

Growing Together



Because My First Years Last Forever

Volume 1 Issue 13

The Preschool Years:
Three and a Half to Four

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Dear Parents,

Exuberance is the name of the game this year! Physically this is a year of busy activity. With a body that will grow about 3 inches and about 4 pounds this year, your child will likely be full of energy. Either get lots of sleep yourself to match the pace or stand aside. There's a need to use that body so allow for lots of physical activity, including running, jumping and climbing. It's a good time to provide for plenty of outdoor active time.

Because of the difference between adult energy and a 4-year-old's energy, it is sometimes tempting for adults to assume a child is "hyperactive." More likely the child is just acting like a typical, energetic 4-year-old.

But, if you have real concerns, ask your child's doctor for an opinion.

Physical coordination is improving now, too, with an increased ability to throw a ball, get dressed and undressed without much assistance, and take care of bathroom needs independently.

Enjoy this active period together when you can. It can be fun to share some of the silliness. Remember, though, that a body that produces all that activity needs rest to "charge the batteries." Most fours need about 12 hours of sleep in a 24-hour period. They may have difficulty settling down to actually sleep during the day but at least quiet rest is really needed.

Reprinted from: Iowa State University Extension Publication *so alive*. . . *three to five*! A newsletter for parents of 3- to 5-year olds, issue 4 Material for this newsletter was written by Vikki Morain, former Iowa State University Extension specialist in human development and family studies. Inquires can be directed to Lesia Oesterreich, Family Life Specialist, Iowa State University. <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/childcare>.



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

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What It's Like to Be...

THREE AND A HALF TO FOUR

(individual development varies)

Developing Body

- Weighs 27-50 pounds
- Stands 37-46 inches in height
- Needs 10-12 hours of sleep each night
- Uses a spoon, fork, and dinner knife skillfully
- Dresses self without much help
- Walks a straight line
- Hops on one foot
- Pedals and steers a tricycle skillfully
- Jumps over objects 5-6 inches in height

Developing Mind

- Places objects in a line from largest to smallest
- Can recognize some letters if taught and may be able to print name
- Recognizes familiar words in simple books or signs (STOP sign)
- Counts 1-7 objects out loud

Developing Communication

- Speaks fairly complex sentences. "The baby ate the cookie before I put it on the table."
- Enjoys singing simple songs, rhymes, and non sense words
- Learns name, address, and phone number, if taught
- Follows two unrelated directions: "Put your milk on the table and get your coat on."

Developing Self

- Understands and obeys simple rules (most of the time)
- Takes turns and shares (most of the time); may still be bossy
- Changes the rules of a game as she goes along
- Has difficulty separating make-believe from reality

How You Help Me Learn...

Encourage preschoolers' language development.

Encourage your four-year-olds to play with words by providing old coupons, junk mail, newspaper ads, and old cereal boxes.

You may also:

- Talk about reading. Show these youngsters that words are everywhere: food labels, menus, etc.
- Ask the children to help plan activities. Build on preschoolers' curiosity and drive to understand their world.

Talk about things being in, on, under, behind, beside, etc.

Four-year-olds will like to act out these words that you are describing and will enjoy new ways of play.



Stimulate ...

Cut out magazine pictures of different shapes, colors, or animals.

This will help children develop cutting skills as well as matching and grouping.

You may also:

- Sort and count everything in sight like silverware, socks, and rocks.

Cheryl Barber, Family & Consumer Sciences Educator, Fulton County
Kathy L. Reschke, State Specialist, Early Childhood
Mary F. Longo, Family & Consumer Sciences Educator, Marion County
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Reference: Berk, L. E. (2000). Child development (5th ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

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Keith L. Smith, Ph.D., Associate Vice President for Agricultural Administration and Director, Ohio State University Extension.

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Play is Learning

Reap the Rewards of Gardening with Young Children

Help children plant a garden, and harvest their appreciation for the wonders of our natural world. From the first stage of seed selection, on through planting and tending to the garden, children develop a sense of pride and responsibility. They may also learn about math, writing, reading and science — with your help!



