

From Creeping to Walking

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YALE FILMS OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT
FROM CREEPING TO WALKING
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Walking is such an accepted part of an adult's existence, but it is easy to forget what an important achievement it is for the growing infant. There are interesting individual differences in the development of locomotion.

36 WEEKS

Compare this dynamic boy on the left with the self-contained girl on the right at 36 weeks of age. The boy is much more active than the girl, he's a more skillful creeper.

52 WEEKS

Nonetheless, when the appointed time comes, the girl walks with ease and excellent coordination.

We will follow the girl's growth,

36 WEEKS

beginning at 36 weeks of age. At this age, her behavior is in a transitional stage, she pulls her knees up to creeping position, but does not hold them there very long. Her whole behavior suggests that she is only at the threshold of creeping. Notice that when she tries to go forward, she cannot bring her arms into coordinate reaction with her legs. The result is a mixture of partial crawl and partial creep, which results in pivoting but not in progression.

Compare the boy at 36 weeks.

The girl does not creep as well as the boy did at that age but she walks better. Her eyes fixate on the floor, her feet spread wide apart and she steps rather high. With greater maturity, she will lift her eyes more and her feet less.

36 WEEKS

37 WEEKS

39 WEEKS

40 WEEKS

At the age of 40 weeks, she kicks more vigorously. All of her motions are more certain and she seems better adapted to her environment. She rolls from her back to her stomach with greater ease, retains her balance neatly. This ability to change from the supine to the prone position is a valuable new accomplishment, which serves the infant well. Now note her floor behavior. She takes a few creeping paces forward but she does not have creeping performance coordinated. She is still in a transitional phase of development where creeping, crawling and pivoting are combined and not yet under voluntary control. Notice therefore that she tends to pivot rather than to advance. But when there is an attractive goal, like the ball, her movements become better coordinated. This often happens for motivation counts.

Compare the boy at 40 weeks. He took the lead in creeping at this age, but the girl will soon overtake and surpass him in walking. This becomes especially apparent when at the age of 44 weeks, she strides across the stage with the help of assisting hands. Her stomach protrudes in her effort to balance, her toes turned outward. But this is a normal characteristic of immaturity. On the floor, notice that she rolls with great ease and apparently, for the fun of it. [...] three months, the patterns of behavior elaborate.

48 WEEKS

At 48 weeks, you will see many new forms of postural behavior: kneeling, standing, cruising, lowering, rolling, creeping, pivoting and even assisted walking. In the pen, she cruises without assistance and even negotiates a corner.

In the bath, you will notice that she rolls, sits, stands, manipulates and explores. She shifts with increasing skills [...] to another, showing excellent body control for her age. She brings her abilities into ever-changing combinations. Usually she's doing not one but two or three things at the same time. No one of her performances develops independently. Growth is a process of progressive organization in which the patterns of behavior are constantly correlated and combined as you see them here.

She now creeps with increasing facility across the floor. Compare the boy at 48 weeks. Her creeping performance is not equal to his and nevertheless, she is not going to stop to perfect her creeping skill, she has a more important developmental interest. She feels a dominant urge to stand and to try out her walking abilities. It would be easier for her to creep than to walk. It would be easier for her to hold with two hands rather than one. But as you see, she is quite willing to do the more difficult thing, even deserting the crib's support to cruise the wall. It would be easier for her to let the door alone while she is learning to stand, but she does not specialize in standing to the exclusion of other abilities. Babies do not select the easiest task, usually they attempt the more difficult. This is part of the whole mechanism of growth. Otherwise, the infant would not mature. Ceaseless activity is part of [the] growth process. She is constantly on the move. Solving new problems of posture and of locomotion at every turn.

Only 48 weeks old, yet this baby is going for a walk with her mother. She does not stride as expertly as adult pedestrians on the sidewalk but she is well on her way and she will soon proceed with more assurance. In four more weeks, she rises to her feet alone and as you see, she walks the length of the tub without aid. Thrilling as this new locomotor experience must be, it does not absorb her attention entirely and she keeps on exploring her environment with her busy hands.

Compare the boy and girl at one year.

The creeping honors went to the boy, the walking honors go to the girl. Her hands are now almost free for manipulation. She cruises and explores at the same time, but she is so near the stage of independent walking that she ventures out into the room all alone, even carrying a book without losing her equilibrium and then comes back to port.

52 WEEKS

60 WEEKS

64 WEEKS

68 WEEKS

16 weeks of time elapsed. Growth continues and brings new forms of coordination. At 15 months of age she can pluck a flower from a bush. Observe that her trunk is less stiff, her stomach is straighter, she stands erect, gazes about her, pays less attention to problems of equilibrium. She stoops and picks up a ball with excellent success, with a pause, also a few pardonable failures. There are individual differences in this matter of balancing. We must not forget that it is entirely normal for some children to walk early and for some to walk late. It is quite common for children not to walk alone until they are one year old or more. In climbing up the stairs, even this girl goes back to the ancient method of locomotion on all fours: two hands and two feet. But note that when she descends the stairs, she uses her two feet only. The upright posture is almost mastered. She is well on her way in the journey of life. She stands and she walks erect. Her hands are liberated. The assumption of the erect posture was one of the greatest achievements in the long evolution of the race. It is an important event in the development of the child.

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