

Developmental Milestones for 3-Year-Olds

Physical Milestones

This year, kids really work hard to refine the motor skills they developed as 2-year-olds. They start doing some new things, too, especially with fine motor skills (small muscle movement).

Most 3-year-olds learn to do things like these by the time they're 4:

Gross Motor Skills

- Run and walk without tripping over own feet
- Jump, hop, and stand on one foot
- Walk backwards and climb stairs one foot after the other
- Kick and throw a small ball
- Catch a big ball (most of the time)
- Climb
- Start pedaling a tricycle or bike
- **At-home connection:** Hallway hopscotch and balloon volleyball? Check out activities that build gross motor skills.

Fine Motor Skills

- Draw a circle with a crayon, pencil, or marker
- Play with toys that have small moving parts and/or buttons
- Turn the pages of a book one at a time
- Build with Mega Blocks and create towers of six or more blocks
- Work door handles and open twist-on bottle tops

At-home connection: What do golf pencils have to do with writing? Explore fun ways to help young kids learn to write.

Cognitive Milestones

This year, kids start thinking about the world in new ways. You may see some creative approaches to tackling tasks and activities. By the end of this year, kids typically can:

- Name the eight colors in a crayon box (red, yellow, blue, green, orange, purple, brown, black)
- Recite numbers to 10 and start counting groups of things
- Start understanding time in terms of morning, night, and days of the week
- Remember and retell favorite stories

- Understand and talk about things that are the “same” and “different”
- Follow simple three-step directions (“Brush your teeth, wash your face, and put on your pajamas.”)

At-home connection: Ask for their attention. Use this and other quick tips to help kids follow directions.

Language Milestones

Three-year-olds have a lot to say. They also understand more of what you say—even though they may not always follow your directions. Kids this age typically can:

- Use the basic rules of grammar, but make mistakes with words that don’t follow the rules, like saying “mouses” instead of “mice”
- Speak well enough that most strangers understand what they’re saying
- Use five or six words in a sentence and have a two- to three-sentence conversation
- Tell you their name, the name of at least one friend, and the names of most common objects
- Understand words like *in*, *on*, *behind*, and *next*
- Ask “wh” questions like “Why?” to get more information about things

At-home connection: Constant interruptions? Get one mom’s tip to help preschoolers learn to put on the mental brakes.

Social and Emotional Milestones

At this age, kids show an interesting mix of independence, playfulness, and fearfulness. As they approach age 4, most 3-year-olds do these things:

- Be interested—although hesitant—about going new places and trying new things
- Start to play with other kids (as opposed to only playing side-by-side)
- Start being able to comfort and show concern for an unhappy friend without prompting
- Take turns while playing (even if they don’t like to!)
- Play “real life” with toys like play kitchens
- Start finding simple ways to solve arguments and disagreements
- Show (but maybe not name) a variety of emotions beyond happy, sad, and mad

At-home connection: Taking turns taking charge! Help build social-emotional skills by letting your child make the decisions for a night.

All kids develop on their own timetable. If your child is late to do a few of these things, don’t panic. But if by the end of this year, your 3-year-old isn’t able to do many of these, consider talking to the doctor about taking a closer look at your child’s skills.