

3-Year-Old Developmental Milestones

How your child plays, learns, speaks, acts, and moves offers important clues about their development. Developmental milestones are things that most children (75% or more) can do by a certain age. Below is a list of milestones that most children will have achieved by 3 years of age.

Social and emotional milestones

- Calms down within 10 minutes of leaving them (like at childcare drop off)
- Notices other children and joins them to play

Language and communication milestones

- Talks with you in conversation using at least 2 back and forth exchanges
- Asks “who,” “what,” “where,” or “why” questions (for example, asks, “Where is Daddy?”)
- Says what action is happening in a book when they are asked, like “running,” “eating,” or “playing”
- Says their first name when they are asked
- Talks well enough for others to understand (most of the time)

Cognitive milestones (learning, thinking, problem-solving)

- Draws a circle when shown how to do it
- Avoids touching hot objects like a stove when they are warned

Movement and physical development milestones

- Strings items together, like large beads or macaroni noodles
- Puts on some clothes by themselves, like loose pants or a jacket

- Uses a fork

Other things to share with your child's doctor at their 3-year visit:

- What are some things you and your child do together?
- What are some things your child likes to do?
- Is there anything your child does or does not do that concerns you?
- Has your child lost any skills they once had?

You know your child best. Don't wait. If your child is not meeting one or more milestones, has lost skills they once had, or if you have other concerns, act early. Talk with your child's doctor, share your concerns, and ask about developmental screening.

You can help your child grow and learn!

As your child's first teacher, you can help their learning and brain development. Try these simple tips and activities in a safe way. Talk with your child's doctor if you have questions or for more ideas on how to help your child's development.

- Encourage your child to solve their own problems with your support. Ask questions to help them understand the problem. Help them think of solutions, try one out, and try more if needed.
- Talk about your child's emotions, and give them words to help them explain how they are feeling. Help your child manage stressful feelings by teaching them to take deep breaths, hug a favorite toy, or go to a quiet, safe place when they are upset.
- Set a few simple and clear rules that your child can follow, such as use gentle hands when playing. If they break a rule, show them what to do instead. Later, if your child follows the rule, recognize and congratulate them.

- Read with your child. Ask questions, such as, “What is happening in the picture?” or “What do you think will happen next?” When they give you an answer, ask for more details.
- Play counting games. Count body parts, stairs, and other things you use or see every day. Children this age are starting to learn about numbers and counting.
- Help your child develop their language skills by speaking to them in longer sentences using real words. Repeat what they say. For example, if they say “need nana,” repeat it and then show how them to use more “grown-up” words by saying, “I want a banana.”
- Let your child help with making meals. Give them simple tasks, such as washing fruits and vegetables or stirring.
- Give your child instructions with 2 or 3 steps. For example, “Go to your room and get your shoes and coat.”
- Limit your child’s screen time (looking at TV, tablets, phones, etc.) to no more than 1-2 hours per day of a children’s program with an adult present. Don’t put any screens in your child’s bedroom. Children learn best by talking, playing, and interacting with others.
- Teach your child simple songs and rhymes, such as “Itsy Bitsy Spider” or “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.”
- Give your child an “activity box” with paper, crayons, and coloring books. Color and draw lines and shapes with your child.
- Encourage your child to play with other children. This helps them learn the value of friendship and how to get along with others.
- Let your child play with playdough by squishing it, pressing it, pinching it, and making balls in different colors. This builds their hand and finger muscles for writing, buttoning, and cutting.
- Give your child simple, healthy food choices. For example, at snack time, ask, “Do you want carrots or an apple?”

- Play matching games. Ask your child to find objects in books or around the house that are the same.
- Play outside with your child. Go to the park or a walking trail. Allow your child plenty of time to choose what and how they want to play. Join them and follow their lead.
- Help your child be ready for new places and meeting new people. For example, you can read stories or roleplay (pretend play) about new places or things to help them feel more comfortable.
- Encourage your child to tell you their name and age.

To see more tips and activities, download CDC's Milestone Tracker app.

Important note: this milestone checklist is not a substitute for a standardized validated developmental screening tool. These developmental milestones show what most children (75% or more) can do by each age. Subject matter experts selected these milestones based on available data and expert consensus.

This handout is adapted from www.cdc.gov/ActEarly

Scan the QR code for more information:



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