

Special Needs
DEVELOPMENTAL
FORM GUIDE

*A Developmental Approach
to the
Charlotte Mason Method*

PREK - FORM 3

A CHARLOTTE MASON PLENARY

**CHARLOTTE MASON SPECIAL NEEDS
DEVELOPMENTAL FORM GUIDE
FOR PREK – FORM 3**

**BY AMY BODKIN, ED.S.
AND RACHEL LEBOWITZ**

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Introduction

DEVELOPMENTAL FORM GUIDE

Thank you for choosing A Charlotte Mason Plenary! And welcome to a Charlotte Mason education, a method that truly honors the child as a person and brings ease and joy to homeschooling.

I'm Amy Bodkin, the Special Needs Consultant at A Charlotte Mason Plenary. I am a School Psychologist, and I have homeschooled my children using Charlotte Mason's philosophy since the beginning. I have an Educational Specialist Degree (Ed.S.) with an emphasis in Neuropsychology, a Masters in Educational Psychology, and a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology with a minor in Mathematics.

Professionally, personally, and as a parent, I have a significant amount of experience with Autism and all the many processing and learning disabilities that can go with Autism. All of these different angles of experience give me a very unique perspective and insight into homeschooling special needs students.

TO SEE A CHILD AS A BORN PERSON, NOT AS A DIAGNOSIS

I am drawn to the Charlotte Mason method because it was the way I wish I, as a child on the Autism spectrum, had been educated. Recognizing early on that our children were also on the Autism spectrum, I knew a Charlotte Mason education would be a perfect fit for many different reasons, but the primary reason is that Charlotte Mason chose to make her first principle "Children are born persons."

Too often, children with special needs are viewed as "less than" because of their differences. Charlotte Mason makes respect for their personhood the foundation of their education.

As a Special Needs Consultant, I make it my business to see each child as an individual and not as a diagnosis.

A DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH TO THE CHARLOTTE MASON METHOD

The Special Needs Developmental Form Guide is an add-on to the [CM Your Way Form Guides](#). The two Guides work hand-in-hand to give you a complete picture of the Charlotte Mason method from a developmental approach.

All of Charlotte's Programmes are divided by Forms, which are like grade levels. Forms allow for more flexibility in meeting the educational needs of your child. Forms are elastic, allowing you to stretch or contract the amount and difficulty of work based on your child's ability and needs.

But your child may not fit neatly into a Form. Taking the developmental approach allows you to meet your child where he is rather than where he should be. So, instead of using Forms as the primary tool for placement of where your child should be, we will be looking at developmental categories instead.

I have divided this Guide into six distinct developmental categories:

- **Social-Emotional**
- **Communication**
- **Gross Motor**
- **Fine Motor**
- **Life Skills**
- **Cognitive**

DEVELOPMENTAL CATEGORIES, CM FORMS, AND BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

Within each of those categories, we will also discuss the subjects that fall into that category and how the work was divided among the Forms. The information in this Guide roughly correlates to the following Forms:

- **Preschool = Ages 3-4**
- **Kindergarten = Age 5**
- **Form 1 = Grades 1-3**
- **Form 2 = Grades 4-6**
- **Form 3 = Grades 7-8**

This Guide covers Preschool through Form 3 because, by the time a student is developmentally ready for Form 4, he has reached Piaget's final stage in Cognitive Development. There is still plenty of brain development left to be done between 12 and 21 years of age, but the basic "hardware" is in place.

For more information on Forms, please see [Understanding Forms in a Charlotte Mason Education](#).

MEET YOUR CHILD WHERE HE IS - NOT WHERE HE SHOULD BE

My advice for you, as a special needs parent is to stop and be grateful for the many wonderful things you have the privilege of getting to experience in this life - from your children to the feel of a summer's breeze, a robin's song, or warm food in your belly.

The second piece of advice I will offer to you is to not get caught up in this idea of trying to "catch your child up." Appreciate who he is today, and only worry about giving him the physical and mental sustenance that is necessary for today. Believe it or not, if you just focus on who he is today, feeding him what he needs today, you will eventually get to where you need to be.

