

The Growing Years

Child Development Fact Sheet

Bulletin #4243

3

Years

How Does Your Preschooler Grow?

Physical growth is slower now than in the past. The 3-year-old is taller, leaner and more coordinated. You will probably notice that she outgrows pants very quickly. This is because most growth will be in height, both in the legs and in the midsection.

Physical activity now includes pedaling a tricycle, throwing and catching a ball and jumping. His hands and fingers are more coordinated, too. Using a fork and spoon for eating, drawing squiggly lines and cutting with scissors are skills the 3-year-old is practicing.

The preschooler's emotions are still intense. Affection, joy, fear, anger and frustration are often expressed loudly and very physically. Throwing a block across the room when a tower falls is the way many 3-year-olds deal with frustration. "Leave me alone, stupid" is a common way to show anger. Enthusiastic hugs and kisses along with "I love you" let you know how happy your youngster is.

Aren't you amazed at the new problems your preschooler can solve? Your child will be ready to learn concepts such as colors, numbers, counting and the alphabet. She will learn ideas like "over, under" or "in, out."

Questions Preschoolers Ask: Why, Why, Why?

It may be hard to answer questions all day long, but your child will have hundreds! He wants to learn about everything. The 2-year-old asked "What is this?" The 3-year-old will want to know "Why?" Don't be surprised by questions like:

Why are you doing that?

Why is the ceiling high?

Why do the clouds move?

Why aren't the clouds moving?

How did you do that?

What is this for?

Although you may get tired of answering so many questions, this helps your child learn. If a child gets no answer, he may stop asking. Answering questions encourages curiosity. Try

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Your Preschooler Wants You to Know

How I Move:

- ♦ I am well-balanced; I walk erect.
- ♦ I am nimble on my feet, move well and quickly, and am purposefully active.
- ♦ I can carry drinks without spilling.
- ♦ I gallop in high, wide steps.
- ♦ I ride a tricycle.
- ♦ I alternate feet on stair-climbing.
- ♦ I put on and take off jackets with some help.
- ♦ I have some finger control in handling small objects.

How I Think:

- ♦ I operate in the “here and now.”
- ♦ I am excited, curious, imaginative.
- ♦ I know number concepts “one” and “two.”
- ♦ I understand: “It’s time to...”.
- ♦ My attention span is four to eight minutes.
- ♦ I name and match simple colors.
- ♦ I have difficulty in combining two activities (i.e., eating and talking).
- ♦ I may see the connection between cause and effect.
- ♦ I talk about things that happened in the past.
- ♦ I often use letter substitutions (i.e., “w” for “r”).

- ♦ I increase my use of pronouns and prepositions.
- ♦ My vocabulary is 800 to 900 words.
- ♦ I understand two directions given one after the other.

How I Get Along:

- ♦ I like to copy adults.
- ♦ I am interested in playmates.
- ♦ I play “animals.”
- ♦ I am beginning to like to play alongside of other children.
- ♦ I am beginning to take turns.
- ♦ I want to please adults, to conform, but often assert independence.
- ♦ I am spontaneous, lively, talkative.
- ♦ I go after what I want, and fight for it.
- ♦ I am jealous.
- ♦ I often get frustrated.



to give simple answers. Avoid too many details. If you haven't given enough information, your 3-year-old will ask for more! Try asking him what he thinks the answer is.

Social Development from 3 to 4 Years

Socially, 3-year-olds are becoming more conscious of other people. They want to be with other children and show an increased desire to please others most of the time. You'll enjoy their willingness to cooperate with you.

Your preschooler may become involved in associative play in which two or three children use the same toys and equipment and participate in the same games, but each in his own way. At other times, he may participate in a more advanced cooperative play in which children share toys, organize games and make friends. At this age, friendships are often short-lived, and friends are valued for their materials and physical characteristics, as well as their proximity. "Why is Johnny your friend?" The answer may be, "He lives next door and has a new swing set."

