



協康會
HEEP HONG SOCIETY

Raising Your Child

A Parents' Guide to
Early Childhood Development



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Preface

In Hong Kong, South Asian parents of children with special needs usually encounter great life challenges due to language barriers and cultural and environmental differences. It is hard for them to acquire childcare knowledge and access community resources to help their children. Unfortunately, in the absence of early intervention, the growth and development of their children is adversely affected. To meet their needs, Heep Hong Society took the initiative to launch a project titled “Support Services for Ethnic Minority Families of Children with Special Needs” for a period of two years (2009-2011) under the financial support of the Community Chest of Hong Kong.

The project aims at building up a support network among the ethnic minority families of children with special needs; equipping them with better parenting skills and raising their awareness of children’s developmental problems in the hope that intervention could be arranged at the first hint of those problems. Most importantly, the project facilitates the parents to tap community resources in bringing up their children.

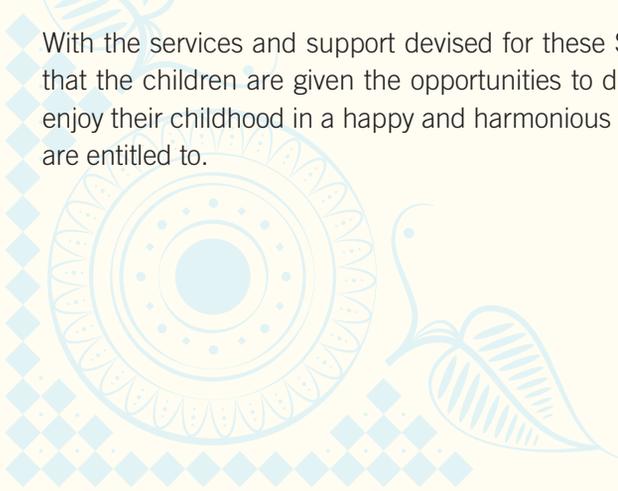
Under the project, a wide range of family support programmes including parents support groups, educational workshops and family outings are organised. Besides, an array of parent education packages revolving around childcare, language stimulation, gross motor and self-care training, cognitive and social development is produced in English, Urdu and Nepali. To further elevate our service quality, workshops are also conducted to enhance the cultural sensitivity of professionals serving the families.

With the services and support devised for these South Asian families, it is hoped that the children are given the opportunities to develop their fullest potential and enjoy their childhood in a happy and harmonious environment as what all children are entitled to.

Nancy Tsang

Director

August 2011





Chapter 1
Childcare

Introduction

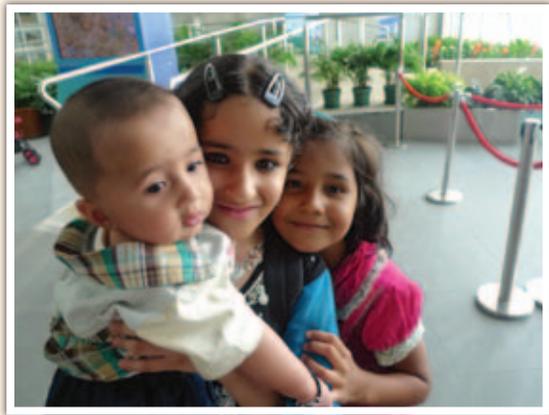
Child development is a gradual process. Although children go through almost the same stages of development, their pace is different as there are a number of factors such as genetic inheritance, personality and the environment affecting their growth.

To facilitate healthy development, children are normally require:

- parental love and care;
- appropriate stimulation;
- proper guidance and role modelling;
- a stable and secure environment for them to grow up;
- constant interaction; and
- early intervention at the first hint of developmental problems.



Childcare is not just about how parents nurture their children. In fact, it is also about legal duties. There are laws protecting children's rights and safety. Legal action would be taken against those parents who have abused their children physically, psychologically, or sexually or who have neglected the needs of their children. Therefore, all parents and care-givers should observe the laws relating to the protection of the rights of children.



A. Parenting

1. Parent-child relationship

It has been found that if there is a good parent-child relationship from early childhood, children are likely to develop good interpersonal relationships with better problem-solving skills.

One important goal of parenting is to teach children to develop self-discipline. There is no absolutely correct way to teach children to behave themselves. The child's temperament, the parenting style and the environment could influence the outcome. However, there are principles that parents could refer to.

When children are able to walk and talk, they become independent and parents at this stage may find them uncontrollable as the children may test the limits of the adults and go against their instructions. Therefore, it is important to teach them what they can and cannot do. As every child is unique, some may need more time to understand and follow discipline. Therefore, parents have to be patient, knowing that every child is an individual.

