

The Growing Years

Child Development Fact Sheet

Bulletin #4249

**4 Years,
6 Months**

“Can-Do” Children

Children who think they can, do. Children who think they cannot, will not try. Teach your children that they can do many things.

Teach your children to think: “I can do it!” This gives them a good start in life. It also helps them succeed.

Children need your praise. Words like “nice job” help them feel good inside. This makes them want to keep trying new things. They will not be fearful. They then will be able to tackle just about anything.

Your Child’s Development from 4 to 5

Physical Development

- ♦ Walks up and down stairs unassisted, alternating feet.
- ♦ Turns somersault, unassisted.
- ♦ Climbs ladder and trees.
- ♦ Bounces large ball.
- ♦ Good muscle control, though small muscles are not as fully developed as large muscles.

- ♦ Cuts paper on a line.
- ♦ Prints a few capital letters.
- ♦ Builds a tower of 10 or more blocks.
- ♦ Puts on shoes and socks.
- ♦ Dresses self, except for back openings.
- ♦ Activity level high.
- ♦ Attention span still short, but increasing.

Social Development

- ♦ Uses language well.
- ♦ Enjoys pretending (dramatic play).
- ♦ Can wash, dress, eat and use toilet but may need occasional help.
- ♦ Interested in group activity.
- ♦ Likes to set and clear table.
- ♦ Plays and interacts with other children.
- ♦ Can talk well on telephone.
- ♦ Can cooperate and take turns.
- ♦ Shows interest in sex differences.

Emotional Development

- ♦ Continues seeking adult’s approval, though less often seeks friend’s approval.

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- ♦ More able to talk about anger when approached.
- ♦ Begins to criticize self.
- ♦ Eager to carry some responsibility.
- ♦ Noisy and vigorous during play.
- ♦ Individuality and lasting traits becoming apparent.
- ♦ Can cooperate and take turns.
- ♦ May have nightmares.
- ♦ Sometimes fears monsters or other fantasies.

Cognitive Development

- ♦ Points to and names four to six colors.
- ♦ Matches pictures of familiar objects.
- ♦ Draws, names and describes pictures.
- ♦ Counts and touches four or more objects.
- ♦ Reads pictures.
- ♦ Likes to finish activities.
- ♦ Interested in death.
- ♦ Can tell likenesses and differences in pictures.
- ♦ Listens to long stories, but may misunderstand the facts.
- ♦ Begins to distinguish between fact and fantasy.
- ♦ Tells tall tales, brags and compliments self.
- ♦ Tattles, calls people names.
- ♦ Asks when, how, why questions.
- ♦ Plays with words (creates own rhyming words).

(This is a general guide to a child's development. Not all children will follow these guidelines exactly.)

Ways to Raise "Can-Do" Children

- ♦ Expect your child to do well.
- ♦ Have faith in your child.
- ♦ Let your child know when he or she makes you happy.
- ♦ Ask your child to do things you know the child can do.
- ♦ Tell your child: "I knew you could do it."
- ♦ Give help when your child cannot finish a task.
- ♦ Tell your family to praise your child for jobs well done.
- ♦ Let your child do things alone, even if it takes longer.
- ♦ Praise your child's efforts, even when the job is not perfect.
- ♦ Praise the parts of the job that were well done.
- ♦ When you correct your child, say what should have been done.

Building Healthy Self-Esteem in Your Preschooler

Preschoolers continue to become more independent, learning more about themselves. Your preschooler will feel good about himself when he has some control over his life. He needs you to comfort him when he has bad feelings, and he needs you to help him feel good when he succeeds. Success helps build healthy self-esteem. Here's how you can help:

- ♦ If your preschooler isn't in day care, get him involved in a play group.





- ♦ Provide clothes that your preschooler can put on himself.
- ♦ Put up low hooks and low shelves so that he can put away clothes and toys himself. Provide space for running and jumping, and toys for learning.
- ♦ Listen to your child. Care enough to stop what you are doing and give full attention to your child each day.
- ♦ Be a good role model. You need to feel good about yourself and take care of yourself.
- ♦ Use humor to show affection and help a child through hurt feelings.
- ♦ Allow your child to fail, to make mistakes, to change his mind and to do things well. Point out things that he can do well.
- ♦ Give your child activities that allow him to release tension. Children feel stress, too. Give him something to hold, squeeze, stroke, rub, bend or hit.
- ♦ Read to your child. Allow him to make up his own stories. Stories allow children to identify with failure, fear and surprise and to experience these with less anxiety.
- ♦ Play games and sing songs that teach the names for body parts.

Parenting by Yourself

Are you raising your children by yourself? If you are a single parent, you are not alone.

About one quarter of all parents today are parenting without a spouse. Half of the children born today will spend part of their first 18 years in a one-parent family. Divorced and separated persons make up the fastest growing category of single parents.

You may be a one-parent family due to death, divorce or adoption, or you may never have married. Single-parent families face a variety of financial situations, have widely varying support systems, employment statuses and personal goals.

