

Child Development: Birth through 5 Years

Working Session on Child Development
for NC District Court Judges
April 16th, 2004

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School of Education
UNC Chapel Hill*

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Acknowledgements

These slides were adapted from previously used materials for this function in 2022 by Mary Wise-Kriplani (MSW, LCSW, PhD) and Katelyn Donisch (MPH, PhD).

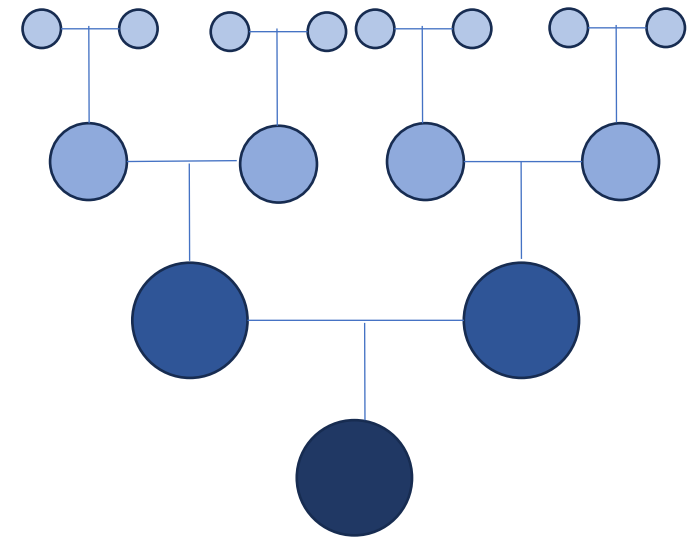


Objectives

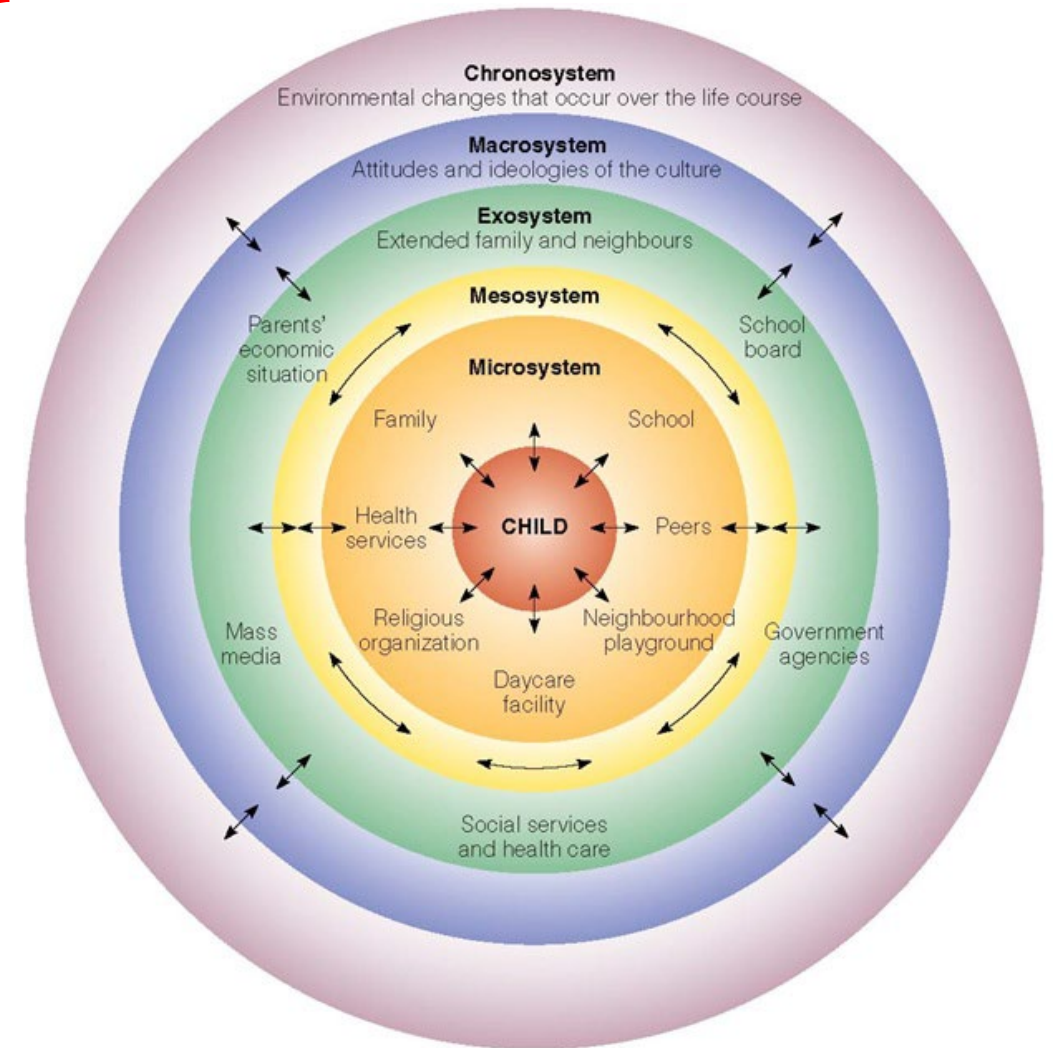
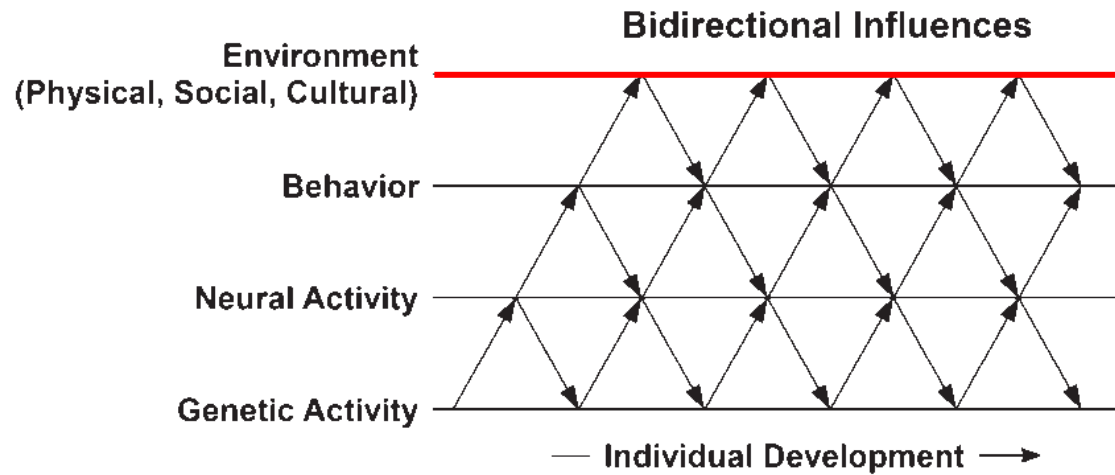
- Describe typical development in early childhood across physical, cognitive, and social-emotional domains
- Explore familial and extra-familial influences on early child development
- Discuss scenarios pertinent to child custody and access arrangements in early childhood



Mighty oaks from little acorns grow...



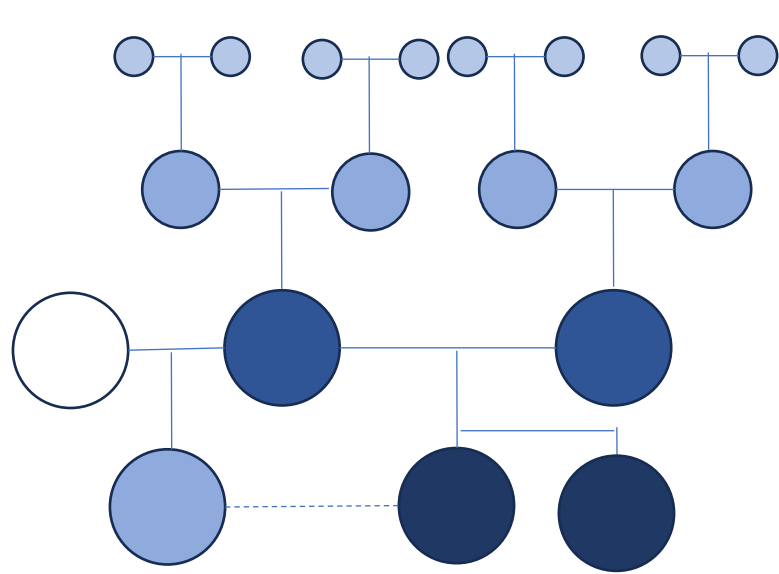
A *brief* acknowledgement of theory...



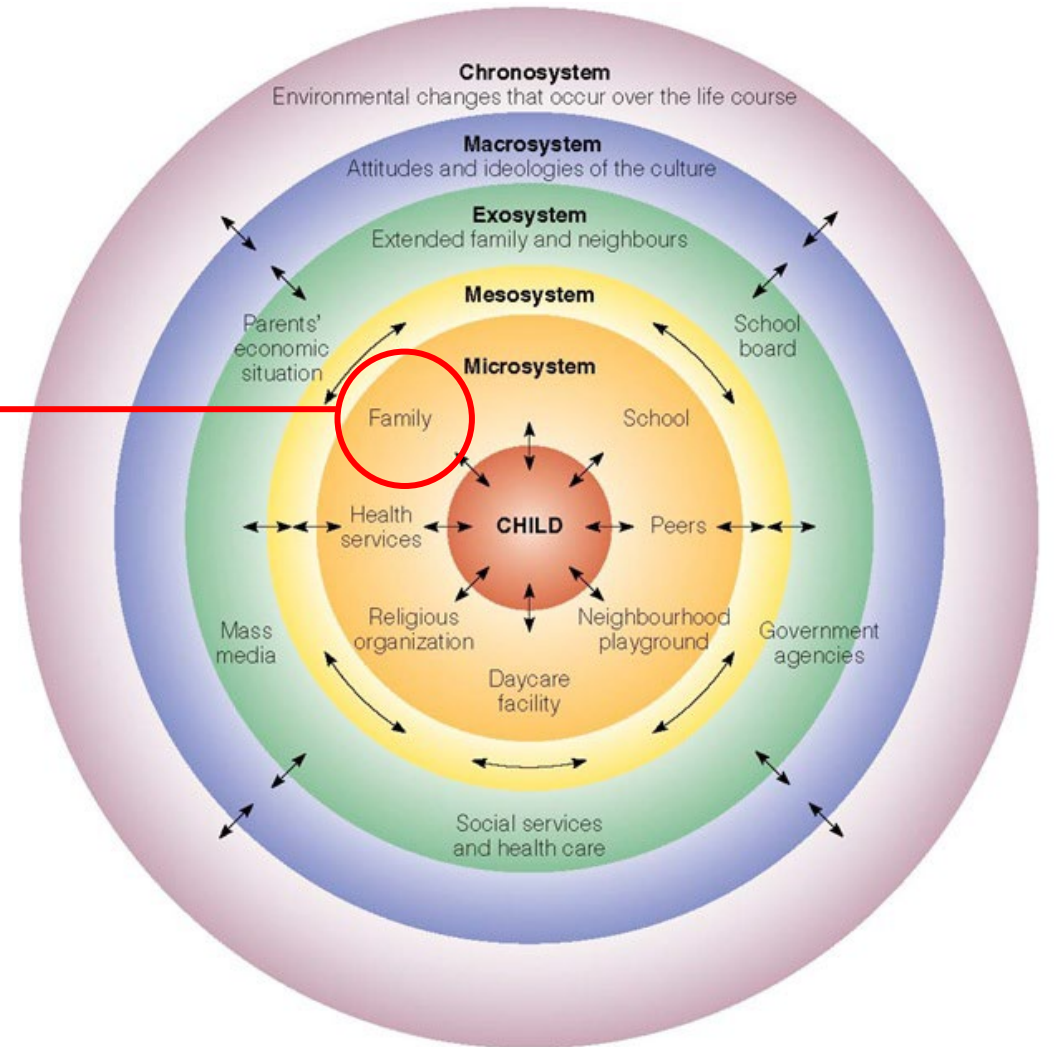
- *Probabilistic Epigenetic Theory* (Gottlieb, 1998; Cairns, 2000)

- *Bioecological Theory*, (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994)

A *brief* acknowledgement of theory...