2. Tips for positive parenting

- At the baby stage, when they are crying, the parents should attend to their needs promptly to give them a sense of security. It could be by means of physical contact such as cuddling or maintaining eye contact.
- Set a time on a regular basis to play with the children to strengthen the bond between the parent and the child.
- Do not give children an order or command without yourself being able to enforce it at the same time.
- State clearly what desirable or undesirable behaviour is.
- Be consistent, by rewarding or punishing the same behaviour in the same way.
- Make it clear and be very specific about what the undesirable behaviour is. For example, it is not enough to say, 'The room is messy.' Instead, the parents could say, 'You have put a lot of toys on the floor.'
- Reward desirable behaviour by verbal praise, a hug or a sticker. The focus of the praise should be on the efforts made by the child instead of on the outcome.
- Make it clear what children are to expect if they display undesirable behaviour.
- In order to manage children's misbehaviour, it is necessary for the parents to set clear and consistent limits to help them understand the demands from adults. If the kids are allowed to do whatever they like with few clear limits, it will be far more difficult to exercise control when they have developed unacceptable behavioural patterns.
- Look for gradual changes in behaviour. Do not expect too much. Praise behaviour that is near to the set goal.
- Parents should not disagree over discipline between themselves in front of their children.

Chapter 2

Language Stimulation

Introduction

Language development is the process by which children come to understand and use language to communicate during early childhood.

Speech and language skills are essential if children are to express themselves clearly and understand others. They are closely related to the development of cognitive, social and emotional skills. Poorly developed speech and language skills can affect the development of pre-academic skills as well as reading and writing. Suffering from speech and language disorders can also have negative social effects, especially among young children. Those with speech and language disorders can be targets of teasing and bullying, which can result in a child's lower self-esteem.

As children begin to develop a more complicated language system, they produce longer sentences that require more oral-motor control. By the time they are ready to go to school, most children have speech that is easily understood by an unfamiliar listener. However, some children might take longer to develop their speech to a level where everything they say can be understood.

C. Causes of Speech and Language Problems

There are many causes of speech and language problems, both environmental and physical. Common circumstances that can result in speech and language problems include:

1. Hearing problems

Children learn to speak by hearing others speak. They also need to be able to hear themselves so that they can improve their own attempts at words. When children suffer from ear infections or other hearing problems, they may have trouble in articulating as well as understanding, imitating, and using language.

2. Developmental disorders

Developmental disorders such as autism, mental retardation, etc. can cause a delay in language acquisition. Children with these disorders may have difficulty in learning the meaning of words and how to use words in sentences.

3. Genetic inheritance

It is common for late speech development to run in the family. One or both parents or other relatives might have had speech problems when they were young. However, children with slow speech development do not always have parents who had the same problem.

4. Bad speech habits

When children are beginning to speak, they say many words incorrectly. If they are allowed to repeat an incorrect pattern for a long time, they will learn it as a habit. If uncorrected, the bad speech will persist.

Although these factors are the most common, they are by no means the only causes of delay in speech or language development.

