

**Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones:
What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell**

PARENTHOOD PREP

with

Devon Clement



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Devon Clement

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

Allison Mell: It's so interesting because there are these conflicting messages, which is in what you're talking about, the preschool ages, there's this pressure to do so many skills earlier and earlier before they're developmentally ready. They should be holding crayons and they should be coloring and they should be cutting out shapes and they should be writing letters and all these things before they're even developmentally ready to make curvy shapes, make a circle, make a C-shape.

And yet on the other side, when I look at baby development, you know, more gross motor stuff, I'm hearing from parents that they're being told wait and see, wait and see, wait and see, don't worry about it. Crawling's not a milestone. Crawling doesn't matter. So it's like these conflicting messages where we're telling parents of babies, nine-month-olds, 12-month-olds who aren't moving at all, just wait, just wait, just wait. And then all of a sudden they're three, and they're expected to write all their letters. It's just, there's something not adding up.

Welcome to *Parenthood Prep*, the only show that helps sleep-deprived parents and overwhelmed parents-to-be successfully navigate those all-important early years with their baby, toddler, and child. If you are ready to provide the best care for your newborn, manage those toddler tantrums, and grow with your child, you're in the right place. Now here's your host, baby and parenting expert, Devon Clement.

Devon Clement: Hello and welcome back to the *Parenthood Prep* podcast. Today we have a very special guest, Dr. Allison Mell, founder of Tots on Target, who's going to talk to us all about motor development and milestones and all those things that I think parents are very curious about when it comes to their babies. I love this topic because my background, in addition to working with babies for years and years, is that I was a special ed teacher in a previous life and almost became an occupational therapist and really was very interested in all that development and not just with, you know, kids with developmental delays or special needs, but how important it is for all kids. And, you know, talking to parents who are like, should I get my kids evaluated or are they on track for

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

this? Should we wait and see? So there's a lot of questions, I think, around that people really have that we could get into.

Allison Mell: Absolutely. I can't wait.

Devon Clement: Allison, why don't you tell us a little bit about your background and how you got into this?

Allison Mell: Sure. So I've been a pediatric physical therapist, I think now it's going on 16 or 17 years. So I've been in the game for a little while now. I'm also a mom of four. I have four kids including my first two are twins. So I have two oldest, and I started out working in a sensory gym. I went into the school system. I was in the preschool, kindergarten, early grade school for quite a long time, almost a decade.

And then I really went into educating families about how they can support motor development at home. And I ended up backtracking more and more into babyhood because early milestones are really what sets the foundation for all of those future skills. And trying to educate more and more families about the importance of that, because the more and more I hear from families, the more and more I'm understanding that these early milestones are kind of, don't worry about them, you know, don't think about them, it doesn't matter, right? That we're hearing a lot of that more in the medical community.

And parents should be aware of how much this early development really sets the stage for future development. And you said it perfectly, which is, it's not just in preparation if there's a delay. It's actually for all children. All children need to be developing their muscle strength, developing their sensory systems, developing their attention span. All of those things happen through motor development that all builds on each other from early stages. And I just found that as kids are growing up and they're entering into the school system, when they're missing those pieces of foundation when they're holes in those foundational components, we see it. We see it in the school system. And the more education parents have, the better they're equipped to advocate and help their child.

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

Devon Clement: I think that motor skills development especially is something that parents are not necessarily educated on. You know, one thing I noticed so much in my work with families is how little preparation we get for parenthood and raising kids. And I say all the time that I work with these brilliant people with all this education and all this professional background, and they just have a baby and just know nothing because we don't have that built in. And a lot of people aren't around babies that much or around little kids. So you have a baby and you think, well, I need to teach her colors and numbers and ABCs, but you don't think that she needs to develop trunk strength or fine motor skills or things like that.

Allison Mell: Absolutely. It's interesting because it's like two parts. It's one is when a mom is pregnant with a baby, right? They know exactly what that baby is doing and looks like at 20 weeks gestation, at 32 weeks, at 38 weeks, you know exactly what size fruit they are and what they're able to do and what body parts they have. And then all of a sudden you're handed this newborn and you're like, what comes next? What am I supposed to do? Does every baby develop at the same exact time? I don't know what I'm supposed to be looking for, right? Because there's not as clear education. If you go looking for it, you can find stuff, but it's not as clear on what to expect. And even between siblings, a parent might forget. You're like, when did my son do that? I don't remember now that I have a second one or even a third one. Not all your children are all going to develop at the exact same rate. So it's confusing also of like, well what's, you know, the range of normal? When do we have to step in and help? It could be very confusing.

Devon Clement: Definitely. And to that point, I think somebody you definitely shouldn't necessarily listen to about milestones are your parents or, you know, older family members because for them it was even longer ago. I joke all the time that, you know, grandma might say, oh, well, you were walking at six months. I remember, you walked right up to the Christmas tree and you're like, well, mom, I was born in January, so I was at least - I was a, that's not, you know.

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

Allison Mell: It's so true. And I also think that milestones were, they weren't different back then, but the approach to milestones was different back then, meaning, I actually think that less intervention was needed all around because of how babies were treated and played with throughout the day, meaning they were sleeping on their bellies and that helps a lot with motor development, right? They were on their tummies already. We don't have to make time for them to be on their tummies. They didn't have car seats that became strollers and the strollers that became car seats, right? That are strapping babies in all day. They didn't have as many devices to put babies in. Babies were left on the floor or in a play pen. There was a lot more free movement time along with that, you know, belly sleeping. And so I think that there was less focus on development, maybe, partially because they didn't have to, maybe because they didn't know. But I don't know because I haven't done the retrospective research on that, but I do think that there was less talk about that and maybe for those reasons.

Devon Clement: Oh, I 100% agree. And obviously we know that back sleeping is safer, but developmentally, it just does not. It is not as sort of intuitive or natural for the babies. They want to be curled up. They want to be tummy to tummy with a surface, whether that's your body or the ground or whatever. And yeah, we're seeing, you know, I'll go into a family for sleep training and see a six-month-old who's not rolling over because they're being held for every sleep. They're in a bouncy chair when they're awake. They're just not being given that opportunity to like get a little frustrated, reach for the toy, roll towards the toy because someone's always there to hand it to them. And they're not spending all this time on their tummies. Again, with the tummy sleeping, I agree completely. So tell me a little bit about what Tots on Target is.

Allison Mell: Sure. So I started Tots on Target and a lot of it is education through my social media platforms. And then I have an online membership, The Tot Spot that helps families around the world support their babies through early developmental milestones, you know, from early development through walking and I have many materials for preschoolers, toddlers and kindergarteners as well. But my main focus is really helping babies roll, sit, crawl, and walk. And I

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

find that families are repeating over and over and over again that they are dismissed when they bring up concerns, that they don't know how to get the help for their baby, that they see something isn't quite right, but they don't exactly know what it is or they need support.

