

Overview



Half of 5-year olds in MN aren't ready for Kindergarten.

According to a Minnesota Department of Education study, "Developmental Assessment at Kindergarten Entrance 2009", more than half of Minnesota five year olds are not fully prepared for Kindergarten. Here's how the study is conducted: volunteer kindergarten teachers are specially trained to observe incoming five year olds and measure their readiness in five areas. This same study has been conducted for the last several years and the results vary little from year to year. In other words, we've got to do better. (To see the whole report, go to www.education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/groups/earlylearning/documents/report/017119.pdf)

What happens to those who aren't fully prepared?

A recent study by Pearson Foundation found that 73% assume that if a child is not ready for kindergarten, they will acquire the needed skills in elementary school. Not true. In fact, too many of those who enter unprepared never catch up. By third grade, only 70% of Minnesota kids are reading at grade level. Our teachers are doing heroic work, but clearly, one of the smartest ways to improve the reading level of third graders is to improve the school readiness of our kindergartners.

Think about the classroom consequences when half the children are not prepared for school.

When teachers have to spend so much time helping those who are behind, it holds back the whole class, and affects those who are ready as well. It's a problem all parents need to be concerned about.

To learn more about the long term consequences for Minnesota's quality of life and workforce development, go to "about us."



Age 1



Language development

Means how young children understand and communicate

Your baby might respond and express himself in one or more of these ways:

- Responds to simple verbal requests.
- Begins to imitate spoken words.
- Says a few more words besides “mama” and “dada”.
- Understands simple commands.
- Makes simple gestures such as shaking head for saying “no”.

Social and emotional development

Means how children behave and relate to others

Your baby might respond to you and other familiar people in one or more of these ways:

- Smiles at familiar faces.
- Shows affection to familiar adults.
- Cries if someone seems upset or sad.
- Enjoys playing with familiar people.
- Shows apprehension about strangers.
- Gets upset when you leave him.
- Shows preference for certain people and toys.
- Uses sounds and gestures to gain attention.

Cognitive development

Means how children explore, think and figure things out

Your baby might explore, figure things out and act in one or more of these ways:

- Looks at correct picture when the image is named.
- Imitates gestures, sounds and actions.
- Begins to use objects correctly (drinking from cup, brushing hair).
- Shows interest in a favorite story by listening and pointing.
- Imitates gestures.



Motor or physical development

Means how young children move their bodies and hands

Your baby moves his body in one or more of these ways:

- Sits well without support.
- Crawls on hands and knees.
- Walks holding onto furniture.
- Begins to walk by self.
- Puts objects in and out of containers.
- Tries to imitate scribbling.

Learn more at: www.parentsknow.state.mn.us/parentsknow/index.html



Age 2



Language Development

Understands when simple events happen

Your 2-year-old is getting used to routines and your family's way of doing things. So your child will anticipate events, knowing that when you start setting the table, it's time to climb into the high chair or booster seat and get ready to eat. When unexpected things happen, such as when something is spilled or broken, your child is likely to say, "Uh-oh," indicating an understanding that what happened was not a good thing.

Tries to participate in conversations

Even if your child doesn't have a large vocabulary yet, he or she probably has learned to understand patterns of conversation, the way people talk back and forth. In his or her own way, your child will say something to you and pause to wait for you to answer back. Or, if you ask a question, your child will try to answer with words and/or a combination of words and gestures. You also might hear your child having "conversations" with dolls or stuffed animals – or using a toy phone to mimic how you sound when you are on the phone.

Responds to simple requests and directions

At 2, a child usually can follow simple directions that involve one or maybe even two steps. For example, you could say, "Go get your truck so we can play with it together," and your child probably would do so. Or you could ask your child to get the plastic cup from the table and bring it to the sink so you can fill it with water, and the child probably would do so. (Even if your child doesn't understand every word of a long sentence, he or she probably will know enough key words that he or she can understand your request.)

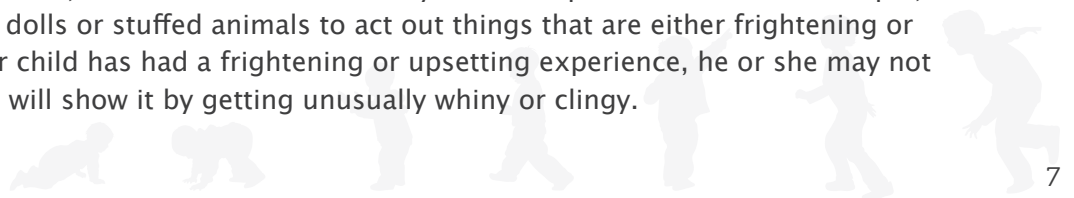
Combines words

Children this age vary a great deal in terms of how much they talk, but usually a 2-year-old will be able to say quite a few words (mostly nouns and some verbs) and will put two words together to make a simple phrase or sentence (for example, "my car" or "mommy home" or "go outside.")

Social and Emotional Development

Shows wishes, worries and fears through behaviors, play and actions

Even though, at 2, your child probably can't use words very well to tell you what he or she is feeling, your child's wishes, worries and fears are likely to show up in behavior. For example, a 2-year-old may use dolls or stuffed animals to act out things that are either frightening or comforting. Or, if your child has had a frightening or upsetting experience, he or she may not be able to tell you but will show it by getting unusually whiny or clingy.