D. Characteristics of Children with Speech and Language Problems

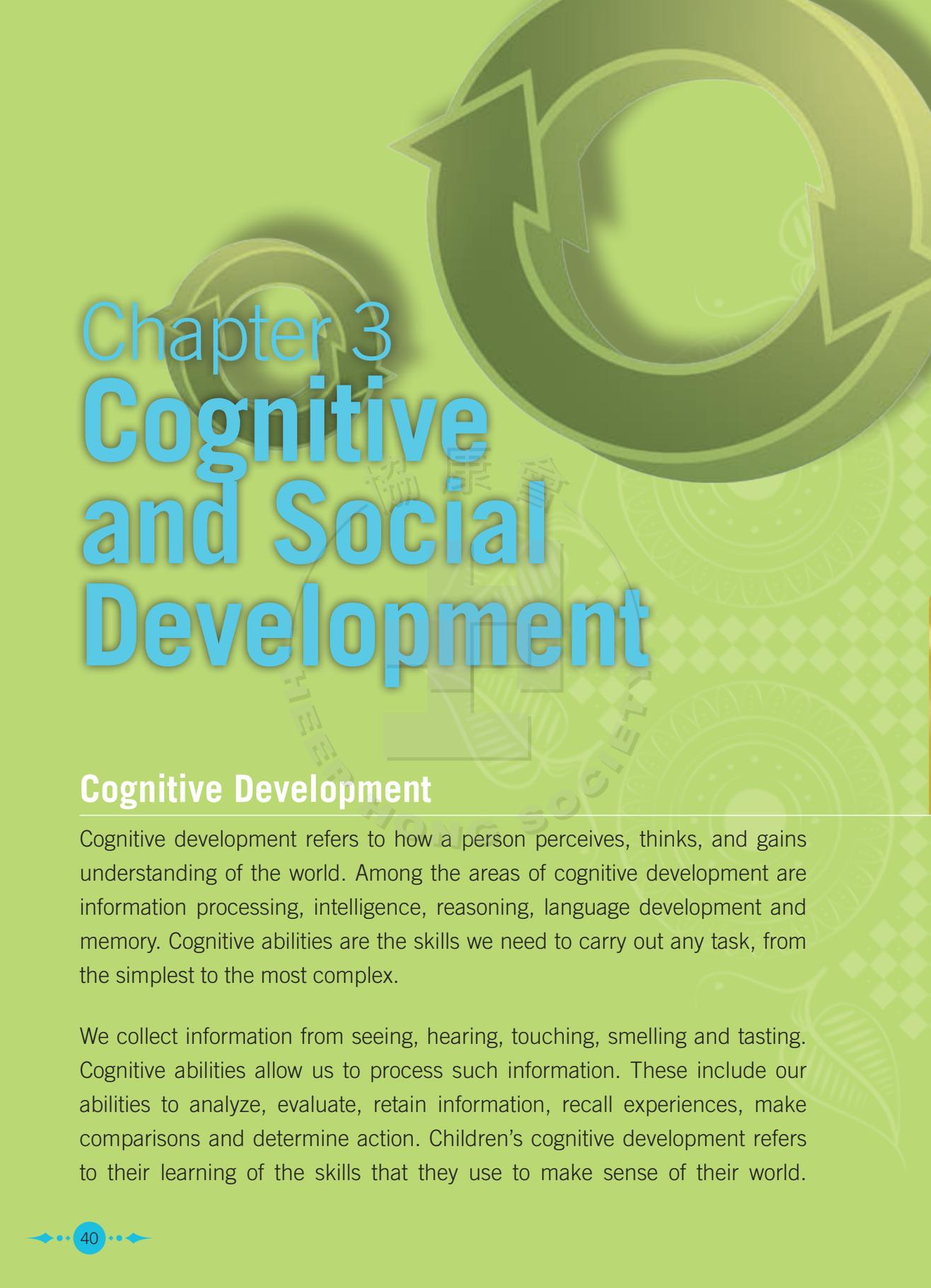


- Unable to follow directions.
- Failing to understand abstract expressions, complex sentence structures, and unfamiliar concepts.
- Having limited vocabulary and failing to express themselves clearly.
- Producing simple or uncommon sentence structures, with words and phrases in sentences mixed, omitted or distorted.
- The content of their speech being out of context, with improper use of words. Their speech being unclear or incomprehensible.

E. How Parents Can Encourage Children's Language Development

- Even before a child can speak, it is important for adults to talk to him / her, for example, by explaining what they are doing together. Remember to leave pauses so that the child has the chance to respond.
- Many daily activities can be used to encourage children's language development, for example, chatting during mealtimes.
- Parents can begin conversation around familiar daily topics by saying, 'Tell me something you did at school today.' This can provide opportunities to listen, learn new vocabulary, speak or ask questions.
- Continue talking about anything but do not dominate the conversation. Do not end the conversation quickly by giving answers. Keep the children interacting and give them time to initiate and respond.
- Use open and leading questions to help children think and organise the content of their speech to enhance their skills.





Chapter 3

Cognitive and Social Development

Cognitive Development

Cognitive development refers to how a person perceives, thinks, and gains understanding of the world. Among the areas of cognitive development are information processing, intelligence, reasoning, language development and memory. Cognitive abilities are the skills we need to carry out any task, from the simplest to the most complex.

We collect information from seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting. Cognitive abilities allow us to process such information. These include our abilities to analyze, evaluate, retain information, recall experiences, make comparisons and determine action. Children's cognitive development refers to their learning of the skills that they use to make sense of their world.



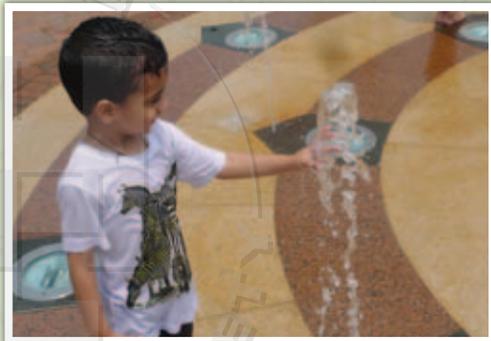
From birth, infants learn to distinguish things through the five senses. The learning ability of toddlers progresses along with the development of their memory, attention span and language. At preschool age, children develop concentration, reasoning, imagination and abstract concepts such as numbers for calculation and letters for expression.

