

Developmental Red Flags to Watch For at 6 Months Old (Must-know for every parent)

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SUMMARY

At six months, health professionals monitor specific developmental red flags in babies to identify potential issues early. Parents play a crucial role in recognizing these signs, which can help ensure timely intervention and support for their child's development.

- Communication red flags include frequent irritability, lack of response to noise, absence of vowel sounds, avoidance of eye contact, and lack of affection or social interaction.*
- Fine motor concerns involve inability to reach for and hold toys, clenched fists, failure to visually track toys, and difficulty bringing hands to the midline.*
- Gross motor red flags include a head that consistently tilts to one side, differences in strength or movement between sides, stiff legs when held in standing, and poor head control during tummy time.*
- If any red flags are observed, parents should consult a health professional for assessment and guidance.*
- A developmental checklist is available for parents to track their baby's progress.*

- At six months there are a series of developmental red flags that we as health professionals look for, to indicate that a baby may need a little bit of help. These red flags help us to identify and treat potential problems early, which will reduce the overall time that a little one requires treatment as well as the potential impact. As parents, you are in the best position to notice these red flags, if and when they occur. But you'll only be able to recognize them if you know what to look for.

So, let's walk through each of these red flags and how you can identify them and what they might mean. Before we jump into the red flags, remember that if your baby was born prematurely it's based on their corrected age, not their birth age. The communication, social and emotional red flags are, if a baby is frequently irritable for no apparent reason. Generally they're extremely social at this age so that frequent irritability should be reducing. Also, they should be responding to noise, so if your little one does not respond to noises or sound by either looking for that source of the noise or going quiet so they can hear it again, or smiling if it's a familiar voice, or they might even start to babble back in response to that noise.

Now, just be aware that if your little one is engaged in an activity and they're highly enjoying that activity, they may choose to ignore the noise, and that is completely fine. If they frequently ignore the noise, then that is when you need to be concerned because it may indicate that they aren't actually hearing the noise. Another red flag is that your little one does not make vowel sounds, like the ahs and the ohs in response to communicating with you or just in general when they are talking.

Your little one should also be providing eye contact with you when they are engaging with you. So if your little one is avoiding eye contact that's another area of concern. Also, if they're not showing any affection towards their primary caregiver, or they're not laughing, smiling, when they're trying to interact with other people. So, babies at this age are really social and typically they will laugh or smile at you when you're trying to interact with them or start to babble.

So if your little one isn't doing that, then it is a cause of concern. Just a side note, if you do notice any of these red flags, it doesn't necessarily mean that there's anything wrong with your little one, it just means that you should take them to the relevant health professional to have an assessment just to be sure. In regards to fine motor concerns, the first one is that your little one doesn't reach out and hold toys.

So, at this age they should definitely be able to reach out when they're lying on their back to grab a toy and they should be able to hold it. And if you are sitting them in your lap and providing them with support, they will be reaching out to grab a toy. Also their hands should not be fisted, so if your little one's hands are clenched, then it might be an indication that they need to go see an occupational therapist because we need those hands to be open so that they can start to grab and interact with toys.

Now, another red flag is if your little one isn't grabbing a toy and mouthing it and then looking at it and mouthing it again. That is how they actually play with toys at this age, there's a lot of time spent in their mouth and that's because they don't yet have the ability to move their hands so well to manipulate the toy but they have the ability to hold the toy in their hand and look at it and then place it in their mouth and then bring it back out.

Your little one should also be able to bring their hands to the middle of their body when they are lying on their back. So, if your little one can't yet bring their hands to the middle of the body,

then that is a red flag. For your little ones fine motor skills to develop well, we need them to be able to visually track a toy. So, if your little one is not yet able to visually track a toy, then that is a red flag.

And the way you assess if your little one can do this is you lay them on the floor and you simply hold a toy above their head in the middle of their body, and you move that toy slowly from one side to the other and they should also be able to follow the toy from above their head to below as well. Now, their eyes should also be extremely well coordinated, so cross-eyed or an eye turning in at this point isn't normally something you would see and if that's something you're seeing, then it's definitely an indication that your little one needs to go and get their vision assessed.

Before we get into the gross motor red flags, if you haven't already make sure you download my free developmental checklist by clicking the link in the description box below. So the first gross motor red flag is that your little one's head falls constantly to the same side. So, when you are supporting your little one up in sitting or when they're lying on their back, or they're in tummy time, what you should see is that their head is straight and it's in line with the middle of their body.

It shouldn't be tilting to one side, and if you notice that your baby's head is tilting to one side and their chin is slightly tucked, and they're unable to follow a moving toy when you place them on their back by moving their head from one side to the other, then it is an indication that they need to go and see a pediatric physiotherapist to assess whether or not they have positional torticollis, because if this is left untreated it can affect your baby's posture, and it can also result in them favoring one side of the body.

The second red flag is that there is a difference between the right or left-hand side out of the body in regards to strength, movement, or tone. So, at this age they should definitely be able to use both sides of the body equally. There shouldn't be a dominant side and there shouldn't be a side that is more stiff than the other side. Also, they shouldn't have extremely floppy muscles. So, when they're lying on their back, your little ones should definitely be able to reach up against gravity and grab those toys, and also be lifting both legs off the ground.

The next red flag is that they hold their arms back and have stiff legs when they're held in standing. And the fourth red flag is that they have poor head controlling and are unable to lift their head. So when your little one is lying on their tummy in tummy time, they should be able to lift their head and be starting to push their body off the ground with extended arms, and they may even start to reach out for toys.

They should also be able to hold their head upright and look around when you are supporting them in sitting, and that might be by supporting them around the ribcage, when you give them that support, they should be able to hold the head in the middle of their body and look around the room without any difficulty. Now, at six months of age, sitting up independently is a skill that most babies are still yet to master. So, to help your little one master this skill, make sure you check out this video, remember to click on the free PDF document in the description box below, and I'll see you next week where I'll share more parenting tips and tricks.