Imitate friends

A child this age learns by watching and imitating what others do. A 2-year-old usually has become interested in what other children are doing and often will try to do the same thing – playing with the same toy, imitating another child’s tricks, making the same silly sounds. This is good practice for the more mature ways children will play together when they’re a little older.

Likes to have your support to try new things

A 2-year-old is beginning to want to try new things and be more independent. When a child this age tries to eat or dress more independently – or tries to put a new puzzle together or ride a new toy car – frustration is not unusual. So a 2-year-old will do best if you are nearby, letting the child try things independently, but being quick to offer encouragement or help when you see signs that your child is struggling.

Watches and plays briefly next to other children

Although a 2-year-old is not really mature enough to interact much with other children, a child this age usually has become very interested in other children. He or she may watch carefully to see what another child is doing or may move into that child’s play space and do the same thing while standing or sitting next to the child. This is called “parallel play” and will go on for at least several months before your child is developmentally ready to play more interactively with another child.

Cognitive Development

Discovers how things work by touching them and trying them out

At 2, a child is curious about the world and eager to explore almost everything by touching, shaking, pounding, even smelling and tasting. Of course, that means you have to be careful to keep dangerous things where your child can’t reach them. But it also means it’s a great learning opportunity for your child to explore toys and safe household objects. Your child probably will love to figure out how to work mechanical toys, household appliances and the remote control for the TV, so watch to see what he or she learns by exploring with your careful guidance.

Makes choices between two things

A 2-year-old is really developing a mind of his or her own and will usually be quite clear about preferences. It’s good to let your child choose between two healthy snack options (a pear or banana, for example) or between the red shirt and the blue shirt. Offering choices allows your child to express preferences and also to feel a sense of control, which will reduce the need for your child to fight for control, as children this age sometimes do.



Remember words to familiar songs

Singing songs together or dancing to a favorite CD are great ways to have fun with your 2-year-old and also to advance your child's learning. Especially if you sing or listen to the same simple songs over and over (as 2-year-olds love to do), your child will be able to remember many of the words. It can be fun to sing part of a line in a song and then have your child fill in the last word.

Enjoys pretend play from real events

A 2-year-old is watching and learning from everything that goes on, especially the things parents and other caring adults do in their daily lives. It is typical for a child this age to pretend to do what grownups do - cooking, cleaning, coming home from work, taking care of the children. A 2-year-old might also pretend to be his or her new baby sister or even the family pet, showing through play how much he or she knows about the way things happen.

Shows increasing memory for details and routines

Your child probably is becoming very familiar with the way things are done in your household. If you tell your child it's time to get up and get ready to go to childcare, then ask what needs to happen first, your child probably will be able to show you even if he or she can't tell you in words. A 2-year-old is likely to remember where the favorite cereal and the plastic bowls are kept, that you brush teeth after eating, and that you put on a jacket, hat and mittens before going outside in cold weather. At bedtime, before you even say it's time for a story, your child probably will be heading for the bookshelf to choose a favorite book or two.

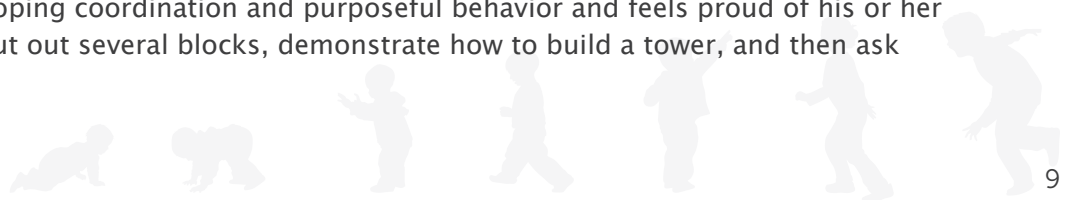
Motor Development

Puts puzzles together

Your 2-year-old is learning to see how things go together and probably will enjoy putting simple puzzles together. Especially good for children this age are wooden puzzles with little knobs on top that make the pieces easier to put into and take out of the spaces in which they fit. Simple interlocking puzzles with only a few large pieces also can be fun, but you may need to demonstrate a few times before your 2-year-old gets the idea of how to put the puzzles together. Turns doorknobs and unscrews lids and is improving his or her skills using eating utensils.

Builds a tower of four blocks

A 2-year-old is developing coordination and purposeful behavior and feels proud of his or her new abilities. If you put out several blocks, demonstrate how to build a tower, and then ask



your child to do the same, he or she probably will be able to build a tower of about four blocks. Most 2-year-olds have trouble building a tower much higher than that because they either lose interest or they are not coordinated enough to balance the blocks on a higher tower.

Jumps up

At 2, a child usually loves to show off all the new things he or she can do. Ask your child to show you how high he or she can jump – and maybe demonstrate once or twice to show your child what you mean. Then cheer as your child jumps for you.