- *Family Systems Theory* (Cox & Paley, 1997)



- *Bioecological Theory*, (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994)

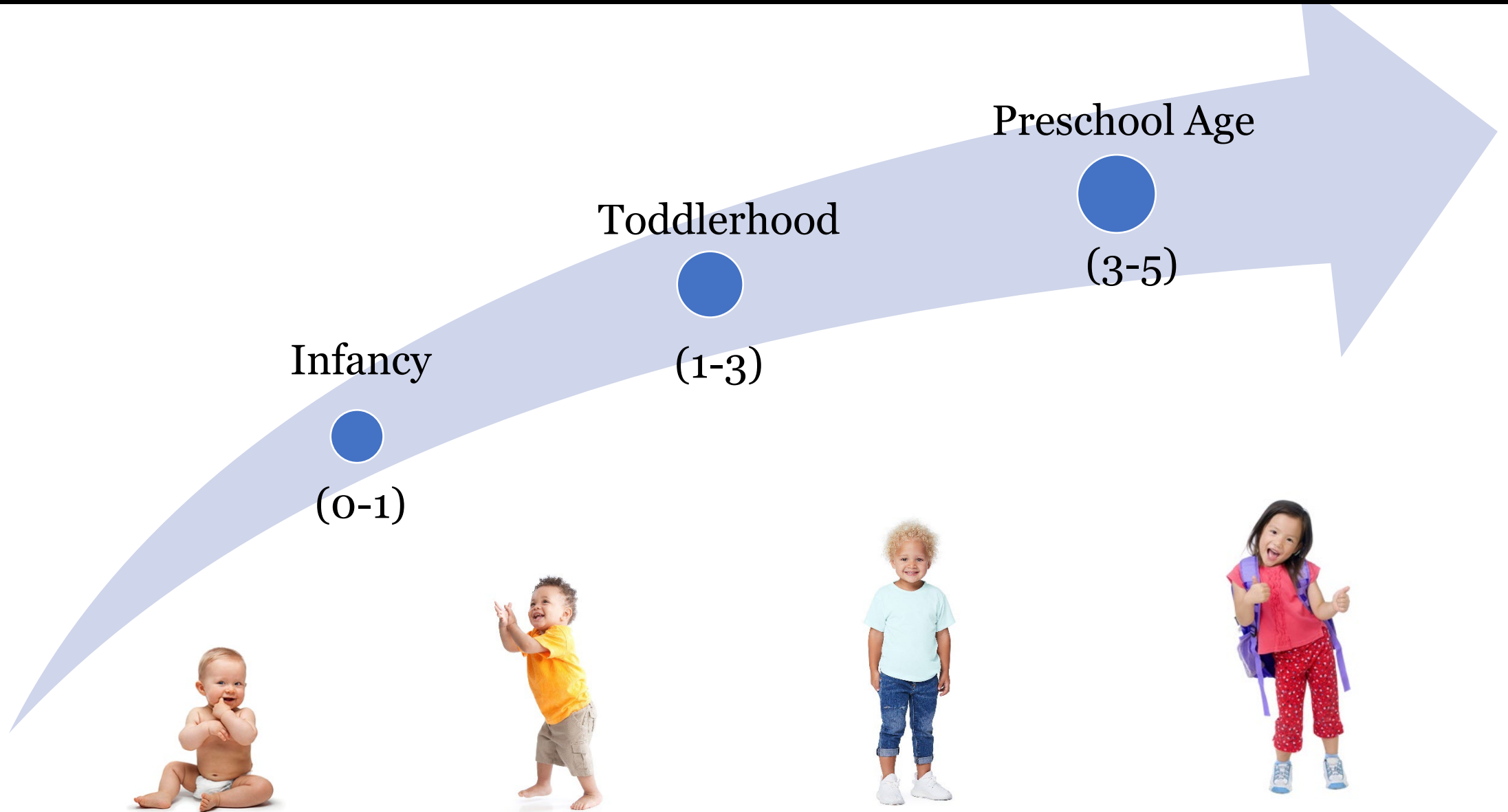
What do you remember from your first 5 years of life?

A blue-tinted photograph showing the silhouettes of eight people sitting around a long table in a meeting room. The people are engaged in a discussion, with one person in the center gesturing with their hand. The background is a bright, hazy window or light source, creating a high-contrast silhouette effect. The floor is reflective, showing the silhouettes of the chairs and people.

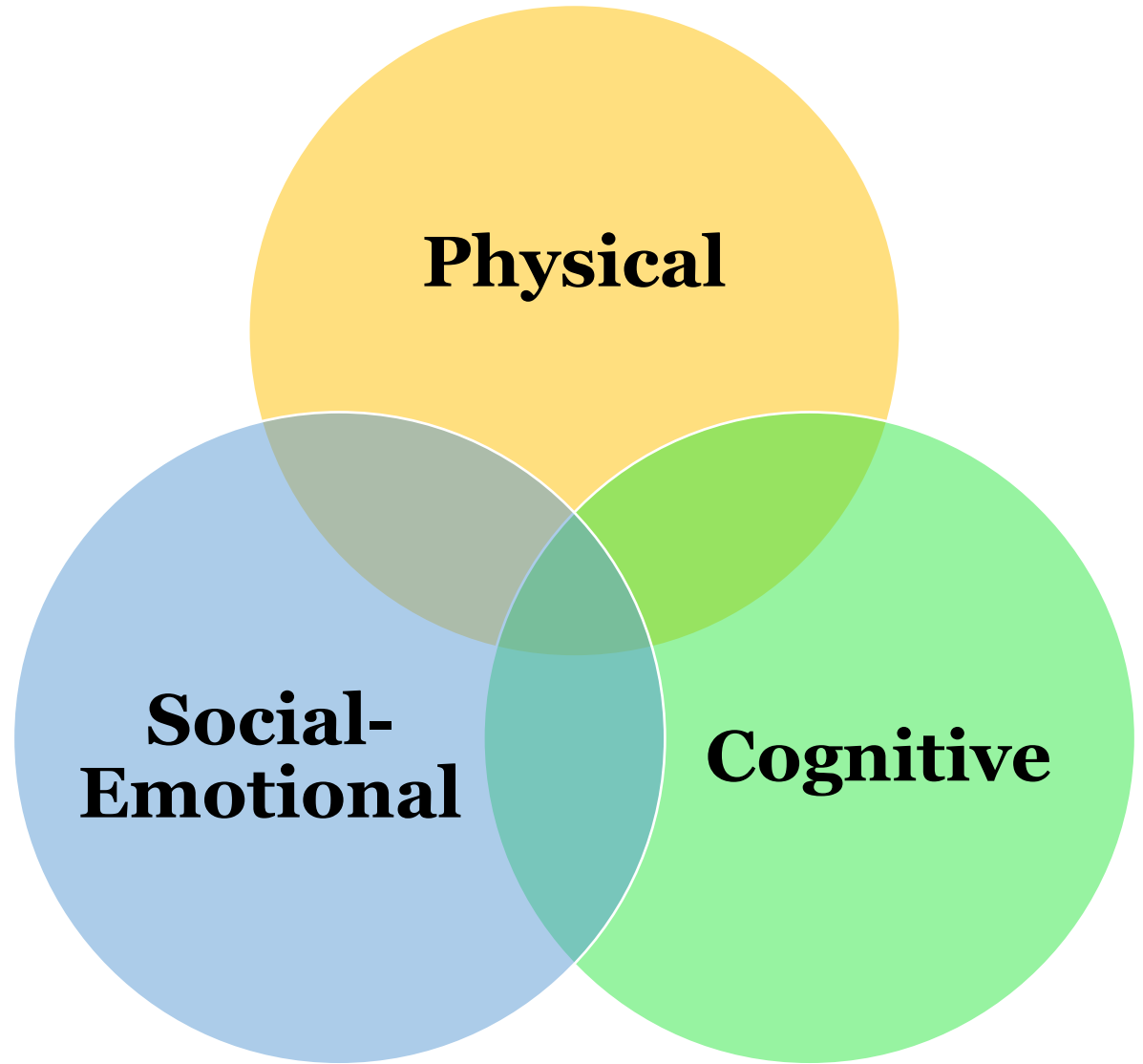
Quick Group Discussion

If you could change one thing, what would it be?

