

# The Growing Years

Healthy Start... *where good results begin*

4 Years 6 Months

## Your Child Wants You to Know

### How I Move:

- I walk up and down stairs unassisted, alternating feet.
- I can turn a somersault, unassisted.
- I climb a ladder and trees.
- I bounce large balls.
- I have good muscle control, though small muscles are not as fully developed as large muscles.
- I cut paper on a line.
- I print a few capital letters.
- I build a tower of 10 or more blocks.
- I dress myself, except for back openings.
- I put on socks and shoes.
- My activity level is high.
- My attention span is still short, but is increasing.

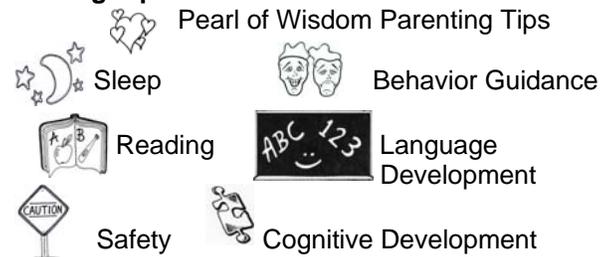
### How I Think:

- I point to and name four to six colors.
- I can match pictures or familiar objects.
- I draw, name and describe pictures.
- I count and touch four or more objects.
- I can read pictures.
- I like to finish activities.
- I am interested in death.
- I can tell likenesses and differences in pictures.
- I listen to long stories, but may misunderstand the facts.
- I am beginning to distinguish between fact and fantasy.
- I may tell tall tales, brag, and compliment myself.
- I may tattle and call people names.
- I ask when, how, and why questions.
- I play with words (creates own rhyming words).

## How I Get Along:

- I use language well.
- I enjoy pretending (dramatic play).
- I can wash, dress, eat, and use the toilet but may need occasional help.
- I like to set and clear the table.
- I play and interact with other children.
- I can talk well on the telephone.
- I can cooperate and take turns.
- I show interest in sex differences.
- I continue to seek adult's approval, though less often I will seek friend's approval.
- I am able to talk about anger when approached.
- I am beginning to criticize self.
- I am eager to carry some responsibility.
- I am noisy and vigorous during play.
- My individuality and lasting traits are becoming apparent.
- I may have nightmares.
- I sometimes fear monsters or other fantasies.

Watch for these symbols to find articles on the following topics:



## Tips for Reading Aloud With Preschoolers

Read aloud so preschoolers can:

- Continue to associate reading with warm, pleasant feelings; learn about words and language; and expand listening skills.



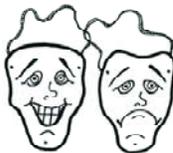
- Pay attention to the language of books and begin to notice how it differs from spoken language.
- Listen to the sounds in words and notice how some are the same and some are different.
- Build their vocabularies with words they understand and can use.
- Gain background knowledge about a variety of topics.
- Talk about the characters, setting, and plot and relate them to their own lives.
- Learn more about print concepts, such as, print is spoken words written down, the letters in words are written in a certain order, and written words are separated by spaces.

Choose books that preschoolers like:

- Preschoolers feel good about their growing skills and accomplishments. As they learn new concepts and self-help skills, read stories about young children who have similar experiences.
- Preschoolers have good memories. Read stories with simple plots children can retell in their own words (to themselves, a stuffed animal, or a friend) and pattern books with repetitive and predictable rhymes, phrases, and story lines that let children participate.
- Preschoolers are building their listening skills and attention spans. Read longer picture books and begin chapter books that last for several sessions.
- Preschoolers are curious. Read information books with facts, explanations, and new people, places and things.
- Preschoolers have vivid imaginations. Read folk tales and books with animal characters that think and talk like humans.
- Preschoolers are learning about the sounds of letters and words. Read books with rhymes and alliteration.

## Those Inappropriate Words

Parents have many reactions to a child's use of an inappropriate word. These reactions range from alarm, anger, and worry to embarrassment, disgust, hurt and a feeling of failure.



