

Development in children (3-6 years)

Child development

When your child is between three and six years old you will see lots of growth in areas like fine and gross motor skills, language and emotion. At this age, play is how your child learns social, emotional and thinking skills. Play also helps her express feelings like joy, excitement, anger or fear. And there is a lot you can do to nurture your child's development.

Why is it important to understand your child's development?

Understanding the ways that your child develops at this age provides you with opportunities to nurture her development. More than anything else, your relationship with your child and the way you interact with her, shape the way she learns and develops.

Tips on what to expect

Children grow and develop at different rates. Development is different for every child. The following milestones are a guide only. See your doctor if you have any concerns.

The third year

By now your child is really starting to understand that her body, mind and emotions are her own. Sharing starts to get easier. She might play more cooperatively in small groups of other children and use her imagination more in her play – for example, pretending to have a picnic with her toys.

By four years, your child will probably speak in sentences of around 5-6 words or more. She will use 'feeling' words like 'happy' or 'sad'. She will be able to follow simple instructions, and probably also ask a lot of 'who', 'what' and 'why' questions as she learns.

You will see improvement in physical skills. For example, she will get better at climbing stairs and kicking balls. She might be able to draw a circle or square and perhaps even copy some letters by four years. She can probably dress and undress herself too.

The fourth year

At this age your child is getting better at getting along with others. You might hear her saying sorry, agreeing to rules and being pleased when good things happen to other people. But she might lie, sometimes. This is normal.

She is getting more control over her behaviour, so you will see fewer temper tantrums.

Physical skills continue to improve. You might see skipping or jumping while running. She might be able to write her first name. She can probably use a fork, spoon and sometimes a knife. She can go to the toilet and bathe independently, although you still need to supervise her.

The fifth and sixth year

Even at this age, play is still important. And although your child loves to be independent, she still needs lots of your love and attention. Connecting with you and her family is the most important thing in her life.

Your child understands more words than she can say and is learning as many as 5-10 new words each day. She's getting more coordinated and can probably ride a bike, catch a large ball and might be ready to play team sports like soccer.

Tips to help your child's development

Here are some simple things you can do to help your child's development at this age:

- . Give your child lots of play time. Try messy play with water or paints, play with puppets or toys, or outdoor play with plenty of running, tumbling and rolling.
- . Make time for creative and artistic play. For example, painting, drawing or dress-up games. Your child might also like to dance, jump around or make music with simple instruments.
- . Read together, tell stories, sing songs and say nursery rhymes. These all encourage your child's talking, thinking and imagination.
- . Cook with your child. This helps her to get interested in healthy food and understand maths concepts like 'half', '1 teaspoon' or '30 minutes'. Try letting her toss a salad or assemble sandwiches.
- . Play games with your child that involve sharing and taking turns. Say things like, 'Now it's my turn to build the tower, then it's your turn'. Give your child lots of praise when she shares.
- . Encourage moving. It helps physical development and teaches social skills like taking turns and cooperating. For example, try basketball or dancing for older children, and taking turns on the slide at the playground for younger children.



For some suggestions on rhymes, click [here](#) to download a booklet on rhymes!

Recommended Reads

- [Early childhood play matters: intentional teaching through play: birth to six years](#)
- [Parenting the strong-willed child: the clinically proven five-week program for parents of two- to six-year-olds](#)
- [Raising a self-reliant child: a back-to-basics parenting plan from birth to age 6](#)

Engage your child with simple activities at home! Check out some of these things you can do together:

- [Animal Masks](#)
- [Alphabet Song](#)
- [Draw the Bus](#)
- [I Am Special!](#)