

Your Child at 3 Years

Talk with your child's doctor at every visit about the milestones your child has reached and what to expect next.

What children do at this age



Social/Emotional

- Copies adults and friends
- Shows affection for friends without prompting
- Takes turns in games
- Shows concern for a crying friend
- Dresses and undresses self
- Understands the idea of "mine" and "his" or "hers"
- Shows a wide range of emotions
- Separates easily from mom and dad
- May get upset with major changes in routine

Language/Communication

- Follows instructions with 2 or 3 steps
- Can name most familiar things
- Understands words like "in," "on," and "under"
- Says first name, age, and sex
- Names a friend
- Talks well enough for strangers to understand most of the time
- Says words like "I," "me," "we," and "you" and some plurals (cars, dogs, cats)
- Carries on a conversation using 2 to 3 sentences

How you can help your child's development

- Go to play groups with your child or other places where there are other children, to encourage getting along with others.
- Work with your child to solve the problem when he is upset.
- Talk about your child's emotions. For example, say, "I can tell you feel mad because you threw the puzzle piece." Encourage your child to identify feelings in books.
- Set rules and limits for your child, and stick to them. If your child breaks a rule, give him a time out for 30 seconds to 1 minute in a chair or in his room. Praise your child for following the rules.
- Give your child instructions with 2 or 3 steps. For example, "Go to your room and get your shoes and coat."
- Read to your child every day. Ask your child to point to things in the pictures and repeat words after you.
- Give your child an "activity box" with paper, crayons, and coloring books. Color and draw lines and shapes with your child.

Cognitive (learning, thinking, problem-solving)

- Can work toys with buttons, levers, and moving parts
- Copies a circle with pencil or crayon
- Plays make-believe with dolls, animals, and people
- Turns book pages one at a time
- Does puzzles with 3 or 4 pieces
- Builds towers of more than 6 blocks
- Understands what “two” means
- Screws and unscrews jar lids or turns door handle

Movement/Physical Development

- Climbs well
- Walks up and down stairs, one foot on each step
- Runs easily
- Pedals a tricycle (3-wheel bike)

How you can help your child's development

- Play matching games. Ask your child to find objects in books or around the house that are the same.
- Play counting games. Count body parts, stairs, and other things you use or see every day.
- Hold your child's hand going up and down stairs. When she can go up and down easily, encourage her to use the railing.
- Play outside with your child. Go to the park or hiking trail. Allow your child to play freely and without structured activities.

Act early by talking to your child's doctor if your child:

- Falls down a lot or has trouble with stairs
- Doesn't speak in sentences
- Drools or has very unclear speech
- Doesn't make eye contact
- Can't work simple toys (such as peg boards, simple puzzles, turning a handle)
- Doesn't play pretend or make-believe
- Doesn't understand simple instructions
- Doesn't want to play with other children or with toys
- Loses skills he once had

Tell your child's doctor or nurse if you notice any of these signs of possible developmental delay for this age, and talk with someone in your community who is familiar with services for young children in your area, such as your local public school. For more information, go to www.cdc.gov/concerned.