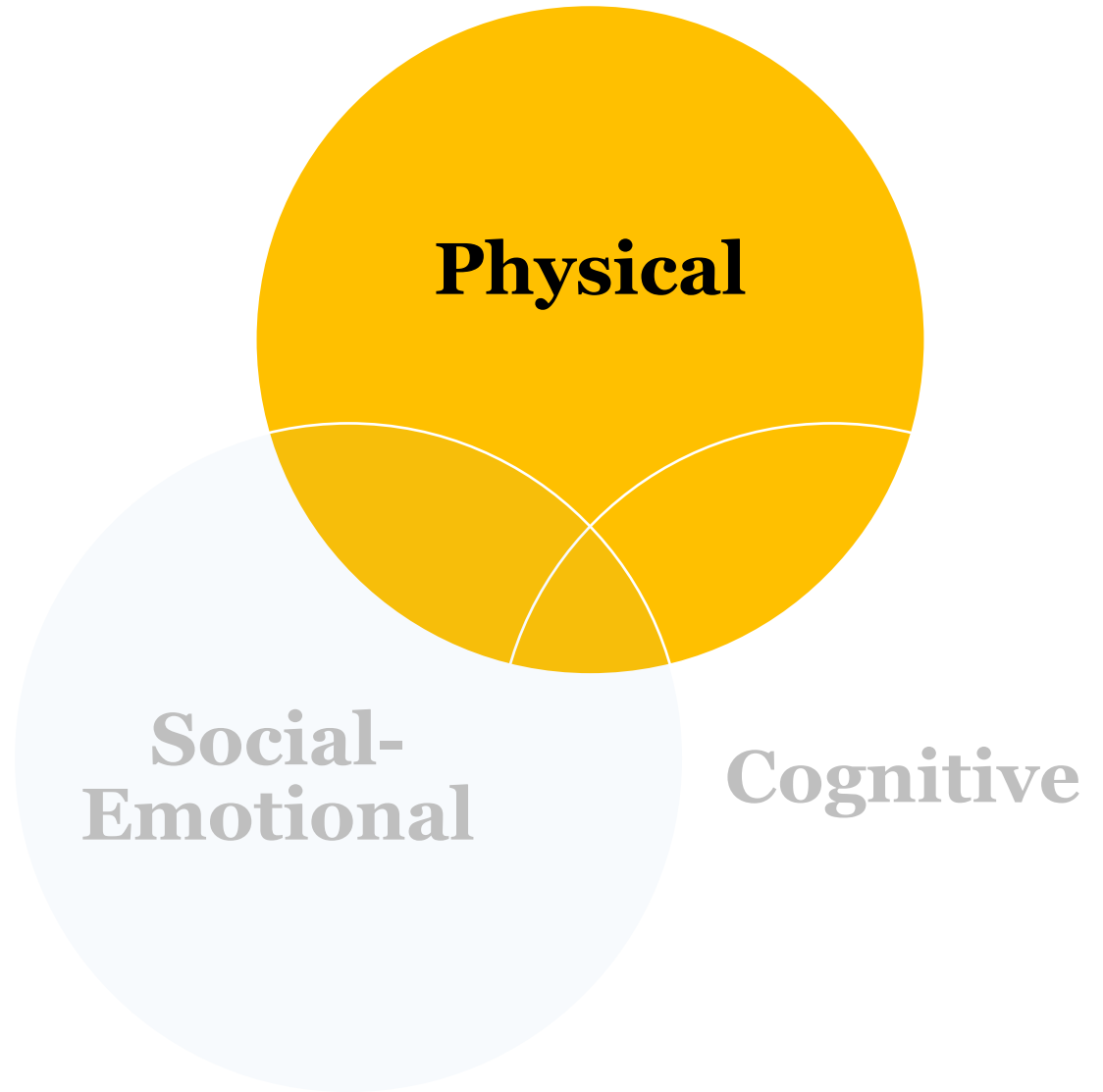
Defining Early Childhood



Typical Development in Early Childhood



Typical Development in Early Childhood



Physical Development...

involves physical growth and the acquisition of motor functioning, including:

- fine motor skills
- gross motor skills
- locomotion



Physical Development Milestones

Age	Gross Motor	Fine Motor
6 mo	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Rolls both waysSits with and without support of hands	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Transfers objects from hand to hand
1 yr	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Walks by holding onto objectsTakes first steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Explores objects in multiple ways (e.g., hand, mouth, smell)
2 yr	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Kicks a ballWalks up/down stairs, two feet at a time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Uses spoon and fork wellTurns pages of a book one at a time
2.5 yr	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Jumps with both feetCan walk on tiptoes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Holds pencil or crayon between fingers (instead of fist)
3 yr	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Climbs stairs using alternate feetRides tricycle and runs well	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Puts on shoes and socksCarries a container without spilling
4 yr	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Skips on one footThrows ball overhand	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Cuts with scissors (not well)Can dress self (not tying shoes)
5 yr	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Hops and skipsHas good balance (e.g., can skate)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Dresses without help, ties shoesPrints simple letters

Physical Development



<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/201-busy-bodies-how-the-development-of-physical-skills-supports-learning>



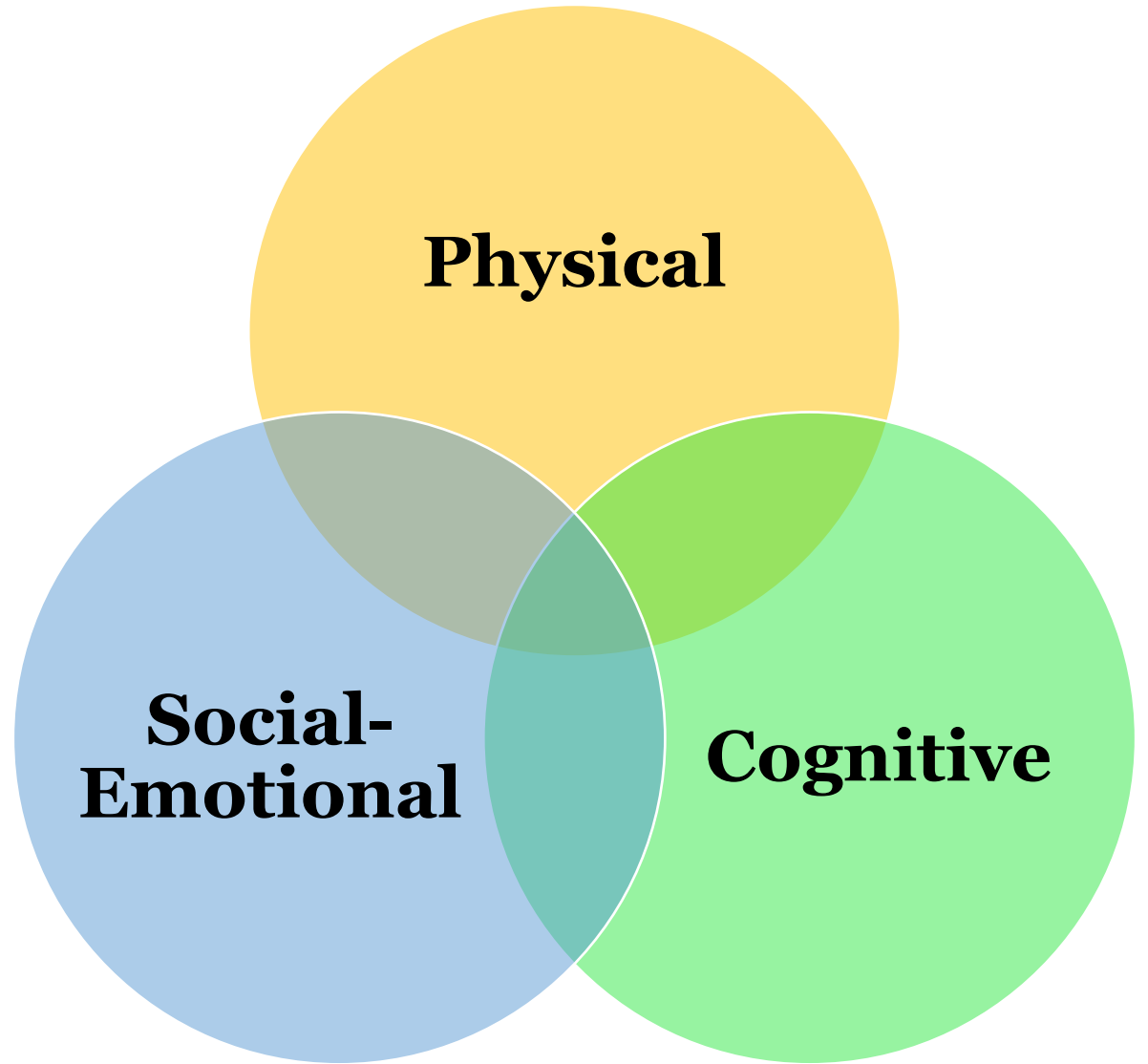
Physical growth is a proxy for health

- Slow weight gain or loss of weight could lead to compromised immune functioning and delayed neurodevelopment

Motor skills allow children to interact with the world

- Autonomy is supported by the ability to move independently
- Children learn by physically acting on their world – which promotes cognitive, speech, and sensory development

Typical Development in Early Childhood



Typical Development in Early Childhood

Physical

Social-
Emotional

Cognitive

A diagram illustrating the three domains of typical development in early childhood. The word 'Cognitive' is centered within a large, solid green circle. To the left of the circle, the words 'Social-' and 'Emotional' are stacked vertically. Above the circle, the word 'Physical' is positioned.

Cognitive Development...

...involves processes of growth and change in intellectual abilities, including:

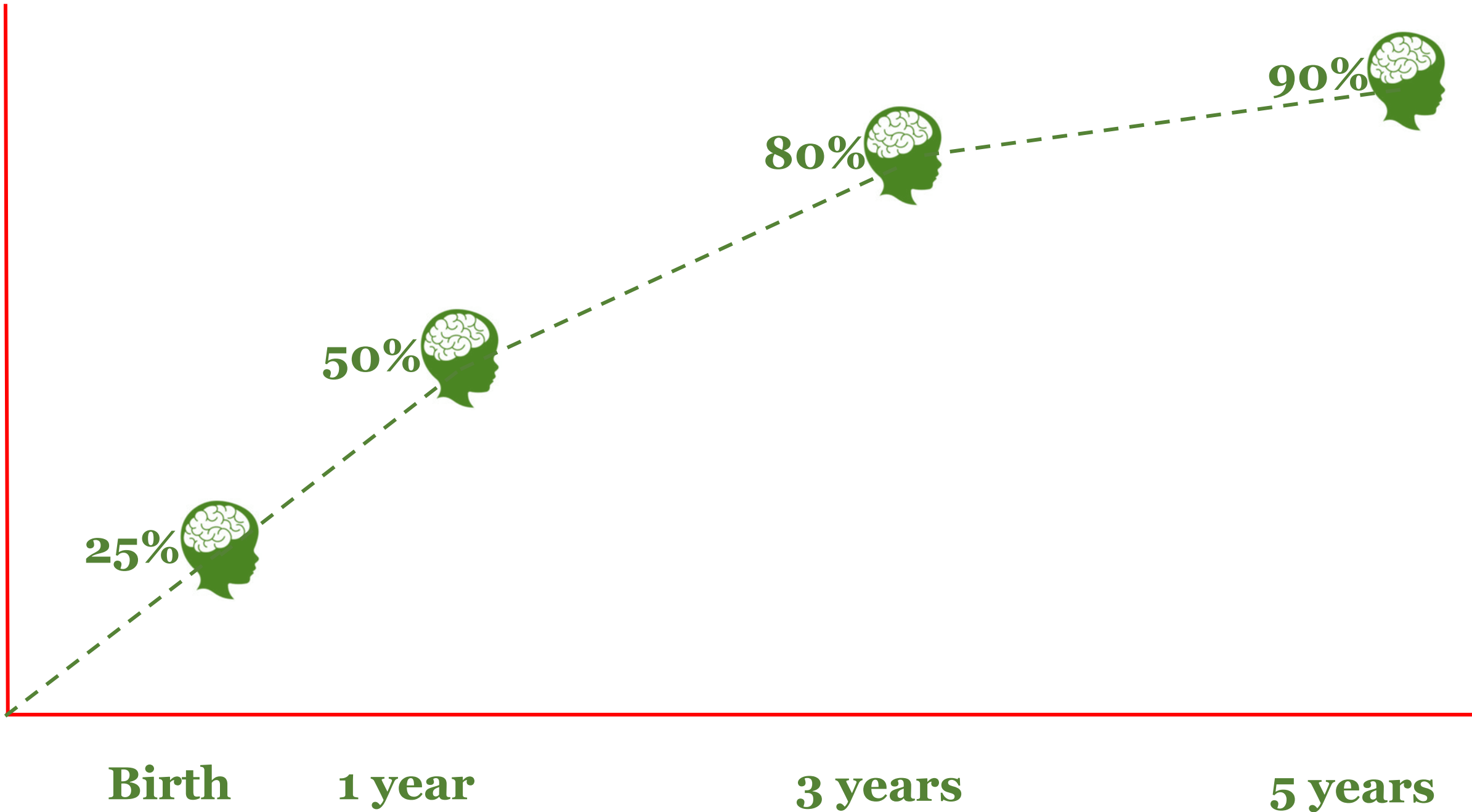
- acquiring knowledge
- thinking
- reasoning
- understanding



