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**United Independent School District
Laredo, Texas**



Developmental Milestones for Preschool Children

Is My Child on Track?

One of a series of Parent Guides from



Parent Guide

Developmental Milestones for Preschool Children

Is My Child on Track?

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Introduction

Think about it. Nearly every time parents get together and chat about their children, the conversation turns to the ways their offspring have developed and grown—the little changes and big steps they've made.

Whether it is the father whose newborn is finally sleeping through the night, or the mother of a teenager who has learned to drive, instinctive parental behavior seems to include measuring and reporting on their children.

Consideration of these changes can be particularly intense in the preschool years, when children are growing and changing quickly and parents are anticipating the whole life that lies ahead for their child.

Parents examine everything, from their child's vocabulary, drawing ability, mastery of nursery rhymes and skill at pumping a swing to his* willingness to patch up a floundering friendship or cheerfully watch as they walk out the door. When preschoolers are with other children of the same age on a regular basis, parents often observe with great interest what their own child is doing in comparison to others.

Watching your preschooler grow and develop is both one of the great joys of parenting—and one of the sources of most worry.



Is my child developing at the right pace and in the right way?

This Parent Guide will help you examine the development of your child. It is important to remember that children mature at different speeds and in different ways but whenever you have specific concerns, or if you think something about your child's development just doesn't seem right, you should consult your doctor.

Little Adults or Little Steps

Long ago children were thought to be simply fully formed miniature adults. We have come to understand that this is not the case, and volumes of research have shown more clearly how and why children develop as they do. We have learned that:

- **Children go through consistent stages** in their growth and development—not all at the same pace, but the steps are the same.
- **Children only reach the capacity** to learn certain things at certain stages or ages. Some things are simply not appropriate or possible for them to learn until that development stage is reached.
- **All children develop in their own way** because of the characteristics they have at birth and the environment in which they grow up.

- **Learning and development** occur as children mature and move into a new stage, but the process isn't always pretty. The unhappiness of two-year-olds moving from infancy and of teens moving from childhood is testimony to this.
- **Each child is an individual** despite the similarities in the stages they go through—and each will develop at his own pace and in his own way.

Experts say parents should pay attention to their child's development, but they should also pay attention to their own reactions and expectations. Take action if you are concerned. Talk to your doctor on health issues. Seek information on how to help your child develop. The most important thing to remember is to avoid pushing a child too quickly or expecting too much too soon.

**Each child is unique, so this publication alternates using masculine and feminine pronouns.*

Something is Different at the Preschool Age

Parents naturally notice their child's development as they observe them with other children—especially in preschool. Children learn a huge number of new physical skills in the preschool years, have increasingly complex thoughts and relate in new ways to the people around them. They separate from their parents more easily and learn how to play next to—then with—friends. Parents see their children do more for themselves and should help them learn to follow rules and control behavior. Children entering preschool begin to understand their limits and enjoy the challenges they face, standing up for themselves and striving to get what they need.

Testing Us at Two

This age got its “terrible” name for good reason, but the difficulty is really a sign of growth.

Two-year-olds are often full of strong emotions, possessiveness, separation fears and frustration. They generally want to undertake more than they are equipped to handle, and aren't certain how to go about getting what they want.

The frustration appears in obstinance and tantrums—or even stuttering when their grasp of language (about 300 words—though it often seems to primarily consist of “no”) just doesn't keep up with all the new ideas in their developing minds.

They may copy what you do, but not follow your directions. They'll want to do things for themselves, but also begin to tell you what they want and precisely how quickly they want it. They learn pronouns—particularly “I” and “me” to describe the person who is most important in their world.

You may quickly learn that distracting them or making them laugh works better than strict discipline or reasoning.

They may begin toilet training at this age ... or possibly not.

Physically, many two-year-olds can:

- Turn pages of books and draw circles.
- Begin to handle silverware.
- Run and try to escape from mom and dad.
- Pedal a tricycle.
- Run without falling.
- Walk up stairs without help, both feet on each step, but may need help coming down.

Intellectually, many two-year-olds:

- Put two or three words together.
- Say 20 to 50 intelligible words.
- Name simple body parts.
- Answer “What does a dog say?”
- Can point to an object when it is named.