And so this membership has been really a lifeline for so many, I mean thousands of families because they've come, I'm like, no, I know exactly what you're talking about. I can absolutely help you. What you're seeing is 100% correct. You might not know exactly what it is that you're seeing or how to help, but I do. That's my job. And therefore they come and they get access to all of my milestone courses plus direct support from me. So I run weekly group Zoom calls, group coaching calls where I can help them and give them tips to, you know, implement certain activities during playtime. And then also there are, you know, there's ongoing support as well because every baby is going to respond a little differently, right? What an activity that works for one baby, another baby is crying and screaming and they hate it. So, you know, I'm there to support these families and make sure that they are handheld if they need it. And they have the support that they need to ensure that their babies are thriving and doing great.

Devon Clement: I think that's great. I think it's so important and something to focus on. And you know, just going back to what we were saying about people waiting until they're in preschool, in kindergarten to get flagged. I think being able to address it in those early stages is so important. So what are some everyday activities parents either are already doing or can do to support their baby's motor skills development? Obviously, tummy time is the big one that everybody talks about.

Allison Mell: Tummy time is absolutely a big one. This is really going to be different for every stage of development, right? So for our pre-rollers, let's say, right? That tummy time, even back time, even playing on their sides is all really great for helping to facilitate development. Having them being able to reach for toys, you know, make sure that they can reach with both hands together. Can they reach with their right hand? Can they reach with their left hand? Are they

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

picking up and playing with their toes? A lot of those things are actually going to happen naturally as long as babies are given the opportunity to you know, play and move around and practice all their movements.

When we get really towards that crawling and walking stage, in the crawling stage, again, with everything, with every milestone for the most part, typically developing babies don't need support. You don't have to do anything to make sure your baby rolls over or crawls or walks, etc. But if they are struggling, that's when we want to set up, you know, are they approaching those milestones? Are you seeing those many milestones along the way? Are you seeing your baby pushing up through straight arms and pivoting in circles? Are you seeing your baby do some planks and maybe some downward dog movements? Those are great signs that your baby is on the verge of crawling or getting their body ready to crawl because these are real physical activities. This is hard work for babies. And so they're not going to just lie on their bellies or their backs and then one day start crawling. They need to prepare their bodies. They need to practice those movements. They need to train their brain how to use both the right and the left side together. So we're looking out for a lot of many milestones along the way. And if they're not doing those things, that's when we want to step in and help them out.

Devon Clement: One thing I see tremendously is that parents a lot of the time will in a very well-meaning way, sort of get in the way of their learning. And I think that when I'm sleep training a four-month-old or five-month-old that's not rolling, I am so focused on giving this baby the opportunity to learn how to roll because it's going to help so much with their sleep in addition to the sleep training and the other stuff that we're doing. You know, and I'll show the parents like some gentle, like just hold their - let them hold your finger and then just wait. Right. And be patient. And the parents always like, look, he rolled over. I'm like, no, he didn't. You did. Like you rolled him over.

Allison Mell: And it's interesting you say that because a lot of times when I'm coaching families, you know, virtually and I'm like, okay, hold a toy here. Now wait. Don't shake it too hard for them to try to reach it. You need to wait. And

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

why is that? Why do we need to wait? It's these are movements that babies are learning. They're learning these movements. It's going to take them a moment to process, okay, this toy is ahead of me and my brain needs to recognize that toy. My brain needs to now tell my hand to lift up and reach for it and then grab it and then put it to my mouth. I once described this, I think it's really brilliant. If you when you start learning how to drive, every movement, everything you do feels like you have to think about it, right? That's like as adults, we could probably relate to that the most because that's the latest skill that we really learn how to do, right? And after that, you don't think about it at all. You just get in the car and go. But when you first learn how to drive, you have to think, okay, put on my seatbelt. Okay, now I'm going to shift the gear into drive. Now I'm going to turn. Now I have to turn my blinker.

Devon Clement: I remember thinking how do people even do this with the radio on? Now I'm like listening to a podcast, eating a sandwich.

Allison Mell: Exactly, like talking to my kids in the back seat and I'm, you know, and I'm doing everything and I don't even realize how I got to my destination, right? And I'm like, I'm on autopilot. I don't even know how I got here. But in those initial months where you're learning, especially those first few times when you're driving, you have to really think and focus. I remember the same thing was when I started learning how to cook. Everything was focused and attention. I couldn't talk to anybody else while I was focusing. And that's kind of where our babies are at with these new skills. And so you're right.

And so if we're going to give support to our babies now, again, this is where it gets a little, it's going to vary baby to baby is how much help do they need? A, we can stand back and just let them, again, for the most part, typically develop neurologically speaking, they should be able to meet these milestones on their own if they're given the opportunity to play on the floor and move around and there's nothing else holding them back. If they need some support, it's we want to give them the least amount of support possible so that they're engaging their muscles, that we're giving them that moment to like, my brain, yep, it's clicking it all together. We think of it as, so just roll over, but the amount of motor planning

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

and coordinating both sides of the body, these are all new skills for babies. So we've got to give them that chance.

Now, the other piece to this though is if a baby is struggling, right? If a baby is six or seven months old, six months is still on the cost, but maybe seven months old and isn't rolling over, I want to know why. There is always a reason. Parents hear from their pediatrician, and I don't like to throw pediatricians under the bus. I just think it's a different discipline. So they cover everything medically. They are really, really good at so many things from diaper rashes through puberty, but they are not motor development specialists.

Devon Clement: I say the same thing when they give parenting advice or sleep training advice or whatever, like take it with a grain of salt because they're not, that's not their expertise. They have to become, you know, advice givers because that's a lot of times the resource that parents have, but they're medical professionals. They're not developmental specialists or anything like that.

Allison Mell: Exactly. And so there might not medically the child, the baby might check out, like nothing looks, you know, off there's no hip dysplasia, there's no anything like that like, you know, oh, this is why a baby's not moving. However, if I see a baby not moving, if I see a baby who's struggling to roll, if I see a baby struggling to crawl or to walk, I can always find the reason. Always. And a lot of times when it comes to rolling and I'm sure you see this a lot more with like when you're in that sleep training phase because that's one where like sometimes babies roll over and they can't get back, so it's disrupting sleep. Sometimes it's right. So there's a lot of that.

