

The Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) is a tool used to look at children's developmental skills and track important milestones. The tool is essentially a short test that describes actions and scenarios. Parents walk through the activities with their child and answer the questions based on how their child performs. It's a great way to watch your child reach milestones and teach them new skills. The developmental areas included in the questionnaire are fine motor skills, gross motor skills, problem solving skills, communication skills, and personal-social skills. The questionnaire takes roughly 20 minutes to complete and is available from 2 to 60 months (from birth to kindergarten)!

I have been completing these developmental check-ups with my children at KARA since they were two months old. I love doing the ASQs with them, mostly because it's a free, entertaining activity that boosts their self-esteem, but also because it's important for me to know where practice is required. And I'm not the only one; my doctor completes a short one with them during their biannual check-ups. It's incredibly important to catch developmental delays early, so both parents and healthcare professionals get involved! My boys are only three and one, but it's not too early to think about elementary school. I want them to do well and keep up with their classmates. One way to accomplish that is to practice and to know what each ASQ area encompasses in order to complete activities that benefit my children.

Fine Motor Skills: This skill incorporates the use of small muscles, particularly in the hands and fingers, to accomplish tasks that require patience and concentration. Examples include a newborn grasping objects, a one year old holding a toy and changing it from one hand to the other, and a five year old using a crayon to draw a picture.

At Home: My three year old, Grizzly Bear, is currently working on learning how to hold a marker properly. He use to bunch his fingers like a fist around any stationary but after a few weeks of practice, he is now able to trace the numbers 1 through 10 while holding his marker between his index finger and thumb (Scholastic Write and Wipe Math Book – an absolutely fantastic book and a great idea for Christmas)!

Gross Motor Skills: This skill encompasses the use of large muscles to complete tasks (and get into trouble)! Examples of these skills include a six month old learning to sit with support, a one year old pulling himself up to stand, and a three year old learning to hop or skip.

At Home: My younger son, Polar Bear, is learning (without much encouragement from me) to throw balls and climb into/onto furniture. My last blog on childproofing is being used to great

effect here but I still wish there was a way to prevent myself from getting hit in the face unexpectedly with Mega Bloks Lego.

Problem Solving Skills: This skill encompasses a child's ability to solve problems. Problem solving to a baby can be illusive to parents. Children have no problems, right? I quickly learned that a two month old that uses his hands and eyes to explore his new world is as much of an example of problem solving as a simple math equation is to a five year old!

At Home: Both of my boys were born problem solvers, from learning how to open cupboards from the bottom to help themselves to snacks, to uncovering the heat registers to shove the snacks into spaces where even Daddy can't get to them. Only little encouragement is required at home to develop problem solving skills but one item that does help is a shape sorter! These toys are marvellous but do require encouragement as they aren't easy to master at first and children can get discouraged. I found it's best to use one that is also colour coded for easier mastery.

Communication: This skill includes the ability to use and understand language, another extremely important skill to have and not to be delayed. Examples of this skill include a 6 month old turning towards you when you call his name and a three year old telling you he has to use the potty.

At Home: Books, books, books. We read a variety of books everyday. My Grizzly Bear had a natural interest in books and took to them easily. When our second was born, we would include him in book time but we kept reading Grizzly Bear's favourites. It's no wonder that it took our Polar Bear a little while to warm up to them and through a little pause and think parenting, we realized we needed to separate book time between the two boys when Polar Bear became mobile. When we understood that our boys were going through different communication stages, we had to adapt our parenting strategies to match, even if it took a little longer to complete the bedtime routine. Polar Bear is now very content to sit and read flip-the-flap books while Grizzly Bear works on his Write-and-Wipe books. A win-win!

Personal-social Skills: This skill incorporates the ability to interact with others and self-control. Examples of this developmental skill includes a two week old making eye-contact with Mom, a ten month old waving his chubby hand bye-bye, and a four year old taking turns in games.

At Home: The most successful type of activity we do at home to build this skill in both kids is pretend play, and they love it! My Grizzly Bear is at the prime age for pretending to be a superhero, pouring Mommy an invisible cup of tea, finding superb spots for hide and seek, and building race cars out of thin air. His younger brother also gets so involved with the play that I've

sat and waited for a make-believe smoothie for 25 minutes before all the right ingredients were blended and I got to make fake yummy noises. The key to helping children develop this skill is interaction and encouragement. A big cardboard box also works wonders too!

The ASQ is a wonderful tool and makes parent-led check-ups fun! Both of my boys passed most ASQ developmental areas each time, and the times they didn't, we worked a little harder to bring them up to speed, having fun along the way. If you'd like to complete an ASQ with your child or simply want more information on the tool, KARA is readily available for questions and to help you complete the questionnaire. The wonderful staff have thousands of ideas on activities you and your child can do together to improve development, believe me! They incorporate their ideas into their programs everyday to help ready your children for their first days of school too!