



PART 2 | CHAPTER 5

THE OLDER CHILD: 36 MONTHS AND OLDER

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Milestones for Feeding: 36 Months and Older*

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SECTION 5.1: IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES FOR FEEDING: 36 MONTHS AND OLDER





THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

From 36 months and older, children continue to make strides across all areas of development. During this age range, children are showing increasing physical strength, mobility, agility and coordination in their bodies. They are expressing themselves using more complex sentences, which are based on more complex feelings and thoughts. Older children in this age range demonstrate robust relationships, finding a greater interest in making friends and playing together. In addition, they continue to enjoy doing many daily activities such as washing their hands and feeding themselves all on their own. Because all areas of development are connected and influenced by one another, it is important to view a child’s development holistically. When working to support children 36 months and older who may need extra help with feeding, it is critical to consider all areas of development.



For more information about each developmental domain, refer to the Introduction.

EXAMPLE OF A HOLISTIC VIEW OF FEEDING:

DEVELOPMENTAL AREA	DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES (SKILLS)
 Adaptive	Child receives good rest at night and may or may not take a nap.
 Motor Communication Cognitive Adaptive	Child washes her hands after being told that it’s “time for lunch.”
 Social-Emotional Vision	Child shows delight when she sees the food being brought to the table.
 Social-Emotional Communication Hearing	Child responds to her caregiver’s questions during meals (“Do you want more rice or chicken?”) using spoken words.



Adaptive | Motor | Cognitive |
Social-Emotional

Child insists on feeding herself using her hands and a spoon and says, “I did it!” when she is successful.



Communication | Cognitive | Social-Emotional

Child helps wash her hands and face and she cleans up her spot after mealtimes.

Feeding is a complex process, and all areas of development are involved. Even when just one area is not working well, it can create challenges for a child and her caregivers. Therefore, it is critical to look at children broadly in all areas to understand their abilities and their needs. By understanding these basic milestones of development (also known as “skills”) and how they work together, caregivers can become experts at knowing when development is going well and when there may be a problem. Additionally, because skills are interconnected, it’s a great reminder that there are always opportunities to support every area of development during simple, everyday activities such as mealtimes.



The earlier challenges can be identified, the sooner support can be provided, resulting in happier and healthier children and caregivers.



Remember: Development is a process and there is a large range of times when babies and children gain skills. Caregivers should become familiar with these milestones to best meet the needs of the children they serve.

Friendship and play are essential for robust child development.



COMMON DEVELOPMENTAL SKILLS^{23,24,26,31}

CHILDREN 36 MONTHS OF AGE AND OLDER:

Adaptive: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Requests for food to be passed at a meal ⇒ Serves self at a meal ⇒ Puts away dirty dishes in a sink, bucket or dishwasher ⇒ Cleans up spills and messes at a meal
Communication: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ States full name ⇒ Answers questions when told a short story or idea ⇒ Uses facial expressions and body language to express emotions ⇒ Uses more complex sentences made up of multiple words
Fine and Gross Motor: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Feeds self using utensils and drinks from an open cup ⇒ Hops and balances on one foot ⇒ Walks down stairs alternating feet
Cognitive: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Understands “more” and “less” ⇒ Counts to at least 20 ⇒ Recounts familiar stories
Social-Emotional: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Shares items (still may need support from time to time) ⇒ Returns objects to their appropriate locations ⇒ Shows pride in accomplishments ⇒ Shows empathy for others
Vision: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Copies making different shapes ⇒ Identifies different colors ⇒ Recognizes letters/print and ready to begin reading
Hearing: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Distinguishes differences in speech sounds ⇒ Repeats more complex words and lengthier sentences ⇒ Marks sounds at the beginning, middle and ends of words ⇒ Talks clearly so that others understand most of what is said



SECTION 5.2: BASIC FEEDING GUIDELINES FOR THE CHILD 36 MONTHS AND OLDER

TYPICAL FEEDING DEVELOPMENT

A child's feeding skills are directly related to her entire body's movement and overall development. The "hips and the lips" are connected. How a child holds her body upright in a chair, feeds herself using fingers and utensils, expresses her ideas using words and responds to directions from caregivers during a mealtime are all examples of how the entire body is connected when a child eats. Therefore, if there is a problem in even one area of development, there is a chance feeding development may be disrupted.

