

Growing & Changing (Children 3-5 years)

This is quick reference guide to the changes that children experience as they grow and develop through the early years.

It is not meant as checklist but, rather, a tool to help you provide activities for your children as they explore and learn. It is also helpful to know what to expect so that you can gather some playthings and perhaps modify the house and yard according to what the little ones will soon be up to

Socially & Physically active

The preschool age is a time for learning how to get along with others.

Socially Active

Whether preschoolers 'get along' with others depends a lot on the child's development of empathy - or the recognition of other people's feelings. This is an important skill in making & keeping friends. Sometimes preschool children need to be encouraged to use their words to explain what they want and to listen to each other and to try to understand the other person's feelings. If children cannot settle a disagreement and are becoming aggressive then it's time to step in. Try to follow the following process:

- Ask them to stop and listen to each other's story without interrupting
- Then ask them to think of different suggestions and solutions
- Consider the pros and cons of suggestions and let children choose one suggestion
- Check later to see that this worked. Acknowledge their achievement or repeat process.

Physically Active

At this age, children will learn a number of different physical skills including:

- running smoothly, balancing, beginning to hop and skip, and throw and catch a ball with accuracy. They will move more rhythmically in movement and dance.

- learning to ride a bike though not be ready to ride in traffic
- dressing themselves without help
- using scissors, glue, pencils and paint and small-piece construction kits.

We need to encourage preschoolers to play actively every day to build fitness, strength, stamina and health. We need to help preschoolers learn how to rest and relax their bodies when they become tired or tense.

We need to organise lots of opportunity to practice and build their skills. And we need to encourage them to enjoy active play in groups, not necessarily competitive play but just to enjoy the fun.

Physically active - suggestions

- Ball games, galloping horses with streamers or hobby horses, play hopscotch, try creative dance to build skill and confidence
- Go to the park, beach, swimming pool to walk, ride bikes and enjoy the outdoors to develop health and fitness
- Instruments, play-dough or clay, drawing and painting, puppet making all help develop hand control
- Try some relaxation ideas with your preschool child to see what they prefer. Relaxation experiences can be especially helpful if a child begins to have sleep problems e.g. not being able to settle or having nightmares.
- Music classes, Yoga and Tai Chi classes can also help develop a sense of rhythm, balance, strength and control.

Emotions

Preschool children are full of ideas and imaginative schemes.

If we encourage preschool aged children to develop their ideas we will help develop their confidence and initiative. Initiative is a valuable trait to have that helps to face and solve the difficulties that arise in everyone's life.

Although the preschool child will have the imaginative ideas they will often have problems putting these ideas into action, for example, problem solving how to build their cubby or convincing others to play in a particular way.

To encourage children give positive feedback on their efforts, for example, "I see you have been working very hard building this cubby," then give suggestions or offer extra materials and let them choose and try a different way. This approach will help them develop confidence in solving problems with others help.

Encourage working together with others and sharing ideas. Acknowledge feelings of anger or disappointment so your child will feel comforted and willing to try again.

Sometimes if a child has experienced trauma in their life they will lack confidence, feel insecure or struggle with their emotions of sadness, fear, anger. Knowing that you love and care for them can help build their confidence and stability.

Allowing them to develop their interests, and personalities, appreciating them for who they are by highlighting what they do and organising special activities for them will also help them feel special and cared for.

Taking the time to talk about feelings and acknowledging your feelings too can help a child learn about feelings and feel comforted that others care.

There are lots of interesting books for children that discuss feelings. Some children in difficult times will develop some behaviours that may need professional help, for example, aggressive behaviours, fearfulness, grief, guilt, withdrawal, constant refusal to do certain things. Ask for advice if you think this is needed.

