

# Developmental Milestones for 4-Year-Olds

## Physical Milestones

If you're spending more on groceries and clothing lately, it's probably because your 4-year-old is growing fast. Kids can put on close to 5 pounds and grow 4 inches this year. Their eyesight continues to get better, too, which means their coordination improves.

By the end of this year, most kids can do these things:

### Gross Motor Skills

- Alternate feet on the stairs
- Jump with two feet
- Use door handles
- Control big muscle movements more easily—they may be able to start, stop, turn, and go around obstacles while running
- Log roll, do somersaults, skip, and trot
- Throw and bounce a ball
- Jump over objects and climb playground ladders
- Pedal and steer a tricycle or bike

**At-home connection:** From playgrounds to pedal cars, explore fun activities that can help build gross motor skills.

### Fine Motor Skills

- Get dressed with minimal help (zippers, snaps, and buttons may still be a little hard)
- Draw or copy basic shapes and crosses (this is a milestone known as “being able to cross the midline”)
- Write some letters or make separated, distinct marks that look like letters
- Draw wavy lines across the page that look like lines of text to make “lists” or write greeting cards
- Put together a simple puzzle
- Begin to use scissors purposefully
- Stack a tower at least 10 blocks high
- String beads or O-shaped cereal to make necklaces
- Pinch and shape clay or play-dough into recognizable objects

**At-home connection:** Watch ways to teach your child self-care routines (and build fine motor skills at the same time).



## Cognitive Milestones

This year, kids' ability to think and learn reaches beyond the basics of the world around them. They start thinking about and understanding things they can't see or touch. You might notice that your child starts to "have an idea" more often than you'd seen before. Most 4-year-olds are developing skills to:

- Start sorting things by attributes like size, shape, and color
- Compare and contrast by things like height, size, or gender
- Begin to understand the difference between real and make-believe, but may still confuse them
- Understand that pictures and symbols stand for real things
- Recognize shapes in the real world
- Count to at least 20 and point to and count items in a group
- Explore relationships between ideas, using words like *if* and *when* to express them
- Start thinking in logical steps, which means seeing the "how-tos" and consequences of things
- Get abstract ideas like "bigger," "less," "later," "ago," and "soon"
- Put things in order, like from biggest to smallest, shortest to tallest
- Stick with an activity for 10 to 15 minutes

**At-home connection:** Uno, Zingo, and Hi Ho Cherry-O: Check out board games to help build reading and math skills.

## Language Milestones

You're likely to see—and hear—and explosion of language this year. By the end of this year, kids may have a vocabulary of more than 1,000 words they understand, use, or both. They may start using complicated sentences that combine more than one thought. And they start asking who, what, why, when, and where questions—and may even answer some.

By the end of this year, most kids:

- Sing silly songs, make up goofy words, and start rhyming
- Follow simple, unrelated directions ("Go find your shoes and pick up that toy.")
- Change speech patterns depending on who is involved in a conversation, like speaking in short sentences to a younger sibling
- Pronounce most sounds correctly, but still have trouble with *s*, *w*, and *r* sounds
- Ask for the definition of unfamiliar words
- Make up stories and talk about what they're thinking
- Argue, even though the argument might not be logical

**At-home connection:** "Umm... uh... that thing." Learn why young kids might have trouble finding the right word.



## Social and Emotional Milestones

Your child may be starting to develop a unique, recognizable personality. Kids this age are more able to get along with peers and work out things that bother them through play. Most kids can also:

- Start to show and express a wider range of emotion
- Share, cooperate, be helpful, and take turns
- Start tattling and acting a little bossy
- Enjoy telling silly jokes and find other things funny
- Begin telling small lies to get out of trouble, even though they know it's wrong
- Do or say things they shouldn't to see what the reaction will be
- Have imaginary friends and play the same imaginary games over and over
- Start playing with other kids and separate from parents and caregivers more easily
- May still have tantrums because of changes in routine or not getting what they want

**At-home connection:** Worried about your child's temper? Take a look at [how to tame tantrums](#).

Remember: Kids develop at different paces. They may gain some skills later than other kids or have some skills that are advanced for their age.

But if your 4-year-old hasn't met many of these milestones, talk with your health-care provider. You can work together to discover whether there are skills that need extra help.