When feeding development is going well, a typical progression of skills for a child 36 months and older can look like this:

AGE IN MONTHS	TYPICAL FEEDING SKILLS AND DEVELOPMENT
36 Months and Older	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Drinking from a variety of different cups without support ○ Drinking from a variety of different straws without support ○ Using fingers and utensils to feed self without support ○ Eating food textures without support ○ Washing hands and face before and after meals without support ○ Cleaning up dishes and area after meals with minimal to no support ○ Showing mastery of oral-motor skills for eating and drinking

By 36 months of age, most children have mastery of skills that allow them to be successful and independent eaters. They eat a diverse array of food flavors and textures. Additionally, children are now feeding themselves on their own during meals using fingers, cups, straws and utensils — while also creating less of a mess.

In order for children to successfully reach these exciting milestones, it's essential that caregivers have a general idea of what to expect from children during this age range, but also in the years that came before. It's helpful that caregivers have a solid understanding of all child development so that they can appropriately monitor and support the advancement of each child's skills.

In the following sections, we will share the different ways to feed children 36 months and older using cups, straws and utensils.



For more information on types of cups, straws, and spoons, refer to Chapter 1 and Appendix 9G.



CUP DRINKING

By 36 months and older, most children should be successfully drinking from cups. Children should have experience and success drinking from a wide variety of cups: open cups, sippy cups and cups of varying shapes, sizes and weights. If cup drinking opportunities are postponed (after 12 months) or if a child is provided with limited opportunities to practice, it can make the process of cup drinking much more difficult as well as impact oral-motor skill development.



For more information on cup drinking, refer to Chapters 1, 2 and 3.

STRAW DRINKING³⁰

By 36 months and older, most children should have had the opportunity to practice drinking from a straw. Additionally, it's valuable for children to have experience and success drinking from a wide variety of straws: short, long, narrow, thick. If straw drinking opportunities are postponed (after 12 months) or if a child is provided with limited opportunities to practice, it can make the process of drinking from a straw more difficult and limit oral-motor skill development.



For more information on straw drinking, refer to Chapters 1 and 3.



It is by this age that the role of the caregiver shifts to supporting a child's ongoing confidence and independent use of drinking liquids from cups and straws on a regular basis.

SOLID FOODS

By 36 months old, most children should be successfully eating a balanced diet of whole solid foods. They should have opportunities to eat solid foods each day, and they should be feeding themselves using fingers and utensils. If eating and self-feeding opportunities are postponed (after 6 months) or if a child is provided with limited opportunities to practice, it can make the processes of eating and self-feeding much more difficult as well as impact oral-motor and fine motor skill development.



On average, children will master eating solid foods by around 2-3 years old. This means that by 36 months old, children should have all of the oral-motor and fine motor skills to eat table foods.



GROWING INDEPENDENCE

As children in this age range are now regularly eating a wide variety of food textures and larger amounts of food at meals, they also show a strong desire to feed themselves using their hands and utensils. They are also becoming much better (and less messy) when doing so. Finger feeding and self-feeding using utensils continue to be highly encouraged with children 36 months and older, as these experiences provide them the chance to explore foods and become comfortable with them prior to tasting and eating them. Plus, when children are able to feed themselves on their own, they often eat more, giving them a sense of pride and accomplishment.

PICKY EATING⁷

Children 36 months and older may show tendencies for food pickiness; however, it is typically not as strong as what is seen from 24-36 months old. Another picky eating phase is sometimes seen between 7-8 years old. This happens because during this age children have a huge burst in their cognitive (brain) growth, which makes trying new foods stressful and more challenging for their bodies. For the most part, children 36 months and older are more open and accepting of new flavors and textures.



Children this age must often be exposed to a food 20-plus times before deciding to eat it. Therefore, eating new foods can take time and patience.