Take children to libraries and local greenhouses to find out what to plant and how to take care of it. Or have children ask family friends and neighbors about their gardening experiences. One discovery will lead to another. You don't necessarily need a green thumb to reap the rewards!

Decide whether you want to plant a square-foot garden, raised garden, or a conventional garden with rows, or a container garden made from empty milk cartons or flower pots. A garden need not be extensive or have dozens of kinds of plants. A barrel, a window box, or cut-in-half gallon jug will do nicely for a planter.

Whichever type of garden you choose, consider the climate and growing season before planting. Use sturdy, well-made tools and equipment. Shovels and hoes with short handles are easier for children to use than full-size tools.

Science and nature

- Begin by finding out which plants and flowers will grow best in your geographic location. Work together to set up the garden so that the particular varieties of plants and flowers you've chosen will grow best.
- Plant a vegetable garden, and children can eat what they grow.
- Talk with children about patterns and cycles they observe; ask them to make guesses about future changes.
- Find out the names of insects that appear in your garden. Which ones are beneficial — and which ones harmful to your plants?
- Consider a companion project, like a compost pile. If you work together with your community, families may contribute grass clippings and kitchen waste. Children learn the value of recycling.

Reading and writing

- Build children's vocabularies by describing what you see happening in the garden.
- Ask children to draw or paint pictures of plants as they grow, and write down what they observe.
- Read stories to children about gardening, such as *The Little Red Hen* by P. Galdone (Clarion 1973), and *The Carrot Seed* by Ruth Krauss (Harper & Row 1945).

Math

- Count seeds with children, and measure the correct distance between plants.
- Mark the calendar for the anticipated date of seedling appearance.
- Keep track of the height of your plants as they grow.

Gardening is one way for children to learn through meaningful activities. The lessons children learn by "digging into" gardening will make for cherished memories of learning with adults. You'll watch children's sense of pride and accomplishment — along with your garden — grow!

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© National Association for the Education of Young Children—Promoting excellence in early childhood education 1509 16th St. N.W. Washington DC 20036 (202) 232-8777 II (800) 424-2460 II webmaster@naeyc.org

Additional Resources:

Clemens, J.B. 1996. Gardening with children. *Young Children*, 51 (4):22-27.
Diffily, D. & Morrison, K. 1996. *Family-friendly communication for early childhood*. Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Computers

Many parents wonder whether educational computer games can help their children with early reading skills. The answer is maybe.... The best early reading software has these characteristics:

- Age appropriate: needs to be fairly simple and easy to follow, with graphics that aren't overwhelming.
- Child-controlled: should allow your child to make lots of choices.
- Gives immediate feedback: lets the player know right away whether the answer they chose was right or not.
- Skill-based: computer games are especially good for helping kids learn letter names and sounds.

If you're still not sure, check your local library — they may have some computer games that you can check out. And one more thing — keep in mind that there are a lot of other ways that your child can and should learn about letters and words — computer programs aren't a must and they shouldn't take the place of other things, like reading books together with you.

Kathy L. Reschke, Ph.D., Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist in Early Development & Care, The Ohio State University.

Reference:

"Technology and Young Children, Ages 3 through 8," National Association for the Education of Young Children Position Statement (1996). *Young Children*, Vol. 51, No. 6.

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

The Road to Reading and Writing

As a four-year-old, your child has become quite a pro at using spoken words – to ask you for more dessert, to tell you his opinion about going to bed, and to tell you about how the plant got knocked over (and that it really *wasn't* her fault!). Now the next language challenge is learning all about written words – how to read them, how to write them, and all the many ways they can be used – what are known as early literacy skills. In this article, we'll talk about what early literacy skills look like at four years old and a few ways that you can help your child build them.

