

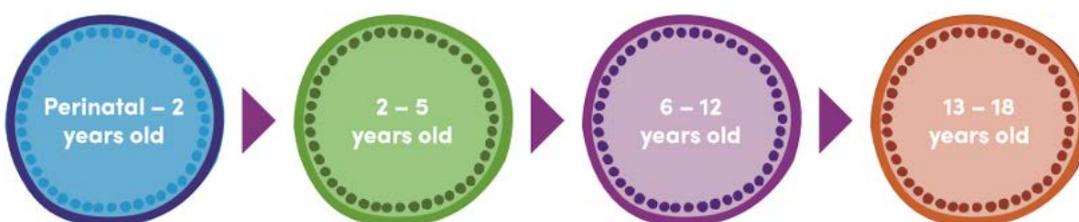
# Child Development Stages



There are many elements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island child development, each of them elements intertwined. These connected elements ensure positive social and emotional wellbeing for the 'whole child', who is supported on many different levels to grow up with safety, consistency and with strong cultural identity.

In general, development happens in the same order in most children, but babies develop their skills at different ages or times.

## Four developmental stages



From an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective, having a focus on the development of social and emotional wellbeing is of great importance for sustainability of culture and traditional practices.

Aboriginal identity plays a significant role in a child's sense of self, belonging and purpose in the world. The more connected a child is to their culture, language, Country and kinship structure, the stronger the child's social and emotional wellbeing will be.



***'My emotions and connections to my family start from the day I am born. This means my experiences now will impact my resilience for the rest of my life.'***

*'Baby's first 1000 days (from conception until two years old) is the time when we form our strongest bond with baby. Culture starts being instilled in baby at this time, whilst in the womb. It is the time when building blocks for baby's life are being made, the foundations for a strong mind, a strong body, good wellbeing and spiritual connections to Country and family.'*<sup>1</sup>

*'Building blocks for baby's life are made in the first 1000 days. For thousands of years, mothers and traditional midwives have passed down knowledge about pregnancy and birth. For many of us, this traditional knowledge has been disrupted. These days, we rely on our mothers, aunties, midwives and doctors to help us through this time.'*<sup>1</sup>



***'It is important for my parents to encourage me to be inquisitive and explore the world around me as it helps me to grow and develop.'***

As Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children learn to communicate with family members, community and other children, their brains develop faster than any other time of their lives. Relationships and experiences are vital, letting children know that their world is safe and secure, and that they are loved. This stage also lays the foundations for learning, healthy habits and behaviours.<sup>2</sup>



***'Attending school is important because it helps me to build up life skills. This helps me learn how to become more capable, solve problems, control my emotions and form friendships.'***

A lot happens for children during these middle years as they begin school and build their social, emotional and thinking skills. They are more able to express their care and understanding of others, but still get frustrated by tricky emotions such as envy or jealousy.<sup>3,4</sup>

Children start to build their self-identity throughout these middle childhood years, and work out the kind of person they want to be. This self-identity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children involves the development of their cultural identity, based on their community's customs and practices, such as language, dress, food and ceremonies.<sup>5</sup>



***'Exploring rites of passage, learning about men's and women's business helps me to find my identity. It's hard for me to make "adult" decisions at a time when I am still developing.'***

Adolescents experience profound changes in how they look and feel. The release of hormones can make emotions feel stronger, which can make adolescents act-out or put themselves in risky situations.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, adolescence can also be a time where they face important life questions like, 'Who am I?' and, 'Where do I belong?' This is when a teenager's understandings of racial identity are affected by external factors such as the media, police and teachers, as well as their own cultural group experiences.

Creating early intervention practices that reclaim cultural and ecological connections, kinship, songs, dance, language and stories from our ancestors are vital for our children's and grandchildren's social and emotional wellbeing.

We know that connection to our culture, family, community, Country and spirit are all protective factors that will ensure positive outcomes for children.

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## References

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