

IDENTITY

What is this developmental skill?

Identity is a child's developing understanding of who they are. It includes their personality, interests, strengths, values, family relationships, culture, and life experiences. Identity continues to grow throughout childhood and adolescence.

How does this normally develop?

Children build identity through relationships, exploration, and positive experiences. Caregivers help children recognize their unique qualities while encouraging them to develop their interests and abilities. Feeling accepted for who they are provides a strong foundation for identity.

How can neglect interfere?

Neglect can interrupt identity development because children may spend much of their energy focused on survival rather than self-discovery. Multiple placements, family disruptions, or inconsistent caregiving may also leave children uncertain about where they belong or who they are.

What might this look like?

A child may:

- Frequently change interests or opinions to fit in.
- Struggle to describe themselves.
- Compare themselves negatively to others.
- Feel unsure about where they belong.
- Have difficulty recognizing personal strengths.
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Parenting Implications

Encourage your child to explore their interests, celebrate their unique qualities, and maintain healthy connections to their personal history whenever possible. Help them see that their past is part of their story but does not define their future.

From Understanding to Attunement

Identity develops through acceptance. When your child feels known, understood, and valued, they gain confidence in who they are becoming.