Walks up steps

When your child was younger, he or she crawled up stairs. But at age 2 your child will be able to walk up steps, maybe holding a railing or your hand for support. He or she may alternate feet going up the steps, but many 2-year-olds (especially smaller children) may step up with one foot and then bring the other foot alongside on the same step.

Throws a ball overhand

Although your 2-year-old probably is not very accurate in throwing a ball right to you, he or she probably can use one hand to throw a small or medium-size rubber ball overhand. With practice and a lot of encouragement – and without pressure – your child gradually will become more coordinated and able to make the ball go where he or she wants it to go.



Age 3



Language Development

Says his or her name and age, when asked

If a parent or other caregiver has taught the child, a 3-year-old typically can answer, “What is your name?” by saying both first and last name. And when asked, “How old are you?” the child typically will say “three” and perhaps hold up three fingers.

Can speak in three to five word sentences.

A 3-year-old is learning a lot of words and beginning to put them together in short sentences. “I want the yellow crayon.” “Mary ate the whole banana.” Expect a lot of grammatical errors. It’s not necessary to correct them. Just use the correct form yourself, and your child will learn.

Enjoys conversation

Excited about all the words he or she is learning, a 3-year-old usually loves to tell you what happened at daycare, what he or she would like for a snack, and what book is a favorite for bedtime.

Follows a three-part direction

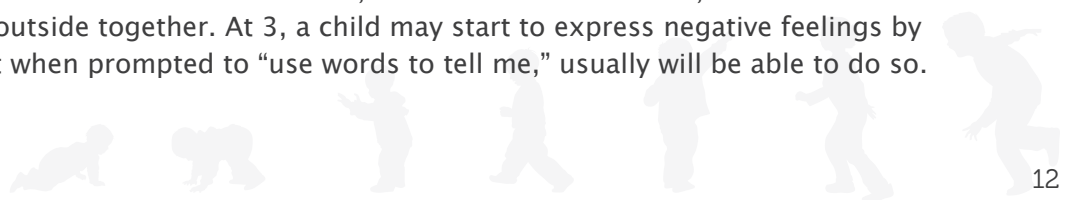
At 3, a child usually is able to understand, remember, and carry out a 2 or 3-part series of steps, such as, “Put your truck in the toy box and then come in the kitchen for a snack.” Of course, a child this age may sometimes resist doing things s/he doesn’t want to do (like put the toys away and get ready for bed), but that’s different than not understanding the directions!

Asks lots of questions

3 is the age of “why,” in which every answer you give your child just leads to another “why?” question. Why do I have to go to bed? Why do I have to eat my sandwich before my ice cream? Although this can drive a parent crazy, it is one important way a child demonstrates endless curiosity.

Uses words to talk about feelings like “sad” or “happy.”

A child this age is quickly building a large vocabulary and learning to use words to tell you when he or she is happy, sad, or angry. (It helps if you have used words to label your child’s feelings and to describe your own.) At 3, a child may start to express negative feelings by crying or whining, but when prompted to “use words to tell me,” usually will be able to do so. A 3-year-old also uses words to choose activities, to ask for a favorite food, or to decide what to wear when you go outside together. At 3, a child may start to express negative feelings by crying or whining, but when prompted to “use words to tell me,” usually will be able to do so.



Understands routines, such as what happens first and then what happens next

By the age of 3 a child probably has gotten used to the order in which things usually are done. For example, we always brush our teeth after eating and we always wash our hands after using the toilet. You can check for this by asking, “OK, we went potty. Now what comes next?” Or, “We are going outside to play in the snow. What do we need to put on first?”

Social and Emotional Development

Takes turns in games

A 3-year-old may not automatically take turns when playing with others, and he or she probably will not be ready to play games with complicated rules. But in playing simple games of catch or a basic board game (like Candyland, a popular game for young children) – and with a reminder from a grown-up that it’s important to take turns – a 3-year-old typically can do so.

Names a friend when asked.

At 3 a child usually will be able to give the first name of a playmate when asked, “Do you have a friend you like to play with? What is your friend’s name?”

Recognizes feelings of other children

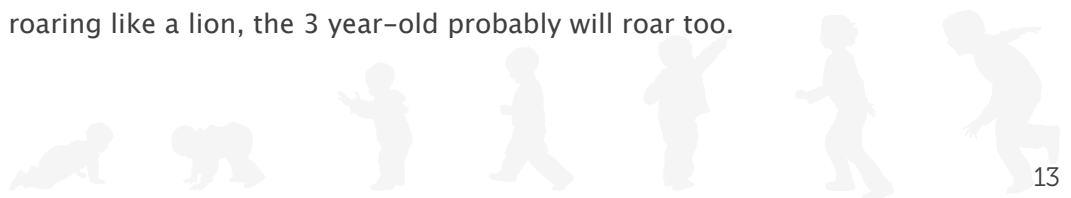
At 3, a child typically will be able to tell you how another child is feeling (sad, afraid, angry, happy) if you ask. Even without being asked, a 3-year-old often will notice a child’s feelings and show concern or empathy if a child is upset. One way to check for this ability to recognize feelings is to read stories that have emotional situations in them and to pause to ask questions such as, “How do you think that boy is feeling now that he can’t find his dog?”

Enjoys helping with household tasks.