For more information on solid foods, refer to Chapters 1, 2 and 3.

For more information on supporting picky eating, refer to Chapter 4.



KEY POINTS FOR THIS AGE

From 36 months and older, children continue to display progress in all areas of development. They are now master eaters and independent self-feeders. Although children may not need as much support as they grow older, caregivers still play a vital role in offering care on a daily basis from showing a child how to eat a new food, to making them feel comfortable and proud while eating and cleaning up after themselves.

IMPORTANT POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- ① Even the development of the older child remains connected and skills are dependent on one another. Caregivers must continue to monitor the older child's skills to make sure they continue to stay on track.
- ② Caregivers should expect that children this age, when given ample opportunity, can typically eat all foods and feed themselves independently using a variety of methods such as fingers, utensils, cups and straws.
- ③ Giving children opportunities to feed themselves during mealtimes is important. This helps them reach mastery and gives them feelings of pride and accomplishment.



SECTION 5.3: FEEDING POSITIONING FOR THE CHILD 36 MONTHS AND OLDER

THE IMPORTANCE OF FEEDING POSITIONING

The way we position a child during a feeding is very important. Certain positions can make eating and self-feeding much easier for a child, and some positions can make it more challenging and even unsafe.



Good positioning has many benefits for children and caregivers such as:

- ✓ More timely feedings
- ✓ Increased success eating different types of foods
- ✓ Increased intake
- ✓ Increased success with self-feeding
- ✓ Improved growth and nutrition
- ✓ Reduced occurrence of illness and death
- ✓ Children and caregivers are happier and mealtimes become a positive experience
- ✓ When positioning is good, children and caregivers are happier, and feedings are a positive experience.

Poor positioning has many risks such as:

- ✗ Inefficient and longer mealtimes
- ✗ Reduced success accepting and managing different foods
- ✗ Reduced intake
- ✗ Increased difficulty with self-feeding
- ✗ Poor growth and nutrition
- ✗ Increased occurrence of illness and death
- ✗ Mealtimes can become a stressful struggle for children and their caregivers
- ✗ When positioning is poor, feedings can be a stressful, negative experience for children and their caregivers.





Please refer to Chapter 2, Section 2.3 for a detailed chart of Benefits and Risks of Positioning for Feeding.

This section discusses the best positions for feeding children 36 months and older, how to create these positions and which children are best suited for each position.



KEY POINTS WHEN CHOOSING A FEEDING POSITION FOR THE CHILD 36 MONTHS AND OLDER:



Is the child's head and neck well supported?



Is the child's trunk (body) well supported?



Is the child upright enough?



Does the child need extra support with making feedings slower?



Does the child need extra support for self-feeding?



Is the feeder/caregiver comfortable in this position?

A caregiver works to provide proper positioning for two children during a lunch meal. These caregivers have learned that when children are in well-supported positions, they can feed themselves more successfully.



Additionally, you may need to consider other individual needs of a child such as:

- ① *What is the size of the child?* A larger child may be more challenging to hold in certain positions. A smaller child may need extra physical supports for sitting upright in a chair such as cushions, pillows and an elevated foot rest.
- ② *How strong is the child?* A weaker child may need a position that offers more support, whereas a stronger child may need a position that requires less.
- ③ *Is the child trying to feed herself?* A child who is not feeding herself may be very capable when given appropriate supports and plenty of opportunities to practice.
- ④ *Does the child appear comfortable in the position?* An uncomfortable child won't eat as well.
- ⑤ *Is the child feeding well in this position or is she fussy?* A fussy child won't eat as well.
- ⑥ *Is the child coughing or choking often in this position?* A coughing or choking child is at risk for poor nutrition, illness and poor feedings.

