

# Child Development:

## Some typical skills for 3, 4, and 5 year olds.

### Points to remember:

- Every Child is different!
- All children develop skills at their own pace.
- It is impossible to give exact ages when a skill will develop.
- The following developmental milestones are meant to give a general idea of how skills acquisition typically progresses.
- Look at the whole picture. Don't be alarmed if your child doesn't follow this outline exactly.

### Language-3 year olds

- Has a vocabulary of around 1000 words
- Understands more language than he uses
- Uses 2-6 word phrases; focuses on noun and verb
- Overgeneralizes the rules of grammar
- Understands and uses negative contractions
- Asks questions
- Answers "what" and "where" questions
- Can be understood by family/familiar listeners, but strangers may have some difficulty
- Names basic body parts
- Names common objects
- Points to pictures of common actions
- Identifies objects by use
- Understands at least 3 prepositions: in, out, on, under
- Follows one step directions
- Talks all the time

## Language-4 year olds

- Has a rapidly expanding vocabulary
- Imitates much of what she hears
- Sometimes uses words and expressions beyond his conceptual understanding
- Uses longer sentences (3-8 words); including adjectives and adverbs
- Uses most irregular verbs and plurals correctly
- Uses pronouns (I, you, me, we, they)
- Understands “not”
- Asks questions, especially “Why”
- Answers more complex questions; including simple logic questions
- Is understood by strangers nearly all the time
- Can follow multi-step directions in exact order
- Names actions, missing parts in pictures, and causes of events
- Understands the prepositions: under, over, next to, behind, in front of
- Can select pictures based on a verbal description
- Tends to go on and on and on when telling stories and answering questions; often expressing thoughts as they come to mind (adults may not see the connection)
- Has many opinions and is eager to share them
- Tells stories (often tall tales)
- Can tell about past events

## Language-5 year olds

- Has a nearly adult sized vocabulary (8,000-12,000 words)
- Selects items or pictures that belong to a named category
- Has an average length of utterance of about 8 words
- Understands the “un” means not ie: unhappy
- Answers who, what, when, why, and where
- Can correctly say almost all speech sounds
- Can talk in detail about past activities
- Can talk about future activities
- Can complete verbal analogies
- Can define words
- Can recall and repeat sentences of up to 6 words in length
- Can answer practical reasoning questions
- Understands most comparative, time, spatial, and descriptive concepts.

○ Speech Sound      Age Range of Acquisition

p	1 ½-2
m	1-2
h	1 ½-2
n	1 ½-3
w	1 ½-2 ½
b	1 ½-2 ½
k	2-4
g	2-4
d	2-3
t	2-3
f	2 ½-3 ½
y	2 ½-3 ½
r	3-7
l	3-6
s	3-5
ch	3 ½-6
sh	3 ½-6
j	4-6
v	3-6
z	3 ½-6
th	4 ½ -6

## Cognitive-3 year olds

- Matches 8 colors and simple shapes
- Finds 2 colors and circle and square
- Names 1-2 colors and circle
- Counts to 3
- Places objects using 1 to 1 correspondence
- Sorts objects by colors or distinct type
- Completes form board puzzle and simple interlocking puzzles
- Understands simple concept words ie: big/little

## Cognitive-4 year olds

- Finds 6-8 colors and circle, square, triangle
- Names 3-5 colors and circle and square
- Rote counts to 10 or higher
- Associates objects with number to 6
- Sorts by color and shape
- Complete 6 piece interlocking puzzles independently
- Matches complex patterns, letters, and simple words
- Forms shapes from other shapes ie: makes a square form two triangles
- Understands most concept words ie: long, short, heavy, light, empty, full, more, less, etc.
- Recognizes name in print
- Reads environmental print