Whatever your situation, you can raise well-adjusted, happy children. You can manage your family and finances well, but it may take a lot of extra hard work.

Living as a single parent can be a healthy, satisfying lifestyle. You will have your ups and downs just like any other family. You may feel excluded from couple activities. Married friends may hesitate to maintain close friendships, and you may occasionally be uncomfortable being a single parent.

Being Successful as a Single Parent

Each family is different. Families have different values, goals and ways of doing things. The success of your family may depend upon how well you adjust to being a single parent. Success may also depend on whether or how well you let go of the past. Single parents say that they have been successful when they have:

- ♦ Optimistic attitudes about themselves and the future.
- ♦ People to turn to when they have family emergencies.
- ♦ Open channels of communication.
- ♦ Time to relax.

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- ♦ An agreeable, supportive relationship with the former partner and relatives.
- ♦ Firm rules and standards for their children.
- ♦ Financial or job security.
- ♦ Friendly neighbors and caring teachers.
- ♦ Reliable child care.
- ♦ Knowledge about where to go when they need help.

Parenting is never easy, even when two parents are living in the same house, but it can be done successfully. It is important that you recognize that you cannot fill the roles of both mother and father. You cannot do the work of two adults, and you will not have the energy, money, time or skills to be a “perfect parent.”

A wise single parent will avoid trying to run the family as if it were a traditional family. A wise single parent deals with the situation, starts new relationships, plans for the future and gets on with life.

Preschoolers in Single-Parent Families

Children aged 3 to 5 worry about and are confused by broken relationships. They cope by reverting to baby-like behavior (clinging to a blanket, refusing to use the toilet), becoming extremely aggressive (noisy, restless, fighting) or becoming sad and withdrawn. Preschoolers spend time thinking about their situation and wanting to bring the absent parent back home. They may become afraid of being left alone. They often want a quick replacement for mommy or daddy.

Preschoolers need constant reminders and assurances that they will be loved, protected and cared for. They also need a clear explanation of the situation. Since small children have difficulty understanding and expressing feelings, you may have to make educated guesses about the feelings that underlie their behavior.

Some tips for single parents of preschoolers:

- ♦ Maintain contact with the absent parent.
- ♦ Set limits.
- ♦ Provide play opportunities with other children.
- ♦ Talk with your child about what has occurred and what is happening to the family.
- ♦ Assure him that he will be protected and cared for.
- ♦ Don't use your child as a bargaining tool.

Do's and Don'ts for Single Parenting

Do let your child know you love him or her.

Do learn about child development to help guide your child's growth.

Do get involved in activities, make new friends and find time for yourself.

Do seek help if you or your child needs it.

Do be flexible in your parenting and change your strategies as the child grows and develops.

Do involve children in decision-making and in setting up family rules.

Do develop family rituals and traditions.

Do spend time with your child.

Do teach your child to love both parents.

Don't allow your child to be caught in the middle of disputes.

Don't take your anxieties, frustrations and personal problems out on your child.

Don't expect your child to take sides.

Don't overindulge your child.

Don't expect your child to replace a spouse or become your confidant.

Don't carry on a custody or visitation war.

Don't give your child too much freedom.

The Effects of Divorce on Children

Most divorcing parents are very concerned about their children's reactions to their separation and divorce. They want to know, "Will my child grow up to be healthy and happy?"

Sociologists and psychologists are just beginning to provide reliable information about the effects of divorce on children. Research shows that the effects depend on the age of the child at the time of divorce. It also depends on other factors, such as the child's sex and personality, the amount of conflict between parents and the support provided by friends and family.

Children from 3 to 5 years of age frequently believe they have caused their parents' divorce. For example, they might think that if they had eaten their dinner or walked the dog when told to do so, Daddy wouldn't have gone away.

Preschoolers may fear being left alone or abandoned altogether. They may show baby-like behavior, such as wanting their security blanket or old toys. They may deny that anything has changed, or they may become uncooperative, depressed or angry. Although they want the security of being near an adult, they may act disobedient and aggressive.

Helping Children Adjust to Divorce



Although painful, discussing the separation and divorce with your children will strengthen your relationship with them. It will also maintain their trust in you. Sharing general information is appropriate when talking with younger children.

The most important factor for children's well-being seems to be limiting the amount and intensity of conflict between parents. Minimizing the conflict and hostility between parents following the divorce can contribute to the child's growth. Agreement between the parents on discipline and childrearing, as well as love and approval from both parents, will also contribute to the child's sense of well-being and self-worth.

Day-to-day involvement of both parents in their children's lives is the clearest way of letting children know they are loved and valued. A parent who lives in a different town or state can still keep in close touch with his or her children. Letters, phone calls, tape-recorded messages, sharing paperwork and artwork done in school are ways parents and children can keep in contact.

Children of all ages fantasize that their parents will get together again. This may be particularly true when parents have joint custody. Be clear with the children about the finality of the divorce, and discourage their attempts to get you back together.