EXAMPLES OF GOOD AND POOR POSITIONING FOR FEEDING THE CHILD 36 MONTHS AND OLDER (IN CHAIR)



GOOD POSITIONING

- Child is seated upright in chair
- Head is in a forward position
- Knees are at 90-degrees
- Feet are well supported by a footrest
- Tray is at an appropriate height for added positioning support and self-feeding



POOR POSITIONING

- Child is seated upright in chair
- Hips are slightly flexed
- Knees are at 90-degrees
- Feet are well supported BUT head and neck are extended up and back
- Torso is twisted
- No table or tray to support positioning and self-feeding



When a child's body feels well-supported, she can focus on what matters most: eating

BEST POSITIONS FOR EATING AND DRINKING

Listed below is the most common position used for feeding children 36 months and older. Also, as children grow larger and stronger, the chair/seat and table they are using will most likely need to change or be modified.



If the current position does not feel right to you or for the child, it's OK to try a different position (and chairs, tables, trays and cushions). Sometimes caregivers must try multiple positions until they find the "just right fit."

UPRIGHT SEATED FORWARD POSITION (IN CHILD SEAT/ HIGH CHAIR)

HOW TO: Place child in a well-supported position in a child seat or high chair. Child should be facing you and/or peers while in the comfort of the seat. You can be holding the food, cup, and/or spoon and the child should also be given the opportunity to assist with feeding.

BEST FOR: Most children 36 months and older; spoon feeding, finger feeding, cup drinking, straw drinking



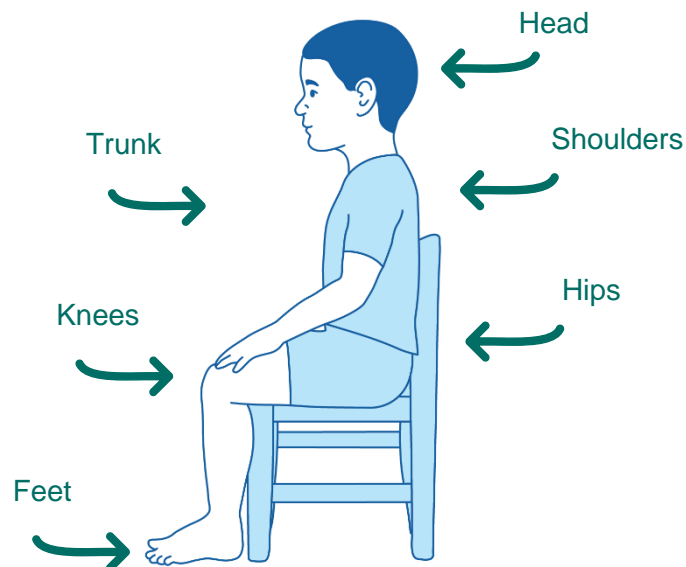
Using a tray or table with a seat or chair is helpful for encouraging exploration of foods and self-feeding using fingers, utensils and cups.



FEEDING POSITIONING CHECKLIST FOR THE CHILD 36 MONTHS AND OLDER:

AT 36 MONTHS AND OLDER A CHILD'S:

- ☐ hips should be positioned at 90-degrees and lower than the head
- ☐ body (trunk) should be upright and well supported by caregiver's body or chair — not leaning forward, backward or to either side
- ☐ shoulders should be level and facing forward
- ☐ head is centered and in midline, neutral position with chin slightly tucked
- ☐ knees should be at a 90-degree angle
- ☐ feet flat on floor, foot rests or against caregiver's body





KEY POINTS FOR THIS AGE

During this time of life, mealtimes have become an interactive process for children and caregivers. By 36 months old, children take even more responsibility during mealtimes, serving themselves, feeding themselves and cleaning up after eating. Good positioning remains critical in the success a child has when eating, and helps them stay more focused during mealtimes. Good positioning also provides a child with more physical stability and independence for effective and confident self-feeding. Caregivers must be skilled in understanding the essential aspects of appropriate positioning for mealtimes so that children can eat safely, comfortably and independently.

IMPORTANT POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- ① Good positioning for feeding leads to safer and easier eating for children and increased confidence and success with self-feeding.
- ② Always consider the key aspects of positioning for every child in order to make mealtimes safe, successful and enjoyable.
- ③ By 36 months old, when provided appropriate positioning and practice, most all children can eat and drink independently.