Much of learning to read and write won't happen until your child is in kindergarten and first grade. But by four years old, most children are already beginning to learn important things about written words. Be on the lookout for these early signs that your child is on the way to reading and writing:

- Recognizes familiar words, like the sign for a familiar store or the brand name on a favorite box of cereal.
- Recognizes his own name when it's written (although at first he thinks that every word that has the same first letter as his name IS his name).
- Knows that books are read from left to right and that the words on the page are related to the pictures.
- Favorite books are ones with words and phrases that are repeated often.
- Knows favorite books by heart and likes to "read" them along with you (and definitely knows when you've skipped a part!).
- Likes nursery rhymes and songs with rhymes – he may even be able to think of words that rhyme, although some of the words will be nonsense words since he's focused on the sounds, not the meaning.
- Beginning to understand that writing has many uses: to tell a story, to label things, to help us remember, to send a message to someone who's not here, to give information....
- When playing make-believe, he pretends to make a grocery list or write a restaurant order or write down instructions.

These are all signs that your child understands that using written words is an important way of communicating and is curious to learn more. So how can you help? As you might guess, there are lots of ways!

One of the most important ways that young children learn is by watching their parents, and learning to read and write is no exception. So make sure that your child sees you reading, whether it's a novel, the newspaper, a cookbook, an instruction manual, or directions to the zoo. And make a point to briefly tell him why you're reading: "I need to know how to make this soup and these words in the cookbook tell me what I need to put in it and how to cook it." The same goes for writing – point out ways that you use writing each day, "I can't remember all these ingredients that we'll need to buy at the store – I better write them down."

By now, I hope you and your child have enjoyed many, many hours of reading children's storybooks together (and if not, now's a great time to start!). Reading books with children is one of the very best ways of ensuring that they will be good readers later. By the way, did you notice that I said "reading *with*" instead of "reading *to*"? That's because talking about books – asking your child what might happen next or what a word means, for example – is just as helpful to early literacy as reading the story.

Storybooks are certainly important to early literacy and children love listening to parents read them...

Local Library Information

**Cleveland Heights –
University Heights Library**
216-932-3600
www.heightslibrary.org

Cleveland Public Library
216-623-2800
www.cpl.org

Cuyahoga County Public Library
216-749-9354
www.cuyahogalibrary.org

Euclid Public Library
216-261-5300

Lakewood Public Library
216-226-8275

Rocky River Public Library
440-333-7610
www.rrpi.org

Shaker Heights Library
216-991-2030



over and over and over! But there are other kinds of books that are especially good for building the skills needed for reading and writing:

- Some books are especially good at building children's *phonemic awareness*, the connection between letters and the sounds they make. Young children first make that connection with beginning-letter sounds and with rhyming. There are many books that focus on words that all start with the same letter and on end-of-word rhyming – just ask your librarian!
- Information books: Your librarian can also show you books intended for young children on just about any topic your child is interested in! These books will contain words that your child doesn't already know, but can figure out by looking at the pictures or by talking with you about them. And the more words your child learns, the better reader he will be later.

As parents, we want our kids to become good readers and writers so they can do well in school. But some things that might seem helpful really aren't, at least at this stage. Correcting your child's first attempts at reading or writing is one of them. Learning to read and write words correctly takes lots of practice and "playing" with words. At this age, your child is just beginning to experiment. The more encouragement she gets, the better. If she's corrected too much, she'll become so worried about making a

mistake that she'll either stop trying all together or she will constantly ask you if her attempt is correct. But that doesn't mean that you should never tell your child how to read or spell a word. You'll know your child is ready for that kind of support when he asks you for it...usually around age 5.

And speaking of experimenting, the more opportunities your child has to play with written words, the better. Keep many children's books out where your child can read them whenever he wants (but be sure to talk about how to treat books well). Keep markers, crayons, pencils and paper available for your child to encourage writing. As soon as your child shows interest in letters and words, **talk, talk, talk** about them! And make the learning fun: "hunt" for letters; make up silly words to rhyme with the names in your family; make letter-shaped pancakes; ask your children's librarian for a CD of fun songs about letters and words. Beginning to learn about reading and writing is one of the most exciting milestones of your preschooler's development – make the most of it!



Kathy L. Reschke, Ph.D.,
Assistant Professor and
Extension Specialist in Early
Development & Care, The
Ohio State University.

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

Photo courtesy of the Ohio
Department of Education

Feeding Your Preschooler

It is Never too Early to Nutrition Educate your Child.

Is a four-year-old too young to learn about nutrition? Most definitely not! The sooner you introduce the concept of healthful lifestyle to your child, the easier it would be for him to form lifelong health habits.