While playing with others has growing importance, 3-year-olds have much to learn about cooperative play. Perhaps because preschoolers are becoming more "adult-like" in their physical appearance, parents and caregivers often expect more grown-up behavior from their children than they are able to demonstrate. For instance, preschoolers play with friends, but their playtime often ends with tears or fights. They are beginning to share, but still push, shove, or hit to get what they want. Their social problems stem from their natural self-centeredness and desire to call attention to themselves. "Look at me! I can ride the trike better than Billy!" is a bid for superiority. Help them feel good about themselves and reduce competitiveness with simple responses like, "You are a real whiz when it comes to riding a trike."

The 3-Year-Old:

- ♦ Likes to be close to mother, but father is increasingly important.
- ♦ Is imitative in language, manners and habits.
- ♦ Begins to learn what is acceptable behavior and what is not.
- ♦ Asks countless questions.
- ♦ May use toilet independently.
- ♦ Can wash and dry hands.
- ♦ Answers telephone.
- ♦ Joins in play with other children.
- ♦ Understands the meaning of taking turns, but may have difficulty sharing.
- ♦ Plays alone for short periods of time (15 to 20 minutes).
- ♦ May have imaginary playmate(s).

Emotional Development: from 3 to 4 Years

The third year is characterized by emotional extremes and some negativism. While children at this age are not as rigid or inflexible as they were a year ago, they can be very demanding and lose control from time to time.



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The 3-Year-Old:

- ♦ Accepts necessary limits much of the time.
- ♦ Wants adult's approval.
- ♦ Shows fatigue by being irritable or restless.
- ♦ Needs reassurances from adults.
- ♦ Begins to use words to express anger, though he may still express anger by hitting or kicking.

Let Me Help

Including children in household chores gives them hands-on learning through routine tasks while they share the family work load and learn responsibility. Chores help children develop eye-hand coordination, organize sequences, understand how parts make up the whole and learn to solve problems. Children learn best through natural life experiences like chores that they can relate to and interact with. Everyday tasks can be an enjoyable way to spend quality time with your child, and they are a better way to help your child prepare for school than memorization or work sheets on numbers, letters or words.

A general rule in teaching self-help skills is: don't do things for children that they can do by themselves. However, that doesn't mean expecting your child to work independently. You need to have reasonable expectations and provide patient guidance. What is reasonable to expect for one child may be totally unrealistic for another. To determine what is reasonable for your child, look at your values, then consider your child's age, temperament, experience and learning style.

Children learn to be responsible in small steps. First, allow your child to help with a job while you offer moral support and physical presence. The patience required to stand by, hands at your sides, while your child struggles with what seems a simple task will pay off as he gains confidence and skills. This leads to

the child's willingness and ability to help. Next, your child will do a task with limited reminding or supervision. In setting the table, he may forget the napkins or spoons and need your prompting, "Let's check to see if we have everything we need." Finally, your child will be able to do the job independently and completely without reminders.

What Does Anger Look Like? Sound Like? Feel Like?

We can often tell by physical signs when people are upset. The heart pounds faster, palms sweat, the face turns red or perhaps grows pale. The jaw is set, eyes are fixed and lips form a tight line. The angry child may shout "I hate you." The angry adult may curse. Both will scream or yell. Anger may turn to physical abuse, like a hit or a kick. People lose control of their tempers and have tantrums. Often, this is the case with young children because they are in the process of learning the correct ways to show their anger.

Anger may show up quietly as well. Passive/aggressive behaviors, such as not responding to parents and appearing uncooperative, hopeless or self-destructive, may be signals of anger turned inward.

What to Do When Your Child's Angry

Children learn by what they see their parents and other adults do. This is called modeling. When we model the behaviors that we want our children to use, they will eventually catch on to them. When children are young and not able to communicate everything verbally (with words), they tend to have fists and feet and teeth do their talking for them.