## Cognitive-5 year olds

- Names all basic colors and shapes
- Identify and name numerals 1-9
- Rote count to 20
- Tell what number comes after...(1-9)
- Identify whether the number of objects in one group is greater than, less than, or equal to the number of objects in another group up to 10
- Counts sets of objects (1-10) and tells how many
- Completes more complex interlocking puzzles
- May be beginning to read
- Recognizes some upper and lower case letters, especially those in his name
- Recognizes some letter sounds
- Is concerned with accuracy
- Enjoys being read to; more interested in real than fiction
- Has good memory skills; can recall missing objects
- Can adjust tone, vocabulary, and sentence length depending on target audience
- Attends to activities for long periods of time, persisting until finished

## Fine Motor-3 year olds

- Builds a tower of 10 blocks
- Imitates simple block designs (3-4 blocks)
- Weaves randomly through a lacing board
- Can snip with scissors; cuts with choppy motions, not fluidly
- Puts pegs into holes
- Screws and unscrews jar lids, nuts and bolts
- Turns rotating handles
- Turns pages of a book one at a time
- Beginning to hold writing utensil with fingers
- Copies horizontal and vertical lines and circles

## Fine motor-4 year olds

- Strings beads
- Laces through the outline of a picture on lacing card
- Imitates more complex block designs (5-6 blocks)
- Folds and creases paper in half
- Can manipulate fasteners: buttons, zippers that are started, and Velcro
- Cuts along a line that changes direction
- Cuts with fluid motions, but has difficulty coordinating cutting and turning the paper
- Draws a person with 3-5 body parts
- Copies +, H, V, a square and their own name
- May begin to “write” on paper imitating adult writing
- Uses a mature pencil grasp
- Shows a hand preference, but may still switch

## Fine motor-5 year olds

- Cuts out shapes with only small deviations
- Prints name
- Copies triangle and other shapes
- Copies simple words
- Draws a complete person with detail to many body parts
- Makes representational drawings
- Can manipulate all fasteners including: hooks, buckles, and zippers

## Gross Motor-3 year olds

- Walks, runs, and jumps
- Balances on 1 foot
- Hops 1-2 times
- Walks on a line
- Climbs
- Kicks and catches a large ball
- Peddles a tricycle
- Walks up stairs with alternating feet

## Gross Motor-4 year olds

- Hops on either foot
- Walks backwards
- Jumps from elevated surfaces
- Jumps over obstacle with a running start
- Walks up and down stairs without holding on
- Gets up from floor without using hands
- Throws ball overhand

## Gross Motor-5 year olds

- Jumps over obstacle from standing
- Can stand on one foot with eyes closed
- Can catch small ball, often in one hand
- Throws ball with one hand
- May be able to ride two-wheeled bike
- May be able to skip

## Self Help-3 year olds

- Feeds self; uses fork and spoon
- Dresses and undresses self with minimal assistance; needs help with fasteners and shoes
- Most children are completely toilet trained by the end of this year, but may still have accidents at night
- Opens doors, containers, and fasteners
- Can serve food and pour drinks from small pitcher

## Self Help- 4 year olds

- Dresses self independently, but needs help to snap jeans, tie shoes, and zip coats
- Can choose clothing appropriate for the weather/occasion with little assistance
- Takes care of toileting independently
- Washes hands independently
- Cuts soft food with a knife
- Loves to assist with food preparation and clean up
- Takes care of personal belongings

## Self Help-5 year olds

- Dresses self independently; may tie shoes
- Zips coat
- Very independent and self sufficient
- Can follow expected routines responsibly with some reminders
- Knows safety rules
- Will remind others to follow rules (and loves to tell adults when they don't)

## Social Emotional-3 year olds

- Plays with other children; although not always cooperatively
- Enjoys imaginative play; imitates adult actions
- Loves to help adults
- Can separate from parents for several hours without being upset
- Still egocentric a lot of the time
- Focuses on the “here and now”
- Spontaneously shows affection for familiar playmates
- Expresses affection openly
- Can take turns in games
- Understands concepts of “mine” and “his/hers”
- Expresses a wide variety of emotions
- Objects to major changes in routines