Emotions - suggestions

- Help a child feel confident in who they are by helping them feel they belong to their family. Create a family book for them with photos of special people and events. If a child's parent are no longer there, for whatever reasons, to acknowledge their parents will maintain a bond that can help a child feel a deep seated connection to others. That strong sense of self and belonging can encourage them to seek and make friends throughout life.
- Set some simple rules for living in the family. A few simple rules can help a child feel safe and cared for. Consequences need to be applied too, as this helps build responsibility. Organize a time-out place where a child can go if they need to calm down and think about the rules.
- Encourage a child to be a helper and a valued part of the family, for example, setting the table, sweeping the pathway. Be sure to give specific thanks and celebrate big jobs with icy cold drinks or fruit ice-blocks to acknowledge their help.

Parents have hundreds of interactions with their children on an average day. What really counts is making the most of this time — showing positive attention and enjoying those daily moments with your child.

Communicating & Thinking

Words, words, words and more words!

Communicating

During this period, preschool-aged children will begin to articulate themselves more clearly. They will:

- Learn to use full sentences with all the little words and joining words such as "because".
- have a vocabulary of around to 1,500 -2,000 words.
- ask endless questions.
- make up silly nonsense words
- be able to follow a longer conversation and stay on topic
- use language to think out loud talking to themselves while they play
- begin to show an interest in reading, enjoy longer stories, retell stories and make up their own stories

Communicating - Suggestions

- Ensure there is some special time each day for quality conversations
- Have fun with word games and jokes
- Correct preschoolers language mistakes gently in conversation
- Organise puppet shows
- Draw or write cards or letters to send to others for birthdays or celebrations
- Organise a cosy story time everyday to develop a love of reading
- There are many special books that deal with difficult events if needed. Visit the Library
- Make up stories to deal with difficulties
- Offer worry dolls to help children to talk about their problems and worries.

Thinking

Preschool children are developing long term memory and a sense of the sequence of events in time. They are more able to predict what might happen in the future if they behave in a certain way, and they are more able to make a simple plan and stick to it.

Imagination and pretend games help to develop your preschoolers ability to solve problems in their mind rather than rely on trial and error.

Preschool children will often talk to themselves while they play, thinking out loud. They become absorbed in their thoughts and play and will need reminding that soon it will be time to pack away then be given time to adjust to another activity.

Preschool children will begin to understand reading, writing and numbers and will include these concepts in their play.

Thinking - Suggestions

- Play thinking card and board games. Borrow from a toy library.
- Focus on maths and numbers with counting songs and number problems e.g. setting the table with a plate, cup etc for each person.
- Focus on scientific and nature discoveries, observing nature and events in our beautiful world. Enjoy gardening together.
- Focus on reading/writing, noticing traffic signs, entry and exit signs, and looking for food in the supermarket.
- Going to the library and borrow books for story time or research.
- Send cards and letters in the mail or via internet.
- Enroll your child in preschool to extend learning and working with others.

Want more information?

Kids Spot

Teach your baby fun games and activities to play that are simple and enjoyable for baby and you.

<http://www.kidspot.com.au/things-to-do/collection/baby-games-and-nursery-rhymes/>
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

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

Dads' Read

Information for dads about reading with children www.dadsread.org.au

Let's Read

Supports families to share words, rhymes, songs, books and stories with children
www.letsread.com.au

Parentline NSW

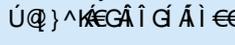
Phone 1300 1300 52
For advice on child health and parenting
www.parentline.org.au

Raising Children

The Australian Parenting website. For information on raising children, including information for grandparents raising grandchildren.
<http://raisingchildren.net.au/>

Local Services

YWCANSW - Kids for Life playgroup

Fun and friendly playgroup with a target age from 0-5yrs. 

Lismore Toy Library

Low cost access to variety of toys
Phone 02 6622 3424

Story time and Baby Bounce

Lismore and Goonellabah Library
Phone 02 6625 5100

Brighter Futures

Support services for improving emotional, social, health and education development outcomes for families and their children.

Phone 02 6682 4334

Goonellabah Child and Family Health Centre

Phone 02 6625 0111
9am – 4:30pm, Monday to Friday to make an appointment.

Refer to Service Listing - Baby and Child Services for more information on Playgroups and Activities