

# your child @<sup>TM</sup>

highlights of what's happening  
at this stage of your child's development...

## 3 years

Your “little baby” is off to preschool, where her world will broaden seemingly overnight. And she'll need your hand to guide her. As she makes friends, you can teach her to share. As she potty trains, you can help her practice. With encouragement and patience, you can help set up your child for success.

## your child's health

### take note...

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, you should let your doctor know if, by the time your child is four, she cannot or does not:

- Jump in place.
- Grasp a crayon between thumb and fingers.
- Scribble.
- Use sentences of more than three words.
- Use “me” and “you” appropriately.

### The Well Visit

Expect to take your child to the doctor for checkups when she turns three and again, when she is four. Exams might include tests to check for lead poisoning, tuberculosis, and kidney and metabolic diseases. Also, well visits are a good chance to check with your pediatrician about any booster shots that your child may need before starting school and be sure to catch up on any missed immunizations.

### The Dentist

By the time your child turns three, she should have almost all of her 20 baby teeth. This means it's time to visit the dentist if you haven't already.

*Before the visit.* Prepare your child by talking about what will happen at the dentist's office and reading books about going to the dentist.

*At the dentist.* The dentist will count and examine your child's teeth, and give a lesson about how to brush her teeth.

- Brush teeth at least once per day (especially at night).
- Use a child-size toothbrush with a pea-sized bit of fluoride toothpaste.
- Let your child brush her teeth herself and then help her to make sure her teeth get cleaned. Is brushing a battle? Give her your toothbrush so that she can “clean” your teeth while you clean hers.

### Nutrition

*Part of the family.* At this age, your child's eating habits should be similar to yours. She should eat the same foods at the same times, and use child-size utensils.

*Beware.* Choking is still a hazard because your child has not yet mastered chewing and swallowing. So, make portion sizes small, especially when serving:

- Grapes (cut them in half).
- Hot dogs (slice in half across and lengthwise).
- Raw vegetables, such as carrots and celery.
- Peanut butter (avoid spoonfuls).

- Avoid entirely foods such as hard candies and cherries with pits.

### Sleep

*Goodbye naptime.* Between the ages of three and four, children commonly give up their afternoon naps. Your child should sleep anywhere from nine to thirteen hours per day.

*Hello bedtime battles.* As a way of gaining control of her world, your child may try to resist bedtime. You can ease the process if you:

- Stick with the bedtime routine.
- Allow your child to make choices — pick out pajamas or books to read.
- Provide a sense of security with night lights, security blankets or stuffed animals.

### Toilet Training

At this age, children's toilet skills are all over the board. Some kids may have mastered it. Others may be just starting. Don't get down on your child (or yourself) if your child is still learning. No matter where your child is in the process, you will probably deal with:

*Accidents.* They happen. Don't get mad or make a big deal about it. This will only discourage your child from trying on her own again.

*Preschool.* First, your child's preschool may require her to be trained in order to attend. So, set her up for success:

- Let her use toilets outside of your home.
- Dress her in clothes that are easy for her to pull up and down.
- Have boys practice from a standing position.

*Staying dry at night.* Help her along by:

- Using the potty right before bed.
- Limiting liquids after 5 pm.
- Putting her to bed in underwear instead of pull-ups.
- Making the potty accessible to her in the night.

American Academy  
of Pediatrics



DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

Reviewed and approved by the  
American Academy of Pediatrics

Sources: *Your Baby's First Year* and *Caring for Your Baby and Young Child*, American Academy of Pediatrics, Steven P. Shelov, MD, FAAP, editor in chief; *Understanding Children*, Civitas and Richard Saul Wurman; *KidBasics*, Civitas; *Healthy Sleep, Happy Child*, Marc Weissbluth, MD.

Civitas thanks **Parents as Teachers**, an international early childhood parent education and family support program, for their ongoing support.

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## 3 years

### your child's growth and development

Your child should be able to do most or all of the following by the time he turns four years old:

#### Physically

- Throw and kick a ball.
- Draw circles and squares.
- Begin to copy capital letters.
- Dress and undress.

#### Intellectually

- Identify "same" and "different" objects.
- Talk in short sentences so that others can understand.
- Tell and remember parts of stories.

#### Socially and Emotionally

- Cooperate with other children.
- Engage in fantasy play.
- Understand that there are ways to solve problems.

### nurturing your child

#### Sharing

*To have a friend means to be a friend.* Whether at school or at a playgroup, you'll notice that your child is beginning to make friends. For the first time, he faces difficult new issues like sharing and taking turns.

To help your child understand these concepts, you can:

- *Show him how to share.* Offer your child a pen from your desk in exchange for one of his markers. Also, let him see you sharing with others. Use the word "share" during these interactions, so he can begin to connect the word to the action.
- *Use "share-friendly" toys.* When your child has a friend over to play, put out toys that lend themselves to sharing and cooperating. Try blocks, dress up clothes, art supplies and climbing toys. Also, before guests arrive, put away toys that your child does not want to share.

- *Practice with your child.* Play games that involve taking turns such as board games, the memory game and hide-and-seek are good.
- *Encourage and explain.* Praise your child when he shares, but don't punish him if he does not. Instead, wait until you are alone with your child and talk about sharing. Explain that just because he lets his friend use his toy doesn't mean that the friend will get to go home with it.

#### Television/Computer time

*Limit media watching (including TV, computer, video games, etc.).* One to two hours per day is more than enough. Also, monitor the shows he watches. Tune into shows that have nice messages. Tune out violence.

### your child's safety

#### In the Car

*Booster time?* If your child has reached the top weight or height allowed for her car seat, her shoulders are above the top harness slots, or her ears have reached the top of the seat, she is ready for a booster seat. Always use a lap/shoulder belt with a booster seat.

Note: Stick with the booster until the adult seat belt fits properly, usually between 8 and 12 years old and about 4'9" tall.

#### take note...

Now that your child is interacting more with other children, she is more likely to be exposed to new germs. Remind her to wash her hands well when she comes in from outside, after using the toilet and before she eats.

*Born Learning*<sup>SM</sup> is a public engagement campaign helping parents, caregivers and communities create early learning opportunities for young children. Designed to support you in your critical role as a child's first teacher, *Born Learning* educational materials are made available through the efforts of United Way, United Way Success By 6 and Civitas. For more information, visit us online at [www.bornlearning.org](http://www.bornlearning.org).