When this happens, first care for the victim. This helps relieve some of your own anger by helping the hurt one and giving you time to think of a helpful, respectful way to handle the child who has done the hurting. It also pulls attention away from the aggressor if the child has harmed for attention.

Next, explain that people are not for hurting. To make this effective, you must be calm and gentle with the child to model the type of behavior you expect. Express what the child is feeling in words, such as "You are feeling angry," and help her express what she wants. "You want to play with the bear, too."

"What would you like to do while you wait for your turn?" This will help a child identify his feelings, express his needs in a positive way and begin to problem-solve.

Remember, children have a right to their feelings, but adults make the rules about actions.

Work with the Zones

To change a behavior, stop the old behavior and then offer alternatives that satisfy the same area (zone) of the body that the negative behavior was linked to. For example, if the child becomes angry and bites, offer food such as a crunchy apple or a safe-to-chew toy. If a child acts out her anger by using fists and arms, offer a pounding block, play dough or a punching pillow to pound on with her fists. (First reinforce the seams of the

pillow or sew it into an old case to minimize feather loss.) Provide crayons and markers with paper to have the child draw or write how she feels.

If the child kicks, work with this zone by offering a ball and an open space to kick it. Kicking soft snow or the tops off from dandelions can also offer the active feet an alternative. Running in an open space or even around a couple of chairs might work, too.

For the child who puts his whole self into it, such as body slamming or smashing others, try a big bear hug (friendly and gentle) or a pile of cushions to attack.

Common causes of anger in children are:

- ♦ Stress.
- ♦ Feelings of not being understood and appreciated.
- ♦ Feelings of being ignored, belittled, taken for granted, overscheduled.
- ♦ Being a go-between for parents who are not getting along.



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Bedtime Routine

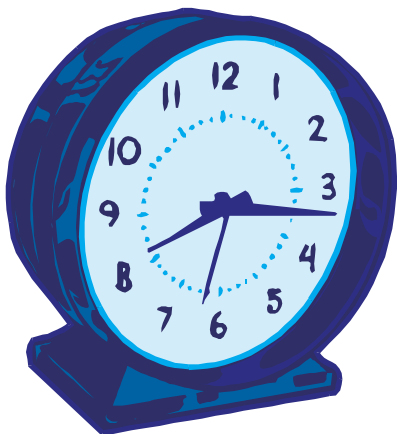
There's a difference between putting a child to bed and putting a child to sleep. One is the parent's responsibility, and the other is the child's responsibility. Parents often don't have much energy at the end of the day, so to avoid conflict with an overly tired child, go along with whatever is easiest. Once the child is in bed, the overwhelming feeling of the responsibility of parenthood decreases.

Children may feel separated from their parents and the activity of the day at bedtime. Isolation, darkness and quietness makes them feel insecure. Help your 3-, 4- or 5-year-old fall asleep, but avoid lying down with him or putting him in your bed. This can create routines you may not appreciate later.

The bedtime routine should be positive for the parent and the child. A parent shouldn't feel trapped or resentful, and a child should go to bed calmly and safely and fall asleep on her own.

Suggestions on Bedtime Routines

- ♦ Give the child transition time. Announce, "It's time to get ready for bed in 10 minutes."
- ♦ Help the child identify time. "When the big hand gets to the top of the clock, it's time



to wash your face and brush your teeth." Or set a timer so she knows when time is up.

