

AAPT – Summary of Domains

AAPT looks across 26 developmental and functional domains. These domains provide places to observe—not 26 simultaneous goals or a predetermined sequence to follow.

Each domain helps us consider what is already present, what may be emerging, and where further observation or support may be useful.

A — Attention and Cooperation

Explores how the child becomes available for shared activity and learning.

Observation begins with what naturally captures and sustains the child's attention, what helps them remain engaged with another person, and how they respond to cues, changes in tone, transitions, waiting and completion of activities.

Rather than viewing cooperation simply as compliance, the goal is to understand the conditions in which **shared participation becomes possible** and gradually build attention, trust, flexibility and willingness to engage.

B — Visual Performance

Explores how the child understands and uses visual information.

Skills progress from matching objects and associating objects with photographs or pictures to making visual choices, using picture-based information, understanding task boards, recognizing associations, categorizing, sequencing, extending patterns and solving visual problems.

For some children, visual information provides an important pathway into **comprehension, communication, independence and learning**.

C — Self Identity and Likes

Begins with the child's own world—**who they are, who matters to them, what they enjoy and what is familiar**.

The domain explores recognition of the child's own name, family members, favourite objects, foods, places and familiar routines. These personally meaningful experiences can provide an important foundation for communication, choice-making, self-awareness and increasing independence.

Understanding what a child likes also helps us discover their **interests and internal motivations**, which can become natural opportunities for connection and learning.

D — Play and Leisure Skills

Explores how the child experiences play before asking them to play in a particular way.

The progression begins with sensory-pleasing and familiar activities and gradually considers exploration of new toys, accepting another person's presence, shared activity, functional and imaginative play, parallel play, interaction with siblings and peers, turn-taking and group games.

By first joining activities that already have meaning for the child, adults can gradually create opportunities for **shared enjoyment, interaction and relationship**.

E — Communication Skills

Explores how the child already communicates and how that communication can become increasingly clear, effective and independent.

Communication may begin long before spoken words. Looking toward something, crying, moving another person's hand, leading someone to an object, gestures, pictures and other actions may all communicate wants, needs or intentions.

AAPT builds from these early forms toward choice-making, requesting, asking for help, refusing or stopping an activity, sharing attention, using phrases and sentences, asking questions and eventually communicating more spontaneously across people and situations.

The starting question is not simply “**Can the child talk?**” but “**What is this child already trying to tell us?**”

F — Spontaneous Vocalization

Looks for sounds, words and language that originate from the child rather than occurring only in response to a direct instruction.

This may include humming, singing, repeating meaningful words or phrases, naming something noticed, commenting, expressing emotions, requesting, or initiating conversation.

Spontaneous vocalization can help us understand **what the child chooses to communicate when communication is internally meaningful** and provides opportunities to expand expressive language naturally.

G — Motor Imitation

Explores the child's ability and willingness to notice another person's actions and reproduce them.

Skills range from familiar movements and actions with objects to new movements, sequences and increasingly spontaneous imitation.

Imitation can become an important bridge between **attention, shared experience and learning**. A child with emerging imitation skills may show us a particularly useful pathway for introducing new activities without relying heavily on spoken instruction.

H — Vocal Imitation

Explores the child's ability to notice and reproduce sounds, words, phrases and changes in voice.

Progression may begin with simple sounds and gradually move toward words, phrases, sound sequences and variations in pitch.

The purpose is not repetition for its own sake. Vocal imitation can provide a foundation from which a child gradually develops a broader and more functional spoken-language repertoire.

I — Language Acquisition

Explores how the child understands spoken language and connects words with people, objects, actions and concepts.

Skills include responding to simple instructions, identifying body parts and pictures, recognizing objects and actions, and gradually understanding descriptive concepts such as colour, shape and other attributes.

Observation helps determine **what language the child already understands and how information may need to be presented** to support further comprehension.

J — Labelling

Explores how the child connects language with the world around them.

The progression includes naming objects, actions, people, emotions, sounds, events and increasingly complex characteristics or relationships between things.

Labelling becomes most meaningful when it helps the child **understand, describe and share their experience**, rather than simply demonstrate memorized vocabulary.

K — Gross Motor Skills

Looks at the child's developing ability to use their body for movement, balance and participation in everyday activities.

Skills progress through increasingly complex movements involving walking, jumping, hopping, balance and activities such as riding.

Motor abilities can influence much more than physical development. They can affect **play, confidence, independence, sensory regulation and opportunities to participate with others.**

L — Fine Motor Skills

Explores how the child uses their hands and fingers to interact with objects and accomplish increasingly precise tasks.

Activities progress from manipulating small objects and early mark-making to puzzles, containers, cutting and other functional hand skills.

