

MAYA *Smart*

GPS for Parents

YOUR PATH TO INFORMED DECISION-MAKING



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*“Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves,
or we know where we can find information upon it.”*

- SAMUEL JOHNSON

When you're feeling stuck, overwhelmed, or confused at any point in your parenting journey, use GPS (**g**uidelines, **p**ersonal observations, and **s**pecialists, that is) to find your way.

Literally, stop and take a moment to assess what's going on with your child. Consider their age and/or grade and then ground yourself in credible reference material, such as developmental milestone guidelines or kindergarten readiness checklists or state learning standards. Take some time to write out some personal thoughts and observations about your child in the moment, relative to what you've read. Then consult with a relevant specialist for extra guidance.

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Step 1: Guidelines

Consult well-researched lists of developmental milestones, school readiness checklists, and grade-level learning standards for ideas on what to expect of kids when. The Centers for Disease Control, the National Institutes of Health, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the National Association for the Education of Young Children are all great starting points.

Just keep in mind that these sources provide useful perspective on typical development—not an ideal path, but an average of many paths. Once you’ve evaluated the guidance, reflect on the question below.

Did anything surprise you or stand out as you reviewed the milestones?

When reading through the CDC milestones, I noticed my son should be saying “mama” and “dada” by age one. He’s about to turn one but I think he’s closer to the nine-month milestone of just making a lot of different sounds that are close to “mama” or “dada” but not forming specific words.

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Step 2: Personal experience

You bring considerable knowledge and expertise to the table, and it's maximized when you consciously observe your child and your home, purposefully documenting what you see, hear, and experience. Pay attention to the gut feelings, recurring worries, or even feelings of calm and positivity that are all part of daily life with kids.

Keeping the milestones and learning standards in mind, in which areas is your child excelling? In which areas might they need more support?

Write down your observations. List your questions.

Reflect on what you've learned and discovered.

He's very vocal and reacts appropriately when we speak to him and call his name. I can tell he's interested in what we're saying and he's trying to communicate with us. But I'm not sure how to better support him. I read books to him but I'm not sure if I could be doing more.

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Step 3: Specialist insights

Now, once you're coming from a place of basic knowledge and awareness, if you sense there's an issue in your child's development or you just want to learn more, tap into other people who can help. Sometimes this requires you to expand your network or venture outside your comfort zone. Ask your pediatrician about the milestone or bring the topic up in a parents' group. This third step of reaching out, asking questions, and raising issues is critical. It sparks the habit of engaging with others around parenting, counteracts feelings of loneliness, and lessens worries about outside judgment.

Given all that you've learned and observed about your child's age and stage, who can you reach out to with questions or for referrals or support?

I want to ask my pediatrician about these milestones to see if I should be concerned or if there's anything I can try at home to help his speech progress. I'd also like to refer back to Reading for Our Lives and other literacy resources for tips on reading in an engaging way.



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Did anything surprise you or stand out as you reviewed the milestones?

The CDC developmental milestones say a 5 year old should be able to keep a conversation going with more than three back-and-forth exchanges. This surprised me because a lot of our conversations feel very one-sided. I'm not sure what questions I should be asking to get her attention and prompt her to respond.

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She's really creative and is always making up stories. When she's using her imagination, she's talkative but she's less focused and detailed when we're having conversations about real-life situations.

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Given all that you've learned and observed about your child's age and stage, who can you reach out to with questions or for referrals or support?

I'm going to look into speech and language services and support in my community to find out how I can better support my daughter's communication. I want to know if working on this at home is sufficient or if we need a more intensive intervention. I don't want to make this call alone.