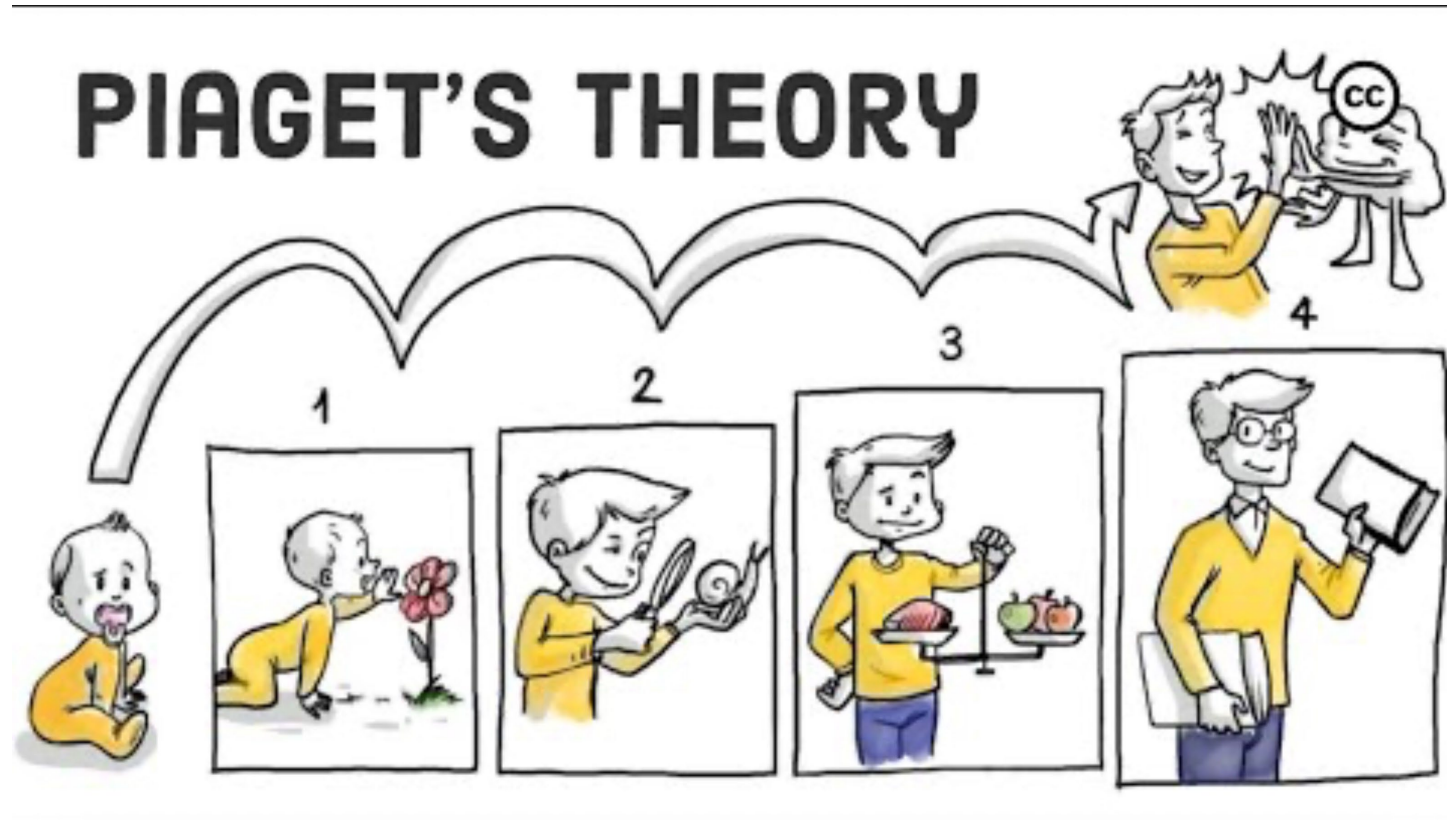


**Intersection of Physical
Development and Cognitive
Development...**

Relative to Adult Brain Size



Cognitive Development – Stage Theory (Piaget)



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lhcgYgx7aAA>

Cognitive Development – Social Interaction Theory (Vygotsky)



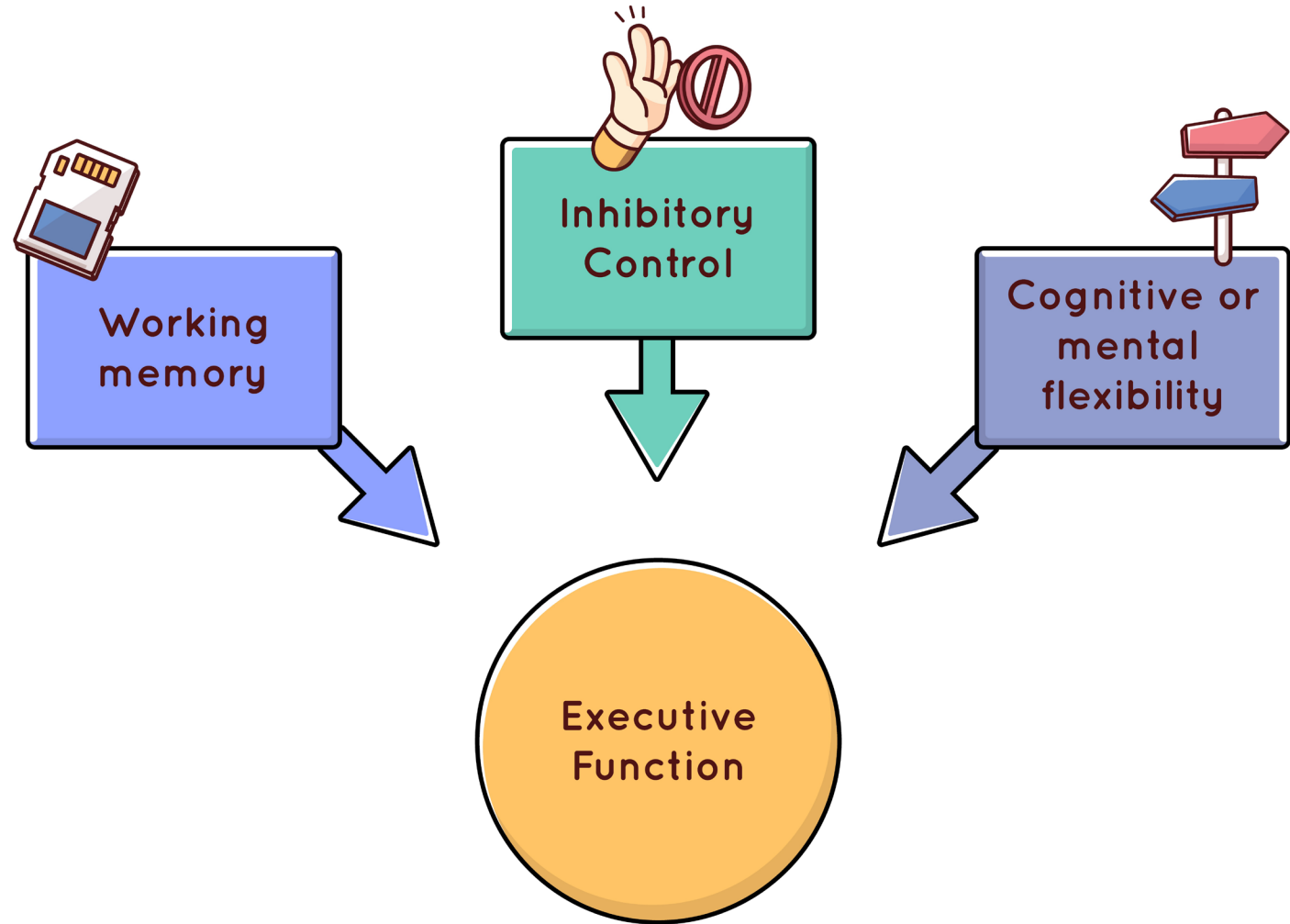
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8I2hrSRbmHE>

Cognitive Development Milestones

Age	Cognitive / Behavioral
6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explores with hands and mouth• Tries to get objects that are out of reach
1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explores objects in different ways• Finds hidden objects easily• Looks at correct picture when the image is named
2-3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finds objects even when hidden 2 or 3 levels deep• Sorts by shape and color• Engages in pretend play
3-5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sorts objects by shape and color• Completes multi-piece puzzle• Draws a person with 2 to 4 body parts

Its not just what... its how.