## Social Emotional-4 year olds

- Plays with other children; usually cooperatively
- Begins to assume role in peer group (leader, negotiated, follower, etc)
- Enjoys games, makes up own rules; can play by standard rules, but sometimes needs adult facilitation
- Negotiates solutions to conflicts
- Socially conscious, especially of adult opinions
- Plays “mom” or “dad”
- Often displays strong fears (may seem irrational to adults)
- Imagines that many unfamiliar images may be “monsters”
- Often cannot tell the difference between fantasy and reality

## Social Emotional-5 year olds

- May have one or more close friends
- Wants to please friends
- Wants to be like friends; shows preferences in the selection of friends, toys, clothes, TV programs, etc)
- Can play structured games with minimal adult guidance
- Follows rules to a game
- Less interested in dramatic play

- Enjoys construction play
- Likes to sing, dance, and act
- Shows more independence and may even visit a next-door neighbor by herself
- Aware of gender
- Able to distinguish fantasy from reality
- Sometimes demanding; sometimes eagerly cooperative

## Signs of possible developmental delays

### 3 year olds (from [cdc.gov/actearly](https://www.cdc.gov/actearly/))

- Frequent falling and difficulty with stairs
- Persistent drooling
- Very unclear speech
- Cannot build a tower of more than 4 blocks
- Difficulty manipulating small objects
- Cannot copy a circle
- Cannot communicate in short phrases
- No involvement in pretend play
- Does not understand simple instructions
- Little interest in other children
- Extreme difficulty separating from mother or other primary caregiver
- Poor eye contact
- Limited interest in toys
- Experiences a dramatic loss of skills he once had

## Signs of possible developmental delays

### 4 year olds (from [cdc.gov/actearly](https://www.cdc.gov/actearly/))

- Cannot throw a ball overhand
- Cannot jump in place
- Cannot ride a tricycle
- Cannot grasp a crayon between thumb and fingers
- Has difficulty scribbling
- Cannot stack four blocks
- Still clings or cries whenever a parent leaves
- Shows no interest in interactive games
- Ignores other children
- Doesn't respond to people outside the family
- Doesn't engage in fantasy play
- Resists dressing, sleeping, using the toilet
- Lashes out without any self-control when angry or upset
- Cannot copy a circle
- Doesn't use sentences more than 3 words
- Doesn't use "me" and "you" correctly
- Experiences a dramatic loss of skills he or she once had

## Signs of possible developmental delays

### 5 year olds (from [cdc.gov/actearly](https://www.cdc.gov/actearly/))

- Acts extremely fearful or timid
- Acts extremely aggressively
- Is unable to separate from parents without major protest
- Is easily distracted and unable to concentrate on any single activity for more than 5 minutes
- Shows little interest in playing with other children
- Refuses to respond to people in general, or responds only superficially
- Rarely uses fantasy or imagination in play
- Seems unhappy or sad much of the time
- doesn't engage in a variety of activities
- Avoids or seems aloof with other children and/or adults
- Doesn't express a wide range of emotions
- Has trouble eating, sleeping, or using the toilet
- Can't tell the difference between fantasy and reality
- Seems unusually passive
- Cannot understand two-part commands using prepositions ("put the doll on the bed, and get the ball under the couch")
- Cannot correctly give first and last name
- Doesn't use plurals or past tense correctly when speaking
- Doesn't talk about her daily activities and experiences
- Cannot build a tower of 6-8 blocks
- Seems uncomfortable holding a crayon
- Has trouble taking off clothing
- Cannot brush his teeth efficiently
- Cannot wash and dry her hands
- Experiences a dramatic loss of skills he once had

## What to do if concerned....

- Talk to your child's teacher
- Talk to your pediatrician
- Request an evaluation from your school district:

Fairfield City Schools-Special Services office -513-829-4311

This information was compiled by Cathy Ogilvie, Preschool Intervention Specialist and Itinerant Teacher for Fairfield City School District, using the following resources and based upon years of experience as a preschool teacher.

## References

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