

CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT THREE TO FOUR YEARS

While reading this information, please keep in mind that all children are unique. While the sequence of development is practically the same for all children (for example, most children learn to crawl before they learn to walk), each child's rate of development is different. There is a wide variation in normal development. Some children reach developmental milestones earlier than others. Some reach them later than others. Rarely does a delay in reaching a developmental milestone mean that there is a problem. In most cases, delays turn out to be normal. Remember that premature infants generally reach developmental milestones later than other infants of the same birth age. Parents with any questions or concerns about their children's development should contact their children's health care provider.

Highlights in Physical Development

By three years of age, most children have the hand control to copy a circle and a straight line. Most children are able to feed themselves completely by this age, and they will probably be able to dress and undress themselves, as long as they can reach the buttons, snaps, hooks, etc. Most children will be much better at undressing than dressing at this age.

During the period from three to four years, children will become very skillful in motor activities. They will probably be able to jump lifting both feet off the ground, and they will enjoy trying new skills like standing on tiptoe and hopping. Most children can ride a tricycle using the pedals after three years of age. Most children this age will probably be able to throw a ball to an adult standing five feet away.

Highlights in Cognitive/ Language Development

By three years of age, most children begin to understand size differences and concepts like "another" and "more." Most children can name at least one color correctly by this age. Memory continues to improve, and by three and a half years of age, most children can count to three and can recall things that happened in the recent past. This is also the age at which most children will know what sex they are, and they will be able to name most of their body parts.

During the period from three to four years, verbal skills increase rapidly. Vocabulary will grow from about 900 words at age three to 1500 words by age four. During this period of rapid vocabulary growth, children enjoy learning new and unfamiliar words. They also love to play with language by making up new words and singing silly songs. They also enjoy listening to and telling stories. As children approach four years of age, they will begin to

understand and talk about imaginary conditions ("What if...").

Highlights in Social\Emotional Development

By three years of age, most children can tell the difference between "mine" and "yours," and they will often refuse to share toys. Most children will begin to share, however, as they approach four years of age. They will then become able to play cooperatively with other children.

Children between three and four years of age can deal with and benefit from being in a play group or nursery school. Being involved in social situations helps children learn how to share and take turns.

Many parents are relieved to find that negativism, which was once so prominent in earlier stages of development, begins to go away between three and a half and four years of age. Children will change from being basically self-centered to being cooperative and affectionate. It is also at this time that children begin to accept short separations from their parents, and they are able to wait with more patience.

As children begin to talk about imaginary conditions, they advance toward make-believe play. Many children this age especially enjoy imaginative play in which every day activities are imitated, with children

playing adult roles. Some children may have difficulty separating fantasy and make believe from reality.

Toilet Training

By three and a half years, most children have adequate control of their bowels and bladder during the daytime, but accidents may still occur at night. Most children will be able to use the toilet without help by four years of age.



*Center for Effective Parenting
Little Rock Center: (501) 364-7580
NW Arkansas Center: (479) 751-6166*

www.parenting-ed.org