Emerging
Executive
Functioning



Language Development

3 months

Cooing & gurgling

6 months

Babbling

12 months

First words

18 months

Knows 5 to
40 words

2 years

150-300 words, 2-3
word sentences

3 years

900-1,000 words,
asks short questions

4 years

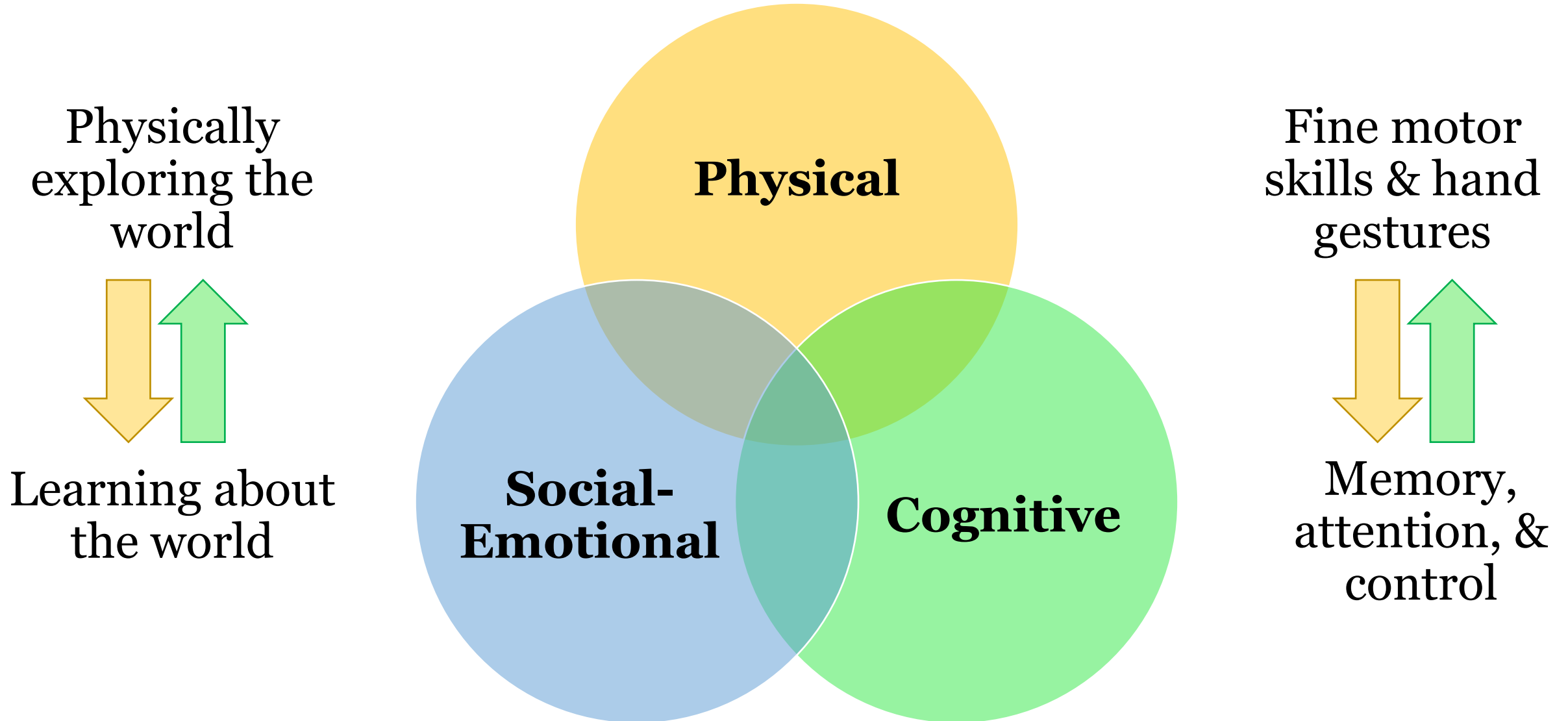
2,000 words, 5+
word sentences

5 years

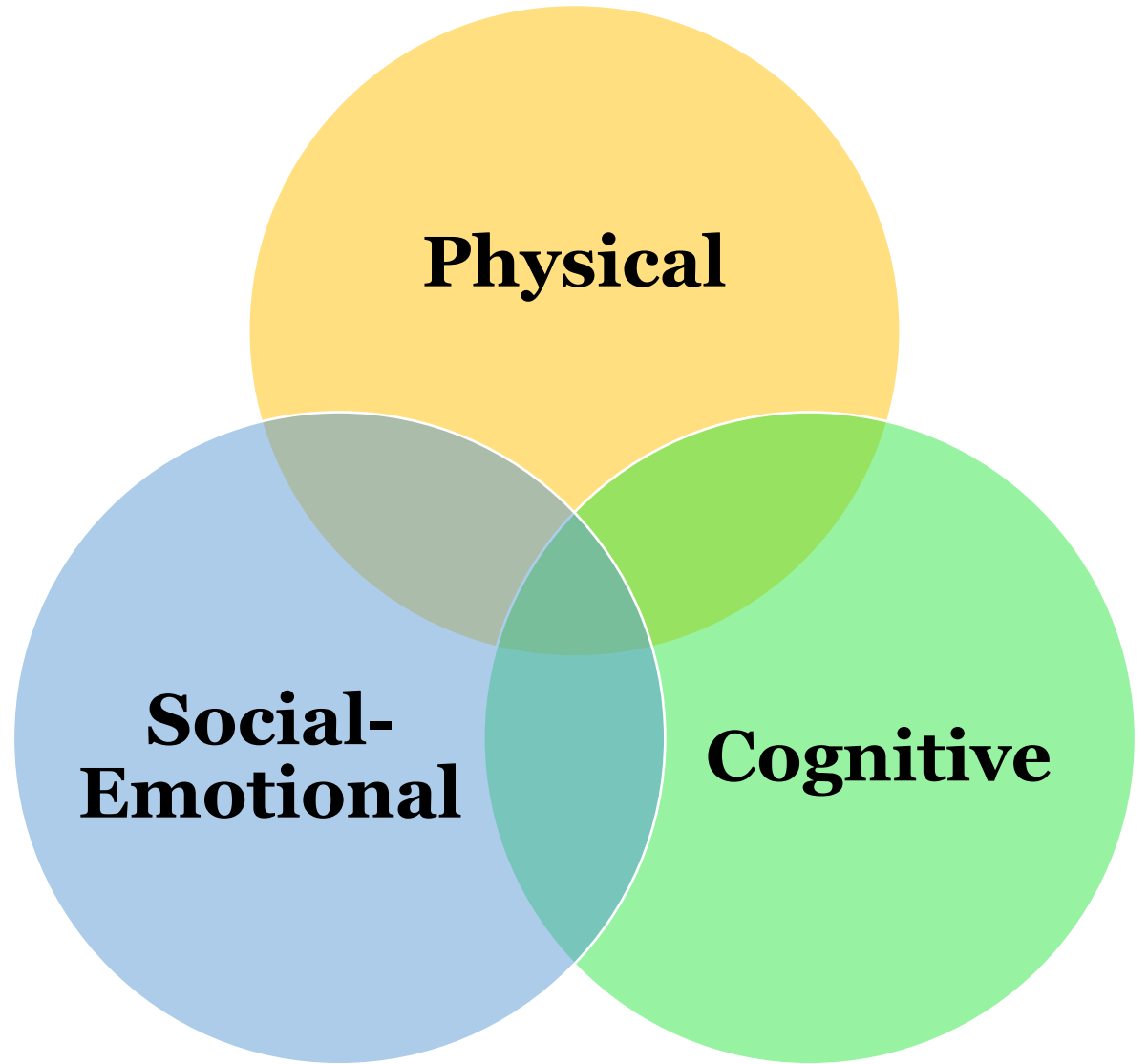
Identifies letters, creates
longer sentences



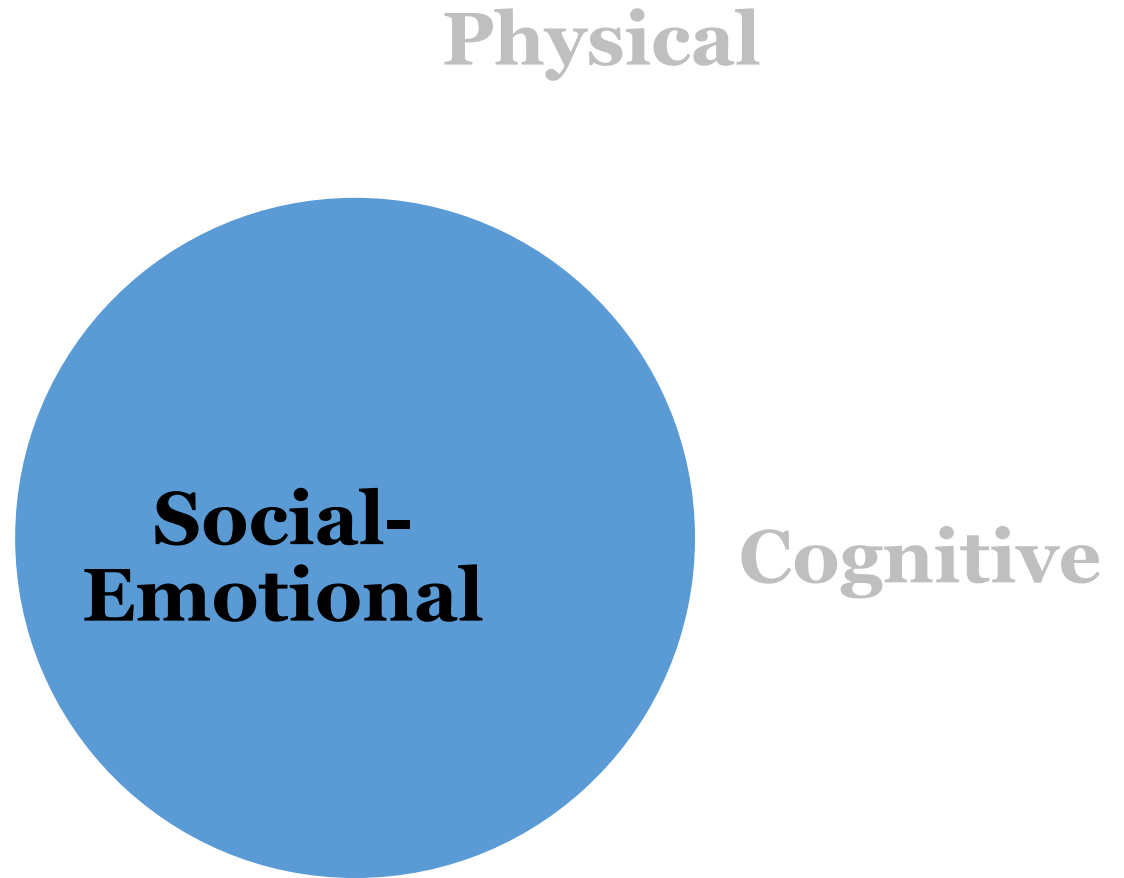
Developing Together



Typical Development in Early Childhood



Typical Development in Early Childhood



Social-Emotional Development...

involves understanding and managing feelings, behaviors, and relationships, including:

- regulating emotions & behaviors
- forming family & peer relationships
- developing empathy



Social-Emotional Development



<https://www.zerotothree.org/resources/30-from-feelings-to-friendships-nurturing-healthy-social-emotional-development-in-the-early-years>

Everything
Begins with
Parent-Child
Relationships





**What can we
expect from
others?**

**How do we
control
ourselves?**

**When must
we control
ourselves?**

**How are we
affecting
others?**

**What can we
expect from
others?**

**Is the world safe or dangerous...
Is there anyone I can trust?**

**How do we
control
ourselves?**

**How do I sit still?
How can I stop feeling angry?**

**When must
we control
ourselves?**

Will mommy leave if I make her mad?

**How are we
affecting
others?**

If I want it, why can't I take it?