Visit your local library to get some picture books about food and nutrition. Check with the librarian or visit <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Students/fun/readers/preschool.html>. Here are a few suggestions to whet your appetite:

Growing Vegetable Soup by Lois Ehlert

Dinosaurs Alive and Well: A Guide to Good Health by Laurie Krasny and Marc Brown

No Milk! by Jennifer Ericsson, Oran Eitan (Illustrator)

Pancakes, Pancakes by Eric Carle (Illustrator)

Bread, Bread, Bread (Around the World Series) by Ann Morris, Ken Heyman (Illustrator)

I Will Never NOT EVER Eat a Tomato by Lauren Child (Illustrator)

Oh, the Things You Can Do That Are Good for You: All About Staying Healthy by Tish Rabe, Aristides Ruiz (Illustrator)

Help your child learn about what he eats. All packed foods have a label on them. Depending on your child's interest and ability, identify foods through colors, pictures, letters, or words on the label. Have him help you find a particular food at the grocery store by looking for a certain clue. Slowly introduce the concept of nutrition facts labels. Help your child decide what healthy choices are and how you learn about them.

Visit your local grocery store and talk to your child about where different foods come from and how they get to the store. Instead of choosing a candy at the end of the shopping trip, let him pick a fruit of his choice.

Grow a kitchen garden or a container garden with your child. Let him help you plant it, take care of it, harvest the fruit of your labors and then prepare it. Studies have shown that when children are involved in growing, purchasing, or preparing a food, they are much more likely to try it. Bon appetite!

Punam Ohri-Vachaspati, Ph.D., R.D., L.D.
Assistant Professor, Extension Educator.
Ohio State University Extension, Cuyahoga County

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Twiss J, Dickinson J, Duma S, Kleinman T, Paulsen H, Rilveria L. Community gardens: lessons learned from California healthy cities and communities *Am J Public Health* 2003;93:1435-1438.
Retrieved January 15, 2006, from <http://www.fns.usda.gov/tn/Students/fun/readers/preschool.html>.

Let's Get Children Moving

To children, exercise means playing and being physically active. A child who is active will have stronger muscles and bones, a leaner body, a lower risk of developing Type 2 diabetes, and a better outlook on life. There are multiple ways for parents to get children moving. Specifically, parents should be aware of indoor activities during inclement weather that promote health education.

There are many resources that provide fun, safe, and affordable tools for physical activity. The web site www.pecentral.org is an extremely useful site that provides free lesson ideas, activities, and articles concerning physical education. In addition, this web site offers safe and affordable homemade equipment ideas. For example, yarn, balloons, and socks can be substituted as balls.

The library is another great source that provides books, music, and videos on how to get children moving. For instance, the book *From Head to Toe* by Eric Carle encourages children to move about like animals. Videos and musical media also engage children in exciting physical movements.

Children can learn and have fun through play and the discovery of movement. Parents have an important role in developing children's attitudes about exercise and promoting healthy behaviors that the children will carry on throughout their lives.

Theresa A. Greene,
M.Ed, Community Health Education

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1. Retrieved November 15, 2005 from www.kidshealth.org
2. Retrieved November 15, 2005 from www.pecentral.org

Gardening is a great way to introduce children to the natural world and encourage them to eat more fresh fruits and vegetables. Many people plant gardens in their backyard but you don't need a large backyard to get children involved. Cleveland has many school gardens and there are over 200 community gardens in Cuyahoga County! Interested in finding a community garden in your neighborhood or starting your own? Call the Community Gardening Program at Ohio State University Extension, Cuyahoga County at 216-429-8246.



Does Television Impact your Preschooler's Health?

From a very young age, our children are exposed to a variety of media, including television shows, videos / DVD's, cable, video games, computer activities and internet. Research shows that children spend more time using media than they spend on anything else except sleeping.

Television remains one of the strongest media influences that impact our children. By the time a child is 16 years old, she has spent more time watching television than going to school. An average American household has three television sets in its home. Thirty-two percent of children under the age of 6 have a television in their rooms. Researchers and organizations such as the American Academy of Pediatrics have been concerned about the impact of extensive television viewing on children's health and nutrition.