A 3-year-old wants to help with laundry, grocery shopping, even picking up. These are great opportunities to make a game out of it and make it fun for both of you.

Imitates you and friends

3-year-olds watch everything you do and are likely to imitate your words and actions – for example, pretending to go to work, pretending to drive the car, using the same phrases you use when you talk to friends or family members. Children this age also imitate their playmates and older children. If one child tries to turn a somersault, the 3-year-old is likely to try too. If a playmate runs around roaring like a lion, the 3 year-old probably will roar too.



Separates easily from you

Although separation anxiety is a normal part of development, by the age of 3 a child usually is comfortable with being cared for by someone other than parents while parents go out for an evening. Or he or she can separate easily from parents to go to preschool or to a friend's house to play. The child has learned that parents will leave for a while, but always come back and take care of him. However, if a 3-year-old is overly tired, not feeling well, or has gone through something upsetting or frightening, he or she may be a little clingy and may protest when parents go away.

Plays alongside children in small groups

A 3-year-old usually is becoming comfortable in small groups of children close to the same age. But rather than interacting with – or having a conversation with – another child, the 3-year-old typically will just stand or sit next to the child and do similar things, such as playing in the sand, building with blocks, or climbing on the jungle gym.

Cognitive Development

Completes a six piece puzzle

Enjoys pretend play to learn new ideas

When children engage in pretend play—taking care of baby dolls, playing doctor or firefighter, pretending to make a birthday cake out of clay—they are learning about and practicing roles they will play in real life. At 3, a child involved in pretend play will show you how he or she is learning to solve problems, figure out routines, and communicate with others.

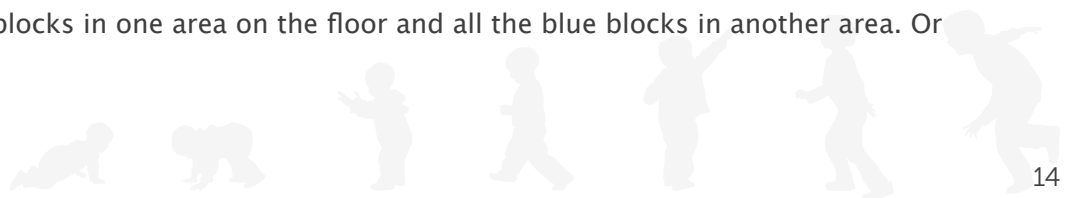
Understands the concept of “two”

A 3-year-old is just beginning to understand number concepts and typically will understand the meaning of two. For example, if you tell your child it's OK to take two cookies from the plate, he or she will do so (gladly!). Or you might ask your child to choose two books for bedtime reading or pick out two toys to take along to a grandparent's house.

Makes mechanical toys work

Can sort objects by size and color.

At 3, a child is learning how to group things by category—especially size, shape, and color. To check for this, you can put out a pile of colored blocks of different sizes and ask your 3-year-old to put all the red blocks in one area on the floor and all the blue blocks in another area. Or



you could ask your child to put all the big blocks in one basket and the small (or little) blocks in another. There are lots of variations on this game, using crayons, toy trucks, or whatever objects you have available.

Can count to three

Shows ability to figure things out

In the course of any day there are many opportunities for a child to figure things out. For example, your child might figure out that she needs to pull a stool over to the sink in order to reach the faucet and turn on the water. Or if a toy rolls under the couch, your child might get a long stick and try to push it out. Or if you tell your child there's going to be a surprise after dinner, he might come up with reasonable guesses about what it might be (a special treat, a trip to the park, or some other thing he has enjoyed in the past).

Motor Development

Climbs and runs well

Although it's common for a 3-year-old to sometimes trip and fall or bump into things when moving fast, a child of this age usually will be able to run on a fairly even surface (a sidewalk or a gym floor) without falling. A 3-year-old also is likely to be able to climb confidently up steps to a sliding board, on a small jungle gym, or over and onto rocks or tree stumps outside. 3-year-olds also are likely to climb on furniture at home, which means you might be working hard to teach your child that furniture is not for climbing!

Builds with blocks

At 3, a child is likely to stack several blocks on top of each other to build a tower and to put blocks side by side and on top of each other to create a simple house or building. A 3-year-old also may enjoy knocking a tower down and starting all over again!

Throw ball underhand

Children this age usually enjoy playing "catch," especially with a medium-sized soft rubber ball (about the size of a soccer ball). With a ball that size, your child probably will use both hands to hold it, throwing it underhand in your general direction, even if the ball doesn't come right to you. With practice your child will get more accurate and may also try throwing a smaller ball (baseball-size, but soft) with only one hand. Catching a ball is still pretty difficult for a 3-year-old, but it's very exciting when it happens. It helps if you throw or bounce the ball very gently from only a few feet away. Remember to praise your child for trying hard and, most of all, to have fun together.



Walks on tiptoe for short distances

At 3, a child typically will be able to walk across the room on tiptoe. However, if you haven't done this with your child before, he or she may not know what you mean by "tiptoe" and you may have to demonstrate. One fun way to check for this is to play "follow-the-leader" and have your child do what you do.