Social-Emotional Milestones

Age	Relational Milestones	Developmental Tasks
6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopts a patterned response to consistent interaction styles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Able to display joy, sadness, fear and anger Responds to expressions of emotions
1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Displays consolidated attachment-related behaviors uniquely directed at each parent/caregiver 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shy or anxious with strangers Cries when parents leave Enjoys imitating people in play Show preferences for certain people and toys
2 – 3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enjoys parallel play with other children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imitates behavior of adults and older children Beginning to have a "theory of mind" Learning how to regulate emotions
4 – 5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enjoy cooperative play with other children 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows affection for familiar playmates Can take turns in games Continuing to learn how to regulate emotions Beginning to show empathy, guilt, shame Decreases in aggressive behaviors

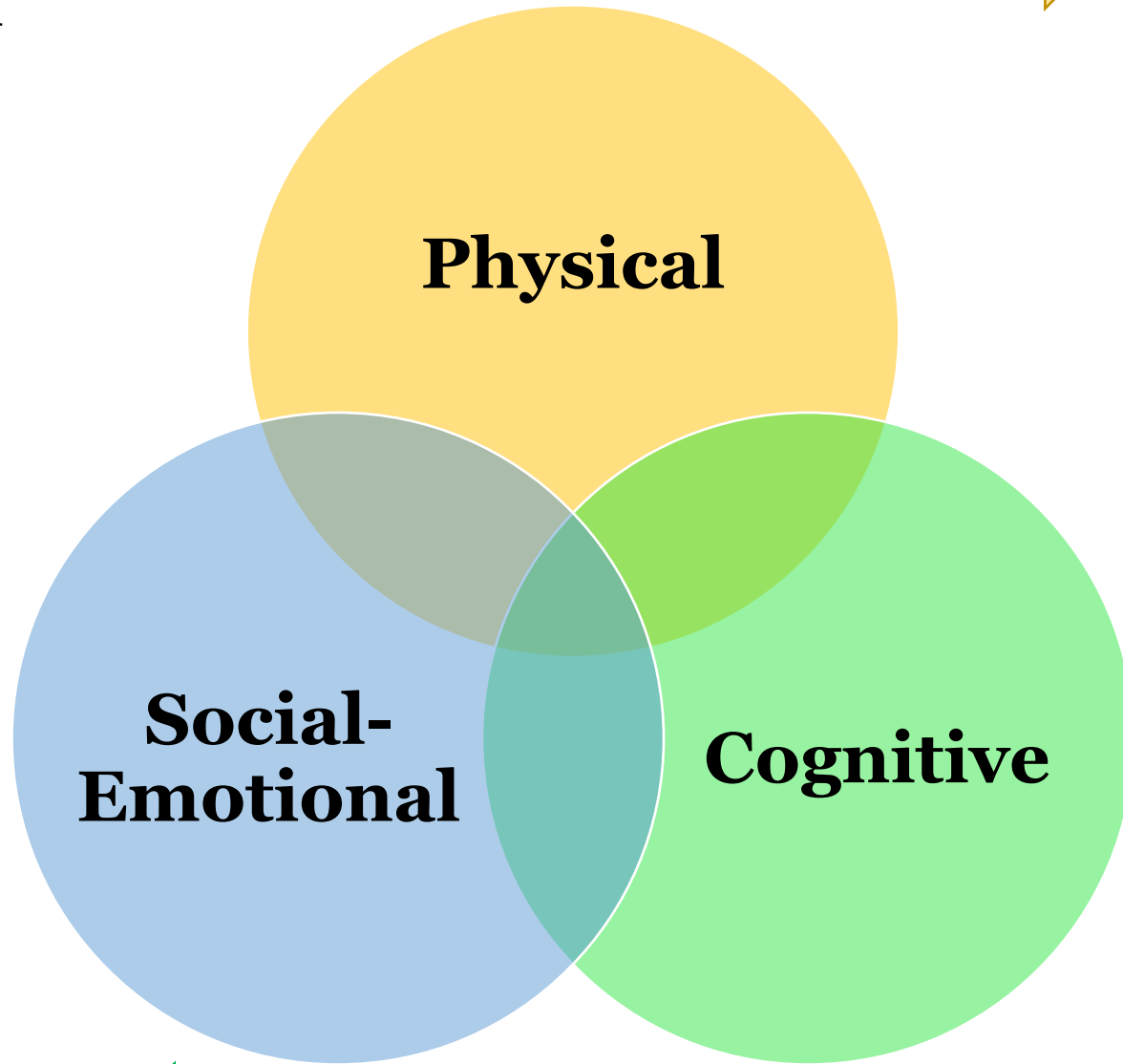
Physically exploring the world



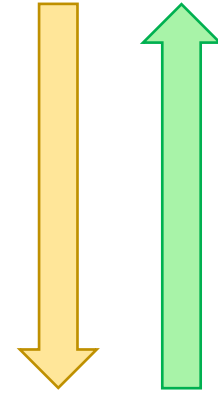
Secure parent-child attachments



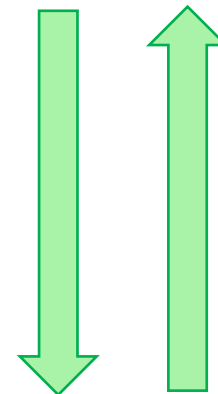
Cooperative play with peers



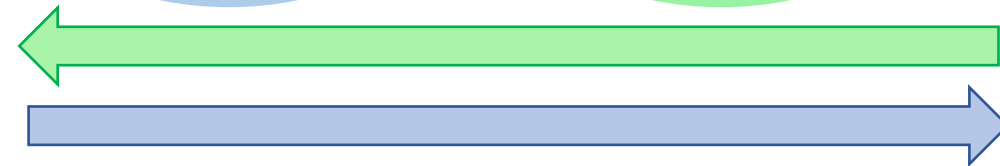
Gross & fine motor skills



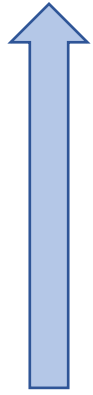
Learning about the world



Self-regulation



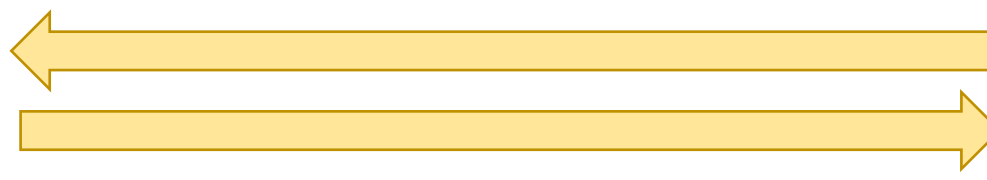
Engaging in the classroom



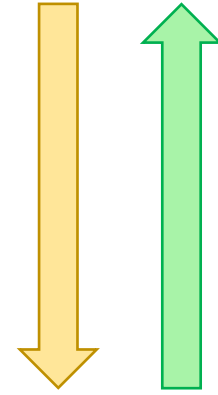
Positive teacher-child relationship



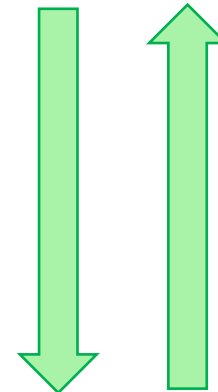
Learning in group activities



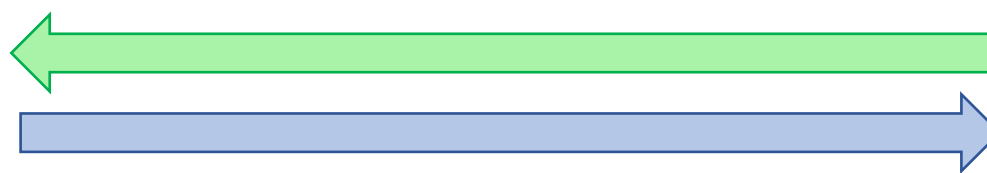
Exploring the classroom objects



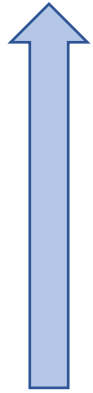
Learning letters and numbers



Positive attitude towards learning



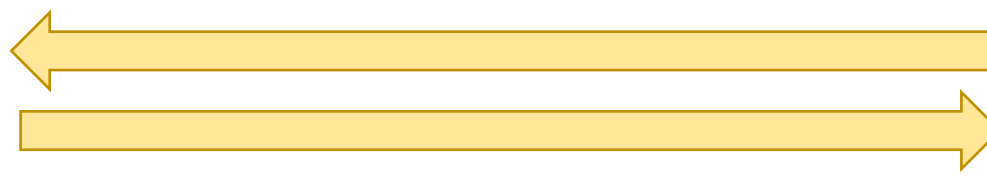
Trying different field positions



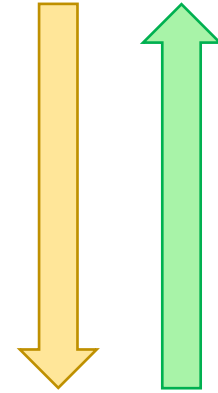
Positive coach-player relationship



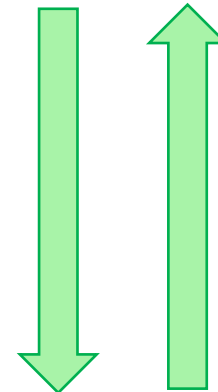
Positive play with teammates



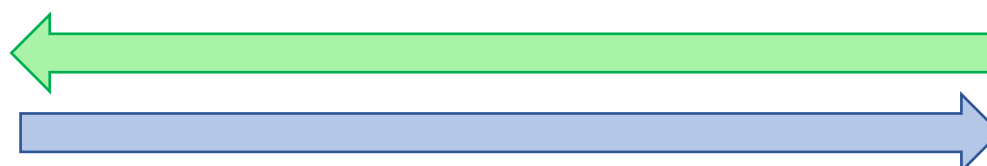
Developing skills and fitness



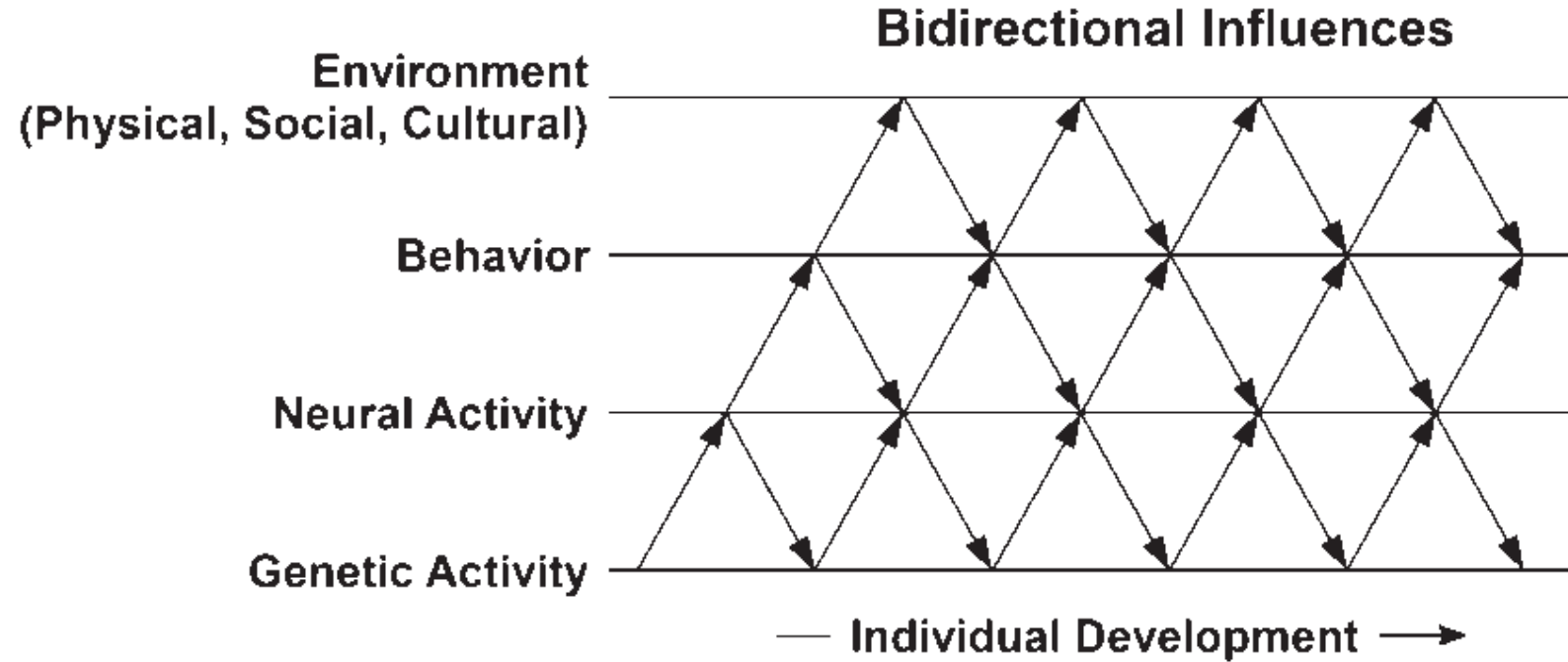
Implicit learning of angles, velocity