Although cognitive skills are partly inborn, many of them are learned. When this development does not occur naturally, cognitive weaknesses appear, which would affect an individual's capacity to learn, and are difficult to correct without specific and appropriate intervention. Like sensory and motor skills, cognitive skills can be practised and improved with appropriate training.

A. Five Aspects of Cognitive Development

1. Imagination

This is the ability to form mental images or concepts of objects that are not present, or that do not exist. With imagination, it is easy to conjure up images such as a beach, family members, school or food. The imagination forms the basis of many activities which we find enjoyable.



2. Creativity

This is the expression of imaginative ideas in a personal and unique way.

3. Concentration

This is the skill of focusing all the attention on one task. It is necessary for successful learning to take place. Children especially need to be trained to focus their attention as this can help develop their skills of concentration and perseverance. Children can be encouraged to concentrate on activities if

- the activities are at an appropriate level.
- the activities are presented in an interesting way.
- praise and encouragement come with the activities.

B. Developmental Milestones

The stages are variable. They are the approximate times when certain abilities are observable. There is no strict timetable for acquiring certain abilities as there is a wide range of what is considered normal. The milestones provide a rough idea of the level of development of children during the preschool years.



0-6 months

- From birth, infants begin learning to use their senses to explore the world around them. They can focus on and follow moving objects, distinguish the pitch and volume of sound, see all colours and distinguish their hue and brightness.
- By 3 months old, infants can recognise faces, imitate the facial expressions of others such as smiling and frowning and respond to familiar sounds.



6-8 months

- Infants begin to understand how the world around them works.
- Imitate sounds, enjoy hearing their own voices, recognise parents, fear strangers, distinguish between animate and inanimate objects.
- Realise that if they drop an object, they can pick it up again.
- Can also recognise their own names.

C. How Parents Can Encourage Children's Cognitive Development

Cognitive impairment is the general loss or lack of development of cognitive abilities. It is quite widely accepted that a child's intellectual ability is determined by a combination of heredity and environment. Although a child's genetic inheritance cannot be changed, there are definite ways that parents can enhance their child's intellectual development through environmental changes. They can provide stimulating learning materials and experiences from an early age, read to and talk with their children and help them explore the world around them.

Parents can engage children in activities that enhance their cognitive development. As children learn in a very concrete and hands-on manner, direct play and interaction are the best ways of teaching them concepts. There are many interesting concrete skills children can practise to raise their concentration, memory, abstract thinking and decision-making abilities.





Chapter 4

Gross Motor and Self-care Skills

Gross Motor Skills

Gross motor skills are the abilities required to control the body for all movements like sitting, crawling, walking, jumping, running, sport activities and other daily functions like lifting heavy objects. The skills involve large movements of the arms, legs or the entire body. As children grow, they pass many milestones, or stages, in their motor skill development, which indicates their maturity. Neurological control and physical build are two factors contributing to the development of gross motor skills.

Gross motor skills development starts from the central part of the body to the extremities. Head and trunk control is gained first, followed by control of the shoulders, upper arms and hands. Upper body control is developed next, followed by the hips, pelvis and legs.





4-5 years

- Can stand on one foot for 5 seconds without losing balance.
- Can jump forward 10 times in succession.
- Can jump with two feet over a hurdle with a height up to his / her knees.
- Can catch an 8-inch plastic ball thrown from 6 feet away with both hands.
- Can run and kick a stationary ball without a pause in between.



5-6 years

- Can stand on one leg and maintain balance for 10 seconds.
- Can drop a tennis ball on the floor with one hand and catch it with both hands.
- Can hop on one foot (using either foot) 8 times consecutively.
- Can hit a balloon upwards 4 times with alternate hands.
- Can hit a basketball single-handedly 3 times consecutively.





B. Signs of Clumsiness

Developmental coordination disorder affects motor skills. With such disorder, the children may have problems in learning new advanced motor skills such as riding a bike, learning to swim, drawing, writing properly and playing ball games. They display clumsiness in physical coordination, balance and rhythmic movements, and their responses are slow.

When a child's disability hinders his / her gross motor functioning, he/she might not advance in the sequence typical of a normal developing child. If parents find their children show any of the signs below, they should pay more attention. Seeking professional advice is the most effective way to identify this developmental problem early.

1. At preschool age

- Unable to walk by 15 months.
- Walking only on the toes and not walking properly on the heel and the toes after walking for several months.
- Falling easily while walking, and this stage lasts longer than other children of the same age.
- Requiring a longer time to walk up and down the stairs during development.

