

Growing Together



Because My First Years Last Forever

Volume 1 Issue 12

The Preschool Years:
Three to Three and a Half

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Dear Parents,

Three and four-year-old children are often called preschoolers. Your preschool child is making developmental strides and expressing an interest in the world around her. She wants to touch, taste, smell, hear, and test things for herself. She is eager to learn. She learns by experiencing and by doing. Your preschooler learns from her play. She is busy developing skills, using language, and struggling to gain inner control.

Your preschooler wants to establish herself as separate from you, her parent. Preschoolers are more independent than toddlers. She can express her needs since she has greater command of language.

Fears often develop during the preschool years. Common fears include new places and experiences and separation from parents and other important people. You can expect your preschool child to test you over and over again, to use profanity and other forbidden words, and to act very silly. She may still have trouble getting along with other children, and sharing may still be difficult. Because of her developing imagination and rich fantasy life, she may have trouble telling fantasy from reality. She may also talk about imaginary friends. A preschooler needs clear and simple rules so that she knows the boundaries of acceptable behavior.

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What It's Like to Be...

THE PRESCHOOL YEARS: THREE TO THREE AND A HALF

(individual development varies)

Developing Body

- Develops a taller, thinner, adult-like appearance
- Develops a full set of baby teeth
- Sleeps through most nights without wetting the bed (occasional accidents are still quite common)
- Uses the toilet with some help (many boys may not be ready for toilet learning until 3 1/2)

Developing Mind

- Understands "now," "soon," and "later"
- Draws a circle and square
- Recognizes everyday sounds
- Matches object and picture
- Identifies common colors
- Can count 2-3 objects
- Puts on shoes (but cannot tie laces)
- Enjoys singing a simple tune

Developing Communication

- 75-80 percent of speech is understandable
- Talks in complete sentences of 3-5 words
- Stumbles over words sometimes
- Listens attentively to short stories; likes familiar stories told without any changes in words

Developing Self

- Sometimes shows preference for one parent (often the parent of the opposite sex)
- Enjoys playing alone, but near other children
- Enjoys playing with other children briefly, but still does not cooperate or share well
- Can answer the question, "Are you a boy or a girl?"
- Enjoys hearing stories about self, playing "house," imitating

How You Help Me Learn...

Encourage preschoolers' muscle development.

Show preschoolers how to hop like a rabbit, tiptoe like a bird, waddle like a duck, slither like a snake, and run like a deer.

This will also:

- Help them connect learning with fun.
- Encourage physical activity habits and enjoyment that can last a lifetime.

Build on preschoolers' first attempts to communicate with you using words.

Add new information to preschoolers' sentences. "Yes, that's a flower-it's a tall, red flower and it smells good."

This will also:

- Help preschoolers to add to their vocabulary and develop their skill at forming sentences.



Stimulate ...

Ask preschoolers to tell you a story during your reading time.

This will also:

- Build creativity and vocabulary in these three-year-olds and will give them a sense of needed responsibility.

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Reference: Berk, L. (2000). Child development (5th ed.).
Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

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Play is Learning

Play is more than just fun for children. Play is the way children learn. Through play, children learn skills to control their bodies, develop communication and thinking skills, concentrate and follow through, and learn how to relate to others. Play in early childhood is the best foundation for success in school. Play develops many skills that are necessary for children to later learn to read and write and for success in math and science. This chart shows some of the skills that children are learning as they play. [*This does not mean that preschoolers are ready to be taught to read and write. It means that they are learning many of the things that will lead to success in elementary school by spending their time playing today.*]

When preschoolers play:	It helps preschool-age children learn:
with blocks, buildings, houses, cars, etc. . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about sizes and shapes, space and distance • visual memory - remembering what they see • how to reach a goal - completing their own projects • matching, classifying and sorting by shape and size
with small interlocking blocks or stringing beads . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • small muscle control and the ability to use eyes and hands together, both important for later writing
with a puzzle . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to stick to a job and feel good about completing it • to notice the difference between the background and the picture
with art materials, like paint, crayons and markers . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an understanding of cause and effect (i.e. mixing colors) • shapes, sizes, colors • how to use pictures or symbols to represent ideas • how to make choices, to try out ideas, to plan and experiment
restaurant or grocery store together . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the ability to think about the way others act, think and feel, and develop empathy and feelings for others • language skills • how to work together to solve problems • to anticipate how to act in real-life situations
in water . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to use different containers to learn about size and measurement • what will happen when they test, experiment and guess
in wet and dry sand . . .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to relax and center attention on a task • the changes that water makes to sand, learning that combining things together can create new and different things