Fine motor development supports **play, self-care, learning, creativity and independence** across many other AAPT domains.

M — Self-Feeding Skills

Explores participation and increasing independence during eating and mealtime routines.

Skills include using utensils and drinking equipment, managing food and participating in the routines surrounding meals.

The child's sensory experiences, motor abilities, preferences and tolerance of different aspects of mealtime should be considered alongside the individual skill being observed.

N — Grooming Skills

Explores participation in everyday personal-care routines such as handwashing, toothbrushing, mouth care and nose care.

Progress is viewed not simply as completing a sequence, but as developing greater **understanding, predictability, participation and independence** within routines that can involve significant sensory experiences.

O — Dressing Skills

Looks at the child's participation and independence in dressing and undressing.

Skills include managing shoes, clothing, zippers, buttons and other components of dressing.

Motor ability, sensory preferences, body awareness and understanding of routines may all influence performance and help determine appropriate next steps.

P — Intraverbals

Explores increasingly flexible use of language beyond requesting and labelling.

This includes answering questions, describing experiences, commenting, talking about events, categories and sequences, and eventually participating in more spontaneous exchanges.

The emphasis is on helping language become **functional, flexible and connected to the child's own experiences**, rather than simply producing rehearsed answers.

Q — Toileting Skills

Looks at the individual steps involved in toileting and the child's participation within the routine.

Breaking the activity into smaller observable components allows the team to recognize emerging abilities and determine where support is still needed.

Sensory comfort, communication, physical readiness, predictability and individual routines are important considerations when planning next steps toward independence.

R — Skills Generalization

Explores whether a skill is becoming available to the child **beyond the situation in which it was originally learned**.

A child may demonstrate an ability with one person, material or environment but not yet use it elsewhere. AAPT therefore looks at whether skills begin to appear across caregivers, family members, community settings, different materials, instructions and everyday situations.

Generalization helps us distinguish between **performing a learned response and genuinely being able to use a skill in life**.

S — Classroom Routine

Explores how the child understands and participates in the routines of a learning environment.

This may begin simply with sharing space and becoming familiar with predictable activities and gradually extend to following routines, understanding sequences, working with greater independence and connecting activities with people and time.

The aim is to make the environment increasingly **understandable and navigable for the child**, rather than expecting the child simply to adapt to it.

T — Group Instruction

Explores the child's participation when learning occurs with other people.

Skills may include remaining within a group space, attending to shared information, seeking help, following instructions from adults or peers and participating in appropriately adapted activities.

The child's sensory regulation, communication, processing time and need for individualized support remain important even within a group environment.

U — Social Skills

Explores how the child notices, responds to and increasingly initiates interaction with other people.

This includes greeting, sharing, responding to social cues, noticing peer interests, asking for information, participating in activities and developing increasingly reciprocal interaction.

Social development is approached as **relationship and shared experience**, rather than simply teaching the child to reproduce expected social behaviours.

V — Spelling and Oral Motor Skills

Explores early spelling and sound-related abilities alongside oral-motor skills relevant to children who are beginning to speak.

Skills include recognizing sounds and letters, completing familiar words and progressing toward spelling names and common words.

The domain helps identify strengths and possible supports for children developing early literacy and clearer spoken communication.

W — Reading Readiness

Explores the progression from recognizing letters, sounds and familiar words toward decoding, reading sentences, following written information and understanding what has been read.

For children with strong visual abilities, written language may sometimes become another important route to comprehension and communication.

The emphasis is therefore not simply on reading aloud, but on **meaning and understanding**.

X — Printing Skills

Explores the motor and visual skills involved in early writing.

Progression begins with scribbling and simple lines and shapes and moves toward copying and independently producing numbers, uppercase and lowercase letters and names.

The child's fine-motor abilities and individual readiness help determine appropriate expectations and supports.

Y — Syntax and Grammar

Explores the developing structure and flexibility of language.

Skills include combining nouns and verbs and gradually using concepts such as plurals, location words, negation, possessives, tense, conjunctions, quantity and more complex sentence forms.

The purpose is to help the child's language become increasingly able to **express what they understand, experience, remember and want to communicate.**

Z — Functional Math Skills

Explores mathematical concepts that can become useful within learning and everyday life.

Skills progress from counting and early number concepts toward comparison, addition and subtraction, money, time, fractions and decimals.

Wherever possible, mathematical learning is connected with **understanding and practical use**, rather than relying only on rote performance.

Looking Across the Domains

The 26 domains are not intended to become 26 simultaneous goals. A child may show strengths in some areas, emerging abilities in others, and abilities that are not currently meaningful priorities.

The domains help us see the learner more fully and consider where useful starting points may lie.

The domains provide places to observe, not a predetermined sequence to follow.