Studies have shown that children who watch more television are more likely to be overweight. Television viewing is considered one of the most sedentary activities that we can engage in. We would use more calories doing almost anything else, besides sleeping.

A lot of the media that is targeted to children is loaded with commercials. It is estimated that a typical child sees about 40,000 advertisements each year on TV, and most of these ads are for unhealthy foods like candy, sugary beverages and, high fat and high sugar snacks. There is a reason why there are so many advertisements on children's television – it is because they work – for the people trying to sell these foods! Preschoolers' inability to purchase their own foods does not in any way impact their ability to influence their parents purchasing behavior. Ask anyone who has taken a 4-year-old grocery shopping or to a fast food restaurant! Children know what's "the latest" and "the coolest" food product – and where did they learn about it – most likely from a barrage of television advertisements.

Researchers have also specifically studied the types of foods that are consumed while watching television. Children usually eat snack type foods in front of the television. And these snacks tend to be calorie dense foods with little nutritional value. Not many children or adults are known to munch on carrots or celery sticks while watching their favorite TV shows.

What is our responsibility as parents? Is it to turn off the TV forever? Not necessarily. Instead, get involved, stay informed, and be proactive. Here are a few suggestions to help you be in the driver's seat when it comes to deciding media exposure for your child:

- Know how much your child is watching - no more than 1-2 hours a day of quality programming from all types of media for preschoolers.
- Discourage children under 2 years of age from watching any television.
- Know what your child is watching. Watch TV with your

preschooler and discuss the content. Help her differentiate between fact and fantasy – a child who eats a certain candy does not suddenly become a princess!

- Remove television sets from children's bedrooms – children who have TV sets in their own rooms watch more unsupervised television.
- Do not allow television during meal times. Meals should be eaten in a pleasant non-distracting environment. When we pay attention to what we are eating, we enjoy it more and our body can decide when we are full.
- Limit use of television as a babysitter.
- If you use day care, find out if your child is watching any television there.
- Encourage alternative entertainment for your child including reading, athletics, hobbies, and creative play.

Punam Ohri-Vachaspati, Ph.D., R.D., L.D.
Assistant Professor, Extension Educator.
Ohio State University Extension, Cuyahoga County

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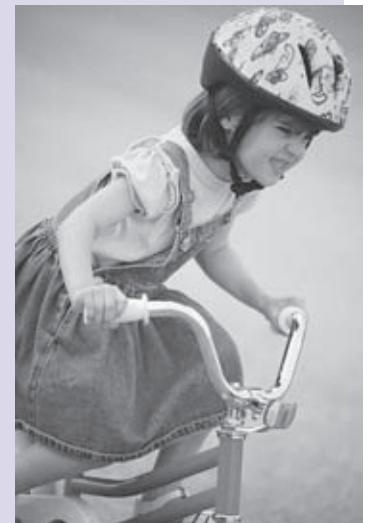
1. American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003. *Children, Adolescents, and Television*. Pediatrics Vol 107, No2, pp 423.
2. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004. *The Role of Media in Childhood Obesity*. Washington, DC.
3. Francis LA., Lee Y., Birch LL. 2003. *Parental weight status and girl's television viewing, snacking, and Body Mass Indexes*. *Obesity Research* Vol 11. No. 1, pp 143.

Safety Tips

Let children know that there are some things like matches and sharp knives that they should not touch.

Teach safety in play by stressing only one child on the slide, swing, or bike at a time.

Model safe behaviors, by wearing a helmet when biking or skating, and fastening your seat belt when you are in the car.



Retrieved on January 23, 2006 from <http://ohioline.osu.edu>.

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.



Ohio State University Extension
 Cuyahoga County
 9127 Miles Avenue
 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
 Jimmy Dimora
 Timothy F. Hagan
 Peter Lawson Jones



This newsletter is produced by Ohio State University Extension, Cuyahoga County, with funding provided by the Ohio Department of Health. If you have a change of address or would like your name removed from the mailing list, please call 216-429-8216.

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.