Joint attention with shared purpose

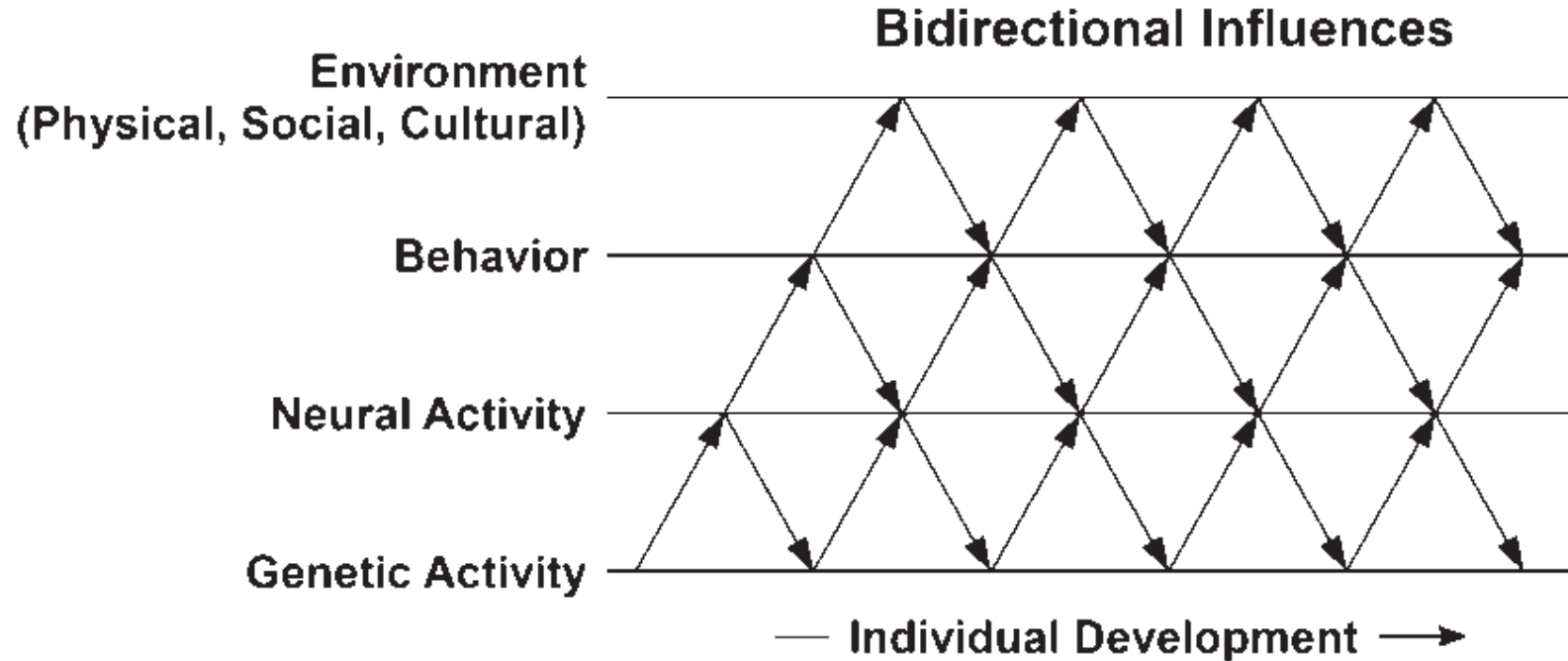


And back to our scientific theories...



- Gottlieb, 1998
- Cairns, 2000

But if everything matters...



- Gottlieb, 1998
- Cairns, 2000

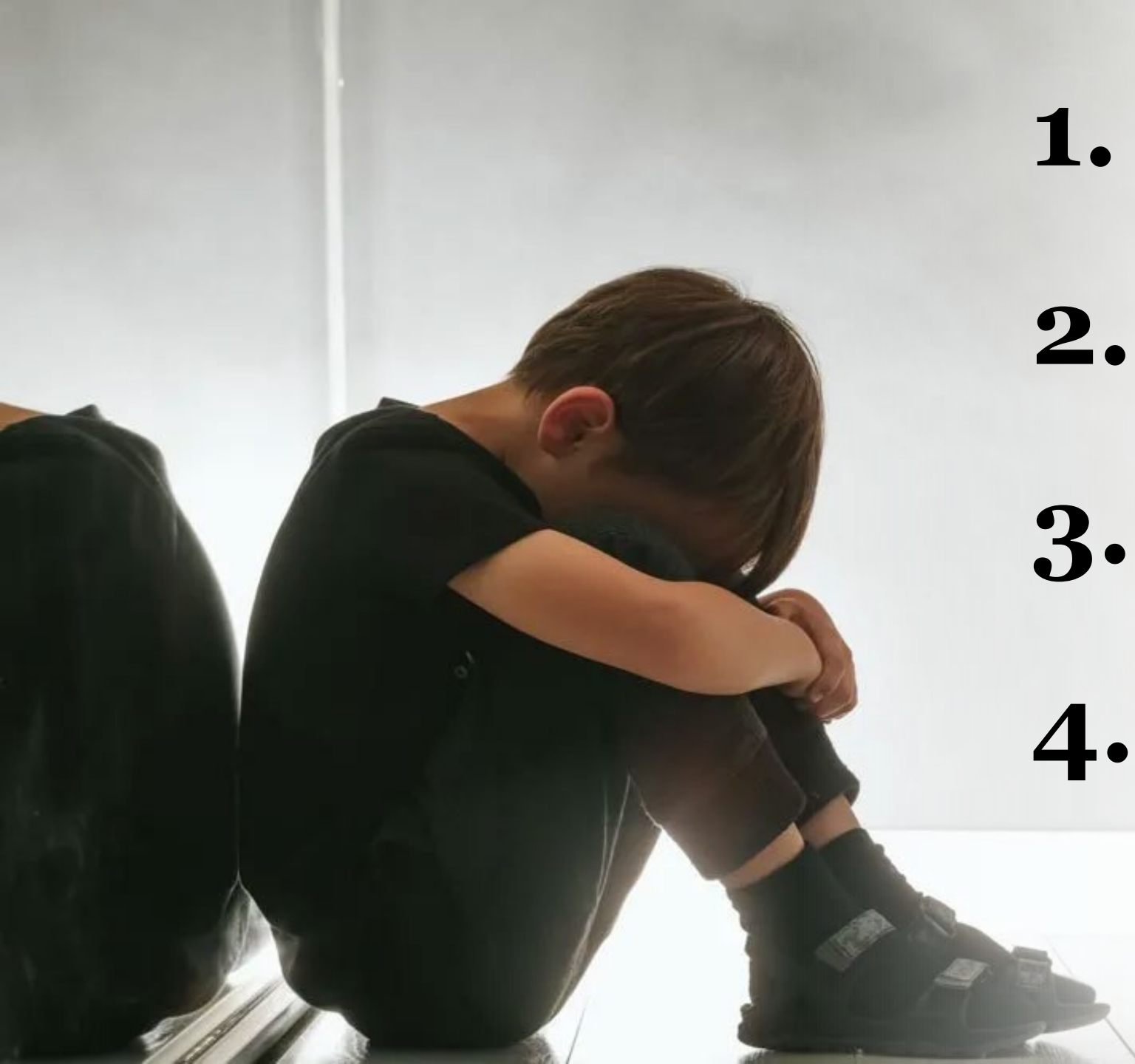
does anything matter?

YES!

Although many variables influence child outcomes...

...not all influences are weighted the same.

Some factors matter more than others!



1. Safety

2. Stability

3. Love

4. Stimulation



1. Safety

2. Stability

3. Love

4. Stimulation

Scientific evidence indicates that these relationships are beneficial to all children, irrespective of parent or caregiver...

- Education, income
- Gender
- Sexuality
- Age or generation
- Biological relationship to child

Challenges Faced in Early Childhood

1. Family disruption, separation, & divorce
2. Physical & emotional deprivation (neglect)
3. Physical & emotional threat (abuse)

Developmental Factors to Consider

1. Safety

..... *Ensuring physical safety, health, & nutrition*

2. Stability

..... *Normalizing sleep, eating, & hygiene routines*

3. Love

..... *Providing emotional and physical affection*

4. Stimulation

..... *Providing learning & growth opportunities*

Developmental Factors to Consider

1. Safety

2. Stability

3. Love

4. Stimulation

*The **QUALITY** of
parenting and family life
is what matters...*

...not the type.

Infant Reaction to Family Disruption

- May exhibit increased separation anxiety
- May experience feeding or sleep disturbances
- May be temperamentally fussier, more irritable, or more listless



Toddler Reaction to Family Disruption

- May exhibit increased separation anxiety
- May experience eating or sleep disturbances
- May exhibit developmental regressions (e.g., loss of toileting or language skills)



Preschool Reaction to Family Disruption

- May exhibit increased separation anxiety
- May experience eating or sleep disturbances
- May exhibit developmental regressions (e.g., loss of toileting or self-help skills)
- May not understand the permanence of the separation (repeatedly ask for the absent parent)
- May increase externalizing behaviors (acting out, manipulate limit setting across parents)
- May increase in internalizing cognitions and behaviors (blame themselves, have nightmares, have fears of abandonment)



Most children show emotional and behavioral changes in the first year after parental separation, with most problems resolving in 2-3 years.

