



Born to Grow—But at Their Own Pace

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Children are born to grow—physically, mentally, and emotionally. In all of these parameters, the pace of growth varies from rapid spurts to level plateaus.

Parents often worry about variations in growth feeling compelled to compare their child's development with that of others. If cousin Janie walks at 9 months but Jim is just beginning to take a step at 12 months, parents are worried. Red flags unfurl in mom's mind when two-year-old Bobby is just beginning to put words together while his now four-year-old sister was talking in sentences at age two. When eleven-year-old Susan's friend begins her menstrual period before Susan even has breast development, Susan's parents wonder.

It is a relief to realize that such variations are normal. Each stage of development has an average, but also an upper and a lower range of normal. Normal, then, is a range, not a point on a line.

We cannot make our children fit into a magic "average" box. We cannot stretch them to be taller, force knowledge into their heads, or demand emotional maturity. What we as parents can do is provide an atmosphere which allows and encourages growth. Then we relax and give our child room to development at his or her own pace.

Conditions that nurture optimal growth in all areas are:

- An affirming, loving emotional atmosphere where discipline is consistent and firm, but not harsh.
- A physical environment that provides good basic nutrition, adequate sleep, and vigorous physical activity
- A stimulating home life that provides bountiful verbal stimulation. Read. Read to and with your child. The importance of this verbal stimulation cannot be over emphasized for it is through communication that we realize our fullest potential as human beings.

When these basic conditions are provided the natural drive to learn and grow that resides in the soul of every child will propel him or her on a trajectory to meet their full potential.