About Your Three- to Four-Year-Old Child

Every Child and Parent is Unique.

This brochure highlights some general patterns of growth and development that apply to most children. As you watch, listen to, and play with your child, you will discover when she or he is ready for new activities and skills. You will find your own ways to use old and new ideas, to fit your individual personality, your family life, and your child’s needs.

General Traits

- Enjoys walking, running, jumping, riding, and climbing
- Likes activities such as play dough, blocks and cars, drawing, simple puzzles
- Stuttering, nail-biting, thumb-sucking, and similar habits are normal at this age
- Friends are extremely important, but skills in dealing with them are few
- Many children are consistently dry, at least in the daytime
- Likes to ask questions: Why? How? What? When?
- Wants to do everything a certain way, likes routines
- Occasionally still reverts to baby-like behavior
- Make-believe play is beginning

Toys for the 3- to 4-year-old

- Puzzles with 6 to 8 pieces
- Balls
- Books
- Play dough
- Riding toys
- Musical toys
- Dolls and teddy bears
- Pegs and pegboard
- Variety of blocks
- Cars and trucks
- Colored paper, paste, finger paints
- Crayons, markers, chalk and large pencils
- Blunt scissors (sturdy and fairly large)
- Soap bubbles and a straw for blowing
- Costume box: hats, gloves, clothes, shoes, purses, belts, scarves
- Small toy animals and people

What a Parent Can Do

- Allow your child to talk about feelings and help by giving names to feelings (sad, happy, scared, angry, confused).
- Friends are important now. Look for ways for your child to spend time with other children. One way might be to arrange a special weekly playtime with two or three friends of the same age.
- Find a regular time to read and look at books with your child.
- Be consistent with rules.
- Encourage independence with simple tasks. Your child may be able to help with supper by washing vegetables, tearing lettuce, or by setting the table.
- Teach the importance of privacy. Practice showing (like a game) that a shut door requires respect and a knock on the door may help gain entrance.
- Don’t worry if your child dislikes certain foods. Offer small food portions with a choice, if possible.
- Give short simple answers to your child’s questions about sex, as you do to questions about other things.

This information was adapted from St. Mary’s Hospital Medical Center Guide to Health with their permission.

For additional copies, contact the Child Care Information Center 1.800.362.7353 or visit www.ccic.wi.gov

Wisconsin Department of Children and Families
201 W Washington Ave.
Madison WI 53703

The Department of Children and Families is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. If you have a disability and need to access services, receive information in an alternate format, or need information translated to another language, please call the Division of Early Care and Education at 608-422-6002. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or speech disabled can use the free Wisconsin Relay Service (WRS) – 711 to contact the department.

DCF-P-11781 (R. 07/2021)