



Key concepts

Growth is a measurable increase in physical size, such as height and mass. **Development** is the emergence and increasing complexity of skills, such as mobility, speech and memory.

While every **individual** is unique, we all pass through the same **lifespan** stages. Within each stage, there are expected **milestones** of growth and development.

Key terms

Term	Definition
Lifespan	The period of an individual's life.
Individual	A person who is unique in terms of their needs and what matters to them.
Milestone	Growth and development that is expected in each stage of an individual's lifespan.
Growth	Increase that can be measured, such as an increase in physical size (mass and height).
Development	The emergence and increase in sophistication of skills.

The five life stages

An individual's lifespan is commonly divided into five distinct stages.

Stage	Age range
Infancy	0–2 years
Childhood	3–10 years
Adolescence	11–19 years
Adulthood	20–64 years
Later adulthood	65+ years

Expected milestones

A milestone is an ability or stage of development expected at a certain age (e.g. an infant being able to walk by the age of two).

Milestones are an important guide, but everyone is different. An individual might reach a milestone earlier or later than their peers. A delay is not always a cause for concern.

However, sometimes a missed milestone can indicate a problem. For example, a baby who is not gaining weight may need support because it could threaten their survival.

Awareness of milestones helps to monitor an individual's health and well-being and identify if they need care and support.

Areas of development

Expected milestones relate to four key areas of development:

- Physical
- Emotional
- Intellectual (also known as cognitive)
- Social

Why milestones matter for health and social care

Knowing about milestones helps professionals to provide the right support at the right time.

Example 1: Later adulthood (social and emotional development)

- Milestone/expectation:** An individual in later adulthood may have an increased risk of loneliness, perhaps due to retirement and having less social contact.
- Health and social care response:** Day centres can be offered to provide older people with opportunities to meet others and access services (e.g. hot meals, foot care). This helps to reduce loneliness and improve well-being.

Example 2: Infancy (intellectual/language development)

- Milestone/expectation:** An infant is expected to say their first words between 0 and 2 years.
- Health and social care response:** If there is concern that a child's speech is slow to develop, a speech and language therapist can provide support and interventions to help them reach this milestone.