

## **Child Care from 3 to 4 Years Old**

My, how your toddler has grown! With this growth has come a change in physical and communication skills. From age three, your child begins to develop into a social being. This development is aided by her interaction with parents, other adults, and in particular, other children. Play is important to this area of development. However, this personality and social growth is replete with challenges for your child and for you as her emotional insecurities are confronted. Your child's interactions will vary from pleasant to difficult. This is normal. You will need to learn to understand the mind of a young child. Ask about the references below.

### **Eating**

Your child is now feeding herself completely. She enjoys mealtime and can help you in many ways, for example; by pouring her cereal, setting the table or even making a sandwich. Fast foods should be limited. Instead, try serving simply prepared individual foods. Children this age may not like casseroles and other combinations of many ingredients. Teach them about the foods.

Your child's normal requirements include three meals with two snacks a day. Of the major food groups, a child needs: around 16-24 ounces of milk and milk products; 2-3 servings of the meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans, and nuts group; 2-4 fruit servings; 3-5 vegetable servings; and 4-6 bread, cereal, rice, pasta group servings per day. At least one serving of fruit per day should be a citrus fruit or juice. A yellow or dark green vegetable should be served at least 3 to 4 times a week. A bread serving is one slice or a cup of cereal. Remember the simple rule of thumb: to offer a tablespoon of each food group per year of life at a meal is adequate, now. A decreased appetite or "picky eater" at this age is not unusual, but if you offer the appropriate foods at each meal, your child will get an adequate diet.

Continue good dental care. Brush your child's teeth twice a day. Floss between teeth afterward. It is important that this become part of your child's routine to instill habits for a lifetime. She will need to be taken to the dentist for a first checkup, if not already done. Be sure to continue the fluoride supplement if your drinking water is not fluoridated. Some dentists recommend fluoride be continued through age 8; others recommend continuing through age 12 or 16.

### **Sleeping**

An afternoon nap is still ideal. If not possible, a quiet time should be utilized, especially if other siblings are at home. Fears of the dark, the unknown, thunder and lightning, etc. are quite common at this age. Maintaining a consistent bedtime and bedtime routine, using a night light, security blanket or toy, are all ways that may help to lessen the fear. If these remain a problem, then discuss these behaviors with your child care provider.

### **Elimination**

Your child may be completely toilet trained at this age. Remember, the age this is achieved varies greatly and should be based on an individual child's readiness. Many children who are toilet trained during the day still don't stay dry at night. It seems more common in boys, often runs in families, and can be a source of embarrassment to your child. If this is a problem, try limiting liquids after dinner, and having your child void prior to bed. Discuss this with your doctor if it persists.

### **Development/Play**

Because your child is in a very social stage, it may be advantageous to enroll in a nursery school or participate in a play group several times each week. Ask for information on selecting a school that will meet your child's needs and your expectations. Again, this interaction through play is very important. Some children have an imaginary friend. Your child may want you to set an extra place at the table for the friend or even tuck the friend into bed at night as well. Rest assured that this is a normal part of a blossoming imagination. Your child's skills continue to change. She may also be able to dress herself completely but need a little help with shoes and buttons. She may be riding a tricycle or some sort of vehicle with pedals. She can jump with both feet or stand on one foot for a few seconds or may even try to dance. She enjoys art work and may try and copy a circle with facial features. Provide opportunities for your child to climb, run, and crawl, using all her large muscle groups. Your child continues to play "at work" so toys that are used in different occupations are excellent. It is also exciting for your child to begin visiting those places that provide services, such as the grocery, post office, bakery, or shoe shop.

She remains curious about everything and constantly asks questions. Art is enjoyed by this age group and provides an excellent outlet for expression of feelings. Finger-paints, newsprint, scissors, paste, poster paint, and crayons are articles that can be available at home and are inexpensive. Musical toys provide an excellent channel for releasing energy and encouraging creativity. She will use short complete sentences of 3 to 5 words, pronouns (I, you, me), plural words, and talk constantly!

Continue to read with your child. Help your child to learn the value of reading. Read in her presence so that she can see your example. Make books available to her and go to the library weekly. Acknowledge her recognition of letters, sounds, or words. This is not an age that you have to push her to read, however. Let her just enjoy her level of "reading".

### **Safety**

Teach your child her full name and your full names, address and phone number. Teach her who is the appropriate people to ask for help if she is injured, lost, or afraid. Teach her never to get into a strange car. You must balance opportunities for healthy interaction with the need for protection especially with preschoolers. In over 85% of child sexual abuse cases the victim knows the offender, who is most often a male. Now is the time to teach your child about "safe touch" and resisting uncomfortable touch (read It's MY body\*3 or Touch Talk\*2 with her). Begin teaching the names of all body parts including genitals ("penis" and "vagina") and bottom. Children need a vocabulary to say "no" to an unwanted touch. Remember that these young children may legitimately need a caretakers touch to wipe after a messy bowel movement. This is difficult to teach, so become involved in a school education program. Begin educating your child about preventing accidents, especially outside. Swimming lessons could be started this year. Teach water safety. If bicycling, then teach safety rules and insist on helmet use. Motor vehicle safety remains critical and still the greatest risk to your child's health (until age 40)! Use safety seats until your child graduates to seat belt size. Review and revise the emergency information you should be keeping by the telephone, fire escape plans, etc., the first Sunday of each month. Check the smoke detectors twice a year when daylight savings time changes are made.

## **Communication and Discipline**

Parents must provide guidance and limits. But in settings these limits, they must not be too restrictive. Children should be allowed to take some risks. This encourages exploration and learning. Children should be permitted to express their own feelings. At the same time parents too, must express feelings. There are some concepts that are basic to effective interaction with your children and success as a “child-rearer.” Try to be honest with yourself, spouse, and children. Similarly, try to be sensitive and understanding, particularly to your own feelings and especially to your child’s view. You may find it difficult to translate from your child’s realm to your own, but your success in analyzing all aspects of a behavior, or of a situation, determines the effectiveness of your actions and helps your child develop self-esteem.

## **Suggested Handouts, Readings, and Videos**

For this visit if not previously given: Selecting a Nursery School, Safety Discipline, Toilet Training (if still needed), Good Eating Habits, Dental Health, Sibling Rivalry (if needed), Temper Tantrums (if needed).

## **Additional Resources for Parents**

### **General Child Care**

Babyhood by P. Leach; Dr. Spock’s Baby and Child Care by B. Spock and M. Rothenberg; Caring for Your Baby and Young Child by American Academy of Pediatrics; Taking Care of Your Child by R. Pantell, J. Fries, and D. Vickery

### **Growth and Development**

Your Three-Year-Old by L. Ames and F. Ilg

### **Communication and Discipline**

Your Child’s Self Esteem by D. Briggs; What Do You Really Want for Your Children? By W. Dyer; Parent Effectiveness Training or P.E.T. in Action by T. Gordon; How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk by A. Faber & E. Mazlish; The Strong Willed Child by J. Dobson; When Your Child Drives You Crazy by E. LeShan; Positive Discipline by J. Nelsen; Without Spanking or Spoiling by E. Crary

### **Other**

Child of Mine, Feeding with Love and Good Sense by E. Satter; Feed Me! I’m Yours by V. Lansky; Mother’s Almanac by M. Kelly and E. Parsons; Pick Up Your Socks by E. Crary; Confessions of a Happily Organized Family by D. Schofield; Siblings without Rivalry by A. Faber and E. Mazlish; Parents’ Guide to Raising Kids in a Changing World Dian Smith; Raising a Son by D. & J. Eilium; Raising a Daughter by J. & D. Eilium

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