

# Developmental Age



## *We often hear the term ‘developmental delay’ but what does it actually mean.*

Developmental delay is not a term I habitually use, because it is non-specific ie: it’s just a general term which adds nothing to our understanding of the child’s performance. However, I do use the term ‘developmental age’ because it tells us something, it tells us what age level the child is operating at.

## *Why is This Useful?*

Ultimately, a child’s developmental age tells us the point at which their development has been disrupted and their performance has been limited to. When we understand the age level a child is operating at, their actions and behaviours suddenly make absolute sense. If a 10 year old child has the developmental age of 6 years, then their acting, behaving and performing as a 6 year old makes perfect sense. It should also make sense that expecting them to perform at a 10 year old level place a tremendous amount of pressure on them, to do something they are just not able to.



## *Identifying a Child’s Developmental Age*

To identify a child’s developmental age we use three criteria. I use another in the Visual Perceptual Evaluation and that is the developmental age of their task performance but, typically it is extremely difficult to do this outside the therapy situation because the tasks they are performing are just too complex and complicated. However, these three criteria provide enough information to identify developmental age. What is discovered in the Visual Perceptual Therapy only confirms this. These areas are

- Handwriting
- Speech and language

- General maturity

These areas of performance are particularly sensitive to developmental disruptions. Performance in these areas needs to become particularly refined, in order for any of us to be able to perform various tasks and fully express ourselves. These are not simple tasks to perform; they are highly refined and sophisticated, relying on our ability to combine various facets of our total performance together, in order to be able to generate them. And, when we consider that the breakdown in performance is happening at a very subtle level within the totality of our performance, the consequences permeate through all outcomes ie: those everyday tasks we observe the child performing, and not just in handwriting, speech and language and maturity.

## *Handwriting*

As a child ages, their exploration of the world requires an increasing refinement of performance. Refinement of fine motor performance occurs as motor function is required to become increasingly refined and focused, relative to the development of our visual perceptual performance ie: what we see and perceive and the desire to engage more fully in life, drives us to develop an ever increasingly refined level of motor performance. Consequently, we can say that issues with handwriting are always indicative of a visual perceptual deficit, simply because fine motor performance only develops relative to visual perceptual performance. It then becomes obvious, that practicing handwriting is only a symptomatic intervention and does not address the cause of the problem.



Because of this inter-relationship between motor function and visual perceptual performance, handwriting becomes an excellent indicator of developmental age, where the age level the handwriting is representative of, is also representative of developmental age.

## *Speech and Language*

Speech and language represents an interesting combination of many human performance components – neurological, cognitive, physiological, psychological, social and emotional performance. However, on the visual perceptual level, particularly language, is representative of the requirement that we form inter-relationships between pieces of information, in order to make sense of that information; but also, in order to generate a level of functional performance. Most children of 5 and 6 years demonstrate a halting, fractured mode of communication in which they skip around all over the place, in an attempt to tell



us about their experiences. We are often left asking questions or suggesting things, to fill in the gaps and to assist them to become more proficient in their communications. It is our capacity to associate such levels of performance with the age level they typically occur at, which gives us the ability to identify developmental age on the basis of speech and language.

## *General Maturity*

Again, maturity is comprised of an eclectic mix of different areas of performance and, as such is also extremely sensitive to a breakdown in the subtle levels of visual perceptual performance. We have all had experiences of suggesting a child is a certain age and discovering they are not. We may think a tall child is older than they are, but their general demeanour, behaviour and actions will also be associated with particular age levels as well. I recall one mother of a 10 year old and a 6 year old, that it was like having two 6 year olds in the house. She had already identified the developmental age of her son, without understanding its relevance to his overall level of performance.



## *Summary*

Once you have identified your child's developmental age, it is useful to look around and see how they are being required to perform at a level that is developmentally beyond them. Usually school is one of the first such areas to come under scrutiny and, unfortunately, there is not much most of us are able to do about influencing how schools operate. However, there is something you can do to help your child. You can contact us at **VisualPerceptual** and arrange for your child to access the Visual Perceptual Therapy. It is available via Skype, all around the world and is delivered by a registered occupational therapist. Most children only need 3 or 4 sessions and their struggles resolve.

*Welcome to my world, the world of visual perceptual performance*

*Natoya Rose*  
*Occupational Therapist*



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Email: [info@visualperceptual.com](mailto:info@visualperceptual.com)

Website: [www.visualperceptual.com](http://www.visualperceptual.com)