And if you can manage to release the expectations - your own subconscious expectations of what is "normal" and the expectations of others around you - I believe you will find a great deal of sorely needed relief. After all, the goal is not to "catch up" or to "get through all the Forms." The goal is to see your child as a person, and provide him with needed sustenance.

SMALL EFFORTS = GROWTH

When you change your focus from the lense of grades and ages to development, you can see your child as the person he is today and it frees you to be the parent you want to be.

Even if you are struggling with chronic illness and other burdens, you can feel a sense of freedom by letting go of expectations. When we unshackle ourselves from the expectations that have been

placed on us by society, doctors, therapists, teachers, books, and other parents, etc., we can find our way forward.

The only way you are going to get through whatever you find yourself facing is by allowing yourself and your child to be the people you were born to be. I encourage you to rethink the way life "has to be" and try to envision how it "could be."

Stop thinking about the "deficits" and what you "don't have to work with." Instead, start thinking about what you do have to work with, the wonderful people you already are. Create an atmosphere that allows you to all be who you were made to be, so you can stop trying to "fake it till you make it."

This process means starting at the part of your child's development that is the lowest, and probably the part you don't like thinking about the most. Get comfortable relating there, doing a little work every day. Consistency, not Herculean effort, is what will win the day.

It's about teaching our kids that learning to nourish their minds, even if it doesn't look like other people, is worth it! They know better than anyone else how to help themselves learn best, we just have to be listening with our eyes and giving them options! Just like plants, when you provide consistent opportunities for sunlight and the right nutrients, you will see growth! Don't rush it because, as was said in *The Princess Bride*, "You rush a miracle man, you get rotten miracles!"

A BALANCED PERSON IS A HAPPY PERSON

Speaking of rotten miracles, when a child ends up developing one skill in abundance to his other skills, we end up with some rather unfortunate consequences. Van Gogh, Beethoven, etc., all were extremely talented in their field, but if there is one thing you notice about some of the greatest people in their field, it is that they are not very happy. People need balance in order to gain confidence and contentment. Our children need the same. Instead of trying to find the one thing that your child is gifted at, focus instead on helping your child grow to be a balanced person.

As you go through this guide, try to determine where your child is developmentally in each subject given the accommodations suggested. Then look at where your child is overall in all of the subjects. From there, begin with the lowest Form working to help your child strengthen his development in this weak area. As he gets stronger in this weak area, he will gain greater balance in his development. And as I like to say, "A balanced person is a happy person." This does not mean that you have to keep your child from enjoying things that he is good at. It simply means that we are focusing on encouraging him in areas that he needs help in and letting him just enjoy the things he loves.

When your child has advanced enough in a weak area that he is ready to start a new Form, don't add everything all at once. Take it slow, one thing at a time.

YOU CAN DO THIS!

In case no one has told you this today, you are doing an amazing job! Now, drop your shoulders, take a slow deep breath, and let's re-envision how this Charlotte Mason Education can look for your child!

Amy Bodkin

SPECIAL NEEDS CONSULTANT
A CHARLOTTE MASON PLENARY

SPECIAL NEEDS FORM GUIDE

Communication Skills
DEVELOPMENT

A CHARLOTTE MASON PLENARY

CATEGORY 2

Communication Skills

COMMUNICATION IS RELATIONSHIP

The Communication Category appears second in this guide, right behind the Social-Emotional Category, because it is foundational to Charlotte Mason's philosophy. Over and over in her Volumes, Charlotte states that "Education is the science of relations." And, after all, isn't communication the foundation for establishing all relationships?

CM Subjects covered in this category include:

- Oral Narration / Composition
- Dictation
- Foreign Language
- Latin
- Recitation
- Reading Instruction / Practice
- Grammar / Composition
- Singing

AND EVERYONE RELATES

So, before we take another step forward, I want you to know that this section was written just for you and your child - whether your child can speak, uses sign language, a communication device, or has no functional language at all. Regardless of communication style and language ability, as human beings we are all able to relate with each other and the world around us.

Our goal here is to provide a broad and rich feast that our children can enjoy sampling from, not what we would necessarily enjoy sampling from but what *they* would enjoy. Your child's happiness is always going to be the greatest tool you have for judging what your child is ready for, but first we need to discuss how communication typically develops so we can more easily find that sweet spot that is rich and yet not overwhelming!