Obscene, profane, or otherwise inappropriate words have a magical quality to most children. At a very early age, children learn these words aren't like most other words in their vocabulary. These words have a certain power, the power to produce a reaction in their parents. Usually, this reaction is emotional and is almost instantaneous. Children know their parents will be upset when they say \_\_\_\_\_. No other word has this same power. Children become fascinated with their use of a particular word. They try out the word in different settings. When certain words are forbidden, children's fascination with the word increases.

### How Children Learn Inappropriate Words

One mother remarked that she was horrified when her young daughter used an inappropriate four-letter word at a family reunion. "Where did she learn it?"

That's difficult to say. The girl may have overheard it in a conversation. If she has an older brother or sister, or plays with older children, she may have picked it up from one of them. Some children learn inappropriate words by listening to their parents or other adults in their homes.

Children repeat inappropriate words used by their parents or other relatives. When they use these words at child care or in school they are usually disciplined by their providers or teachers. Parents who use inappropriate words must find substitute expressions. Or they must use these words only when their children aren't present.

A child seldom knows what a specific word means. All the child knows is that the words must be important because Mom, Dad, or other adults *really* become upset or angry.

It is good for parents to remember that children are learning. In the beginning, these inappropriate words are no different from any other words. The inappropriate word is heard and then used.

After using the word several times, children begin to sense something is different with this or that word. It brings a strong reaction.



Sometimes, parents will be very patient with children in every other aspect of learning except the use of "bad" words.

### **Techniques to Stop the Use of Inappropriate Words**

The child has to learn. The obvious question is "How should parents cope with these verbal expressions?"

Often, parents feel they must punish their children. They may even resort to physical punishment. They may threaten to wash the child's mouth out with soap. Or they may explode!

Each of these techniques may momentarily stop the use of the word. However, the child will probably use the word again. None of these methods shows any regard for the child's feelings. They simply reinforce the idea that these words have emotional power.

A good approach is to react calmly. In this way, children won't experience the "emotional power" of these words.

Parents might choose to ignore children when they use a certain word or immediately distract children to some different activity.

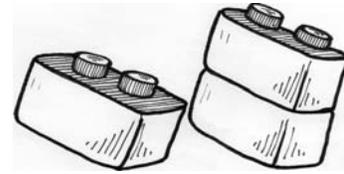
Many parents find that a very casual response such as "We don't use that word in our family. We say\_\_\_\_," works very well.

Others will say, "Mommy does not use that word. Listen to how Mommy talks." In these examples, the parent is helping the young child learn appropriate social behavior. No importance is placed on the word and no punishment is given.

Remember to remain unemotional and casual when these situations occur. Chances are very good that the use of a certain word will cease.

Children are developing and learning. Many words enter their ears. When it comes to language, children are like expensive vacuum cleaners – they pick up just about everything! Our job is to help them learn to sort out what they have picked up. We can do this by being

understanding and reacting calmly when a new word appears.



### **Building Healthy Self-Esteem in Your Preschooler**

Preschoolers continue to become more independent, learning more about themselves. Your preschooler will feel good about himself when he has some control over his life. He needs you to comfort him when he has bad feelings, and he needs you to help him feel good when he succeeds. Success helps build healthy self-esteem. Here's how you can help:

- Listen to your child. Care enough to stop what you are doing and give full attention to your child each day.
- Be a good role model. You need to feel good about yourself and take care of yourself.
- Read to your child. Allow him to make up his own stories. Stories allow children to identify with failure, fear, and surprise and to experience these with less anxiety.
- If your child isn't in child care, get him involved in a play group.
- Provide clothes that your preschooler can put on himself.
- Put up low hooks and low shelves so that he can put away clothes and toys himself. Provide space for running and jumping, and toys for learning.
- Use humor to show affection and help a child through hurt feelings.
- Allow your child to fail, to make mistakes, to change his mind and to do things well. Point out things that he can do well.
- Give your child activities that allow him to release tension. Children feel stress, too. Give him something to hold, squeeze, stroke, rub, bend, or hit.
- Play games and sing songs that teach the names for body parts.