Many children can actually benefit from the separation of two parents who are in constant conflict with one another.

Important to Remember:

Understanding children's experiences, feelings, and behaviors is very difficult in early childhood!

Young children are not “little adults”

- They think and feel differently than adults and older children
- You cannot project your feelings and understanding of the world onto them

Important to Remember:

Understanding children's experiences, feelings, and behaviors is very difficult in early childhood!

Young children often lack the cognitive capacity to accurately describe their experiences and feelings with words

- They may lack the necessary vocabulary to communicate
- They may not understand the question

Important to Remember:

Understanding children's experiences, feelings, and behaviors is very difficult in early childhood!

Young children can be very good actors

- They can mask their true feelings as a defense mechanism
- They may convincingly answer in the affirmative in an effort to please an adult

Important to Remember:

Understanding children's experiences, feelings, and behaviors is very difficult in early childhood!

Young children can be very susceptible and easily manipulated – even if that is not the adult's intention

- Children will create new “memories” simply by being repeatedly asked the same questions about an event

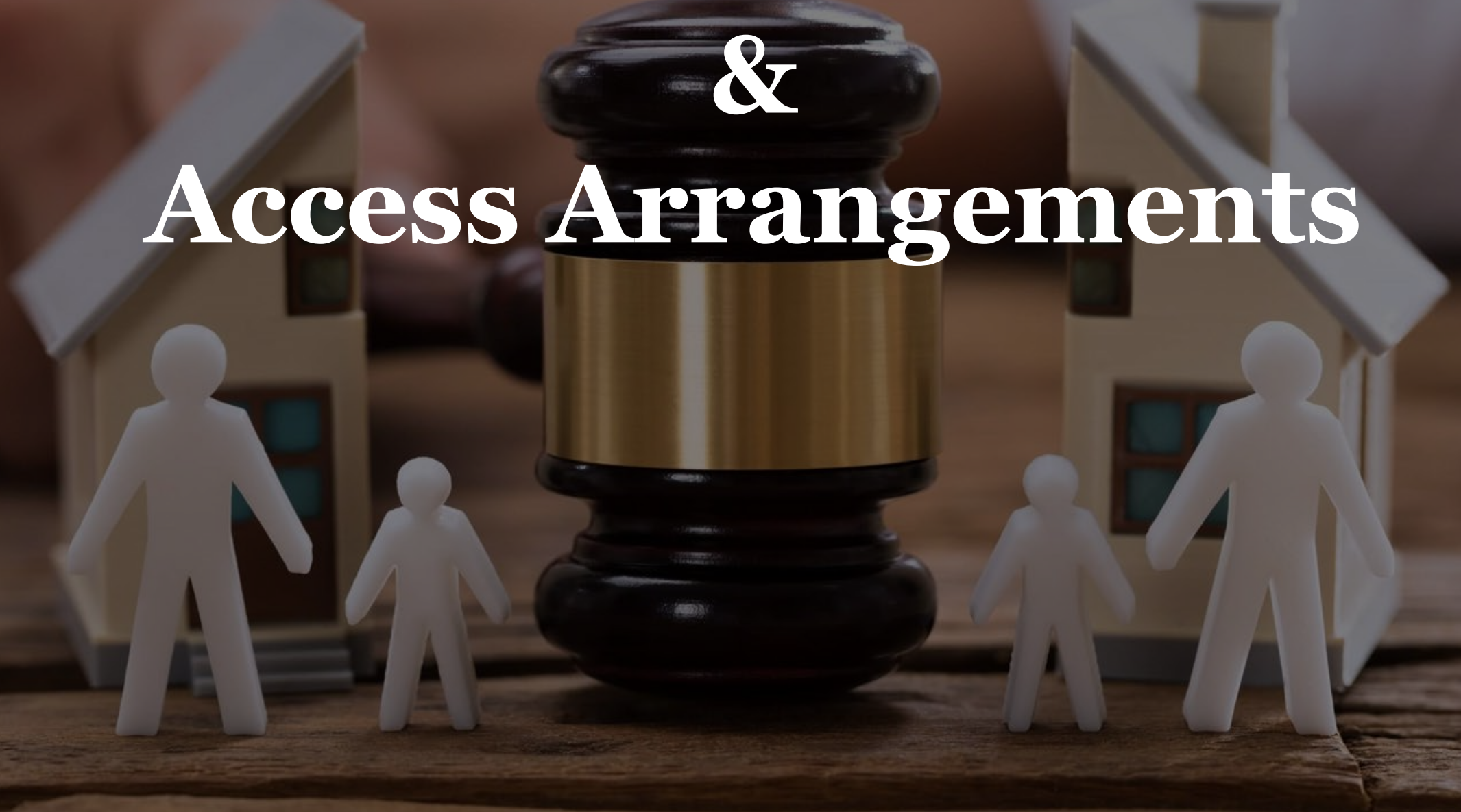
Important to Remember:

Understanding children's experiences, feelings, and behaviors is very difficult in early childhood!

When possible, rely on objective reporters with experience working with young children

- Consult teachers or social workers that know this child and can be objective
- It is not always about their current behaviors – it is about how their behaviors have changed

Considerations for Custody & Access Arrangements



Did the parents live together prior to separation AND are the relationship with each of adequate quality and supportiveness?

- *Strive to maintain both parent-child attachment relationships*
- *Encourage coparenting and the prevention of parent-child alliances that undermine the relationship of the other parent*

Have the parents never lived together AND has the child had the opportunity to attach to only one parent (common when paternity is being established legally)?

- *Strive to support the development of an attachment relationship to the new parental figure while maintaining the existing relationship*
- *Encourage coparenting and the prevention of parent-child alliances that undermine the relationship of the other parent*

Are there concerns about child maltreatment, substance abuse, mental illness, or domestic violence?

- *Evaluations of parental adequacy recommended*
- *Supervised or restricted visiting may be required to ensure safety*

CLINICAL REPORT Guidance for the Clinician in Rendering Pediatric Care

American Academy
of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

Helping Children and Families Deal With Divorce and Separation

George J. Cohen, MD, FAAP, Carol C. Weitzman, MD, FAAP, COMMITTEE ON PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS
OF CHILD AND FAMILY HEALTH, SECTION ON DEVELOPMENTAL AND BEHAVIORAL PEDIATRICS

abstract

For the past several years in the United States, there have been more than 800,000 divorces and parent separations annually, with over 1 million children affected. Children and their parents can experience emotional trauma before, during, and after a separation or divorce. Pediatricians

USING CHILD DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH TO MAKE APPROPRIATE CUSTODY AND ACCESS DECISIONS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Joan B. Kelly and Michael E. Lamb

Decisions regarding custody and access are most often made without reference to the research on child development, although this literature can be useful in conceptualizing children's needs after separation and divorce. Research on attachment processes, separation from attachment figures, and the roles of mothers and fathers in promoting psychosocial adjustment are reviewed in this article. It concludes with a discussion of the implications for young children's parenting schedules.

American Academy of Pediatrics

Family and Conciliation Courts Review

Resources: Divorce, Separation, Custody


Challenges Faced in Early Childhood

1. Family disruption, separation, & divorce
2. Physical & emotional deprivation (neglect)
3. Physical & emotional threat (abuse)

Consequences of Deprivation (neglect) and Threat (abuse)

There is no safety.
There is no stability.
There is no love.
There is no stimulation.





Questions & Break

Case Scenarios

Please spend 10-15 minutes discussing each scenario in your breakout group.

As you review each scenario, notice concerns related to early childhood development and answer the provided questions.

Scenario 1:

Child Age: 9-months-old

Context: Parents of baby stayed home from work the first 4 weeks of baby's life and were both involved in meeting baby's needs. Mother stayed home another 6 weeks after the father returned to work. Baby is now in a day care while parents work full-time. When baby was 6-months-old, father moved out, but still sees baby every day at mother's home.

Legal Details: Father files a custody action seeking primary custody because mother is a "workaholic" and he seeks a temporary custody order because mother won't let him have overnights. Mother states that overnights are harmful, as they disrupt the baby's routine.

Discussion Questions:

- What should the court consider to support the baby's positive development?
- How would you resolve the temporary custody request?
- What other information do you want before making a permanent custody decision?



Scenario 2:

Child Age: 6- to 8-weeks-old

Context: Unwed mother gives birth to child 2 weeks before her due date. Father and mother broke up before baby was born and mother does not tell him when she has the baby. He finds out 1 week after the baby is born and tries to communicate with mother so he can see his son, but she avoids his calls for a while. When baby is 5 weeks old, mother allows dad to see the baby at her home for an hour and agrees he can visit the baby at her home for one-hour visits when she is there to supervise. He shows up for every visit mom agrees to. Mother won't let him have any unsupervised time with the baby.

Legal Details: Father files a paternity and child custody action and is seeking joint custody. He has filed a motion for a temporary order for overnight visitation arguing that mom is interfering with his ability to form a relationship with his child.

Discussion Questions:

- What should the court consider to support the baby's positive development?
- How would you resolve the temporary custody request?
- What other information do you want before making a permanent custody decision?



Scenario 3:

Child Age: 3 years of age

Context: A permanent custody order for baby awarded joint legal and physical custody between mom and dad. Things worked well until girlfriend (GF) moved into dad's home when toddler was 2.5 years of age. GF is actively involved with the child and dad reports the child has a positive relationship with her.

Legal Details: Six months after GF moves in, mom has filed a motion to modify, arguing that since GF moved in, the child now has temper tantrums, cries when going to dad's residence, and is having more nighttime potty accidents than before. Dad says child's behavior is normal for the child's age and that the child settles down and is happy once at his house and cries when leaving his house to go to mom's. Assume there is a substantial change in circumstances affecting the child's welfare.

Discussion Questions:

- What child development issues related to the best interests of the child are raised in this scenario?
- What additional information would you like to know before deciding?



Resources

Local Children's Developmental Services Agencies (CDSAs, developmental assessments)

<https://bearly.nc.gov/index.php/contact/cdsa>

UNC Carolina Institute for Developmental Disabilities (developmental assessments)

<http://www.cidd.unc.edu/services/clinical/>

Duke Children's Evaluation Center (general mental health assessment and informed referral)

https://www.dukehealth.org/locations/duke-childrens-evaluation-center?utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=Directory+Management

Duke Child and Family Study Center (variety of treatment and assessment for children)

https://www.dukehealth.org/locations/duke-child-and-family-study-center?utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=Directory+Management

Duke Family Studies Program and Clinic (family therapy to address conflict)

https://www.dukehealth.org/locations/duke-family-studies-program-and-clinic?utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=Directory+Management

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