

The Growing Years

Healthy Start...where good results begin

4 Years

Your Child Wants You To Know

How I Move:

- I have a longer, leaner body.
- I am lively and active until exhausted.
- I am a "worker". I have drive.
- I am accurate, but impulsive in my body.
- I can jump my own height, land on my feet and am acrobatic.
- I throw a large ball and kick with some accuracy.
- I dress myself.
- I brush my teeth and wash my hands.
- I have sureness and control in finger-hand activities.

How I Think:

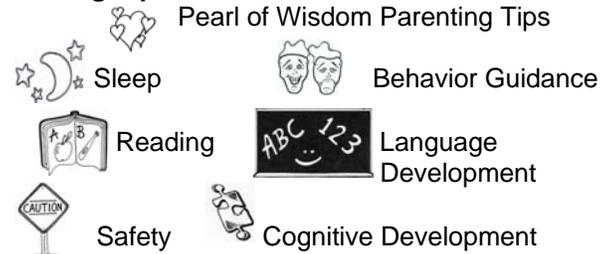
- I like a variety of materials; I am driven to learn.
- I accept changes as long as you prepare me for them.
- I confuse facts and fantasy.
- I understand simple reasons for things.
- I can do two things at once.
- I understand the concept of "three" and can name more objects.
- I am dramatic in play and like to use simple props.
- My attention span is 8-12 minutes long.
- I may call people names and swear.
- I enjoy silly words and rhyming without meaning.
- I comment, criticize and compare.
- My vocabulary is 1,500 words.
- I tell tall tales.
- I am able to talk to solve conflicts.

How I Get Along:

- I may dominate, am bossy and boastful.
- I may hit and grab for what I want.
- I play cooperatively with two or three children, but am impatient in large groups.

- I am assertive, a show-off, and noisy.
- I love to tease and outwit you.
- I have a terrific sense of humor. I am nonsense-loving and silly.
- I can resist your rules, argue and test limits.
- I am easily over-stimulated and often go "out-of-bounds."

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



A Word About 4's

"Energetic" and "imaginative" best describe the 4-year-old. Often impatient and silly, they discover humor and spend a great deal of time being silly and telling you "jokes".

A 4-year-old's language may range from silly words such as "batty-watty" to profanity. Loud, boisterous laughter may accompany such language. Imagination suddenly becomes greater than life for the 4-year-old, who often confuses reality and "make-believe". Wild stories and exaggerations are common. Four-year-olds feel good about the things they can do, show self-confidence, and are willing to try new adventures. They race up and down stairs or around corners, dash on tricycles or scooter, and pull wagons at full tilt. You still need to watch them closely as they cannot estimate their own abilities accurately and are capable of trying some outlandish and dangerous tricks. Understanding their growth and development will help guide your 4-year-old through this stage. Remember that all 4-year-olds are



different and reach various stages at different times.

Why Are Friendships Important?

The idea of a playmate to share toys and laughter, excitement and special times, is the bright side of friends and friendships. The downside is the arguing and hurt feelings, the tears and jealousy. Parents of preschoolers might ask, "Why bother?"

When children play with other children their own age, they have great opportunities for learning fairness, sharing, taking turns, following the rules, negotiating, compromising, and cooperating. They learn other children also want the biggest piece and the first turn. They learn other children feel badly when they have to wait or when someone pinches them. Children who only play with adults or older children never have the chance to work out their friendships as equals.

Children who are rejected by their peers or who have no friends are at risk for emotional and mental health problems later: dropping out of school, delinquency, lower grades, a more difficult time adjusting to school and a negative outlook about school.

How Can Parents Help?

Friends are important to a growing child. Parents provide nutritious foods, plenty of rest and exercise to help their children develop physically. Practice at being a friend is just as important to social and emotional growth.

Expect some difficulties. Children do not share until they are somewhere between 4 to 6 years old. Some don't share until much later if they haven't had practice at it. Parents can expect some arguments, perhaps threats, bribes and other unpleasant ways of dealing with people. Try not to get involved unless you are asked to or if someone is going to get hurt. Adults who get mixed up in preschoolers' problems frequently make things worse. Help children talk about what they want and need. Teach ways to wait, and above all, ways to negotiate.

Adjust to children's activity level. Children can range from calm to very active. Be ready for differences and provide standard equipment

that gives everyone a feeling of success. Sand, water, big balls, a lot of open space, dress-up clothes, play dough, and an arts and scraps box are usually favorites at the preschool age.

Give opportunities for taking turns. The amount of practice children have at being friends can impact how they accept or reject the idea of playmates using their toys. Experiences with other friendly children will help them realize other children can add an element of fun that playing alone can't.

Monitor the amount of time together. Parents need to decide the length of time children will be playing together. However, if the children are having difficulty, separating and trying again another day might be the best answer.

Set up play environments. The space and toys available will determine the kind of play to expect. An arsenal of war toys will lend itself to running and shooting and loud sounds and words. A puzzle will be quieter and more cooperative in nature. Large, open spaces invite fast movement, while small, full spaces demand that people go slowly.

When Should Adults Step In?

When it's going well: When children are sharing, talking kindly to one another or showing other friendly behavior, encourage them with a statement such as, "I like the way you are working together on that castle," "I enjoy watching you two play together," or "That's what I call cooperation!" Children feel good about being noticed for positive reasons. The behaviors we pay attention to are the ones that often get repeated.

