

3- to 4-Year-Olds: Developmental Milestones

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Congratulations, you have survived the "terrible two's!" Hopefully, you have energy left to enjoy what lies ahead for you and your preschooler. They call the next few years the "magic years" -- partly because it seems like magic that your child is finally listening to you and partly because for your child, it is a time for his or her imagination to run wild.

Your 3- to 4-year-old child will continue to grow and develop in many ways in the coming year. Although children reach developmental milestones at different times, your child will likely achieve the following developmental milestones before he or she turns 5 years old.

3- to 4-Year-Old Development: Language Milestones

If your child is not very talkative, that will likely change soon. At 3 to 4 years old, your child should be able to:

- Say his or her name and age

- Speak 250 to 500 words

- Answer simple questions

- Speak in sentences of five to six words, and speak in complete sentences by age 4

- Speak clearly

- Tell stories

3- to 4-Year-Old Development: Cognitive Milestones

Your child will start asking lots and lots of questions. "Why is the sky blue? Why do birds have feathers?" Questions, questions, and more questions! While it may be annoying at times, asking questions is a normal developmental milestone. In addition to asking "why?" all the time, your 3- to 4-year-old should be able to:

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- Correctly name familiar colors

- Understand the idea of same and different

- Pretend and fantasize more creatively

- Follow three-part commands

- Remember parts of a story
- Understand time better (for example, morning, afternoon, night)
- Count, and understand the concept of counting
- Sort objects by shape and color
- Complete age-appropriate puzzles
- Recognize and identify common objects and pictures

3- to 4-Year-Old Development: Movement Milestones

Your busy preschooler continues to be on the move. At 3 to 4 years old, your child should be able to:

- Walk up and down stairs, alternating feet -- one foot per step
- Kick, throw, and catch a ball
- Climb well
- Run more confidently and ride a tricycle
- Hop and stand on one foot for up to five seconds
- Walk forward and backwards easily
- Bend over without falling

3- to 4-Year-Old Development: Hand and Finger Skills

Your child is becoming much more nimble. At this point in his or her development, your child should be able to:

- More easily handle small objects and turn a page in a book
- Use age-appropriate scissors
- Copy circles and squares
- Draw a person with two to four body parts
- Write some capital letters
- Build a tower with nine or more blocks
- Dress and undress without your help
- Screw and unscrew jar lids
- Turn rotating handles

3- to 4-Year-Old Development: Emotional and Social Milestones

Your 3- to 4-year-old is not only becoming more independent physically, but also emotionally. You may start to notice fewer tantrums when you leave your child with a sitter or at preschool.

3- to 4-Year-Olds: Developmental Milestones

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3- to 4-Year-Old Development: Emotional and Social Milestones continued...

In addition, your 3- to 4-year-old is becoming more social. Your child may now be able to cooperate with his or her friends, take turns, and may begin to show some problem-solving skills.

At this point in development, your child should be able to:

- Imitate parents and friends

- Show affection for familiar family and friends

- Understands the idea of "mine" and "his/hers"

- Show a wide range of emotions, such as being sad, angry, happy, or bored

In addition, you may notice your child's imagination is in overdrive. This can be good and bad. Fantasy and pretend play becomes more interesting and involved, but your child may also start developing unrealistic fears, such as believing a monster is lurking in the closet.

3- to 4-Year-Old Development: When to Be Concerned

All kids grow and develop at their own pace. Don't worry if your child has not reached all of these milestones at this time. But you should notice a gradual progression in growth and development as your child gets older. If you don't, or if your child has signs of possible developmental delay, as listed below, talk to your child's doctor.

Signs of developmental delay in 3- to 4-year-old children include:

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- Inability to throw a ball overhand, jump in place, or ride a tricycle

- Frequent falling and difficulty walking stairs

- Inability to hold a crayon between his or her thumb and fingers; has trouble scribbling and cannot copy a circle.

- Unable to use a sentence with more than three words and uses "me" and "you" inappropriately

- Persistent drooling and trouble speaking

- Cannot stack four blocks and has trouble handling small objects

- Continues to experience extreme separation anxiety

- Lacks interest in interactive games and doesn't engage in fantasy play

- Does not play with other children and doesn't respond to non-family members

- Has trouble with self-control when angry or upset

- Does not understand simple commands

- Avoids making eye contact

- Resists getting dressed, sleeping, and going to the bathroom

Also, if you notice your child resisting or struggling with doing things that he or she was once able to do, tell your child's doctor. This can be a sign of a developmental disorder. If your child does have developmental delay, there are many treatments available to help your child.