A lot of babies struggle to roll because maybe they have a lot of tightness. Maybe there is an oral tie or tightness in the neck from a condition called torticollis. Um or they have reflux, which actually also causes a lot of tightness throughout the body. If a body is tight, they cannot rotate easily. They cannot move their hips and their trunk and dissociate those movements, right? And so babies are then going to struggle to roll. And that might have been caused by something that was noted earlier. Maybe baby did have difficulty feeding, maybe

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

baby had, you know, was always turning their head in one direction or had a head tilt, an oral tie, but there's always a reason why a baby is struggling. And so if that's the case, if a baby is struggling, then it's not just as simple as giving a little bit of support or giving baby open floor time. It's really about how do we step in and resolve the issue so that now they can develop naturally as, you know, as they should be.

Devon Clement: But sometimes when people are concerned, they've gotten to that point because they haven't given them the opportunity. So if from the beginning you're giving them space and giving them that opportunity, you're not going to end up in a situation with a six-month-old who has, you know, a flat head on one side because they're always in the exact same position because that's the only position you ever hold them in or whatever. So giving them that space from the beginning and then recognizing when something is a little off.

And I mean, again, with the pediatricians, I think people come to them with so many concerns that are fine and of course parents worry and they want to be reassuring and things like that. But motor skill development is definitely one where I say it can never hurt to get an evaluation. It can never hurt to catch it early. And really like every kid benefits from the support. So if you're lucky enough to qualify for those supportive services through your insurance or through the school system or early intervention or whatever, like take advantage. It's not any kind of like red flag that is going to put your kid in some like bad situation going forward or slap some kind of label on them, because they needed a little bit of support when they were little.

Allison Mell: Yeah, and I actually find that's why a lot of families have joined my program is that either they don't want to wait on the waitlists. They just are like, I know something's wrong. I don't want to wait on a waitlist, right? To, you know, until I get that evaluation or my insurance won't cover it or my doctor won't give me a referral. I hear this all the time. In the United States, you don't need a referral to go to your state's early intervention program. You can do that yourself. You can call your state yourself. It just can sometimes take a few weeks to get everything, you know, all together. But that's why parents are finding my

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

program and they're like, I didn't have to wait. I could join that day and start seeing progress within a few days because you as a parent should be able to help your child immediately.

That is my goal is you shouldn't have to wait any longer to help your child because if you think about it, a whole month of waiting in a baby's life who's only six or seven months old, that's quite a large percentage of time of their life. If you're pushing this off for like another month. So if we could get that in and when we then resolve whatever that issue is, if there is something that's actually a reason why your baby's struggling, when we resolve that, all of a sudden we start seeing quick progress with everything else because everything is falling into place and then we're back on track. And as you said, there's no stigma here. Those days are over. There's no stigma about getting extra help and it doesn't necessarily mean your child's going to need help long term. In fact, I'm finding that a lot of people that are coming to my program when we set them on track early on, they're doing great and then they start meeting their other milestones, you know, at a quicker pace within those typical time frames.

Devon Clement: Yeah, I love that. I think a lot of times in, you know, the focus in preschools and daycares and stuff like that is quote unquote academic where, oh, all our kids learn the colors and the shapes and the numbers by the time they're two or whatever. But they're not being given ample time to do physical things and to play, free play and explore and do songs and games and stuff where they're like moving their bodies or just run around in that way because they're sitting and holding a crayon way too early to be wanting them to appropriately hold a crayon. And I say this, you know, coming out of the education system. I was former school teacher and that was a big part of why I left. I just did not like the complete focus on the wrong things.

Allison Mell: It's so interesting because there's this conflicting messages, which is in what you're talking about, the preschool ages, there's this pressure to do so many skills earlier and earlier before they're developmentally ready. They should be holding crayons and they should be coloring and they should be cutting out shapes and they should be writing letters and all these things before they're

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

even developmentally ready to make curvy shapes, make a circle, make a C-shape. And yet on the other side, when I look at baby development, you know, more gross motor stuff, I'm hearing from parents that they're being told wait and see, wait and see, wait and see, don't worry about it. Crawling's not a milestone. Crawling doesn't matter.

So it's like these conflicting messages where we're telling parents of babies, nine-month-olds, 12-month-olds who aren't moving at all, just wait, just wait, just wait. And then all of a sudden they're three and they're expected to write all their letters. It's just, there's something not adding up. And then again, when you when you go to school teachers and they're so frustrated because I and I worked in the school system for so long that I would hear this from them and they're like, we're so frustrated because these kids are coming in and they're not able to hold a crayon. They're not able to color in the lines or cut out shapes. They need help with so many things. They need help to take off their coat and hang up their bag. All these things actually require a tremendous amount of strength that if they my stones and strength are all like math. It all builds on each other.

So if we're telling parents that this area, you know, the younger ages, that doesn't matter. Don't worry, delay, delay, delay, you know, wait to get your baby help. But all of a sudden in there two, three, four and it's we're shoving down all these tasks that we expect these kids to do independently. That's just not going to add up. And I'm finding that we're blaming a lot of that on technology and I'm not pro technology. I think that kids should be outside and do play with dirt and use your hands and all those things. But I don't think technology is necessarily always causing the problem. I think it's part of the mixture of lack of exposure, but it's like all of this mixed messaging that's coming together of like we're not valuing time spent on the floor for babies and promoting what milestones should be. Then you add in the mix of like technology and then, you know, expecting, you know, our preschoolers or toddlers to do more, it's just - it makes parents feel overwhelmed and they don't really know what the source of the problem is.

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

Devon Clement: Yeah, and it's not intuitive to think that pushing up on your hands is going to eventually lead to your ability to hold a crayon or hold a pencil accurately. But that is one of the early...

Allison Mell: Or even go to the bathroom themselves and pull down their pants and turn on the faucet. Like all that hand strength and the squatting, it's all shoulder and hand and hip strength that is going to allow that child to go to the bathroom.

Devon Clement: And you don't you don't think about that. You're like, oh, well, they, you know, I don't need them to be like lifting weights. So why do they, you know, but it's all interrelated and it's not something that you learn about unless you're in this field or unless you're working with someone in this field. I learned so much from the OTs and PTs that I worked with as a special ed teacher and I know that like regular ed teachers aren't getting that same, you know, amount of exposure or education. Even speech, like the speech therapist talking about how much like fine motor and occupational therapy leads to speech development. Exactly. You know, oral stuff, like eating different textures, eating, you know, eating different foods. And then that leads to speech and we're so ready to jump to like my one and a half year old knows, you know, knows how to spell her name, great. Like cool. It doesn't.

Allison Mell: There's so much more time for that, but the amount of time that they have to do these early things, that's limited. They can learn their letters for a lot longer and their colors and all of that. That has time. They could take their time with those things, for sure.

Devon Clement: Totally. Totally. So yeah, so sorry. I interrupted you before and you started to talk about something, some different things that people could try and do if they just want to encourage activity a little bit more. Let's go back to that some practical steps and things.

