

Child Development

As far back as the *Tanakh* (Bible), Jewish wisdom has recognized that children develop in different ways and at different rates. The Sages and later thinkers developed their pedagogical theories to fit their times.

Modern child development research

demonstrates that there is a difference between chronological age—how old the child is—and developmental age—the child’s physical, emotional, and cognitive development in contrast to the typical person in the same age range.

Understanding different theories of human

development and how [they relate to education](#) enables educators to track where learners should be and how they are progressing. Each child will have [physical, social-emotional, cognitive, and linguistic](#) development milestones of which educators should be aware.

The Soviet-Jewish psychologist Lev Vygotsky put forth [two important social-cultural learning ideas](#):

- The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) describes tasks that a child has not yet learned but is capable of learning at a given time. Being aware of ZPD lets educators know when a child or group of learners is exactly at the point of readiness for a given concept.
- Instructional Scaffolding is the assistance provided by more competent peers or adults. In other words, teachers and others support the learner's development and provide support structures to get the learner to that next stage or level.

- Keep child development milestones in mind while planning and teaching. Doing so enables educators to set appropriate goals and expectations for learners.
- Understand and accommodate for individual variability. Despite having the same chronological age, children’s developmental and chronological ages can be different.

חֲנֹךְ לַנֶּעַר עַל פִּי דַרְכּוֹ
גַם כִּי יִזְקִין לֹא יִסּוּר
מִמֶּנָּה
(משלי כב: 6)

Teach the child according
to their way and when
they grow old they will
not deviate from it.

(Proverbs 22:6)

- Use the concepts of ZPD and Instructional Scaffolding with learners.
- Do not assume every learner can perform in the same way just because they are the same age.
- Remember that cultural, socio-economic, racial, and religious factors might affect learners’ development. Be aware of the different considerations that influence each learner.
- Keep in mind other factors—such as attention span, motivation, interests, habits, and rewards—that can influence learners’ development.

My Own Thoughts About Child Development