Can hop on one foot

Hopping on one foot can be fun for children this age, but it takes some practice before they become confident. You can make a game out of it, hopping together to upbeat music, playing follow-the-leader, or keeping track of how many hops your child can do on each foot.

Turns book pages one at a time

At younger ages, a child will have a hard time getting ahold of the paper and turning just one page at a time—or may not even understand that this is the way a book is read. But at 3 a child typically understands that you follow a story by reading each page in the book (especially if you've been reading to the child regularly), and he or she also has the fine motor coordination to grasp and turn the pages one at a time.

Draws simple shapes.

A 3-year-old usually is beginning to develop some control of where the crayon goes on the paper, especially a fat crayon that is easy for small hands to hold. Although a child may not draw recognizable objects at this age, he or she usually will be able to make dots, draw lines (although not perfectly straight) and make a circle (again, not perfect). These are important steps toward putting those shapes together at later ages to make letters, numbers, and pictures of people and other recognizable objects.



Age 4



Language Development

Communicates clearly

By 4, a child usually is able to tell you quite clearly what he or she needs or wants, using a large vocabulary, speaking in complete sentences, and describing things in some detail. A child this age will carry on a meaningful conversation, telling you about his or her day, asking questions in a logical way, and often negotiating rules and expectations (for example, how about two bedtime stories instead of one?).

Your child has mastered some basic rules of grammar

Despite the grammatical mistakes that still are common for a 4-year-old, a child this age also has absorbed a lot about the basic rules of grammar—talking about things in the future (“I’m going to...”) and things in the past (“I did...”), making both statements and questions, forming possessives (“this is mine, that is hers”) and following a host of other rules even though no one specifically has taught the child those rules.

Speaks in sentences of five to six words.

A 4-year-old who has been talked to from infancy has absorbed a great deal about the structure of language. Not only does he or she know many words, but also can put them together in increasingly long sentences—at least five or six words. A child this age may still make quite a few grammatical errors (using “her” instead of “she,” for example, or mixing up the past tense of words, such as saying “I rided my bike” instead of “I rode my bike”). It’s not necessary to correct those mistakes; just keep using the correct forms yourself and gradually your child will learn them too.

Can retell his or her favorite stories.

At this age, a child usually has developed a good memory and a good understanding of the sequence of events. So, if you have told the child the same story – or read him or her the same book – more than once or twice, the child usually will be able to tell you the main events of the story if you ask. For a simple story that really catches a young child’s interest, reading it only once may be enough for the child to be able to retell it. You may need to prompt the child at points in the story, by asking, “Then what happened after that?” Sometimes it’s fun at bedtime to ask your child to tell you a story for a change – either a familiar one you’ve read together or a new one the child makes up.

Social and Emotional Development



Feels secure enough to try new things

By age 4, a child usually feels secure enough to move eagerly beyond familiar experiences and try new things. A 4-year-old might become bolder about trying new foods (although it's not unusual for a child this age to be a picky eater), enjoying more challenging activities at the playground (going down a bigger slide or trying to climb higher on the jungle gym), entering a new group and inviting an unfamiliar child to play, or trying to learn a new sport or arts activity.

Is able to negotiate solutions to conflicts during play

Although 4-year-olds are developing new abilities to cooperate and build friendships with other children, conflicts are inevitable—arguments over a desired toy, temper outbursts because someone knocked down what you built with blocks, or disputes about whether a third child should be allowed to join in playing house. But 4-year-olds also are beginning to see possible solutions and to be able to negotiate—for example, suggesting taking turns with the favorite toy, asking the person who accidentally knocked over the block tower to help rebuild it, or suggesting the third child who wants to play house can be the grandpa who came to visit. Children this age still may need some guidance and coaching from adults when conflicts arise, but, given consistent teaching about how to get along, gradually they will become better at resolving issues without adult help.

Seeks to be more independent

With all the new physical coordination, language, and social skills that go along with being a 4-year-old, a child this age often is eager to do more things independently. For example, a 4-year-old may insist on dressing him or herself, buckling the car seat, helping to make a sandwich or pour juice (as long as you provide a child-size pitcher or bottle that is easy to handle). Sometimes it may seem quicker and easier to continue to do these things for your child. But allowing extra time to let your child do things independently is a way of allowing your child to build valuable skills and confidence.

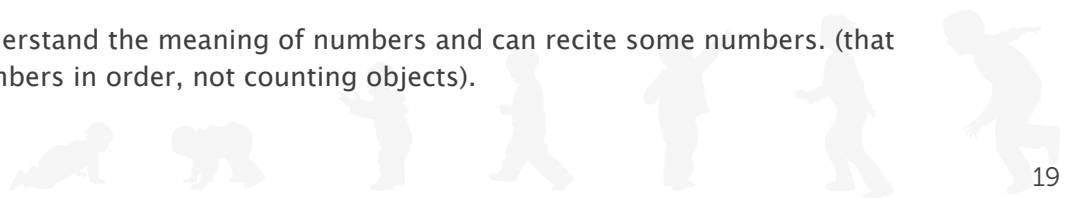
Cooperates with other children

A 4-year-old is beginning to move beyond parallel play (playing next to another child but not really interacting) and is more likely to carry on a conversation with another child, invite the other child to join in building with blocks or playing dress-up together, and figuring out ways to share playthings and take turns so that both have a chance to be equal partners in play.