University of Wisconsin. U.S. Department of Agriculture and Wisconsin counties cooperating. UW-Extension provides equal opportunities in employment and programming including Title IX and ADA

Reference

"A Good Four Letter Word - Play." Better Kid Care Satellite, Pennsylvania State Cooperative Extension, March 1998.
Joan E. LeFebvre, Area Family Living Agent, University of Wisconsin-Extension, 330 Court Street, Courthouse, Eagle River WI 54521-8362, 715-479-3653, FAX 715-479-3605, E-Mail joan.lefebvre@ces.uwex.edu January 1999.

Even professionals are not always in agreement on specific child-rearing and feeding recommendations. Contact your doctor with any specific questions.

All children develop at a different rate. If you have any questions about your child's development, contact your doctor or local school district.

Just for Parents

More Than Discipline: Raising a Moral Child

By this time, you've already had plenty of experience with the up-and-down behavior of three-year-olds. One moment Ivan picks up his toys without being asked, the next he's pulling the cat's tail; one minute Caitlin's happily sharing her cookies with her sister, the next she's throwing the mother of all tantrums in the grocery store! You long for the day when your child will "do the right thing," without prodding or threats, all on her own, even when you're not around.

That is one of the great tasks of parenthood - transferring your values and standards for right and wrong to your children. And that's the goal behind disciplining children - to let them know which behaviors go in the "wrong" category and to give them good reasons for not repeating them. But raising moral children is much more than stopping bad behavior. It also includes encouraging positive behaviors - like kindness, gentleness, and helpfulness. Another part of moral "coaching" is helping your children learn to handle it when they do make a wrong choice - learning to take responsibility, apologize, make amends, and figure out how to do better the next time.

Sounds like a tall order for moms and dads! But raising a moral child happens one moment at a time. You can slowly but surely shape your child's moral character as you learn how to make the most of those moments to model, teach and encourage right choices.

Now that your child is past toddlerhood, you can build on his/her growing language and thinking abilities by using more reasoning when moral choices come up. Research shows that children who end up with strong moral character had parents who: were clear about the rules; talked about the reasons for the rules; and encouraged

them to talk about choices and their consequences. What might that look like for your 3 1/2 year old? Maybe like this:

Parent: You need to put away your toys now, Jerell. It's time for dinner.

Jerell: I don't want to.

Parent: I know you're having fun but everyone's coming to the table for dinner and they'll be angry if they have to wait for you.

Jerell: But I want to play with them later.

Parent: You can do that. But you know the rule: we all have to put away what we're doing when it's time for dinner - it's part of taking care of our things. If you still want to play with them later, you can take them out again.

Jerell: *pouting, not putting the toys away*

Parent: Jerell, you have a choice. You can put your toys away now or I'll put them away. If it's too hard for you to take care of your toys by putting them away, then I'll have to put them up in the closet and you won't be able to play with them until you can take care of them. What are you going to do?

That's just one of hundreds of situations that come up every day in homes with 3 1/2 year olds. Although it takes more time to reason with children - and you won't always have the time to spend - when you do have the time, *take it!* If you're consistent in using this approach, over time you'll see more obedience in your child, even when you're not around.

Whether you are trying to discourage wrong behavior, encourage obeying rules, or promote acts of kindness and helpfulness in your preschooler, here are some things to keep in mind:

- **Praises work!**

Be sure and point out when your child has made a right choice - and link it to the positive results, when possible (“Look at you! You shared your playdough with Sunghee. She’s really having fun with it, isn’t she?”). Praising your child’s positive behavior is just as powerful in shaping his future choices as disciplining him when he misbehaves.

- **Temperament matters.**

By now you know your child’s temperament: maybe she tends to be sensitive and gets her feelings hurt easily or maybe she’s a fearless risk-taker who’s forever pushing the limits. The most effective discipline and guidance will match the child’s temperament and personality. The sensitive child will respond to a look or a word; the challenging child will need stronger actions from you.