Allison Mell: Sure. So one of the things that if your baby is, let's say army crawling, that's a big one that babies are, you know, commando crawling on

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

their bellies. If they're not yet pushing up on straight arms, something that I love to do is laying out.

Devon Clement: And that's when they're sort of on their elbows and forearms, right?

Allison Mell: Yeah. They're getting like that full body contact with the floor. So they're really, you know, pulling around on their forearm. They may be kicking off with their feet, but they're not pushing up onto all fours, right? So in those kind of cases, and this is very, very common, but army crawling is not the end goal. We want them on all fours. And so one of the things that I love to do is put out large couch cushions, not like the little throw pillows, but like the large couch cushions, put them on your floor and let baby crawl up and over them. Let baby navigate over them like an obstacle course, but just like in play and they are going to gain so much strength. It's like running on sand. Right when you have a dynamic surface that you're, you know, running on, it's a lot harder to walk or run on sand than it is to walk on the pavement. And when we add that into our play space, it can make all the difference in really strengthening up those muscle groups.

So that's something super simple for our babies that cannot push up through their arms, through their legs, but they are moving around. And so that's kind of where my head goes is how can I set up your environment in a way that is going to be easy for you to incorporate. You know, as a mom of four, I can tell you that even though you think like, oh, I have all this time in the day. The day goes by so fast and to think of one more thing that you have to do, it's too hard, right? It's like, I have to set up these activities and an obstacle course and of this. But if you could have like three things that you can just set up your play space like that and it just is set like that or it's simple that while you're folding laundry, while you're scrolling on your phone, whatever it is that you're doing, and your baby's navigating around like that, that is so fantastic and really, really easy to implement.

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

Devon Clement: Just shifting your mindset about it too. Like this is something that's enjoyable for my baby and is going to keep them busy while I fold the laundry or I do whatever. It actually gives you more time because you can get stuff done while they're doing these activities. I mean, like in the bath. Like I used to baby sit and I baby sat for this two-year-old and I would let him be in the bath for like an hour because he loved it. And I would sit there and I would, you know, read a magazine or something. Obviously keeping an eye on him, but you know, not like the baby stage where you have to keep a hand on them at all times. And his mom would be like, oh my God, how do you have the patience for that? Like I have him in and out of the bath in five minutes and I'm like, because you don't see it as him sitting there entertaining himself, leaving you alone for getting you're even there for an hour. As long as you're making sure he doesn't drown, you don't need to be with that, you know.

Allison Mell: Exactly.

Devon Clement: As long as they're safe crawling around on the couch cushions, they do not need you to be part of that.

Allison Mell: No. And it's such an easy way to like put one or two couch cushions on your floor and then throw a toy across, you know, throw a toy over here because like, you know, like a dog, you like you play get fetch, like just one and they're like, oh, I'm going to go get my toy. And now it becomes a whole workout that you're like, oh, that was actually really easy. It's super, super, super simple.

Devon Clement: And instead of just handing them the toy, if it takes them five minutes or six minutes or seven minutes to go get the toy, that's six minutes that you're alone with your thoughts. It's kind of great, you know.

Allison Mell: 100%.

Devon Clement: I talk a lot about being sort of process oriented rather than product oriented. How does skill development and motor skill development tie into like behavior and emotional development and things like that? Like are you

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

seeing a connection with meltdowns or tantrum behaviors or things like that are related to motor skill development?

Allison Mell: There are a lot of different ways to think about it. I don't know if there's necessarily a direct tie between if your baby crawls around and you're going to have a child that behaves better and is more emotionally regulated. There is a lot and it's not really my area of expertise on integrating reflexes. So babies are born with primitive reflexes that are like uh the suck swallow reflex or grasping your finger, the startle reflex, the moral reflex. And there are certain reflexes that babies have that are really for survival instincts. They're born with it and as they move and they're becoming more controlled in their movements, they're integrating those reflexes over time. I'm not going to delve into it too much because I don't know enough of the research on the, you know, on these early skills that they're integrating and later. But I do know that there are connections between when those reflexes are not integrated and then some behavioral outcomes, you know, later on.

So if the startle reflex is not integrated, do they have more anxiety later on? I have seen things like that in play. I've also seen that when babies are learning to balance and they have better body awareness, they can better pay attention later on in class. So for example, go back to crawling because that's like this major, major milestone that really helps with so many things like bilateral coordination and body awareness. So body awareness is where is my body in space? And we don't really also think of it as a delta like what do you mean where is my body in space? I know where my fingers are and I know where my toes are. But babies are actually not born with that internal knowledge. They have to actually learn that over time.

That's actually why babies want to be swaddled or they want to they're more comfortable in that contact, having that physical contact because it gives them external pressure to be like, oh, that's where my body is. Now I can call my nervous system down. If I don't know where I am in space, like think about your, you know, your eyes are shut, if there was somebody blind and completely a space that you didn't know where you were, you would be like, where am I? You

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

know, and you'd be like, let me touch every surface around me so I can get that external feedback.

Devon Clement: Something I even suggest to my newborn clients is put the baby in the bassinet or whatever like next to the side of it. Like put them up against the side of the bassinet or when you move them to the crib when they're bigger, start them out like next to the side of the crib so that they don't feel like they're literally floating in outer space with like no grounding and nothing to show them where they are.

Allison Mell: Because it's really like, where am I? It's hard for them to, you know, and then how could you settle down if you don't know where you are? And you're like, somebody tell me where I am, you know? So when babies are rolling around on the floor, when they are crawling, all that deep pressure that goes through their joints and the muscles of their body, send signals to the brain about where my body is in space. Now, that also relates over to later on because when our children are sitting in a circle time or they're sitting on their chairs at their desk, if their brain does not process where my body is in space, their mental energy is focused on where is their body in space, not on the lesson ahead of them. Or then they are sitting in circle time and they are going to be leaning on their friends because they need some sort of external queue to tell them where their body is. So they are going to lean on their friends. They're going to lie on their on the floor, they're going to slide out of their chair or in the hallway, they're going to touch every bulletin board on the side as you're walking in a line in the hallway. They're going to bump into their friends.

Sometimes this also happens where proprioception, that's this sense, that's the sense of where my body is in space. It also helps with grading force. How much pressure do I apply? How lightly do I pet the dog or how much pressure do I put when I'm coloring or writing or how much pressure do I put with putting a block on a block tower? Now, is it the same kid that's always knocking over everyone's block tower, right? They're all the kids in the class are playing together, they're making this block tower, it's amazing and that same kid always comes over and they're the ones to knock down the block tower.