Cognitive Development

Can count to ten

Most 4-year-olds understand the meaning of numbers and can recite some numbers. (that means saying the numbers in order, not counting objects).



Enjoys telling you her favorite stories

You probably have read or told your child some favorite stories many times. So if you ask your 4-year-old some questions about one of those stories, he or she probably can answer. For example, you could ask your child, “What happened after...” or “Where did the boy and his family go?” At age 4, children are usually developing a good memory and a good sense of the order of events in a familiar story.

Recognizes some capital letters, especially those in his or her own name

By age 4, children who have been exposed to books will start to recognize some capital letters. They will be especially interested in the letter in their own name.

Understands the concepts of “same” and “different”

At 4, a child understands that some things are alike (or the same) and some are different. For example, if you put out 4 blue blocks and one yellow and ask your child to point to the one that is different, he or she probably will choose the yellow block. Or if you put two apples and one orange on the table, your child probably can identify the orange as the fruit that is different and the apples as the ones that are the same.

Can count actual items, such as the plates on the table or apples in a bowl

Engages in pretend/fantasy play

At this age, your child probably loves to play make-believe. A 4-year-old might pretend to be a pirate, a princess, or a doctor, continuing in that role for quite a while and acting out a variety of imaginary scenes. Whether pretending to be something that really exists (a firefighter or a teacher, for example) or a fantasy character (a mermaid or a dragon), this kind of creative play is a great way for a child this age to learn.

Recognizes some written numbers.

Children this age are beginning to recognize numbers from games, elevators and mailboxes. They may recognize the number for their age. There are countless opportunities everyday to help them recognize the numbers in their life.

Motor Development



Can copy some capital letters

At 4, children vary a great deal in terms of how familiar they are with letters. But they usually will be able to copy simple capital letters (T, P, V, O, for example) with some accuracy. At this age it's not unusual for a child to reverse the direction of letters. Over time, most children will grow out of that and learn to print letters correctly.

Can balance on each foot.

As with all skills, the ability to balance on one foot develops at different times for different children. But at 4, most children can begin to balance on one foot for at least a few seconds, sometimes more easily on one foot than the other. It may help to suggest that they hold their arms out to their sides to achieve better balance. Some children like to have you time them to see how many seconds they can balance on one foot, but don't push if your child isn't ready.

Can catch a bounced ball most of the time.

Children this age often enjoy playing "catch" with a soft medium-size ball and usually are getting more consistent about catching it if you bounce the ball gently from a few feet away. Some children will be able to catch well when they turn 4, but others may not be very consistent until they're closer to 5. Remember to praise your child for trying hard and, most of all, to have fun together.

Can copy simple shapes like a circle, square or triangle

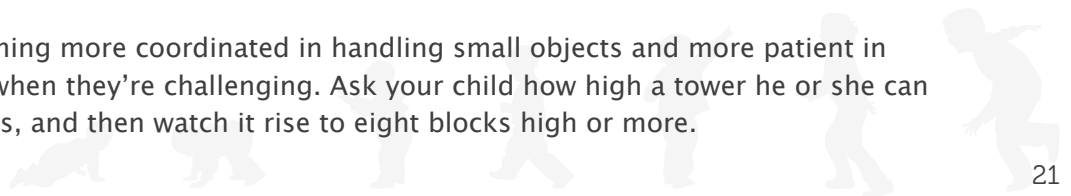
Draw a circle on a big piece of paper and ask your child to use a fat crayon to draw one just like it. Try the same thing with a square or a triangle. The shapes your child draws may not be perfect, but with practice and encouragement he or she will continue to develop more control. Again, having fun is the key to building these skills.

Can draw a person with at least three body parts when asked.

At 4, a child is beginning to draw more recognizable objects. When asked to draw a person (in general) or a specific person (yourself, your mommy), a 4-year-old usually will draw a body, a head, and maybe another part or two (legs, arms, hair). It's not necessary to coach or push your child to draw more accurately, because that will come with development. Just give your child lots of opportunities to use crayons or paint and have fun with it. If your child draws something you don't recognize, rather than asking, "What is that?" just say, "Tell me about your drawing," which also gives your child a chance to practice language skills.

Builds a tower of eight blocks

A 4-year-old is becoming more coordinated in handling small objects and more patient in building things even when they're challenging. Ask your child how high a tower he or she can build with small blocks, and then watch it rise to eight blocks high or more.



Age 5



Language Development

Tells longer stories.

5-year-olds love to tell stories, both made-up and true. This is a great way for children to practice their rapidly increasing language skills, and the parent's job is to listen attentively and encourage the child to elaborate on what happened next, how someone felt, what the consequences were of the actions taken. This not only is how children practice communication, but also memory, understanding of cause and effect, and perspective-taking (understanding how someone else sees things or feels in a certain situation). You can help by asking questions like, "What happened next? How do you think he felt when that happened? I wonder what she could have done to solve that problem?"

Uses future tense.