## Preparing Children For School: A Primer for Parents

When your children are about to start formal schooling, you may worry: "Are they ready?," "Have I done enough?" Actually, you may have taught your children more than you realize. You have helped them learn basic survival skills. You have taught them to feed themselves, cross a street, and get along with others. By teaching them language, you have given them the foundation for all later learning. You have also given your children attitudes toward school and education. Those attitudes are far more important than numbers and letters. Attitudes determine how children feel about school and how hard they try. Making sure children form positive attitudes is one of your most important tasks.

### Butterflies

Most children are eager to go to school. They talk and talk and talk about it. They want to learn how to read, and they are anxious to please and do well. In fact, most children feel so excited they begin to get "butterflies" inside. They may be:

- **Worried about their parents.** "Will Daddy leave me there and never come back?"
- **Nervous about being with strangers.** "Who will play with me?"
- **Scared about going to a new place.** "How will I find my classroom?" "What if I get lost?"
- **Afraid they will not fit in.** "But I cannot read yet."

Parents, too, feel excited. They have looked forward to this time as well. They are glad their child is growing up and becoming independent. Yet, parents may be apprehensive. They may be:

- **Upset about leaving their child.** "Will Tammy miss me? Will she cry?"
- **Nervous about their child's health and safety.** "Will she be worn out from riding the bus so long?"
- **Anxious for their child to succeed.** "Did I do enough to prepare him?"
- **Unsure of their new responsibilities.** "What will Billy's school expect of me?"

Even if a child has been in school settings before – play groups, nursery school, or child care – the start of formal schooling is a new experience for both the child and you, it brings apprehension as well as joy.

### Confidence

Preparation helps. At the start of formal schooling, a child needs to learn new skills – waiting for a turn and being tested, for example. Preparing a child for these experiences gives both parent and child confidence and direction. To make the change easier for you and your child, there is some homework that you can do:

- Visit the classroom where your child will be.
- Find out what the school expects of you.
- Become involved in your child's school.

Learning about your child's school program and your new role as a school parent may help you in two ways. It may ease your worries and fears. It also may help you do a better job preparing your child.

Of course, your job will not be over the day your child enters school. Children continue to need support throughout their school years. They need your enthusiasm and interest in education, and they always need your confidence in their ability to learn.



### A Lesson Plan for Parents

As a parent, you have been helping your child develop the skills and attitudes needed in school. However, right before your child starts school, he or she needs some special preparation. Here are a few things you can do to help your child adjust to school more easily.

- Take your child to visit the school.
- Walk or ride the route to school.
- Wander down the halls.
- Look around the classroom and point out different things.
- Watch what children are doing.
- Find the bathroom.
- Look for the nurse's office.
- Play on the playground.



- Draw a map of the route to school.
- Draw a picture of the school.
- Take a photo of your child at school.
- Talk about what you saw.
- Talk about what your child will do in school.
- Find out what your child expects.
- Clear up misconceptions, such as "But I can't read yet."
- Describe activities your child will do in school. Discuss why they are important.
- Explain some rules your child will have to follow in school and why they are necessary.
- Talk about the purpose of tests and grades.
- Introduce your child to people at school.
- Introduce your child to the teacher and principal.
- Tell your child something about the teacher – where he or she lives and whether he or she has children.
- Explain who other people are – custodians, secretaries, and assistant teachers.
- Invite a few of your child's future classmates home to play and get acquainted.
- Help your child feel he or she will like school and learning.
- Find out why your child thinks school is important.
- Explain why you think school is important.
- Share some of your good experiences in school.
- Show your child how skills learned in school may be used in later life.
- Explain how the teacher will help your child learn.
- Start a school scrapbook to record important events and progress.

## Games for Growing

### Printing

Children love to make pictures by printing. You can make printing blocks easily by slicing a potato in half and cutting a pattern or shape into each sliced end. Other interesting prints can be made with other sliced vegetables and fruits, leaves, flowers, or sponges cut into shapes or letters. All you need to add is a saucer of non-toxic paint, paper (newspaper is fine) and an artist!

### Where Am I Going?

Take a long string and weave a path around a room (over chairs, under the table, behind the sofa, around corners, etc.). Ask your child to follow the path and describe where she's going.

