4-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 4 years of age.

Social and emotional milestones

- Pretends to be something else during play (for example: teacher, superhero, dog)
- Asks to go play with other children
- Comforts others who are hurt or sad, and they will hug a crying friend
- Avoids danger (for example, they will not jump from a tall height at the playground)
- Likes to be a "helper"
- Changes their behavior based on where they are

Language and communication milestones

- Says sentences with 4 or more words
- Says some words from a song, story, or nursery rhyme
- Talks about at least 1 thing that happened during the day, like "I played soccer"
- Answers simple questions like "What is a coat for" or "What is a crayon for"?

Cognitive milestones (learning, thinking, problem-solving)

- Names a few colors

- Tells what comes next in a well-known story
- Draws a person with 3 or 4 body parts

Movement and physical development milestones
- Catches a large ball most of the time
- Serves themselves food or pours water, with adult supervision
- Unbuttons some buttons
- Holds a crayon or pencil between their fingers and thumb (not in their fist)

Other things to share with your child's doctor at their 4-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.
- Help your child be ready for new places and meeting new people. For example, you can read stories or roleplay to help them consider new situations.

- Help your child learn about colors, shapes, sizes. For example, ask the color, shape, and size of things they see during the day.
- Encourage your child to use their words to ask for things and solve problems. They may not have the words they need, so you may have to help them. For example, if they try to take a toy from another child, say, "Can I have a turn?"
- Help your child learn about other people's feelings and about positive ways to react. For example, if they see a child that is sad say, "They look sad, let's bring them a toy."
- Use positive words and give attention to behaviors you want to see. For example, say, "You are sharing that toy so nicely!" Give less attention to behaviors you don't want to see.
- Tell your child in a simple way why they cannot do something you do not want them to do ("unwanted behavior"). Give them a choice of what they can do instead. For example, say, "You can't jump on the bed. Would you like to go outside and play or put on some music and dance?"
- Let your child play with other children. Ask about local play groups and pre-school programs. Playing with others helps your child learn the value of sharing and friendship.
- Eat meals with your child whenever possible. Let them see you enjoying healthy foods such as fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Show them how you drink milk or water rather than juice or soda pop.
- Create a calm, quiet bedtime routine. Avoid any screen time for 1-2 hours before bed, and don't put any screens in your child's bedroom. Children this age need 10-13 hours of sleep a day (including naps). Having consistent sleep times makes this easier!
- Give your child toys or things that encourage imagination, such as dress-up clothes, pots and pans, or blocks. Join them in pretend play, such as eating the pretend foods that they "cook."

- Take time to answer your child's "why" questions. If you don't know the answer, say, "I don't know" or help your child find the answer in a book or from another adult.
- Count simple things, such as fingers and toys. This will help your child learn about numbers and counting.
- Give your child choices that are simple. Let them choose what to wear, play, or have for a snack. Limit their choices to 2 or 3 so they don't get overwhelmed.
- Continue to teach your child skills to play with others, such as using their words, sharing, and taking turns.
- Teach your child to play outdoor games with friends, such as tag, follow the leader, and hide and seek.
- Spend time speaking to your child in complete sentences using "grown-up" words. This will help them learn better speaking skills, and it helps with reading and writing skills later.
- Let your child help with simple chores, such as bringing in the mail, feeding a pet, or wiping down tables. This will help build their independence.
- Teach your child to stop and wait when they are excited by playing "red light, green light" or "freeze dance."
- Play your child's favorite songs and dance with your child. Take turns copying each other's dance moves.
- Give your child time to solve their own problems with friends. For example, if they are arguing over who gets to be which superhero, let them work it out. Stay nearby to help if needed. If they can't work it out, use questions to help them think of other solutions.
- Use words such as "first," "second," and "finally." When playing, telling stories, or doing chores, ask your child what comes next. This will help your child learn about the order of events.

- Comfort your child if they are scared, and talk about their fears. For example, say, "Monsters can feel scary even though they are not real and can't hurt you." Help your child learn things they can do when they are scared, such as hugging a stuffed animal.
- Play simple games like tic-tac-toe or matching games.
- Try to make time for active play each day. Your child will have more fun if they can choose the activity. For example, give them choices such as playing music and dancing together, playing outside, or taking a walk together.
- Help your child notice when they hurt someone's feeling by describing what you see. Encourage them to say they're sorry, and help them find a way to make the person feel better.
- Take trips to the library to let your child pick out books.
- 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.

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
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