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

Is that a behavioral? Well, sometimes, right? Behavior can be different than a sensory struggle. But for some kids, what looks like a behavioral problem that they were just clumsy or they didn't care or they were trying to knock over their, you know, their friend's block tower is really this like, I don't know how to use my body. I don't know where my body is. I can't judge how to, I can't judge that personal space or how, you know, heavily or lightly to place that block on the block tower. So again, there's that two parts where there's that reflex integration that can lead to some real struggles later on. And there's also some of that sensory piece of when we don't have good proprioceptive awareness, that good body awareness that can affect how a child interacts with friends and going to school throughout the day and how they function and navigate.

Devon Clement: I think that's so important. And parents are so understandably, it's frustrating having little kids around. But they don't understand that it is a physical need to drag your hand on the wall, to lean against something, to touch everything, to I remember I took my girlfriend's kids to the grocery store once she had to do something and I was like, I'll take them to the store. And they were hanging on the shopping cart and I heard my mother's voice come out of my mouth like, stop hanging on the shopping cart. Like it's so annoying. But for kids, like feeling that pulling and just feeling that awareness and having something to hold on to or to like stretch your arm out or whatever. Like that is what their bodies are asking for and that's what they're looking for. And I think having an awareness that's something that they need makes it easier to give them those opportunities, but also to try to not get quite as frustrated when they're hanging on the shopping cart again.

Allison Mell: Right. And you know, to that point, because there's always going to be that range of normal, right? Somebody might look at somebody else's child and say, but that child doesn't touch all the bulletin boards. That child doesn't have to hang on the shopping cart. They just walk so nicely. They sit nicely with their friends, right? They never knock over the block tower. There is always going to be a range of normal. And some kids need more sensory input. They need more of that stimulation to stimulate their brain. And I'm always curious,

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

like, are those kids the kids that didn't crawl, didn't roll, right? Did they struggle sometimes initially? And therefore their brain didn't get what it needed at that time and they're making up for lost time. Sometimes yes, sometimes no.

But I think also there is also the outside of the normal range. Right? Is that child really struggling beyond every kid in the class and it's really standing out and it's making it really difficult and then they might need additional help and support so that it makes it easier for them to be part of that class within the range of normal, right? They might need more sensory input. They need more opportunity to jump and climb, which I would love all children to get. You know, it goes back to our original point, which actually is that all children would benefit from a quote unquote sensory diet, which I really think is just actual lots of physical play, right? Like let them climb and go on monkey bars and go down a slide. I think all kids would benefit from every hour on the hour.

And I used to go into schools and give in services to teachers, to kindergarten teachers and tell them when you're doing a circle time, what you think is 20 minutes can feel like freaking forever for some of these kids. You are expecting them to sit and attend to sight words when they just cannot stop moving their body and you think 20 to 25 minutes of first you're doing a, you know, a good morning circle song and then you're doing your letters and then you're reading a story and like these kids are sitting there for so long. You need to get up. You need to have them lie on their bellies while you're reading a book to them. Have them jump up and down 10 times every 10 minutes. Have them be in a downward dog position or a rag doll position where they're hanging their heads upside down. Like if teachers would do this for their entire class, yes, it would really support those kids that are on one end of that spectrum of like, I need that sensory input, but it would also benefit the kid who's on the other end of the spectrum, who doesn't need that as much and it awakens their sensory systems and it helps them feel their bodies too and gets them excited for learning and helps them attend more because they're not zoning out. So I wish all teachers would integrate these movements throughout the day and create some sort of

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

like quote unquote again, sensory diet because it really to me is just more physical movement and play.

Devon Clement: And it's not just the jumpy kids, the hyper kids, the kids that are like flailing around. I was a kid who, you know, could sit still and loved to read books and stuff like that. And never sought out those experiences, those physical experiences. And partly my mother fully blames herself for this. I think it was a little bit her fault, but she never let me do anything. She was always so worried I was going to get hurt, I was going to fall. When I was walking, she didn't let me like fall down and stand back up again. She was always like hovering over me like, oh, you know, got you, got you. My grandma, thank God, took me to the park where I could like swing on the swings. My mother was terrified at the park. You know, we had no like swing set in the backyard. I wasn't climbing trees. I was reading books. I was doing puzzles. I was coloring because those were safe activities.

Allison Mell: Those kids are looked at as the well-behaved kids, right? The kids who just want to sit and they want to read a book and oh, look how your child sits so nicely. That's so great. And it is great.

Devon Clement: But you know, my whole when I was older and as an adult, I'm uncoordinated, I'm clumsy. I don't know where my body is in space. Sometimes I'm walking through a doorway and I hit the doorway with my hand because I don't have that like awareness because I wasn't physical and I wasn't seeking that out. So, you know, when it's just built in for all the kids.

Allison Mell: Look at that. Look how you really even feel that impact.

Devon Clement: Yeah. And I think there's some natural ability to it too. Like I saw the other girls in my dance class and this and that doing all these things that I just like I don't think ever would be able to do. But it really has an impact on every kid. Even if you think your kid is, you know, so good, so well-behaved, they sit still. They need that too.

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

Allison Mell: Yeah, absolutely. And it doesn't mean you have to go and roll in gymnastics and figure skating and all that. It's really just getting out, running around in the grass. If you have a swing set or you can go to a park or riding a bicycle or scooter and exposing your child to those risky movements. Risky movements because they're not going to get significantly hurt. Even if they did fall off a scooter. I mean, they're not going at such a high speed. They might get, you know, a scrape. I mean, wear helmet.

Devon Clement: Right. Wear helmets, you know.

Allison Mell: Could there be a broken bone? Yes. But the point is, and you're making it so well, which is when we're too safe, that's also a risk. We want to expose our kids to a lot of physical movement. They need it. Their brains need that movement and it's going to help them in school and even into the future when they're adults and I've heard this from many other adults. We're like, I'm so uncoordinated. Everything you're saying adds up because this is the way I felt as a child and this is the way I'm feeling now as an adult. And it really goes to show that these are this is real and it's, you know, it's affecting our kids and can really stay with them as adults.

Devon Clement: Yeah, 100%. What would you say are like some really important milestones that people should be looking for in the first year?

Allison Mell: So I want all babies to meet those bigger milestones. I want them rolling in both directions. I want them crawling on our fours and then obviously walking. But here's what I want parents to really most pay attention to. Well, A, I'm going to focus in on crawling because a few years ago, the CDC eliminated crawling from their milestone checklist. Yeah, this was like a big uproar in the therapy world and a lot of controversy around this, which is basically they came out with there's too much variability with the crawling milestone, right? We have the army crawlers, we have the butt scooters, we have the crawlers that have one leg up and there's so much variability. How do we identify when most babies, when 75% of babies should be crawling when there's so much variability in it? So they just eliminated it.

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

Devon Clement: Oh, geez.