### MN Parents Know

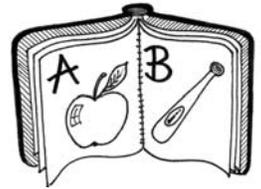
This is a trusted website with valuable parenting information, resources, and activities to help your children grow, develop and learn from birth through high school. Visit the website at [www.parentsknow.state.mn.us](http://www.parentsknow.state.mn.us)

### Leap Into Literacy

#### Moving Toward School and Reading

Your preschooler knows a lot of things she didn't as a baby. Preschoolers don't read independently, but if they've been read to a lot, they know a thing or two about reading.

- They know books are read from front to back.
- Pictures should be right side up.
- The language of books is different from spoken language.
- Words have different sounds in them.
- There are familiar and unfamiliar words.



All of these are emergent literacy skills – important building blocks toward the day when your child will read independently. How can you encourage your child to further develop these skills? Just keep reading aloud.

Choose lots of different books to read aloud to help your preschooler increase his or her vocabulary, acquire knowledge about many different topics, and understand how stories are structured and what characters do in them.

Your child also will learn that:

- Text is words written down.
- Letters in a specific order form a word.
- There are spaces between words.

Understanding these basic concepts will help when your child starts formal reading instruction in school.



## Other Ways to Encourage Book Time

Read-aloud time isn't the only opportunity your child should have to spend time with books – preschoolers love to choose and look at books on their own. Keep books in a basket on the floor or on a low shelf where your child can reach them easily and look at them independently. Keep some books in the car and always have a few handy in your bag for long visits to the doctor or lines at the post office.

At this age you might choose to foster independent reading by putting a reading lamp by your child's bed and letting him look at books for a set period of time before going to sleep. And children who have just given up naps can be encouraged to spend "quiet time" looking at books on their own.

Most important of all: Remember to let your child catch you reading for enjoyment. Turn off the TV, pull out a book, and curl up on the couch where your child can see you – and join you with his or her own favorite book.

### 15-Minute Reading Activities:

**License to read:** On car trips, make a game to point out and read license plates, billboards, and interesting road signs.



**Labels, labels, labels.** Label things in your child's room as they learn to name them. Have fun while they learn that written words are connected to everyday things.

**A reading pocket.** Slip fun things to read into your pocket to bring home: a comic strip from the paper, a greeting card, or even a fortune cookie from lunch. Create a special, shared moment your child can look forward to every day.

### Pearl of Wisdom Replacing Stress With Peace

In the book *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*, Alexander has a day when everything goes wrong. He gets gum in his hair, trips on a skateboard, gets scrunched in the car, is deserted by his friends, goes to the dentist, and falls in the mud. At home he is scolded by his



mom, gets in trouble with his dad, has lima beans for dinner, gets soap in his eye, and is left alone by the cat.

Have you ever had a day when everything went wrong? Bad days make it hard to be patient and loving. A tired, frustrated, angry person is not likely to be a good parent. Here are some suggestions to help you replace the stress in your life with peace. You can use the suggestions below to make a personal stress plan.

1. *Recognize the things that bother you.* Becoming aware of your stresses is a first step to dealing with them. It is also a part of showing respect for your own feelings.
2. *Recognize that you may not be able to fix everything at once, but there are things you can do that will help.* Maybe they are little things. But they make a difference.
3. *Throw away stresses that you cannot change.* For instance, you may worry that an earthquake or tornado is going to destroy you and your family. While it is possible that you could move to a safer house or city, it may be more appropriate to throw away that worry. You may want to close your eyes and mentally tie the tornadoes in a knot and throw them in the trash. Decide which of your stresses you cannot change by thinking about them. Then don't think about them.
4. *Replace stressful thoughts with pleasant ones.* Think of it as emotional gardening. You pull the ugly weeds out of your garden, and cultivate the good plants. A beautiful garden is very satisfying, so think of someone you like and perhaps someday you can help that person.
5. *Allow yourself time to have vacations from stress.* Sometimes we feel so worn out or frustrated that we want to scream or cry. That's a good time for a mental vacation. Find a place where you can be alone. Lie down, close your eyes and imagine that you are lying on a beautiful, peaceful beach. Imagine the



sun on your face. Listen to the sounds of the birds and waves. When you are feeling better, open your eyes. Think of some small thing you can do to make things run more smoothly.

