

PRESCHOOLER DEVELOPMENT

PRESCHOOLERS

Preschool children are making developmental strides and express an interest in the world around them. They want to touch, taste, smell, hear, and test things for themselves. They are eager to learn. They learn by experiencing and by doing. Preschoolers learn from their play. They are busy developing skills, using language, and struggling to gain inner control.

Preschoolers want to establish themselves as separate from their parents. They are more independent than toddlers are. They can express their needs since they have 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 the preschool child to test you over and over again, to use profanity and other forbidden words, and to act very silly. Preschoolers may still have trouble getting along with other children, and sharing may still be difficult. Because of their developing imaginations and rich fantasy lives, they may have trouble telling fantasy from reality. They may also talk about imaginary friends. Preschoolers need clear and simple rules so that they know the boundaries of acceptable behavior.

Understanding their growth and development will help you guide preschoolers through this stage. This fact sheet lists some of the characteristics of preschoolers. These characteristics are listed for three main areas: physical (body), social (getting along with others) and emotional (feelings), and intellectual (thinking and language) development. Remember that all preschoolers are different and reach the various stages at different times.

THREE-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN

Physical Development

- They walk on tiptoes.
- They stand on one foot.
- They jump horizontally.
- They ride a tricycle.
- They build towers of 6-9 blocks.
- They catch a ball.
- They smear or daub paint. They draw or paint in vertical, horizontal, and circular motions.
- They can handle small objects (such as puzzles and pegboards).

Social and Emotional Development

- They enjoy dramatic play with other children.
- They begin to learn to share.
- They need to know clear and consistent rules and what the consequences for breaking them are.
- Their emotions are usually extreme and short-lived. They need to be encouraged to express their feelings with words.

Intellectual Development

- They can communicate their needs, ideas, and questions.
- Their attention span is a little longer so they can participate in group activities.
- Preschool children learn best by doing. They need a variety of activities. They need indoor and outdoor space. They need a balance between active and quiet play.

FOUR-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN

Physical Development

- They have more small muscle control. They can make representational pictures (for example, pictures of houses, people, and flowers).
- They run on tiptoes.
- They hop on one foot.
- They gallop.
- They begin to skip.
- They throw a ball overhand.
- They pump themselves on a swing.
- They like unzipping, unsnapping, and unbuttoning clothes.
- They dress themselves.
- They can cut on a line with scissors.
- They like lacing their own shoes (but not tying).
- They can make designs and write crude letters.
- They are very active and aggressive in their play.

Social and Emotional Development

- They have very active imaginations.
- They sometimes have imaginary friends.
- They can be aggressive but want friends and enjoy being with other children.
- They tend to brag and be bossy.
- They are learning to take turns and to share. Games and other activities can help preschoolers learn about taking turns.
- They enjoy pretending to be important adults (mother, father, doctor, nurse, police officer, mail carrier, fire fighter, etc.).
- They need to feel important and worthwhile.
- They need opportunities to feel more freedom and independence.
- They appreciate praise for their achievements.

Intellectual Development

- They are very talkative.
- They enjoy serious discussions.
- They ask lots of questions, including "how" and "why" questions.
- Their language includes silly words and profanity.
- Their classification skills and reasoning ability are developing.
- They should understand some basic concepts such as number, size, weight, color, texture, distance, time, and position.