Allison Mell: And they said that there's not enough research to show that crawling is necessary for higher level skills, which I will say is completely incorrect. I mean, I also don't know how much research there is that pulling to stand, you know, or rolling leads to higher level. Like I don't know how much research has been done on any specific skill. So I don't know why they chose to eliminate crawling other than what they claim to have said and, you know, I just shared. But so crawling despite what the medical community says, the therapy world and many, many, many teachers who are on this bandwagon as well will say that crawling is absolutely crucial. So if your baby looks like they're going to skip crawling, we want to be on top of that and we want to get them crawling because of all the things that I've shared, you know, in this podcast so far.

But I also want to pay attention to the quality of movement as well. And that goes for how they're positioned early on in that newborn stage, how they are rolling and then crawling and pulling to stand and walking, which is that we want to make sure babies are using both sides of their body equally. A lot of times I hear from parents, oh, my baby's a righty or my baby's a lefty. No, they are not. Eventually they will be, but in this early stage, we do not want to see dominance on one side of the body. We want to see them using them symmetrically because of what we're talking about all that body awareness, when they become very, very dominant, they only roll to the left side, they only use their right hand to play with toys. They're so dominant on one side, that body awareness is not being fed from that non-dominant side.

So they get really used to having their right side, right? They know that right side exists, but they have no idea that left side exists or it's just kind of there and like maybe helps out. But we do not want that in the early stage. We want body awareness for the full body. We want strength equally on both sides. So that quality of movement is so important to pay attention to where we're seeing that babies are rolling in both directions, that babies are able to look in both directions easily, that they're crawling using both sides. I don't want to see butt scooting. I don't want to see a symmetrical crawl. I don't want to see one foot

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

up. And if we do see those things, I always go back and say, there's always a reason. There's always a reason. We can identify it and we can help.

Devon Clement: Well, just to pause for a second though, some of those things are a developmental stage on the way to crawling. Like right now my niece is seven months old, she's pushing up on her arms and pushing herself backwards. Like I don't see that as a red flag because I know it's a...

Allison Mell: So that's not asymmetrical.

Devon Clement: Sure. But some of these things that may seem a little bit like, oh, they're not fully crawling, it doesn't mean there's something wrong, it just means that they're building the steps.

Allison Mell: Yeah. So let me clarify because that's an excellent point. So there are two things that we want to look out for, the mini milestones that lead up to the bigger milestone, and then there's atypical movement patterns, okay? So the mini milestones that are leading up to rolling would be being able to reach up with one hand, cross over the midline, the imaginary line that runs down to the center of the body, being able to start rolling towards their side, being able to lift up their feet and play with them. Those are a lot of the moves. Are they able to push up um through straight arms? Are they rocking and weight shifting while they're on their bellies? Those are all mini milestones that are going to lead up to rolling.

For crawling, what are some of those mini milestones? Certainly is, you know, pushing up through straight arms, pivoting, I mentioned some of them before, that planking, downward dog movements, rocking on all fours. A lot of times babies do start pushing backwards first because their arms are stronger at first than their legs. And so they're pushing backwards, but their legs aren't, you know, don't know what to do yet. So they can push, but they can't coordinate that movement.

Devon Clement: And what we want to see with those is the symmetry, right? One both arms working together, both legs working similarly, not just like, oh,

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

they're always pushing with the same arm. I remember a baby I met years ago, a friend's baby was doing this like, he would like sit and like use his arm to like push and he could go really fast, but it looked so weird. I was like, that doesn't feel like a normal thing.

Allison Mell: And when we see those kinds of things, there's usually there's babies who can't ever get out of sitting. They're stuck. Once they're in sitting, they are stuck. They cannot get out of sitting. A lot of it is asymmetry. If your baby feels stiff and rigid and can't move, they hate being flexed, they always want to be vertical. These are flags that tell you, hey, my baby's not comfortable. They're not comfortably moving. They're not easily getting in and out of different positions. Or if they're moving asymmetrically, the quality of movement really does matter. So again, that's different than the mini milestones that we're looking at as babies are approaching that bigger milestone. And if you're not seeing those mini milestones, if your baby's not making any progress, that's also a sign that we want to step in and help.

Devon Clement: Yeah. Okay, so they do the mini milestones, we want to see the symmetry. Then they start with crawling in a different way and then they start working on pushing all the way up to the hands and knees.

Allison Mell: Exactly. And I get this a lot of when should babies get in and out of sitting? Because should babies, you know, sit before they can get into sitting themselves? Getting in and out of sitting is really a different skill than sitting or even crawling. It requires a lot of arm strength, a lot of rotation, a lot of motor planning. So that skill usually comes in around when crawling happens. It could come a little bit before crawling or a little bit after. Either one is totally fine. But we want them to be able to get in and out of different positions so then they can get into that kneeling position, push themselves up into stand, start cruising around, and then eventually take steps. That walking milestone, a lot of parents think that their baby should be walking independently by 12 months, by their first birthday. They get very panicked, especially when you know, the grandparents are in our ear like, when are we buying the baby shoes? You know, their first birthday is approaching. But walking is actually a very, very wide range

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

milestone. Anytime between 10 and 15 months, even a little bit beyond 15 months is considered normal. And because it takes a lot of balance and coordination and body awareness in order to get standing and walking independently. So a lot of babies need a lot of time for that skills to come in and that is totally fine. We don't need to rush it.

Devon Clement: Yeah. No, that's great. That's great to know that if they're on the way and they are working on it. It's so funny because as you're talking about all these developmental skills, I am just thinking about everything I see during sleep training because sometimes when they're left alone in the crib for the first time basically ever, now they're suddenly like, oh, look at me, I can get into a sitting position. I can pull up to standing. We see rolling over the first time so often in the crib when they're just like trying to figure out how to get to sleep. And we're watching it on the monitor and I always say it's like watching sports. You're like, okay, come on, come on, come on, come on. Yes. Or like if they get almost there, but not all the way, you're like, oh, like, okay, you'll get it next time. Like you know, it's a it's a lot of fun to see. And then sometimes I do see things like, wow, they got themselves up into sitting and now they're falling asleep sitting up and like keeling over because I don't think they actually know how to get back down and lay themselves down.

So, you know, being able to observe that and really see that development. And a lot of times for the parents, it's the first time they're seeing that too. Another thing I think of that I hear a lot from parents is like around, I think it's about two months, like eight weeks, they can start really getting their fingers into their mouth like consistently. And they'll be like, oh, are they hungry? Like, why are they sucking their fingers all the time? I'm like, they just figured out how to do that. So of course they're going to do it all the time. It doesn't mean that they are going through a growth spurt or they're suddenly hungrier than they were before. Like we attach all this meaning to these movements that's just not there. It's like, no, now they know how to do it on purpose. You know, just like with grabbing the toy. Now they know how to do it on purpose when before they didn't know that and we had to wait for them to figure it out. And I just really want to reiterate

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

what you said about giving them time to process. Because if you're learning how to drive and your, you know, mother or father or driving instructor is like stomping on the gas for you and stomping on the brake for you and jerking the steering wheel out of your hand, you're like, that's not going to help you learn how to drive. It's going to make it worse.