6. *Use your sense of humor.*
7. *Be sure you are keeping yourself strong.* Eat well and get some exercise. Make time in your schedule to keep yourself physically fit.
8. *Draw strength from friends and family members.* You may have some friends and family members who help you make decisions, feel loved, and feel hopeful. Call them. Ask them if they will listen to you. Talk to them. Tell them how you feel.
9. *Focus on things you love to do.* Pick out some things you enjoy doing and set aside some money to do them. Ask people to help you do them.
10. *Be a friend to yourself.* Don't expect yourself to be perfect. Stop doing things that tear you down. Notice the good things you do, and dwell on those things. Treat your feelings with respect. Your feelings are important. Listen to them.

## Four-Year-Old Tid Bits

### Short Memories

Much of a 4-year-old's behavior troubles are due to poor memory. Although memory is steadily improving, a child can happily get into situation without remembering past experience or consequences. They remember only a few words or ideas when someone is talking to them and have difficulty recalling what happened this morning or yesterday.

Their short memory makes them unable to follow many instructions given at the same time. Don't be surprised if Judy does not follow all your instructions when you say, "Take those toys upstairs to your room, put on your pajamas, brush your teeth, and hurry up!" Judy will probably brush her teeth thinking she has done what she was told. Being told too much, too fast, is upsetting to a child.

## Should 4-Year-Olds Be Allowed to Continue Sucking Their Thumb?

According to the American Dental Association, thumb sucking does not damage baby teeth. Most 5-year-olds will have outgrown this habit. For those who do not, however, gentle persuasion proves helpful. When the baby teeth become loose, thumb sucking can be painful. After the permanent teeth grow in, continued thumb sucking can affect the placement and spacing of a child's teeth.



## Will Naps Be Outgrown During the 5th Year?

All children are different. Many 4-year-olds will no longer be taking afternoon naps, yet some will require up to an hour of rest sometime during the day. A quiet period is recommended for most children this age whether they sleep or not, since this time allows the child time to relax. It is important to observe children this age carefully and to readjust nighttime schedules when needed. A busy day might require an earlier bedtime than usual.

## Home Fire Drills

Plan and practice. In addition to a working fire extinguisher and smoke detectors, your family should have a plan for members to follow in the event of a fire. Be sure to pick a safe place for everyone to meet; either a neighbor's home or other safe location. That way you will be able to find everyone in case you get separated exiting your home.

## Watch Out: Bikes are Vehicles, Not Toys!

Every year, nearly 50,000 bicyclists suffer serious head injuries. More than half of all bicyclists who die are school-aged children (ages 5-7).

What can parents do to protect their children? Buy an approved helmet and insist that it be worn **every** time your child rides. (Look for the ANSI 290.4 sticker inside). Set a good example and wear one yourself if you ride, too. Teach your children bicycle safety rules. Remember, children under 10 should never ride bikes in the road or street. Sidewalks, paths, and driveways are the only safe options. Young children are not able to identify and adjust to many dangerous traffic situations.



## Well Child Check-Ups

At your child's yearly check-up, your medical provider may test him for hearing and vision. Ask your provider or contact your Early Childhood Program about Early Childhood

Screening. This is a required screening before entering Kindergarten. Also, don't forget to check with the medical provider about required booster doses for school entry and be sure to catch up on any missed immunizations.

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Remember, this developmental mailing describes a typical child at each age. Each child is special and each child develops at his or her own pace. Perfectly normal children may do things earlier or later than those described in this mailing. If you are concerned about your child's development, see your medical provider.

This developmental mailing gives equal time and space to both sexes. That's why we take turns referring to children as "he" or "she." When we use he or she, we include all children. Fathers, partners, and other significant adults all play an important role during pregnancy and in childrearing. When we specifically refer to "fathers," the information may also apply to partners and/or other significant adults involved in childrearing.

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