BASIC STAGES OF COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT

Typically when we think about the developmental category of Communication, we are thinking about Language Development. Although Language Development is much more than just learning to talk, we are going to begin by walking through those steps of language acquisition and development.

Broadly speaking, language development breaks down nicely into 5 stages with three year increments each.

Five Stages of Communication Development:

- Stage 1: Language Acquisition (ages 0-3)
- Stage 2: Pre-reading Skills (ages 3-6)
- Stage 3: Reading (ages 6-9)
- Stage 4: Mechanics of Writing (ages 9-12)
- Stage 5: Advanced Language Skills including analytical reading, formal writing and speaking skills (ages 12+)

Let's take a brief look at what typically happens in the first three years of Language Acquisition.

STAGE I: LANGUAGE ACQUISITION (AGES 0-3)

As early as the second trimester of pregnancy, a child hears his or her first sounds. By the beginning of the third trimester of pregnancy, a child begins to recognize and remember familiar language structures, including his mother's voice, a book read, or a song frequently sung before birth. Immediately after birth, babies seek out and are comforted by their mother's voice. As infants, they enjoy that sing-song quality we as adults audiotactically hear when speaking to babies: motherese. That joint attention when we sing to and forth with each other as babies begin to coo, is what helps them begin to grow up to understand and produce language.

At birth, babies can distinguish all of the different sounds used in every language. But by six months of age, they have keyed into the sounds that are used in the primary language, or languages, of their environment. They have lost the ability to distinguish some of the sounds not used in their primary language.

About the time children turn one year old, they begin to understand more and more of the language around them. They begin to say words that are important to them. At this time, they begin to learn words like "Mama" and "Dada" and other words like "bottle," "blanket," "milk," "baby," or "ball."

Over time, their vocabulary grows by leaps and bounds, and eventually includes verbs and adverbs (including the ever-present "no" that is so important to the parent). The average child has a vocabulary of at least 200 words and is perhaps beginning to string two or three words together to form simple sentences!

For more details about the many nuances of Language Acquisition, see [*How Babies Talk: The Magic and Mystery of Language in the First Three Years of Life*](#) by Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, PhD, and Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, PhD.

If challenges arise in the Language Acquisition phase, I recommend you get a Speech Evaluation. We need to determine whether there might be a neuromuscular problem, a cognitive processing deficit, or a problem in sensory processing. Speech evaluations are now available online worldwide. An assessment with an Audiologist may also be useful to determine if hearing or auditory processing may be an issue (more about Auditory Processing Disorder in the Cognitive Category).

STAGE 2: PRE-READING SKILLS (AGES 3-6)

Once Language Acquisition has happened, Pre-reading Skills begin to develop. There are roughly six areas that develop between the ages of 3 and 6 years old:

Communication Development

OVERVIEW OF FORM SUBJECTS

ORAL NARRATION

PREK / KINDERGARTEN

Communication is simply relating. Use this time to connect with your child instead of worrying about meeting milestones. Make time for shared attention on whatever interests your child. Look for ways to expand how you and your child connect. Connection can happen through words, signs, pictures, communication devices, apps, videos, drawing, or even reading and writing (if you have a child with hyperlexia). All of these things can encourage language development through purposeful communication and relationship.

As language develops, your child may not prove to be a natural-born narrator, but that is okay. You can model this for your child by reflecting back to him with words that describe what he is doing, such as: "You are putting the toys into the box."

To help a child develop an interest in books, we start by pointing to the pictures and talking with our child about the pictures. Only later do we read the book to them. Some children even benefit from seeing a movie of the book first, as some animation can help them understand the action the words are describing.

The [Charlotte Mason DVD Series](#) is excellent. If you have a hyperlexic child, there are ways you can encourage language in your child, both with talking and reading, [Talk with Me! The Big Book of Exclamations 2](#) by Teri Kaminski Peterson MScCC/SLP is excellent. Also watch [Building a Solid Foundation](#), which is one video in a series on Behavior and Communication.

