

Determining a Child's Developmental Age

Determining a child's developmental age is probably one of the most useful things any of us can do, because it tells us the age level a child is actually performing at.



The reason why it is so useful to determine a child's developmental age is that it gives us insight into the age level they are performing at. For example, if a child of 7 is demonstrating a developmental age of 4 years, we are then able to understand why performing educational tasks such as reading, and writing is so difficult for them. We are then also able to identify the tasks the child is performing, which then can form the basis of helping them move forward and improving upon their overall performance.

It is relatively easy to determine a child's developmental age, and this is because we know the different skills and abilities that are associated with different age groups in childhood.



DETERMINING A CHILD'S DEVELOPMENTAL AGE

We use three areas of performance to identify a child's developmental age.

- Handwriting
- Speech and language
- General maturity

These areas are particularly sensitive to developmental disruptions, because of the degree of refinement in performance it takes to perform or generate them. Despite what we may think, most tasks children struggle with are highly refined and sophisticated and are not as simple or easy as we may believe.

HANDWRITING

Handwriting is one of the most complex tasks we will ever undertake. It is so much more than motor function alone, and the list of things we are actually doing when we are writing is huge, with most of these things occurring before the child ever picks up their pencil.

As any child ages, their performance and competency should naturally improve. In handwriting we should see them demonstrating increasing precision and control over their pen or pencil, while producing longer and ever more complex pieces of work. This progress should be obvious to all.

You will probably be very aware of the quality of your child's letter formation and how they hold their pencil, relative to age related performance. Because of this, we can have a child write their name and immediately know if their performance is age appropriate or not. If that performance is less than expected for their age, then we can assign that age level to them. This age should also be the age we see in their speech and language and in their general maturity.



SPEECH AND LANGUAGE

Speech and language are also very complex skills. We call on many subskills, abilities and processes in order to speak coherently, and our ability is also increasingly refined through our early childhood years.

Speech and language development is also clearly related to the age of the child. We know that a child of 3 years communicates entirely differently to a child of 8 years; consequently, we are able to associate different levels of performance to different age levels, allowing us to determine what age level the child is performing at.



GENERAL MATURITY

Maturity is a mix of different areas of performance, and it is also extremely sensitive to any breakdown in core skills, abilities and processes.

We all tend to make determinations about the age of children, based on their general demeanour. Most of us have had experiences of thinking a child is a certain age and discovering we were wrong. We may think a tall child, or a high performing child is older than they are. However, overall, the age level we tend to associate with general demeanour, behaviour and actions is typically quite

accurate, especially when we link this to handwriting and speech and language performance.

OVERVIEW

Once you have identified the level your child is performing at it is very likely that a lot of what they are doing will become understandable. I determine the developmental age of all my clients, especially all those up into their early 20's. I do this because it allows me to understand what level they are performing at and it is also one of the outcome measures I use, ensuring the client's developmental age catches up to their actual age.

One of the important things for all of us to make sure of is that a child is not expected to perform tasks that are beyond their capability. When children get the help they need it is truly amazing to see them catch up to their peers and to perform at a level they were not previously capable of. In my experience it typically doesn't take long for this to happen.

Natoya Rose
Occupational Therapist

*With that, I would like to welcome you to my world,
the world of visual perceptual performance*

