence later behaviour to a large extent.** Many of the ways of thinking and behaviour of adults can be traced to early childhood experiences. The need for love, nurturance and secure relationships continues throughout life but it is of utmost importance in the early years because this is the time when the child is developing self-esteem. Positive experiences are important in this

period. The foundations of the feelings of security and confidence are laid in the early years. Why are these feelings important? They are important because they influence the attitude with which a person approaches a task, whether the task is learning to ride a cycle, doing well in school, making new friends or learning to cast a net. If one is not confident about oneself, one does not expect to succeed.

The above discussion is an overview of the importance of the periods of infancy and early childhood. As you read the following Blocks, you will study in detail the development in each area and how it can be fostered.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 3

Read the following questions carefully and answer in the space provided below.

- 1) Define the term 'Norms of Development'.

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- 2) State how the study of Child Development will be useful to you.

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- 3) Give three reasons for the importance of the periods of infancy and early childhood.

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## 2.5 SUMMING UP

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In this Unit, you have read that the field of Child Development is concerned with describing and explaining the changes that take place during the course of development. Development refers to all qualitative and quantitative changes in the individual that are long lasting, orderly and progressive. Growth, on the other hand, refers to only those changes that can be measured.

The human life span is divided into five stages: infancy (birth-2 years), preschool years (2-6 years), middle childhood (7-12 years), adolescence (12-18 years) and adulthood (18 years onwards). These stages are characterized

by differences in thinking and physical, social, emotional and language abilities of the individual. Change from one stage to the other is gradual and the age limits are not rigid.

The various areas of development are: cognitive, physical, motor, social, emotional and language development. Personality refers to the person's characteristic ways of relating to others and distinctive patterns of thinking and feeling about oneself and others.

The study of Child Development gives us an insight into human behaviour and describes universal patterns of development. The average age ranges at which individuals acquire specific skills help us to identify norms. These norms help us to evaluate the children's progress and plan and devise play activities for them. Individual differences among children help us to appreciate that every child is unique. This knowledge help-in day-to-day interaction with children.

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## 2.6 GLOSSARY

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**Attachment:** An emotional bond between the infant and the caregiver. The infant approach this person when in distress and display anxiety if separated from her.

**Babbling:** A term used to refer to the sounds produced by the infant around 9 months of age. These sounds are repetition of syllables like 'gagaga...' 'dedede'

**Fertilized Ovum:** When the ovum and the sperm unite, the ovum is referred to a fertilized ovum.

**Nurturance:** Providing emotional support, food, shelter and protection to the young, weak or helpless.

**Peer group:** This term is used to describe children's or adolescents' groups of friends where the members are of approximately the same age.

**Skills:** A co-ordinated series of actions that serve to attain some goal or accomplish a particular task.

**Self esteem:** The degree to which one values oneself. Self esteem emerges from evaluation of oneself. Thus a person who has more positive feelings about herself has high self esteem, but one who has more negative feelings about herself has a low esteem. It determines the extent to which people anticipate success in what they do and believe themselves to be capable, successful and worthy.

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## 2.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

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### Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) a) quantitative, qualitative, measured  
b) orderly, progressive, long lasting



- 2)
  - a) most rapid
  - b) 2, 6; 6, 12
  - c) adolescence
- 3) Child Development studies the changes in behaviour of children over time. It aims to explain why and how these changes occur. It studies the physical, motor, social cognitive, emotional and language development of children.

**Check Your Progress Exercise 2**

- 1)
  - a) Motor development
  - b) Cognitive development
  - c) Social development
  - d) Cognitive development
  - e) Physical development
  - f) Social development
  - g) Language development

**Check Your Progress Exercise 3**

- 1) Norms refer to average age ranges at which most individuals acquire particular abilities.
- 2) The study of Child Development will help you to describe universal patterns development as well as understand individual differences between children. It also provides a better understanding of human behaviour and thus helps in day-to-day interaction with children.
- 3) Infancy and early childhood are important periods in a person's life because experiences during these periods influence later behaviour to a large extent. The rate of development is fast during these periods and the child learns a great deal. Thus, any favourable or unfavourable experience in these periods may foster or hamper development.