SECTION 5.4: BEYOND THE MEAL: TIPS FOR SUPPORTING THE CHILD 36 MONTHS AND OLDER

During the first 36 months of life, children have made incredible changes in their development. By this time in life, they show a healthy interest in the world around them and a determination to explore, learn from others and thrive. This section discusses simple ideas to encourage healthy development across all areas of the older child's life, beyond the feedings.

By incorporating these ideas for a child during everyday activities and routines, caregivers can support a child's development in an efficient way that requires very little extra time. Try adding these ideas into mealtimes, dressing/undressing routines, during diaper and toileting routines, bath time, when offering comfort, and when providing care for multiple children at a time, such as while toileting one child, another child is nearby waiting for her turn.



MOTOR MOVEMENTS

Supporting a child's motor development is something that can easily be done each and every day. When a child is able to move her body and explore the world, she is growing her body and her brain! Additionally, supporting a child's movement directly supports feedings. Strong children with good motor skills typically have fewer issues with feedings, or issues resolve sooner.

MOTOR (PHYSICAL) ACTIVITIES

DESCRIPTION (WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE)

Big Movement Play

- ⇒ **Play ball:** Take turns throwing, rolling, kicking and catching a ball back and forth. Try it alone or have several children play together in a fun game.
- ⇒ **Soccer play:** Turn a box on its side and pretend it's the goal. Have fun kicking a ball into the goal.
- ⇒ **Kangaroo hop:** Place an object on the floor as the starting line. Encourage children to hop as far as they can from the starting line.
- ⇒ **Outside play:** Encourage children to play with balls and playground equipment (if you have it). Encourage big movements such as running, jumping, climbing and exploring.
- ⇒ **Stair climbing:** Allow a child to practice walking up and down stairs. Make it a game and see who can reach the top first.
- ⇒ **Freedom to explore:** Offer lots of opportunities for children to freely explore their environments using big movements, such as crawling, standing, walking, running, jumping, etc.
- ⇒

Movement and Music

- ⇒ **Dance party:** Play music you enjoy and dance together.
- ⇒ **Sing-along:** Sing songs, perform finger rhymes, and move your bodies.
- ⇒ **Make music:** Have fun making your own music (shaking and banging) using toy instruments, everyday items such as pots and pans or real instruments such as guitars, pianos, drums and bells.

Finger and Hand Play

- ⇒ **Table time:** Use a small table, box, or upside-down laundry basket with chairs for playing (blocks, puzzles, etc.), eating, artwork (scribbling, painting, drawing, cutting, folding) and schoolwork (writing, math).
- ⇒ **Block time:** Have fun stacking blocks and building towers and buildings.
- ⇒ **Basketball:** Toss items into a laundry basket or trash can as a game. Objects can include soft balls, small pillows, bean bags, stuffed animals, etc.
- ⇒ **Art time:** Have fun making designs and pictures using crayons, markers, chalk, pencils, paint or even water and dirt. Use fingers or brushes.
- ⇒ **Big helpers:** Ask children to be helpers for daily activities such as dressing/undressing, washing hands, serving food for themselves and others, opening and closing doors, pouring liquids at meals, sweeping and other clean-up activities.



Older children enjoy daily outside time where they can run, jump, slide, swing and play with each other.



PLAY AND LEARNING

Supporting a child's early play and learning is something that can easily be done each and every day. In fact, the main way young children learn is through play! So, when a child is able to play, explore objects, interact with others, and discover his environment, he is growing a strong brain that will serve him well as he grows to become an adult.