If possible, limit the number of disruptions children must handle during separation and divorce. For example, try to keep the child in the same school, child care facility, home or neighborhood.

Develop positive ways to handle your stress. Exercise, eat nutritious food or take up a hobby. If you feel you are under too much stress and may hurt your children, do something quickly. Close your eyes and count to 10. Take a walk. Take a cold shower or hot bath. Look through a magazine. Call a friend or relative and ask for help.

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Be sure to let your children see the positive ways you use to cope with stress. This helps them understand that they must also find positive methods to handle their feelings. Suggest activities they might do to feel better. Playing with friends, joining a club, taking up a hobby, or reading can be helpful in reducing stress. Perhaps there are some activities, such as going for walks, that you and your child can do together.

Although joint custody has many benefits, recent research suggests there may be drawbacks to this arrangement. Preschool children may think they are being punished when they are moved from one household to another. They feel that they are sent away because they are naughty.

Practice a kind, but firm style of discipline. Accept the children's feelings of anger. Help them find acceptable ways to express this anger without hurting themselves, other people, animals or property. Provide the nurturing and love that your children need, while setting firm limits on aggressiveness and other inappropriate behavior.

Adult friends and family members can provide emotional warmth, reassurance and comfort to your children. They can teach them new skills and activities and act as role models. They can also let children know that they are important and valued.

Some children can be helped through counseling with social workers, psychologists, marriage and family therapists or psychiatrists. Many schools and religious organizations also provide support group sessions. In these situations, children can explore their feelings and learn how other children from divorced families cope.

It often takes two or more years for children to adjust to their parents' divorce. Through love, understanding and keeping in close contact with your children, you will help them grow into well-adjusted and productive adults.



Effective Ways to Discipline a Child

- ♦ Separation. Have children rest or play apart for a time when they irritate one another, fight, squabble, hit and kick. Being apart for a while lets each child calm down. Then you can use other ways to encourage better behavior.
- ♦ Behavior management. Talk with children calmly to learn what happened, why and how they see it. Then talk about ways to deal with the situation. Come to a solution that is agreeable to both you and the child. This helps children learn to be responsible for their behavior.
- ♦ Redirection. When children get into trouble, stop them, explain why you are stopping them and suggest another activity. When they scribble on the wall, give them paper and crayons. When they race dangerously indoors, take them outside for a game of chase. When they throw books at each other, gather them for a story time or organize a beanbag toss. This works especially well with very young children.

- ♦ Fix-up. When children cause trouble or hurt, expect them to fix it, or at least to help. If they spill milk, give them a cloth to clean it up. If they break a toy, ask them to help you fix it. If they make a child cry, have them help with the soothing. If they throw toys around the room, ask them to put them away.
- ♦ Ignore. The best way to deal with misbehavior aimed at getting your attention is to simply ignore it. But be sure to give attention to your children when they behave well. Children need attention for good behavior, not misbehavior.
- ♦ Be firm. Clearly and firmly state, or even demand, that the child do what needs to be done. Do not use a wishy-washy tone of voice. Speak in a tone that lets your child know that you mean what you say and that you expect your child to do it. Being firm doesn't mean yelling, threatening, reasoning or taking away privileges. Being firm works for children at any age and for many situations.
- ♦ Stay in control. Act before the situation gets out of control, before you get angry and overly frustrated and before the child's behavior becomes unreasonable.
- ♦ Be detached. In other words, "keep your cool." If your child does something you don't approve of, or is wrong, pretend your child is your neighbor's child and ask yourself, "What would I do?" Or imagine that you are your child's teacher. How would the teacher handle this situation? That is how you might handle it, too.

Watch Out: Guns Are a Hazard to Young Children

Firearms cause childhood injuries and death. If you must keep guns, keep them unloaded and under lock and key. Lock up ammunition in a separate place and teach

children that firearms are not toys. Never let children play with shooting toys, such as BB guns, darts or anything that explodes.

Games for Growing

Printing

Children love to make pictures by printing. You can make printing blocks easily by slicing a potato in half and cutting a pattern or shape into each sliced end. Other interesting prints can be made with other sliced vegetables and fruits, leaves, flowers or sponges cut in shapes or letters. All you need to add is a saucer of non-toxic paint, paper (newspaper is fine) and an artist.

Where Am I Going?



Take a long string and weave a path around a room (over chairs, under the table, behind the sofa, around corners, etc.). Ask your child to follow the path and describe where she's going.

Questions Parents Ask: Should 4-Year-Olds Be Allowed to Continue Sucking Their Thumbs?

According to the American Dental Association, thumb sucking does not damage baby teeth. Most 5-year-olds will have outgrown this habit. For those who do not, however, gentle persuasion proves helpful. When the front baby teeth become loose, thumb sucking can be painful. After the permanent teeth grow in, continued thumb sucking can affect the placement and spacing of a child's teeth.

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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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