The use of the future tense reflects not only the child's growing language skills, but also the development of the concept of time – past, present and future. It can be both fun and useful to sit down in the evening with your child and talk about what lies ahead the next day—or the next few days. You might look at a calendar together and mark days with special events or activities. Then you also can invite your child to think about what you need to do to be prepared for those future events. Each time you involve your child in a conversation like that, you are building your child's language and life skills.

Speak in sentences of five or more words.

At 5 years of age, a child is able to tell you very clearly what is on his or her mind. Sentences are becoming longer and more complex, with fewer mistakes in grammar. If your child does make mistakes (for example, saying "I weared that shirt yesterday,"), rather than pointing out the child's error, just say, "Oh, you wore that yesterday? Then maybe you want to wear something different today." You want to encourage your child to continue to express his or her opinions and feelings, without worrying about being judged.

Says name and address

5 is the age when most children are developing a clear sense of where they and their family live, both in terms of the street address and the city and state. But this is not something that develops automatically; parents need to teach it, pointing out to their child the house number on the house or apartment, the name of the street on the street sign, and the location of the city and state on a map. Then it's a matter of practice and memorization for a child to learn to say the address when asked.

Social and Emotional Development



Wants to please friends

Friendships are becoming increasingly important to 5-year-olds. They want to be liked and accepted and they are learning how to invite someone to play with them, how to share and compromise so they can keep that interaction going, and how to resolve conflicts when they arise. Parents often need to play the role of coach, helping their child practice what to say or do when a tough situation comes up with another child.

Shows increasing independence

5-year-olds take pride in being able to do things on their own. They may be excited to brush their own hair (even if it doesn't look as perfect as when a parent does it), spread the peanut butter on their own toast, or choose the outfit they want to wear to childcare or preschool. For parents, it's important to provide opportunities—and just enough support and encouragement—so the child experiences success in trying new things independently. Perfection is not the goal; effort and confidence are!

Likes to sing, dance and act

5-year-olds are excited to discover the things they can do with their voice, their body, their imagination. The more outgoing child is a natural performer; even a shy child is likely to enjoy singing, dancing and make-believe in a familiar environment with caring adults. The best way to nurture this important aspect of creativity and self-expression is to join the child in creative play—acting out a favorite story, singing a familiar song (or making up a new one to fit the situation) while driving in the car, or having a family dance party after dinner.

Seeks new experiences

5-year-olds have a great sense of adventure and usually are eager to try new experiences, as long as trusted adults are nearby to protect and encourage them. This is a time for parents to encourage their children to try a variety of things to discover what they like most—new foods, arts, sports, outdoor adventures. It also is important to respect the fact that children may not like everything they try; pushing something new on a child almost always backfires and makes it less likely that the child will enjoy the new experience.

Agrees to rules more easily

5-year-olds have discovered that it pays to cooperate with others, both their peers and adults. They have learned through experience that following the rules leads to a more enjoyable time for everyone. The task for parents is to make sure children understand in advance exactly what will be expected of them (for example, you need to share the Legos with your sister and, when I tell you dinner is ready, you need to come to the table right away).



Knows the difference between fantasy and reality

5-year-olds have lively imaginations, but they usually can tell you when they are making up a story or when it really happened. Although you don't always have to point out the difference, it can be helpful to ask your child to tell you stories about what happened at school or childcare that day, listening carefully to your child's experiences. Then, at bedtime when you often read a book to your child, you might say instead, "How about we make up a bedtime story tonight?" Then you might take turns telling parts of a story of an imaginary adventure.

Cognitive Development

Recognizes his or her written name.

5-year-olds may vary in their ability to write their names—and that also may vary with how long and complicated their names are. But, with a little instruction, most 5-year-olds can learn to recognize their name. Write down several people's names, including your child's, and have him or her circle their own name. Point out the features of their name—for example, the first and last letters. Put a nametag on your child's bedroom door or the coat hook where your child hangs his or her coat after school so that your child has plenty of opportunity to see their name and become familiar with it.

Can sort items by color, shape and size.

At 5, children are becoming more attentive to different features of objects, seeing how they are the same and different. They can see how some items can be the same (e.g. in terms of shape) and different (e.g. in terms of color) at the same time. Sorting tasks can be fun for children this age—for example, first sorting the blocks by color, then sorting the same set of blocks by size. This helps children not only understand concepts of size, shape and color but also increase their ability to focus their attention and follow directions—both important skills for succeeding in school and life.

Knows about things used at home, such as money or food.

5-year-olds usually love to be engaged in what's happening around the house. They are constantly watching and learning from the everyday tasks of the adults in the family. So it's great to engage them in figuring out what you need to get at the store in order to make the recipe you have planned for dinner—or to figure out if you have enough money in your wallet to pay for the ice cream your child wants. Let your child see you planning and making decisions, talk out loud about what you are doing, and, as your child learns, engage him or her in helping with daily decisions.



Names at least four colors correctly.

At 5, children are usually able to distinguish between different colors and to name at least the most common primary colors (black, white, red, blue, green, yellow). To help your child, be aware of mentioning colors when you are talking to your child (for example, “Look at that shiny red fire truck!” or “The sky is blue today, so I don’t think it’s going to rain.”). Or play a fun game while riding in the car, looking to see who can be the first to spot a black truck or a green car.

Understands the concept of time.

