



PARENTING & CHILD DEVELOPMENT

# Your Child at Three Years Old

**WITH YOUR CHILD'S THIRD BIRTHDAY**, the “terrible twos” are officially over and the “magic years” of three and four begin—a time when your child’s world will be dominated by fantasy and vivid imagination. During the next two years, your child will mature in many areas.

**Sleep** Goodbye naptime, hello bedtime struggles. Between the ages of three and four, children commonly give up their afternoon naps. Your child should sleep anywhere from 9 to 13 hours each day. As a way of gaining control of their world, children sometimes try to resist bedtime. You can help make bedtime easier by:

- › Sticking with the bedtime routine
- › Allowing your child to make some choices, like picking out pajamas or books to read
- › Providing a sense of security with night lights, security blankets or stuffed animals

**Nutrition** At this age, your child’s eating habits should be similar to yours. He or she should eat the same foods at the same times as you, and use child-size utensils. Choking is still a hazard because your child has not yet mastered chewing and swallowing. Avoid foods such as hard candies and cherries with pits and make portion sizes small, especially when serving:

- › Grapes (cut them in half)
- › Hot dogs (slice in half across and lengthwise)
- › Raw vegetables, such as carrots and celery
- › Peanut butter (avoid spoonfuls)

## Physical Development

- › Throws and kicks balls
- › Draws circles and squares
- › Begins to copy capital letters
- › Dresses and undresses

## Social and Emotional Development

- › Cooperates with other children
- › Engages in fantasy play
- › Understands there are ways to solve problems

## Cognitive Development

- › Identifies “same” and “different” objects
- › Talks in short sentences others can understand
- › Tells and remembers parts of stories



## ADDITIONAL SAFETY TIPS FOR YOUR THREE YEAR OLD

A Home Safety Checklist should be completed at each stage of your child's development. A sample checklist is provided for you on page 70.

- › Children who have reached the weight or height limit on their rear-facing car seat should use a forward-facing car seat with a five-point harness until they reach the weight or height limit allowed by the car seat manufacturer.
- › Now is also a good time to get your child swimming lessons and to teach playground safety, such as not running in front of or behind swinging children.

## Positive Parenting Activities that Promote Nurturing and Attachment

Set a good example for your child. If you want children to be nice to each other or have good eating habits, show them how these things are done. Tell your child why you do things a certain way. Children may not understand everything you say, but they will begin to understand that you have reasons for doing things a certain way.

**Provide children with simple explanations for your rules or limits and offer alternatives.**

- › It is 8:00 and time for bed; you may play with the markers again tomorrow.
- › You may not have popcorn now because it is dinnertime, you may have some Jell-O for dessert after you are finished with your dinner.



## When to be Concerned

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, you should let your doctor know if at three years old your child:

- › Cannot throw a ball overhand
- › Cannot jump in place
- › Cannot ride a tricycle
- › Cannot grasp a crayon between thumb and fingers
- › Has difficulty scribbling
- › Cannot stack four blocks

## HERE'S HELP



Use the **Family Resources on pages 72–78** to learn about a variety of family support services available in your community.