- ♦ Make up a bedtime ritual song. "This is the way we wash our face, wash our face, wash our face, so early in the evening." Other verses continue with what to do next, such as brush our teeth, take off our shoes.
- ♦ Make up games. Paint a sleeping face on one side of the pillowcase and an awake face on the other side. At bedtime turn up the closed eyes. Give the character on the pillowcase a name. Say, "Night-night, Snoozy," then say, "Night-night, Suzy," and tiptoe out of the room.
- ♦ Make a picture chart of all the things that Bobby does before he goes to bed. It helps organize the routine.
- ♦ For a sense of security, tuck a favorite animal in bed beside the child, or leave a light on or a flashlight beside the bed.
- ♦ Allow some talk time to unwind, "pre-sleep time." Read, sing or ask questions about the day. Be specific. "Did you see your friend Toby today?" Prepare for the next day. "The weather is going to be colder. Would you like to wear your red sweater or blue sweater tomorrow?"
- ♦ Make some rules about the number of stories or songs before bed so it isn't a method for stalling.
- ♦ Stop the popping. When children keep popping out of bed, say, "Stay in bed. I'll be back in five minutes to check on you."
- ♦ Let the child decide what clothes to wear the night before. Once you give the option to choose, be prepared to allow any combination.

Routines help children develop a sense of responsibility for their actions and respect for

others. The rewards are many for parents since consistency in establishing routines helps children uphold rules and limits.

Watch out: Strings Can Strangle

Clothing strings, loose clothing and stringed items placed around the neck can catch on playground equipment and strangle children.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission has received reports of deaths when these items became caught on playground equipment, especially slides and swings. Items included strings on clothing (such as hoods and attached mittens), loose clothing (such as scarves and ponchos) and other items (such as jump ropes) placed around the neck. These items caught on protrusions, open-ended hooks, gaps and other parts of playground equipment.

Avoid dressing children in loose or stringed clothing if they will be on playground equipment.

The Importance of Play

Some parents think that play is not serious and is just for fun. But children learn through play. It is serious business to them. Just watch how hard a child works at stacking blocks to make a tower.

Play is natural to all children. Many different kinds of activities help children understand themselves, discover how things work and solve problems.

Parents are often frustrated when children grow tired of toys. It seems that they play with them for only a short time. Most toys teach a skill. When the child has learned that skill, he is ready to move on to something else. For example, a shape sorting toy keeps a toddler busy trying to put the circle object in the circle hole. When he can do this over and over, it is not challenging any more. The child is now ready to learn a harder task, such as a puzzle with different shapes.



Play is important for all areas of development. A child's play changes as his abilities and interests change. The four main kinds of play are:

Active, physical play: This increases muscle strength and coordination.

Manipulative, creative play: This play is good for practicing eye-hand coordination, gives children an opportunity to express ideas, use initiative, solve problems and make decisions.

Imitative, imaginative play: This encourages emotional expression, helps child understand others and himself, and lets children practice different ways of behaving.

Social play: This provides ways for learning about how to get along with others, fair play, sharing, friendship.

Play is important during the preschool years. You may notice your child talking to a doll or favorite stuffed animal as though it were real. Imaginary friends also appear now. You may overhear very detailed conversations between your child and his imaginary friend.

This pretend play helps children deal with their emotions. It helps develop emotional stability. Children who play make-believe

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games can handle frustration better. They are also less aggressive and get along better with others.

Parents can encourage imaginary play. When your child wants to “feed” his teddy bear, play along and set a place at the table for this special friend. Often, you will not need to actively participate in make-believe play, but avoid criticism. Allow your child freedom to create his own imaginary world for learning.

Activities, Games, Toys

Outdoor Play

A tree house or playscape built low to the ground with a ladder and slide provides hours of fun and creative play. This does not have to be in your own yard. Find one at a park or nearby school. Plan a picnic or after-work walk to a play area to let your child climb, swing, jump and shout. Tricycles, wagons, a balancing board, sandbox and tire swing are great to share with friends.

Indoor Play

Anything to draw with will keep your preschooler occupied. Crayons, chalk, markers, pencils and paint are a few ideas. Children like to try different materials. Collect scrap paper, because your “artist” will want a clean piece of paper every time.

A variety of blocks and construction sets are good for building. Small cars, trucks, people and signs can be added to make streets or villages.