5-year-olds are becoming very aware of time—how many days until our special outing to the zoo? Is it time for dinner yet? How long before my friend has to go home? Children can learn a lot about hours and minutes if you use an oven timer. For example, tell your child that it will be time to put the toys away and come to the dinner table in 30 minutes, then set the timer to ring when the 30 minutes are up. (You also might explain that 30 minutes is the length of a favorite TV show or the same amount of time it takes to drive to swim lessons.) For time concepts related to days or weeks or months, show your child the calendar and mark off each day until a special event arrives.

Can identify six body parts.

5-year-olds are becoming very familiar with the parts of their body and usually can name basic parts if you point to them—arm, leg, head, foot, hand, eye, ear, nose, mouth. Because children this age are typically so excited to learn new things, it can be a fun game just to see how quickly they can identify more specific body parts—first by having you say the name (e.g. elbow, wrist, ankle) and have the child point to it, then you point to it and have the child say the name (a more difficult task). Remember to keep it light and fun for your child as he or she builds new vocabulary and a new awareness of body parts.

Counts ten or more objects.

Whereas a younger child may be able to say numbers in order, a 5-year-old is learning to really understand the concept of counting objects. You can encourage this understanding by asking your child to figure out how many forks or knives you need to put on the table for dinner. Or you can look at the calendar together and count how many days it is until you go to visit Grandma and Grandpa. It helps to point (or have your child point) at the objects being counted—and then to notice how well your child is counting (for example, “Way to go! That’s good counting!”).

Motor Development



Does somersaults.

Somersaults are a fun and exciting milestone for young children, representing both bravery and coordination in making their bodies do impressive tricks. (Cartwheels, an even more challenging task, will follow in a year or two.) Children love to practice somersaults in a safe space, clear of obstacles and with a reasonably soft surface. Initially they will need a little coaching on how to tuck their head under and get started, but soon they will want to show you this new trick over and over.

Prints some letters.

Children vary a great deal in terms of when they develop both the visual attentiveness and the fine motor coordination to be able to print letters of the alphabet. But by age 5, most children will be able to print some letters, especially capital letters (which have more straight, simple lines) and letters that are very familiar, such as those that are in the child's own name. It can be helpful to have a child practice first by using his or finger to draw letters in a tray filled with sand, then moving on to printing with a fat crayon on wide-lined paper. Print the letter first so the child can copy what you have done, then gradually move toward having the child print from memory. (While printing the letter, say the name of it and the sound it makes, paving the way for other important pre-reading skills your child is developing at this age.)

Swings and climbs.

5-year-olds are quickly becoming stronger, more coordinated and more independent in what they can do with their bodies. Whereas at earlier ages they relied on grown-ups to help them onto the swing and to push them, now they are more likely to get themselves securely into the swing and even to pump their legs to keep the swing moving. (Loving the thrill of swinging high, though, they still might like parents to give them a big push now and then.) They also usually love to climb on playground equipment, steep hills and even furniture. They relish the challenge and the confidence they feel as they discover their new found balance and skill. It's important to create safe opportunities where children can practice these skills independently, with some good cheers from loving parents on the sidelines.

Hops and may be able to skip

5-year-olds usually are proud of the new things they are able to do with their bodies. They love to show parents and teachers how well they can hop on one foot (and then the other foot, which is usually even harder). It can be a fun and motivating game to count how many hops your child can do on each foot, always focusing on the success not the failures. Skipping is a more challenging motor task, requiring a repeated "step-hop" one foot after the other. Some children will pick it up just from watching an adult or older child do it; other children will need more direct explanation and demonstration.



Draws a person with a body.

5-year-olds are becoming more aware of how the human body looks and more able to represent it on paper. Although the proportions may be off and many parts may be missing or incomplete, a child this age usually will be able to draw at least a basic human figure that includes a body, a head, and maybe arms and legs. As with so many skills, children at this age will vary a great deal in terms of the level of details in their drawings and the coordination with which they put crayon or pencil to paper.

Uses a fork and spoon, sometimes a table knife

Children at this age are becoming increasingly independent and coordinated in the way they feed themselves. Typically they can handle a spoon without too many spills, can use a fork to spear solid food items and may even begin to use a table knife to spread butter or peanut butter on their bread. Although they still probably won't be very coordinated in using a knife and fork together, with some guidance and encouragement, they may be able to begin to hold a soft piece of chicken or baked potato steady with a fork while they try to slice off a bite of it with a table knife. It's important for mealtime to be relaxed and enjoyable, so don't rush things or worry about a few spills; just admire your child's new skills and manners and know that he or she is practicing skills for a lifetime.

Copies triangles, circles, squares and other shapes.

5-year-olds are observant and beginning to be able to look at a simple object and duplicate it on paper with a sturdy crayon or marker. They usually love to experience their own success in copying basic shapes (circles, squares, triangles, ovals) you've drawn (or that are printed in a worksheet or workbook). While it's good for children this age to be able to name these shapes, copying them actually is important preparation for the drawing and printing they will do in years to come. If copying shapes on paper is difficult for a child, it sometimes is less frustrating to practice by drawing with a finger in a tray of sand or even going outside to draw in the mud with a stick.

