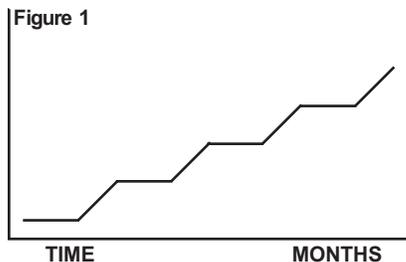


HOW DOES A CHILD GROW? THE DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL

How does a child grow? Have you ever wondered about this question? If we talk about growth in terms of inches and pounds, the answer to the above question is very simple. However, if you are a parent, you know there is more to the development of a child than just height and weight. There are many dimensions to the development of a child. Cognitive development (thinking), emotional/social development (relating and interacting with others), motor development (use of muscles), as well as physical development (inches and pounds) make up the many aspects of a child's job of growing up.

Most developmental growth in children moves forward in spurts. Physical growth is somewhat smooth and very easy to measure. (See Figure 1)



However, in the other aspects of development, growth takes place with plateaus and regressions as well as spurts. (See Figure 2)

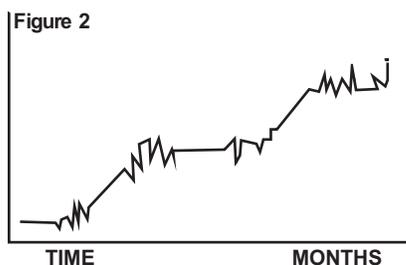
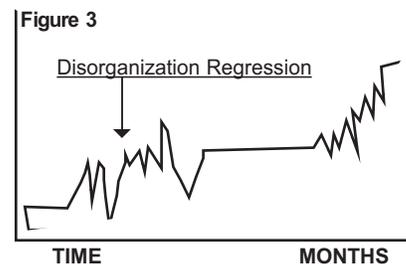


Photo by Howard G. Buffett

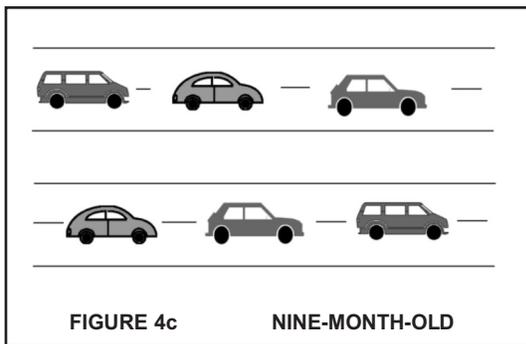
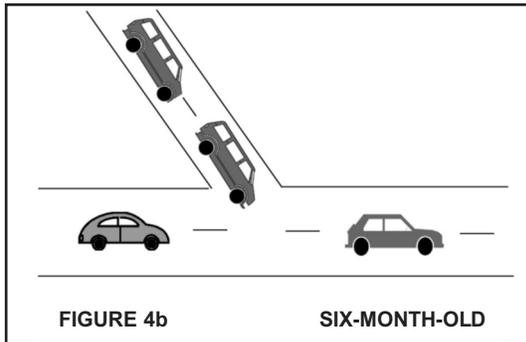
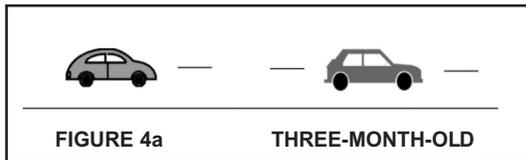
In his book, *Touchpoints*, Dr. Brazelton tells parents that there are predictable periods of regression just before a surge of rapid growth in any line of development. During this short period of regression, a child's behavior falls apart before going forward again. (See Figure 3)



REGRESSIONS FROM THE CHILD'S POINT OF VIEW

What does this regression mean for the child? As your baby becomes more aware of his world and explores it, he is taking in lots of new information through his senses. His body is busy building brain cells through proper nutrition. The new information from his world helps to make connections from one cell to the next. When the brain cells connect and become organized, he has a spurt in development.

Sometimes his central nervous system cannot process the new information because the pathways for the information are too simple. The old connections need to re-organize with the new connections to handle the more complex information the child is gaining. (See Figures 4a, 4b and 4c).



REGRESSION FROM THE PARENT'S POINT OF VIEW

Parenting is not easy. It takes a great amount of patience and an understanding of both yourself and your child, especially during her growth time of regression. During these short periods, parents cannot rely on their child's past accomplishments and they find her behavior difficult to understand. Because of this, parents question their parenting skills and abilities and become anxious and alarmed. The time of regression for each child in a family will have an effect on the whole family. Everyone will need to understand and support the child through these peaks, valleys and plateaus of growing up.

For a while, the child's behavior is disorganized. It is during this time of disorganization that the child will display some regression. In regressing, he is simply trying to conserve and focus his energy on the next step of development. This regression can affect all areas of his life. When your child is learning to walk, his sleeping and eating habits may be disorganized. He may also have a temporary change in his general mood. Your always happy baby may suddenly become a crabby baby as he goes through a period of regression. This change does NOT mean he is a bad baby or you are a bad parent.

At each time of disorganization and regression, your child's particular strengths and vulnerabilities, as well as temperament and coping style all come to the surface.