- **They’re watching....**

Your most effective tool in shaping your child’s moral character is YOU! You are your child’s first and most important teacher. Even when you don’t know it, they are watching and learning from you about good and bad behavior. Bottom line: Be a consistent example of the kinds of moral choices that you want them to make as they grow up.

Building moral character in your child will be a long, long process that happens one day at a time. But no one has a bigger impact on children than moms and dads and no time is more important than these early years, so every effort you make will be worth it. Learn new discipline strategies. Read storybooks with your child that have moral dilemmas. Coach your child through conflicts with friends. Look for opportunities to do good together. Be proud of your children when they make good choices. You won’t always handle each situation brilliantly but, over time, your efforts to shape your child’s right and wrong choices will pay off.



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Reference: Berk, L. E. (2000).
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Needham Heights, MA: Allyn
& Bacon.

**If you need
advice, or just a
listening ear,
call Bellflower
Center’s 24 -
Hour Family
Help Line at
216-229-8800.**

Feeding Your Preschooler

Let Us Be a Positive Role Model...

Like many things in life, children learn to make healthy choices by copying what they see being done around them. Although it is true that children are influenced by many factors in their environment, at this age, you as a parent are one of the main influences in their lives. Research has shown that children's eating and exercise habits are often very similar to those of their parents. Parents who regularly exercise have children who enjoy physical activity. Mothers who drink milk at meal times have children who enjoy drinking milk. On the other hand, parents who never exercise or refuse to eat certain vegetables, are sending a message to their child that those behaviors are not valued by them. And this applies not only to what you eat but how you eat. If the child sees the parent overeat on a regular basis, she may too - if not now, then later. If you eat slowly and eat only when you are hungry, not just bored or stressed, you are setting a good example for your child to follow.

When your child sees you engaging in healthful activities regularly - whether it is enjoying a variety of fruits and vegetables at meals and snack, to stop eating when you are full, or incorporating physical activity in your every day life, she starts to see these behaviors as the norm. By modeling healthy behavior, not only will you help your child adopt healthy habits, but it will give you a chance to improve your health as well.

Pressuring your child to do something healthful can often discourage him from practicing that behavior. For example, if you want your child to eat more vegetables, instead of pressuring him to eat his vegetables before he can have dessert, it might be helpful if you offer a variety of vegetables on a regular basis and enjoy eating them yourself. A child is much more likely to eat fruits and vegetables if he sees them at the dinner table and sees adults around him enjoying them.

Next time you want to spend some *fun* time with your child, take her to the playground, on a short hike, on a walk around the neighborhood, or prepare a healthy snack together instead of a going to a movie, a fast food restaurant, or watching TV. Your choice of a healthy fun activity will help your child associate "*fun*" with healthy behaviors.

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Green SD. (2004). *Parents as role models for healthy living*. Retrieved November 10, 2005 from Texas Cooperative Extension Web site: <http://fcs.tamu.edu/health/HealthEducationRuralOutreach/HealthHints/2004/feb-mar/parentsasrolemodelshandout.pdf>
Faughn P. (2004). *What healthy habits am I teaching my children?* Retrieved November 12, 2005 from University of Illinois Extension Web site: <http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/regionwc/lessismore/01issue.html>

Eat Right. Exercise. Have Fun.

That is the message from **MyPyramid**, a personalized guidance system from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Based on a lot of scientific evidence, MyPyramid reminds us to make healthy food choices and stay physically active each day. To get your own, and your child's personalized guide, visit www.MyPyramid.gov.



Variety is the spice of life - even at 3 1/2 years of age!

Make sure you are incorporating foods from all the five food groups in your child's meals each day. Different food groups provide different nutrients that are needed for growth and good health.

Grains: *Make half of your grains whole.* At least half of the grain (bread, cereal, rice, and pasta) your child eats should come from whole grain products. Check the nutrition facts labels on food packages to learn more about what you eat.

Vegetables: *Vary your veggies.* Aim to include some dark green and orange colored veggies, beans and peas, starchy, and other veggies in your child's meals each week.

Fruits: *Eat a variety of fruit and go easy on fruit juices.* Fruits are loaded with nutrition. Juices are a concentrated source of calories and lack dietary fiber. Juices often replace other more nutritious foods (like milk and fruit) in children's meals.