Narration is not about helping children memorize words. Rather, it is more about enhancing our relationship with our children through increased communication.

Sometimes narration can prove challenging. When it does, the first thing to do is to check your child's receptive language level and make sure that the books you are reading are comfortable for your child to understand.

It does not matter how skilled of a narrator your child might be if the book you are reading to him is beyond his comprehension.

Now, this isn't to say that you can never read a book to a child that is above his comprehension level. I would expect that many family read-alouds are above some of the children's comprehension, but the books you expect your child to narrate should be at their comprehension level.

Over time, and through the use of daily narration, your child's comprehension will improve. If your child does not naturally make pictures or movies in his head, then support his comprehension by

SPECIAL NEEDS FORM GUIDE

Charlotte Mason's
20 PRINCIPLES

APPENDIX

A CHARLOTTE MASON PLENARY

Charlotte Mason's **20 PRINCIPLES**

Please join our free 20 Principles Study, [Finding Your Way with Charlotte Mason's 20 Principles](#), on The Plenary website.

PRINCIPLE #1: Children are born persons.

PRINCIPLE #2: They are not born either good or bad, but with possibilities for good and for evil.

PRINCIPLE #3: The principles of authority on the one hand, and of obedience on the other, are natural, necessary and fundamental; but –

PRINCIPLE #4: These principles are limited by the respect due to the personality of children, which must not be encroached upon, whether by the direct use of fear or love, suggestion or influence, or by undue play upon any one natural desire.

PRINCIPLE #5: Therefore, we are limited to three educational instruments – the atmosphere of environment, the discipline of habit, and the presentation of living ideas. The P.N.E.U. Motto is: “Education is an atmosphere, a discipline, and a life.”

PRINCIPLE #6: When we say that “*education is an atmosphere*,” we do not mean that a child should be isolated in what may be called a ‘child-environment’ especially adapted and prepared, but that we should take into account the educational value of his natural home atmosphere, both as regards persons and things, and should let him live freely among his proper conditions. It stultifies a child to bring down his world to the ‘child’s’ level.

PRINCIPLE #7: By “*education is a discipline*,” we mean the discipline of habits, formed definitely and thoughtfully, whether habits of mind or body. Physiologists tell us of the adaptation of brain structures to habitual lines of thought, i.e., to our habits.

PRINCIPLE #8: In saying that “*education is a life*,” the need of intellectual and moral as well as of physical sustenance is implied. The mind feeds on ideas, and therefore children should have a generous curriculum.

PRINCIPLE #9: We hold that the child’s mind is no mere *sac* to hold ideas; but is rather, if the figure may be allowed, a spiritual *organism*, with an appetite for all knowledge. This is its proper diet, with which it is prepared to deal; and which it can digest and assimilate as the body does foodstuffs.

PRINCIPLE #10: Such a doctrine as *e.g.* the Herbartian, that the mind is a receptacle, lays the stress of Education (the preparation of knowledge in enticing morsels duly ordered) upon the teacher. Children taught on this principle are in danger of receiving much teaching with little knowledge; and the teacher’s axiom is “what a child learns matters less than how he learns it.”

PRINCIPLE #11: But we, believing that the normal child has powers of mind which fit him to deal with all knowledge proper to him, give him a full and generous curriculum; taking care only that all knowledge offered him is vital, that is, that facts are not presented without their informing ideas. Out of this conception comes our principle that –

PRINCIPLE #12: “*Education is the Science of Relations*”; that is, that a child has natural relations with a vast number of things and thoughts: so we train him upon physical exercises, nature lore, handicrafts, science and art, and upon *many living books*, for we know that our business is not to teach him all about anything, but to help him to make valid as many as may be of –

“Those first-born affinities that fit our new existence to existing things.”

PRINCIPLE #13: In devising a Syllabus for a normal child, of whatever social class, three points must be considered:

- (a) He requires *much* knowledge, for the mind needs sufficient food as much as does the body.
- (b) The knowledge should be various, for sameness in mental diet does not create appetite (*i.e.*, curiosity).
- (c) Knowledge should be communicated in well-chosen language because his attention responds naturally to what is conveyed in literary form.