Games While You Work

Children at this age are very willing to help. Turn picking up toys into a game. Say, “Can you pick up all the cars?” “How many books can you put on the shelf?” At first, you will have to be there to supervise, but as your child grows older, you will be able to give directions, then go to your own work.



Children’s Play Tools: Toys

Children of all ages play in many ways with an endless variety of “toys.” There is no all-inclusive list of toys or the ways that children play with them. One has only to watch a child at play to realize that well-chosen toys are important to early and healthy development.

The list of toys is organized into three categories: (1) those that stimulate active play and physical development, (2) those that encourage dramatic and imaginative play, and (3) those that foster creative and constructive play, all according to age.

Tips for Parents

- ♦ A child’s age will serve as a general guide in the selection of toys. Manufacturers have marked many toys by age or level of skill to help the purchaser.
- ♦ Toys should be kept separate for each age group, as an older child’s toys might be harmful to a younger child.
- ♦ Remember, a toy is only as safe as the way it is used. Rules and guidelines will not protect children if they are careless with toys, or if they are given an “unsafe” toy. Select toys carefully and teach children the necessary safety rules. Toys and play will then be both safe and enjoyable.

Toys that are given to children to play with should be chosen because they meet the child's needs and not because they amuse the idle moments of adults.

For Active Play and Physical Development of 3-Year-Olds

Assorted blocks

Large hollow blocks

Big wagon

Push and Pull toys: airplanes, automobiles, fire engines, trucks

Parallel bars

Hammer and nail sets

Trains

Balls

Junior indoor gym sets

Trikes without pedals

For Dramatic Imaginative Play

Doll corner materials

Children's house play materials

Dolls

Dolls accessories: dresses, combs, brushes, bedclothes

Animals

Telephone

Musical instruments

For Creative and Constructive Play

Plasticine or clay

Easel, paints, paper, brushes

Blunt scissors

Colored cubes

Large crayons

Large wooden beads

Large pegboards

Paste

Rings pyramided on pegs

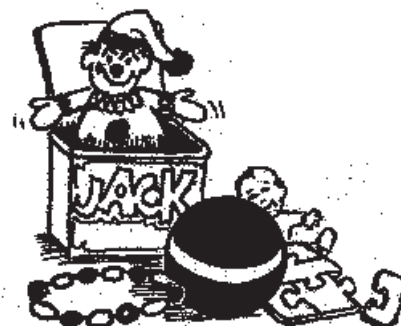
Simple puzzles

Toy Tips for Parents

- ♦ When coping with the TV and other media sales pitches, be aware that children know all the popular items on the new toy market, but often don't know their limitations or cost. When children are conditioned to believe they shouldn't live

without a certain toy, how do the parents say it is unsuitable, overpriced or otherwise inappropriate? Honesty is the best approach. Honesty is an important part of parenthood, and children can and do understand and will accept the truth. They can understand that basic necessities, like food, are more important than expensive toys. Children don't need to have everything — that is one of life's lessons. When they become adults, they'll find this out. Parents should not have to feel guilty about not being able to provide everything for their children.

- ♦ What about the expensive toy? Parents who pay large sums of money for a special toy or game often end up making tough rules for its use. Often, it also bothers the children because they are concerned about damaging it and feel guilty if it happens. Or when they handle it roughly or even in a normal manner, the parents get irritated and worried, causing friction between them and the children. Parents find it very difficult to preserve the expensive toy. Is it worth it?
- ♦ Children are often pleased and happy without the latest, newest, neatest toy. To help get more out of your toy dollar, look for specials, toy reduction sales, lawn or yard sales, garage and moving sales. Bargains can often be found on excellent toys. Look and examine before you buy



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and apply the rules for selecting a good toy that are in the following section. Many delightful and fascinating toys can be homemade. All it takes is a little time and interest by dad and mom and older brothers and sisters. Use old wood scraps, leftover cloth, what-have-you, a little imagination, and you're on your way.