Allison Mell: Yeah. We got to give them time. And the crib is actually a great place for them to practice because for two reasons, there's no distractions. So that's really a time that they are focused on just what they're doing in the crib. There's no toys, there's nothing to distract them. Also, the springs from the crib mattress do give them a little bit of help. So they push up against the crib mattress versus the floor, they might get a little bit more support through there and it's going to help them. That eventually they're going to be able to transfer that skill to the floor. But yes, this is very common that they're going to do a skill over and over again like rolling onto their belly, but they can't roll back yet. And they're like, oh, but why are they doing that? And it's like, because the brain is wired that way. They're just going to keep doing it and doing it or they push themselves up into sitting, but don't know how to get back down and it's like, but why are they doing that? Well, that's the way the brain works at this stage.

Devon Clement: Yeah. And the muscle development too, like just being able to physically push yourself over and having the strength to do that. A little girl I used to nanny for was about five months and she wasn't rolling and I was, this was many, many years ago before I knew anything about development and I started Googling it like, is she okay? And they I just literally read something that was like, fatter babies take longer to roll and she was a chunker. I was like, okay, this makes sense. She just has a physically heavier body and it's just going to take her a little more time and she did get there. You know, but I also see, I don't know what your twins were like, but working with twins, a lot of times there's like sort of the like chubby, giggly one that just sort of sits there and laughs and then the one is like, the other one's like skinnier and they're like rolling and zipping all over the place and the fat one's just like sitting there laughing at them. But they all get the milestones eventually.

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

Allison Mell: They do. A lot of times they do. If your baby is, so five months is still within the typical, you know, time frame for rolling, right at a four to six month milestone. If a baby though is six to seven months old and still not rolling, I never blame size as the reason, meaning we're never going to put our baby on a diet, right? Your baby doesn't need a diet to meet milestones, but and I know that's not, you know, what you meant at all. It's just I know that sometimes when babies are delayed and they're given that reason, it's like we can still make fat babies roll and crawl. So my twins were very premie and so they were like under every chart through forever and they actually met all milestones towards the end of the range of normal gestationally. So premies you're always going to adjust that age range of expectation right now, chronologically, not the age that they're born, but gestationally what they should have been. So they were six weeks early. So whatever that range of normal was, they were like at the end of it, you know, six weeks delayed. And always within like a few days of each other. It was really weird. And it's a boy girl, like it was not - it was just really funny.

Devon Clement: One sees the other one and has to catch up.

Allison Mell: Yeah. They just did it. They walked within a few days of each other. Like I don't it was I potty trained them six months apart, but everything else that they did on their own, they did it very close together.

Devon Clement: That's something that's interesting too potty training. I don't know if that's something that you work on or you talk about in your program, but a lot of the time when I have parents say to me like, oh, well, you know, we mastered peeing, but they won't poop on the potty and I just can't get them to do it or whatever. And the thing that I always say is think about what their physical body is doing when they are in a diaper and they go over into the corner and they squat down or they lie on their belly or they like get in this position to poop. And then we're asking them to sit upright on a potty or on a chair. Like even I have a squatty potty in my bathroom, like a little stool in front of the toilet to like help, you know, create a more natural position. And you know, thinking about what do they want to be doing with their body that they're just not able to do, you know, sitting on the potty and how can we create that more like natural physical

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

experience for them where they feel more comfortable or like, do they want to go, you know, do they poop in a diaper off in the corner and when you're trying to get them to poop in the potty, you're sitting in front of them like putting on a puppet show. I'm like, I would not be able to poop if you were doing that to me.

Allison Mell: Yeah. It's a really good point.

Devon Clement: No, it's I think a big part of it. Well, and we see it with sleep training too, like, oh my gosh, she's waking up at 5:00 a.m. every morning and pooping and then I have to go in and change her. And I'm like, yeah, because they kind of wake up naturally just a little bit. Like, okay, I went through a lighter sleep cycle. You know what's a great thing to do when I'm alone in the dark with some time to kill? I'm going to poop. Like, you know, I've got some privacy, I've got some space, I'm going to, you know, so...

Allison Mell: Nobody's bothering me, right? Time to focus.

Devon Clement: Exactly. Nobody's bothering me. I'm not distracted. I'm focused. I'm, you know, and I think it's very natural for them to want to do that. So even just thinking about the physicality of these different things.

Allison Mell: And it goes back to that body awareness piece, right? If their legs are dangling, as you just talked about the squatting in the corner where their feet are planted on that floor and they're getting, you know, they know exactly where they are. And now put them on a toilet seat and their legs are dangling in the air and they're like, I have no leverage, I have no awareness, nothing giving me that feedback of where my feet are. That's very disorienting and now this new skill that you're trying to encourage your child to do. I won't say which one, but one of my children really struggled with this skill. This is not professionally where I am, but as a mom, I will share. And one of my kids really struggled with pooping on the toilet. They all potty trained peeing night and day all at once. My kids were like, I don't know magically they were in underwear overnight, but that was really hard.

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

And I remember working when I was working in the school setting, I was working with an OT and she said to me, she's like, "Allison, you got to stop pressuring your child about this. You got to stop panicking yourself about this. I promise eventually it will happen. Give that child the diaper and one day they are going to call out to you and say, come wipe me." And that's exactly what happened. That is exactly it was like months, months, months later. And I look back now and I said, I don't know what I was stressing over in that first month or so when we were getting into power struggles over this, right? Like, you know, come on, you could come on, you can't get up from the toilet and again, this was so many years ago, but like, I tried everything, right? It was like, oh, I love you. I'm going to read you a book. Oh, I'm going to give you a treat. Don't get up from the toilet. Right? Like I tried everything and I was so stressed about it. And when, you know, it was again, it was somebody who an OT who had kids older than my kids and she's like, just stop. Just stop everything you're doing. And if she asks for a diaper, give her that diaper and let it go. And I did. And I looked back at my, you know, my mom skills at the time and I said, I don't know what I was stressing over. I promise you that child to this day goes to the bathroom in a toilet.

Devon Clement: Well, and I say that about potty training generally, parents stress over it and they start so early and then it's taking forever and they're like, well, we're trying and this and that. I'm like, don't even - like the number of kids that I've taken care of normally developing special ed that just one day were like, I'm going to start using the potty now. And whether you spent six months leading up to that, stressing about it or you just let it be.

