

# Play

## (Children 3-5 years)

**A child's development at 3-5 years typically has a few things in common. Here's what they might be doing, how you can help, and some fun activities for play**

**Your child is learning to express and manage emotions. This is great news for you, because it means less frustration and impatience and fewer tantrums.**

During this year your child really starts to understand that her body, mind and emotions are her own. She knows the difference between feeling happy, sad, afraid or angry.

Also, at this age children are more interested in playing and making friends with other children. Your child might start to play more cooperatively in small groups. She will also begin to understand the concept of mine and his/hers, and will therefore start to share more readily with others.

At four, children are also becoming more imaginative during play. For example, your child might play pretend games with imaginary friends or toys, like having a tea party with her toys. She'll try different roles and behaviour and might pretend to be a doctor or a mum. And at this age, it is common for children to have imaginary friends, although your child can probably tell the difference between real and fantasy.

By four, your child might enjoy tricking others and describing what happened, for example, 'Mum thought I was asleep!' At the same time, she'll also worry about being tricked by others.

### Science & natural discoveries

At this age, in their thinking and use of language, children are beginning to wonder and ask questions "Why is it so?" "How does that happen?" "What will it do next?"

Their curiosity about the natural and scientific world is exciting and often challenging. We can support this development by listening to their questions and wondering with them, not necessarily giving them immediate answers but encouraging them to investigate a little further. We can assist by::

- asking them more questions about different aspects of situations
- experimenting with them to see what might happen or change
- seeking out more information in books or on the internet and sharing it with them. There are absolutely wonderful books full of ideas about exploring nature with children.

**These suggestions help children learn about different ways to find answers and explore our beautiful world. "Believe in magic. You walk in it!"**

## Suggestions

- Organise a vegetable garden or some pot plants to grow some beans or other vegies. Let children discover how plants grow and where our food comes from. Dig some of the early seeds up to see how they swell and grow their first roots and leaves.
- Observe shadows changing as the day progresses and wonder why.
- Make some ice-blocks and discover how water can be frozen solid then thaw back to water. Why did that happen? You can arrange some flowers in the ice-blocks to make the experience more interesting.
- Observe water turning to steam when the moment arises. Beware of scalding and relate the discoveries about changes of water to the formation of clouds and rain.
- Organise a bird-bath. Allow children to be responsible for filling and cleaning to encourage care and responsibility for living things. Develop an understanding that all animals need food, water and shelter.

## Play with dough and clay

Play with these materials will help strengthen hands and fingers as well as provide opportunity for creative, imaginative ideas and thinking.

Clay requires more strength than playdough to manipulate so is good to offer regularly. Clay is also easy to store and can be used again and again. When play is finished simply thump together into cubes the size of your fist and poke a hole into the middle. Pour a little water into the hole and store in an airtight container like a plastic ice-cream container and it will be soft and ready next play time.

Clay is also great because its is very cheap to buy from a craft store or pottery supplier. Use plastic placemats to work on for easy cleaning.

# Draw up a simple flour, salt and water recipe in pictures, and allow children to try making their own play-dough..

## Suggestions

- With clay play, sometimes include other natural materials such as twigs, leaves and seedpods for inspiration.
- Leave some clay productions to dry out over several days to help children understand how our everyday crockery is made. To have some pieces fired in a potters kiln would complete the story.
- Offer some paddle pop sticks for cutting and slicing clay, or strong shells or seed pods for pressing into clay and making imprints.
- Play-dough is softer to use but has the advantage of playing with different colours. Offering two colours to use and mix together is an interesting experience. A range of colours enables children to make multi-coloured objects which could include pretend food for their cubby house play.

**See the *Recipes for Fun* resources for a range of fun recipe ideas!**

## Drawing, painting and writing

Preschool children will have more strength, control and dexterity in their hand control but will still need thick textas, crayons and paint brushes and large sheets of paper (A3 size). They will learn how to hold the paper with one hand while they draw and will be able to manage while sitting. Suitable sized table and chairs that allow them to rest their feet on the floor will be best so try to organize a special drawing place with their own equipment to use whenever needed during play.

As they begin to understand writing your child will add letters to their drawings and be interested in writing their own name. Show them how to write their name with a capital letter first and then lower case letters in correct school script so they become familiar with that format.

Drawings will involve simple shapes to begin with then with developing skill they will draw recognizable figures. Painting will be more experimental exploring colours, mixing, textures, patterns and techniques.

### Suggestions

- **Painting.** Offer different types of painting tools.g. large brushes, small brushes, sponges, dish mops, rollers, even tennis balls, leaves and feathers to create interesting textures and patterns.
- **Printmaking.** Offer a collection of printers such as cotton reels, sections of cardboard tubes, cut-out shapes from sponges, different shaped leaves etc to print on large sheets of paper, tissue or rolls of brown paper. (Makes lovely wrapping paper for presents).
- **Drawing.** Draw around their body as they lay on a large sheet of paper. They can then paint themselves. Discuss the different parts of the body and how they feel when they are happy, angry, and scared so as they can learn more about their feelings.
- **Excursions.** Take children to a suitable art exhibition to look at the many ways artists paint to encourage and acknowledge children's interest in art-work.

## Want more information?

### GreatStart

Department for Education and Child Development website with lots of ideas and activities to do with children to make the most of everyday learning opportunities  
[www.greatstart.edu.au](http://www.greatstart.edu.au)

### The Little Big Book Club

Provides free packs of books for babies and toddlers – available from libraries and the Child and Family Health Service. The website has free Activity Time and Learning Time sheets to complement books and e-books to read online  
[www.thelittlebigbookclub.com.au](http://www.thelittlebigbookclub.com.au)

### Dads' Read

Information for dads about reading with children  
[www.dadsread.org.au](http://www.dadsread.org.au)

### Let's Read

Supports families to share words, rhymes, songs, books and stories with children  
[www.letsread.com.au](http://www.letsread.com.au)

### Parent Helpline

Phone 1300 364 100  
For advice on child health and parenting

### Beyond Blue

Phone: 1300 224 636 or 03 9810 6100  
Website: [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

Child and Family Health Centre: Tel 02 6625 0111 9am–4:30pm, Monday to Friday to make an appointment.

For information on raising children, including information for grandparents raising grandchildren.

[www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)

[www.families.nsw.gov.au](http://www.families.nsw.gov.au)