Milk: Go low-fat or fat free when you choose milk, yogurt, or cheese. Children can switch to lower fat milk options after the age of 2 years.

Meat and Beans: Go lean with protein. Vary the protein foods in your child's meals - choose more fish, beans, peas, nuts and seeds.

And remember, help your child find a balance between food and physical activity, he should be physically active for at least 60 minutes every day.

How much should your child eat?

According to the MyPyramid guidelines a 3 year old, who is moderately active (active for 30 - 60 minutes each day) should eat as per the plan below. To get a personalized guide for your child, visit www.MyPyramid.gov.

Grains ^a	Vegetables ^b	Fruit ^c	Milk ^d	Meat and Beans ^e
2 ounces	1½ cups	1 cup	2 cups	3 ounces

^a 1 slice of bread, ½ cup of cooked rice or pasta, 1 cup ready to eat cereal counts as an ounce.

^b 1 cup of raw or cooked vegetables or vegetable juice, or 2 cups of raw leafy greens counts as 1 cup.

^c 1 cup of fruit or 100% fruit juice, or ½ cup of dried fruit, 1 small apple, ½ large apple counts as a cup.

^d 1 cup of milk or yogurt, 1 ½ ounces of natural cheese, or 2 ounces of processed cheese counts as a cup.

^e 1 ounce of meat, poultry or fish, ¼ cup cooked dry beans, 1 egg, 1 tablespoon of peanut butter, or ½ ounce of nuts or seeds counts as a cup.

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Reference: MyPyramid (2005). Retrieved November 10, 2005 from www.MyPyramid.gov

Smart Snacking

Most children cannot eat enough at meal times to meet their nutritional needs. Planned healthy snacks are a great way to bridge the gap between what children eat at meal time and what their bodies need to grow. Your child needs 2-3 small and healthy snacks in addition to three meals each day.

Snacks often get a bad reputation, mainly because of the types of foods we have come to associate with snacking. These are the usually high sugar, high fat, and high sodium foods with minimal nutritional content like candy, chips, and pop. Snacks do not have to be unhealthy. In fact, if chosen wisely, snacks can help your child boost up her intake of fruits, vegetables, and low-fat dairy, food that most children do not eat in enough amounts. You can help your child snack smart by planning ahead. Keep foods like cut up fruits and vegetables, milk, cheese, whole-wheat bread or crackers handy; time the snack at least two hours before meals; keep snacks small; and be a good role model and choose healthy snacks for yourself. A piece of fruit with a glass of low-fat milk, instead of a bag of chips and juice drink will keep you and your 3 ½ year old going till the next meal.

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Reference: Nibbles for Health, USDA, Food and Nutrition Service. 2002.



If you have any specific questions on preschooler feeding and would like to speak to a registered dietitian, call Cuyahoga County Board of Health, Nutrition Program, 216-201-2000, Ext. 1526.



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 Cleveland, OH 44105-6136

Call any one of these Invest in Children partners below for support or information on how to make sure your child is healthy, well cared for and ready for school.

Prenatal Hotline • 216-778-BABY

Prenatal information and support for expectant mothers

MomsFirst • 216-664-4194

Prenatal care and support for expectant mothers in the City of Cleveland

Help Me Grow • 216-736-4300

Services and support for children prenatal to age three

Healthy Start • 216-987-7346

Health Insurance (Medicaid) for children prenatal to age nineteen

Starting Point • 216-575-0061

Child care services and information on care for children with special needs

Family Help Line • 216-229-8800

Free, anonymous support, information, referrals and crisis intervention

Tot-Line • 216-431-8200

Information on child development

First Call For Help • 2-1-1 or 216-436-2000

Free, confidential information and support for referrals to other local health or social services

This newsletter is provided to parents by Help Me Grow of Cuyahoga County.

Help Me Grow is a statewide child development program and a partner of Invest in Children. As Cuyahoga County's early childhood initiative, Invest in Children works to increase the development, funding, visibility and impact of early childhood services in the county, so our children start kindergarten healthy, well cared for and ready for school.



COMMISSIONERS
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If you have specific questions about your child's health or development, or concerns about your own health and well-being, please contact your physician.