PRINCIPLE #14: As knowledge is not assimilated until it is reproduced, children should ‘tell back’ after a single reading or hearing, or should write on some part of what they have read.

PRINCIPLE #15: A *single reading* is insisted on because children have naturally great power of attention; but this force is dissipated by the re-reading of passages, and also, by questioning, summarizing, and the like.

Acting upon these and some other points in the behavior of mind, we find that *the educability of children is enormously greater than has hitherto been supposed* and is but little dependent on such circumstances as heredity and environment.

Nor is the accuracy of this statement limited to clever children or to children of the educated classes: thousands of children in Elementary Schools respond freely to this method, which is based on the *behavior of mind*.

PRINCIPLE #16: There are two guides to moral and intellectual self-management to offer to children, which we may call “the way of the will” and “the way of the reason.”

PRINCIPLE #17: *The way of the will:* Children should be taught

- (a) to distinguish between “I want” and “I will.”
- (b) That the way to will effectively is to turn our thoughts from that which we desire but do not will.
- (c) That the best way to turn our thoughts is to think of or do some quite different thing, entertaining or interesting.
- (d) That after a little rest in this way, the will returns to its work with new vigor.

(This adjunct of the will is familiar to us as *diversion*, whose office it is to ease us for a time from will effort, that we may ‘will’ again with added power. The use of *suggestion* as an aid to the will *is to*

be deprecated, as tending to stultify and stereotype character. It would seem that spontaneity is a condition of development, and that human nature needs the discipline of failure as well as of success.)

PRINCIPLE #18: *The way of reason:* We teach children, too, not to “lean (too confidently) to their own understanding”; because the function of reason is to give logical demonstration (a) of mathematical truth, (b) of an initial idea, accepted by the will. In the former case, reason is, practically, an infallible guide, but in the latter, it is not always a safe one; for, whether that idea be right or wrong, reason will confirm it by irrefragable proofs.

PRINCIPLE #19: Therefore, children should be taught, as they become mature enough to understand such teaching, that the chief responsibility which rests on them as *persons* is the acceptance or rejection of ideas. To help them in this choice we give them principles of conduct, and a wide range of the knowledge fitted to them. These principles should save children from some of the loose thinking and heedless action which cause most of us to live at a lower level than we need.

PRINCIPLE #20: We allow no separation to grow up between the intellectual and ‘spiritual’ life of children, but teach them that the Divine Spirit has constant access to their spirits, and is their continual Helper in all the interests, duties and joys of life.

About the Authors

Hi! I'm AMY BODKIN, Ed.S., the Special Needs Consultant at A Charlotte Mason Plenary. I have an Educational Specialist Degree (Ed.S.) with an emphasis in Neuropsychology, a Masters in Educational Psychology, and a Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology with a minor in Mathematics.

I am drawn to the Charlotte Mason method because it was the way I wish I, as a child on the Autism spectrum, had been educated. Recognizing early on that our children were also on the Autism spectrum, I knew a Charlotte Mason education would be a perfect fit for many different reasons, but the primary reason is that Charlotte Mason chose to make her first principle "Children are born persons." Too often children with special needs are viewed as "less than" because of their differences. Charlotte Mason makes respect for their personhood the foundation of their education.

As a Special Needs Consultant, I make it my business to see each child as an individual and not as a diagnosis. I also strive to see each member of your family as an individual, analyzing each person's needs, and working to provide a balanced plan that will meet your needs as a parent, as well as the needs of each child, while honoring your core beliefs.

For more information about Special Needs Homeschooling using the Charlotte Mason method, please see the [SPECIAL NEEDS RESOURCES PAGE](#) of The Plenary Website.

Hi! I'm RACHEL LEBOWITZ, the owner of A Charlotte Mason Plenary. My husband and I have always homeschooled our two children using the Charlotte Mason method of education. I have a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Houston where I studied Communications and Political Science. Before attending college, I travelled as a member of Up With People, a performing arts organization with a mission to transcend cultural barriers and create global understanding through music. After college, I spent many years working as a Radio and Television Journalist. My husband and I currently live in Texas with our two children, two dogs, and one guinea pig.