Socially, many two-year-olds:

- Play next to friends.
- May offer their first and last names when asked.
- Hum and sing.
- Are often obstinate and independent with some tantrums, whining, biting and screaming.
- Are distressed when separating from loved ones.

Two-Year Checklist

Has your two-year-old:

- Kicked a ball?
- Picked up food with a fork?
- Put two to three words together?
- Responded to something funny?
- Dressed herself in simple pull-on clothes?

Have Patience With Preschoolers

Experts say the best parenting during the preschool years often involves endless patience as a child moves through these important stages of development. A child not only develops at different speeds when compared to playmates, but may shoot ahead in one area of development while lagging behind in another.

Good Things Come in Threes

Children continue to change dramatically as they move through their third year.

Socially, they may occasionally play together with friends (not just next to them) and even share or take turns. They know the difference between a boy and a girl—and may exhibit some jealousy about affection given to the parent of the opposite sex.

Your three-year-old will probably become more willing to conform, even though his personal identity and awareness of himself as an individual is growing. He will be more cooperative, but still may have short bursts of unexpected emotion and frustration. (There is no magical transformation from the terrible two's right on his birthday.)

Three-year-olds will also feel more secure, better able to handle change and more comfortable being separated from mom and dad, although many still have lingering struggles with being left at school or with a babysitter. They may also complete toilet training ... or possibly not.

Three-Year Checklist

Has your three-year-old:

- Poured his own breakfast cereal and milk or gotten a snack?
- Caught and thrown a ball?
- Sat still to do an activity for 10 minutes?
- Engaged in a short conversation?
- Told someone his name, age and sex?

Physically, many three-year-olds can:

- Go up and down stairs without support.
- Kick a ball forward.
- Unzip and unsnap their clothes and brush their teeth.
- Build with blocks.
- Draw a simple person (two or more body parts) with a crayon.
- Walk on tiptoes, stand on one foot and ride a tricycle.

Intellectually, many three-year-olds:

- Ask a lot of questions—and are happy to answer them.
- Talk in five- to six-word sentences (including properly used verbs) to develop thoughts, not just make demands.
- Recall parts of stories.
- Know some colors.
- Have vivid imaginations.
- Develop a sense of time—understanding night and day and getting excited about approach of special days.

Socially, many three-year-olds:

- Tell simple stories and often chatter endlessly.
- Begin to play cooperatively and love to pretend and perform.
- Make each other angry, make each other cry but still can't wait to see each other.
- Tease other children.
- Start developing some empathy for others.
- Sense their own identities, and those of others, and begin accurately using not just the words *I*, *me* and *mine*—and but also even *you* and *yours*.

Enjoy the Preschool Period While It Lasts

Parents should be alert to the developmental stages of their child and try to enjoy the interesting changes that occur. Though the preschool years can seem endless to parents dealing with an obstinate three-year-old, parents of children who are long past this stage often look back and wistfully describe the time as flying by in but a minute. Enjoy this precious time while it lasts!

Four-Ward March

Much of what began at age three continues as children move through preschool and age four.

Small muscle development and control grow quickly and four-year-olds love to show their skills at drawing or buttoning their shirts—or on the playground at school. More self-care abilities develop, and they can be encouraged to do more things for themselves and help for the benefit of everyone. They can help set the table, fold some laundry and pick up their toys.

Their imaginations stir them as does curiosity, so they are full of endless questions. They become even more social, playing with other children and beginning to share (with difficulty sometimes) while learning to sympathize and understand the feelings of others and the significance of lies.

Girls often shoot ahead of boys developmentally by as much as a year starting at this age.

Four-Year Checklist

Has your four-year-old:

- Recalled the part of a story she likes best?
- Dressed herself except, perhaps, for shoe-tying?
- Copied or printed some letters of the alphabet or drawn an object or person fairly accurately?
- Used the names of familiar animals, seasons and days of the week in a complete sentence?
- Skipped, galloped, hopped on one foot or pumped on a swing?