Allison Mell: It probably happened at the same time, no matter what.

Devon Clement: Yeah, exactly.

Allison Mell: I found with all four of my kids that when I waited until they were ready, meaning they woke up dry, that they kept telling me to change their diaper when they felt wet, right? Like, change me, change me, right? When they started being aware and wanting to not sit in a wet diaper or you know, that was

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

my sign, okay, we're ready. And then it took, I mean two days, not without an occasional accident, but I mean a day, two days.

Devon Clement: Yeah, 100%.

Allison Mell: Anybody who's taking six months to do this, you are stressing, I mean, I want to say over nothing because it's going to happen. And it's you can't push this when before that they're ready. It just it's a power struggle and you don't want to make toileting something that's stressful for your child because then they're going to start holding it. Then they start getting constipated. Then they start having bladder accidents because when there's constipation, they start, like so maybe they've been toilet trained with peeing but they won't poop on the toilet. Actually went to a whole course on this for physical therapy is when a child is constipated, they're start pushing on the bladder and they'll start having peeing accidents. And then you're like, why are you having accidents?

Devon Clement: Well, also if you're just putting them into underwear too soon before they have the awareness, then they're just going to pee everywhere and you're going to have to clean it up and you're going to have to do 100 loads of laundry a day. Like it's not worth it. My mother even said, I potty trained very early and then she waited with my sister because she was like, it was annoying having to take you to the bathroom all the time. Like we'd be in the car driving and you'd be like, I have to go potty and then we would have to find a potty. Like that was it, you know?

Allison Mell: Keep that diaper. So a lot of people when they're like, oh, I'm having my next child, we need to potty train before I have a two in diapers. I'm like, I had three in diapers at the same time, okay? You know what it was better that way? Once I started having to it was fine. It was better. I changed everybody was like a production line of like, you know, one baby, next baby, next baby. And that's what I did.

Devon Clement: Keep them in diapers, keep them in the crib, just let it ride.

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

Allison Mell: Don't rush to the next thing before you have to. That comes with the next set of challenges. It's not like everything is all of a sudden resolved. I mean, again, every stage is easier and harder for different reasons. So pace yourself.

Devon Clement: And if you're having another baby, your older one might regress anyway. So it doesn't really make sense to push anything on them in that moment anyway. Okay, so before we wrap up, what is like one tip, if you could get parents of babies or parents, people expecting or pre-parents to change one thing or do one thing, what would it be?

Allison Mell: Can I say two? I'm going to say two. I'm going to say two. One thing that they have to do and one mentality change that I want them to have. One thing that I really want them to do is recognize that the car seat should not be the stroller and the crib and everything combined. That car seat does not allow your baby to move for a very important safety reason. When your child is in the car, those straps are meant to be tight. There's not supposed to be any movement because God forbid you're in an accident, we don't want your baby moving at all to protect their head and all of that. So that really prevents movement. And now with the do not and other ones like that, I see babies in those car seats for longer and longer periods of time and it not only prevents them from moving, but if they do have any asymmetry, if they do have a head turning preference or a torticollis, which is tightness in the neck muscle, it is exacerbating that position and can make it worse. And when you're in the car, absolutely be in that car seat. When you're not in the car, please, please take your child out of that car seat, get a regular stroller, place them on the floor, please limit your time in the car seat. So that's number one.

Devon Clement: Just a note about that. It is actually unsafe for them to sleep in the car seat if it is not mounted in the car or the stroller. So the old days of like bring the car seat in the house with the sleeping baby, set it down on the floor. That is actually not recommended and advised against. So yeah, take them out of the car seat. I am always pushing people to switch to the regular seat on the stroller like, oh, but they're not ready. Yes, they are.

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

Allison Mell: They are ready. They are ready.

Devon Clement: You can recline it really far back too. Like with they're little and they, you know, recline it all the way back.

Allison Mell: Exactly. When my twins were our were turning 15. So this is a long time ago and I didn't there were not a lot of double strollers on the market for like, you know, I mean, most double strollers are for a toddler and a baby. So there was no adapter for two car seats. I mean, there was like nothing except the Bugaboo, which was like \$2,000 and I couldn't afford that. But you know what? I laid the seat very far down. I even put a little insert for when they were like really, really newborn so that they weren't rolling all over the place. But very soon I removed that and they were just fine. So your baby should not be in the car seat in the stroller. Even the bassinet if they don't like it, put them in the regular seat, they will be fine. So that's a really big strong stance that I have. And then the mentality shift that I want parents to have is you are the expert in your child. A lot of times as new parents, in this first age, even if it's new parent third time over, you think that everybody else is going to know better because they're the expert, but you're the expert in your child. If you think that there is something wrong, then you should push your way until you get help because nobody else is the expert in your baby but you.

Devon Clement: I love that. I love that. And you're right. Early intervention is from like birth basically, right?

Allison Mell: Birth to three.

Devon Clement: So if you have concerns about your six-month-old or your three-month-old or whatever, you can call early intervention and schedule an evaluation. And you know what? I mean, best case scenario, they tell you your baby's fine and you don't need any support or they tell you these are the supports that we have available for you. And it's great. And it does not mean that they are going to get some kind of diagnosis or label that's going to follow them for the rest of their lives because I know that's a big concern for people. And I mean my thing is they're not trying to spend money on kids that they do not

Ep #86: Baby Motor Skill Milestones: What Parents Need to Know with Dr. Allison Mell

need to spend money on services for. So if they're going to give it to you, then your kid needs it. Allison, thank you so much. This has been so great. I love this topic and I think it's so important. Where can people find you?

Allison Mell: Thank you so much for having me. You can find me my website, totsontarget.com. You can check out the membership that I have if you are interested in supporting your baby through the milestones, want to get a jump start on that. Absolutely. That is available to you as well as all my social media channels where you can learn for free at Tots on Target on Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Pinterest, all the platforms. So you can check out at Tots on Target.

Devon Clement: Amazing. I love that. And I think this is something that people should learn about even before they have a baby, even before they have kids. I think it's, you know, it's something that's really important, really important to know. Thank you so much again. This has been great.

Allison Mell: Thank you for having me.

—

To be sure you never miss an episode, be sure to follow the show in your favorite podcast app. We'd also love to connect with you on social media. You can find us on Instagram [@happyfamilyafter](https://www.instagram.com/happyfamilyafter) or at our website HappyFamilyAfter.com. On our website you can also leave us a voicemail with any questions or thoughts you might have, and you can roast your baby. Talk to you soon.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of *Parenthood Prep*. If you want to learn more about the services Devon offers, as well as access her free monthly newborn care webinars, head on over to www.HappyFamilyAfter.com.