PLAY AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES	DESCRIPTION (LOOKS LIKE)
Talking, Singing, Reading and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Story time: Have fun reading books together or telling your favorite stories. Share nursery rhymes or traditional tales. Ask for help turning pages, pointing out pictures, answering questions ("What happens next?") and recounting the story. ⇒ Music time: Listen to music and sing songs with a child. Have fun singing along to the songs that you know. ⇒ Talking time: Talk about what a child is doing, what you are doing and what you are doing together. Use words and phrases to describe shapes, colors, numbers, letters, body parts, animals, foods, action words, feelings and other common everyday items and familiar people. ⇒ Play time: Have fun with pretend play. Play with dolls, have a tea party, pretend to cook dinner, play "house" or imagine that you are all fun animals. ⇒ Pretend play: Make a playhouse, store, farm or a boat out of a large box. Explore and maneuver around the creation. ⇒ Dress-up time: Have a dress-up box with different types of clothing and accessories for children to explore (dresses, shirts, pants, shoes, hats, scarves, gloves, belts, costumes, etc.) ⇒ Number time: Use numbers throughout the day with a child. Count everything — the number of chairs in a room, children, shoes, balls, dolls and practice telling time. ⇒ Sorting time: Sort everyday objects by color, shape, size, type, etc. Have fun sorting in piles or containers for dumping and filling.
Playtime on Floor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Play where the child is at – on his level – and follow his lead. Let a child guide their play with you. Children this age enjoy playing with: blocks, balls, play food and dishes, dolls, cars/trucks, big outdoor toys, books, puzzles, homemade Play-Doh or clay, art activities, musical instruments, plastic animals and dinosaurs, hula hoops, ball pits, flashlights, forts, tents, toy tools, tricycle with helmet child-size furniture, chalk, board games, etc.

A girl has fun playing on the floor in her classroom with her caregivers and friends.



COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIPS

Supporting a child's early communication and relationships is something that can easily be done each and every day. Positive relationships are the primary way to build strong children and supporting a child's communication is a wonderful way to nurture relationships between caregivers and children. When caregivers are deeply connected to children and show that they understand what a child needs, children feel safe, secure and ready to learn and grow.

COMMUNICATION AND RELATIONSHIPS ACTIVITIES	DESCRIPTION (LOOKS LIKE)
Play and Interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Relate often: When together, talk, tell stories, read and sing or hum to a child. Share special rhymes or poems, look at pictures and play games or do activities together. Repeat a child's words and encourage back and forth conversations with one another.
Calming and Soothing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Teach regulation: When a child becomes upset, use the same movements and sounds repeatedly to soothe him such as rocking, swaying, bouncing, patting, massaging, singing or music. ⇒ Heads-up: Talk to a child ahead of time about new routines, events and people. Use picture schedules to alert children to what is happening next. ⇒ Choice making: Offer a child two choices to help cope with feelings and options: "Do you want a book or blocks?"

	<p>⇒ Share feelings: Help a child identify emotions by talking about them. Give names for feelings to help a child understand. For example: “You feel frustrated when other children take your toys without asking.”</p>
Positive Interactions	<p>⇒ Connect often: Repeat the words and phrases that a child says or faces, such as smiling. Gaze at a child during activities such as diapering and toileting, mealtimes, playtime and bathing. Use touch to connect with a child, such as snuggles, hugs, massage, wrestling/rough play, holding, etc.</p> <p>⇒ Sharing is caring: Teach children how to share and take turns by doing these with them during play and when interacting with others. Use simple phrases repeatedly to help teach these concepts (“My turn,” “Your turn,” “Can I have a turn?” “In 1 minute.”).</p>
Consistently Care	<p>⇒ Respond well: When a child expresses they’re upset, respond consistently and in a timely manner with soothing words and/or touch and physical comfort.</p>



A group of boys show the importance of friendship and relationships.



KEY POINTS FOR THIS AGE

Being a supportive caregiver means supporting children throughout the day, including at mealtimes, playtime and during daily routines. Every activity and routine throughout a child's day is an opportunity to enhance development and quality of life. These activities don't need to be complicated or done for hours at a time. Use convenient objects from your environment, and offer short, frequent moments throughout the day for activities. Since development is interconnected, often times multiple areas can be supported simultaneously through the incorporation of one simple activity.

IMPORTANT POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- ① No matter how independent a child's skills may be, they still need attention and thoughtful interaction from caring adults every day.
- ② Encouraging daily movement, play and positive interactions with others are the best ways to support a child's total development.
- ③ Children will reap the benefits when caregivers find small moments throughout the day to incorporate activities that support total development.