Physically, many four-year-olds can:

- Bounce a ball and throw it overhand.
- Wash themselves, dress themselves completely and brush their teeth.
- Eat fairly neatly.
- Sit quietly and copy for extended periods without the help of a caregiver.
- Print some letters.
- Cut with blunt scissors on a line or around an object in a picture.
- Wash their hands and faces and then get themselves snacks.

Intellectually, many four-year-olds:

- Ask endless arrays of questions.
- Recall parts of books they liked best and express themselves clearly in complete sentences.
- Say their names and addresses.
- Use language to express needs and feelings.
- Have a vocabulary of around 1,500 words.
- Pretend, talk and give reasons.
- Know about household items (food, furniture, etc.).
- Count 10 objects and list four colors.

Socially, many four-year-olds:

- Play cooperative group games like tag or “duck, duck, goose.”
- Think they are the center of the world and that inanimate objects are alive.
- Tease and taunt siblings.
- Copy other children.
- Experiment with inappropriate or hurtful language, as they test the newly recognized power of words.
- Enjoy playing with an imaginary friend as well as a new real one.
- Make and break friends easily.

Before Your Preschooler Starts Kindergarten

Following is a brief list of questions to ask yourself about your child as he gets ready to enter kindergarten. Remember, not every child progresses at the same pace, but generally the following are some things most children entering school can accomplish.

A child entering kindergarten:

- Takes off.** Can he run, skip, jump and pump himself on a swing?
- Stays put.** Can he sit quietly and undertake an activity of interest to him for 10 to 15 minutes? Can he use blunt scissors to cut on a line or draw a figure that looks like a person?
- Speaks up.** Can he speak short sentences clearly and use pronouns such as I and me and yours? Can he repeat a story and ask a question clearly?
- Tries it out.** Is he willing to learn by doing and happy to experiment? Does he love being praised if he accomplishes something new?
- Likes to laugh.** Does he use his new sense of humor and tell a simple joke or recount a funny story—and understand one?

- Plays well with others.** Does he love to pretend and imagine, but can also share and take turns and play with other children, rather than just next to them? Is he comfortable with cooperative play in groups? Can he sympathize and understand how other children feel?
- Gets the message.** Does he understand stories and their meanings? Does he appreciate why rules are important? Can he understand what people are saying when they explain procedures? Can he understand letters and words, recognize sounds that rhyme and perhaps even “read” some words and briefly converse?
- Figures it out.** Does he work to understand new concepts such as time (minutes, hours, days, seasons and patterns of life) size, counting, distance, and quantity (more than just counting—adding one to two to make three)?
- Helps at home.** Can he clean up after himself, brush his teeth and wash his face, dress and undress by himself? Can he successfully use a toilet?
- Goes it alone.** Does he like to be independent when he works on some things and can he handle separation from his parents? Does he stand up for himself? Can he express his emotions?

For More Information

Child Development

by Laura Berk
Pearson Allyn & Bacon
201/236-7000
www.ablongman.com

“Child Development: What to expect when”

ParentCenter
www.parentcenter.com/child-development

“Developmental charts”

All About Moms
www.allaboutmoms.com/chart.htm

The Parent Institute

1-800-756-5525
www.parent-institute.com

Theories of Development

by William Crain
Prentice Hall
1-800-848-9500
www.prenticehall.com/

“Understanding Child Development”

Child Development Institute
www.cdipage.com/development/

What’s Going on here? How the brain and mind develop in the first five years of life

by Lise Eliot
Bantam Dell
1-800-733-3000
www.randomhouse.com

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School Readiness—Set 1

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Preparing Your Child for Reading Success—Birth to Age Five
How to Choose the Best Preschool or Day Care for Your Child

School Readiness—Set 2

Common Discipline Problems of Preschoolers and How to Deal With Them
37 Experiences Every Child Should Have Before Starting School
Getting Your Child Ready for Kindergarten

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31 Alternatives to TV and Video Games for Your Elementary School Child

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Help Your Child Deal With Peer Pressure
How to Help Your Struggling Student

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What to Do If Your Child Has ADD/ADHD
Common Discipline Problems of Middle School Children and How to Solve Them
Making a Smooth Transition to Middle School

*For more information about these and other materials for
parents to encourage learning in their children:*

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