- ♦ With various types of electrical toys, such as stoves and irons, supervision may be necessary until the child knows how to use them carefully. Look for the UL (Underwriters Laboratories) seal on electrical toys. It shows that the toy has been tested for safety of its electrical parts. There should also be supervision for pull toys with long cords that could strangle the child.
- ♦ Toys with moving parts should be considered for safety. Is the child mature enough for the toy?
- ♦ When painting a child's crib or toys, use only paints that are labeled "lead-free" or "nontoxic." These paints will not contain antimony, arsenic, cadmium, mercury, selenium or soluble barium, which could be harmful to your child. Since not all paints are so labeled, look for and use only those that are marked: "Conforms to



American standard Z66.1-9: For use on surfaces that might be chewed by children.”

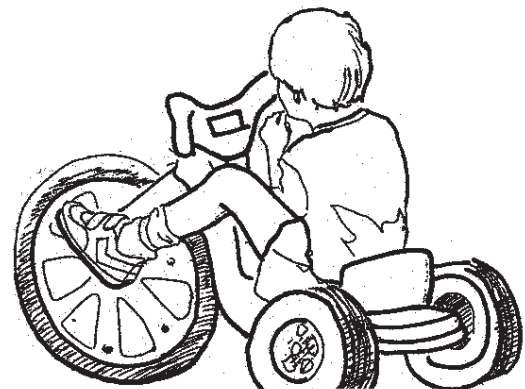
Characteristics of Good Toys

Ask yourself these questions:

1. Is it safe? There is no absolute safety against accident or injury, but reasonable precaution should be used, and toys should be selected with great care. Any toy can be unsafe if given to the wrong child, to a child at the wrong age or when it is misused. A child's safety depends upon the types of toys selected, the way they are maintained and the amount of safe handling taught and practiced in the home.
2. Is it durable? Toys are going to be used: mauled, hugged, dropped, thrown, stood on, chewed on, washed, dried, etc. So they need to stand up under normal wear and tear.
3. Is it appropriate to the age of the child? A toy should be selected according to unique and individual needs, and abilities, as well as physical and emotional characteristics of the child. For example, you wouldn't buy a two-wheel bicycle for a toddler or a crib mobile for a school-age child. Toys should allow for growth, so they can be used in many different ways over a long period of time.
4. Does it work? Does it do what it is supposed to do? Nothing causes loss of interest as readily as a toy that fails to perform. It often results in frustration, anger and discouragement.
5. Is it artistic in color, form and expression? Avoid ugly or grotesque figures, and toys that make harsh, jangling noises.
6. Does it capture the child's interest? You shouldn't have to coax, force or trick a child into playing with a good toy. Play should be spontaneous. It should reflect

the child's, not the parent's, interests. Toys that can be used for a variety of purposes keep the child's interest longer than those with only one use.

7. Is it fun? That is, are they fun from the child's point of view? Are they for enjoyment now? Can they be used at various ages?
8. Does it stimulate creative activity? Can the toys offer problem-solving opportunities? Do they leave room for imagination? Imagination isn't only concerned with unreal things, but also with reality, and it involves planning, ideas and creating. Do they teach new skills?
9. Does it involve interaction with others? Must the child play alone with the toys, or can others, such as peers, siblings, or adults, be involved, too?
10. Does it contribute to parental goals for the child?
11. Does it make for a balanced set of toys?
12. Can it be kept clean easily? Rag dolls, animals and the like should be washable, or at least have removable clothes that can be washed often.



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Remember, this fact sheet describes a typical child at each age. Each child is special, and each child develops at his or her own pace. Perfectly normal children may do things earlier or later than those described in this fact sheet. If you are concerned about your child's development, see your doctor.

He or She? Him or Her?

This fact sheet gives equal time and space to both sexes. That's why we take turns referring to children as "he" or "she." Please note: when we use he or she, we include all children.

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