

Developmental Milestones & Widely Held Expectations at 3-4 Years

(Taken from Child Development: A Primer by Ingrid Crowther & NAEYC's Developmentally Appropriate Practice)

Note: Experts say every child develops differently. These Developmental Milestones are designed to give a general idea of how a child of this age may develop.

Gross Motor Development (large muscles of arms & legs)

- **Balancing**—can balance on one foot for short time; walks across balance beam
- **Walking/Running**—walks with arms swinging; runs more smoothly; better able to change direction & stop
- **Climbing**—climbs/descends stairs using alternating feet; climbs up playground equipment but may have difficulty coming down
- **Jumping**—jumps using both feet at the same time; jumps over obstacles leading with one foot; jumps down from platforms or climbing equipment
- **Ball Skills**—throws ball overhand; catches ball by trapping it against body; kicks ball while running and continues to chase & kick it
- **Using Riding Toys**—generally uses pedals on tricycle; able to steer with greater confidence
- **Sledding**—brings sled up hill, sits and pushes off to descend

Fine Motor Development (small muscles in thumb & fingers)

- **Manipulation**—cuts paper with scissors; controls crayons & markers to make vertical, horizontal & circular shapes; uses pincer (thumb & one finger) or tripod grasp (thumb and 2 fingers); may show hand dominance
- **Artwork**—produces wider variety of scribbles with lines, swirls, loops & closed forms; draws with increased intentionality & often names what he/she has drawn; may draw people although not all body parts are present
- **Hand-Eye Coordination**—pours with less spilling; places small pegs in holes; increased skill in building with construction blocks/toys

Cognitive Development (thinking skills)

- **Symbolic Function**—pretend play more complex; uses one object to represent another even if not similar in shape (eg: might use a square block to represent a cup)
- **Attention Span**—increased attention span for areas of interest; may return to an activity over several days
- **Sorting**—sorts objects based on one characteristic (eg: shape, color or size)

- **Concept Development**—*Size*: differentiates between large & small; *Quantity*: identifies when one set of items contains more than another; *Time*: expresses an understanding of time duration and knows the daily routine; *Color & Shape*: identifies and names colors & shapes
- **Counting**—can rote count to 10+ but may miss or insert incorrect numbers
- **Problem Solving**—uses materials to help solve problems (eg: finds a different paintbrush to make wider lines, wets sand to make moulds); enjoys age-appropriate puzzles; still focuses on only one aspect of a problem (called centration; for example, might say that a tall skinny glass holds more than a short fat glass even though it is not true)

Communication & Language Development

- **Language Usage**—uses 3-6 words in simple sentences, uses words to compare (eg: more, longer, faster); repeats simple rhymes & fingerplays; sings simple songs; asks many questions; talks about things that are not in the immediate vicinity (eg: “My cat’s black. She’s at home.”); describes actions, events, feelings (eg: “Amy is sad.”); maintains conversations by adding to what someone has said; asks questions about what has been heard; makes suggestions; answers questions appropriately; uses descriptive words (eg: big red ball); uses language to describe what he/she is doing; identifies words that sound alike (eg: ball and fall or toy and boy)
- **Grammar**--uses plurals (eg: oranges, apples, but may still overextend by saying “feets”); puts endings on verbs (eg: -ing)
- **Vocabulary Size**—at 3 yrs ranges 300 to 2,000+ words; at 4 yrs ranges 4,000 to 6,000
- **Reading & Writing**—listens to stories for 10 or more minutes; makes relevant comments about stories heard; tells stories or pretends to read to peers; can read name and some other significant words; interested in writing some letters

Social/Emotional Development

- **Emotional Control**—takes turns but not consistently; understands basic emotions and starts to use words to indicate feelings (“Sarah is happy”); shows affection to peers and younger children; shows concern for hurt child; defends own rights (“I had it first!”); may act aggressively if toy is taken or activity disturbed by others
- **Peer Interaction**—participates with peers in activities; shares but not consistently; may observe others before joining in
- **Pride in Accomplishments**—expresses pride in accomplishments; demonstrates enjoyment in having efforts recognized (eg: artwork put on display)

- **Making of Choices**— chooses from a wide variety of activities and materials; increased ability to focus & sustain interest in chosen activities & materials; enjoys age appropriate group games/activities led by educator; may interact with peers to make group decisions & collaborative efforts
- **Self-Help Skills**—the ability to do things for themselves continue to expand & become refined; capable of the following: wash own hands; use the toilet; independently dress (needing help only with starting zippers, doing buttons or tying shoes); eat with a spoon/fork & drink with a cup; pour own milk; help to clean up
- **Self Regulation/Coping Skills**— able, with advanced warning, to change activities or deal with changes in the regular routine with little fuss; able to lie quietly on his/her bed
- **Identity**—states own gender correctly (but may not realize that this gender will always be the same)

Creative Development

- **Water, Sand & Playdough**—experiments to make connections (sink/float activities or weight/volume concepts); builds increasingly complex structures/objects
- **Music & Movement**—enjoys listening to and singing songs; experiments with instruments to create different sounds & volumes; keeps a steady beat when using instruments; follows another's lead as well as creates own dance movements
- **Art**—enjoys experimenting with different art mediums (markers, paint, glue, etc.)
- **Blocks/Construction Toys**—uses materials to express ideas or create structures (eg: builds a field for farm animals); builds enclosures; bridges; names structures
- **Dramatic Play**—acts out familiar roles (family members or doctors); demonstrates feelings and personalities of those imitated; may create an imaginary playmate