When it's not going well: Introduce a new game or snack time. Perhaps you could sit down together and review the rule that people are not for hurting. Next, talk about a different way the children might play to ensure nobody gets hurt.

Be prepared to hear 5-year-olds barter for friends: *"If you do this for me, I'll be your friend."*

Three and 4-year-olds will seem unkind when they say, *"I don't want to be your friend."*



Translated this means, "*I want to play alone right now.*"

While another 3-or 4-year old would not take this comment personally, parents find it rude and unacceptable. If this type of statement makes you uncomfortable, help the child restate what he has said without making an issue of it. A statement such as "*You would like to play alone right now,*" will clarify the point for all concerned.

Skills for Children to Make and Keep Friends

- Make eye contact, use people's names and touch them gently on the shoulder to get their attention.
- Ask for what you need, then think of other things to do while you wait for your turn.
- Teach children to suggest alternatives to their friends' ideas when they don't want to play. Instead of simply saying "No," they could say, "We played that this morning. Let's play blocks or draw now."
- Help children feel comfortable joining a group. This may make a difference in how the playing will go. Children who burst into play are often rejected. Children who hover around the edges are ignored. Encourage your children to welcome others into play.

Children who feel loved and accepted in their families and whose ideas and talents are valued feel confident in themselves and competent in forming successful relationships. They are better able to develop skills that attract friends and maintain successful friendships.

Why Parents Get Angry

In her book, Love and Anger: The Parental Dilemma, Nancy Samalin writes, "the greater our love, the greater too our capacity for feeling a full range of troubling emotions, including anger, resentment, and even rage. It is only natural that these strong emotions are sometimes expressed in our relationships with our children, for they are the people in whom we invest our greatest love, our most intense feelings, and our highest expectations."

Even though parents get angry, they must control their behavior. Easier said than done?

Yes! Here are some things to remember the next time your child "pushes your buttons."

- The louder they get, the quieter you get.
- Take responsibility for your own emotions by saying, "I'm angry," instead of "You're bad."
- Nothing is learned or gained at the point of crisis. To teach a lesson, you and your child must be calm and alert.
- When anger takes over, logic goes by the wayside.
- Anger can be a secondary emotion. The underlying cause may be fear or pain or guilt. Try to get to the cause.
- Anger can cause huge gaps in the best of relationships.
- Use the spotlight approach: Stop... think...before you act. Proceed with caution...Consider what you want your child to learn from the situation. Go...Follow through with a respectful, helpful solution.

Ways to Help Your Child

- When you discipline, explain why.
- Tell children what they should do, not what they shouldn't do. "We will hold hands while we walk here," instead of, "Don't walk alone."
- Give more attention and praise for good behavior and less for naughty behavior. Don't make punishment a reward. Children who like attention may be naughty just to get attention. Protect and preserve children's feelings that they are lovable and capable.
- Plan ahead. Let your children know clearly and thoroughly how you want them to behave. Let them know the house rules. Tell them the consequences if they misbehave.
- Focus on the naughty action, not on the child. "That was a bad thing to do," not "You are a bad boy."
- Set things up to encourage good behavior. Have enough space so children can play alone, enough toys to reduce arguments, enough rest periods to minimize crankiness, enough planned activities to keep children from being bored. Put away breakable and dangerous things.



- Teach by example. If you hit children for hitting others, they won't understand why they can't hit.
- Follow through. Be consistent. If you have a rule, enforce it.
- When children are naughty, talk to them. Listen to find out why they did what they did. Did they just make a mistake? Are they angry at you? Are they trying to get attention? Are they upset about something else? Are they sick or tired?
- Offer choices to children only when you are willing to accept their decisions.
- Change the environment instead of the child's behavior.
- Work "with the grain" of the child instead of against it.
- Give child safe limits that they can understand.
- Be a good example.

Ways to Listen

- When your child talks, be ready to listen. Take time to figure out what your child is saying.
- When your child speaks, make eye contact.
- Watch for signs that your child needs to talk.
- Ask questions.
- Find time to listen each day.
- Pay attention to your child's feelings.
- Think about what your child says.
- Act on what your child tells you.

Feeling Frustrated? 12 Alternatives to Hitting Your Child

When the big and little problems of your everyday life pile up to the point where you feel like hitting, slapping, or spanking your child – STOP. Take time out. Don't take your problems out on your child. Try any or all of these simple alternatives. Use whatever works for you.

1. Stop in your tracks. Step back. Sit down.
2. Take five deep breaths. Inhale. Exhale. Slowly, slowly.
3. Count to 10. Better yet, 20. Or say the alphabet out loud.
4. Phone a friend. A relative.
5. Still mad? Punch a pillow. Or munch an apple.

6. Thumb through magazine, book, newspaper, or photo album.
7. Do some sit-ups.
8. Pick up a pencil and write down your thoughts.
9. Take a hot bath or a cold shower.
10. Lie down on the floor, or just put your feet up.
11. Put on your favorite music.
12. Water your plants.

Things to Remember about Good-byes by Amy Flynn

Think about your own feelings and experiences with saying good-bye.

Children learn about saying good-bye from you. It is important for you to reflect on your own style of saying good-bye. It may be helpful to try to remember what it was like for you to say good-bye to parents or loved ones. It is okay to cry and feel sad when you say good-bye to children.

Developing trust and a working relationship with the child's school and caregiver makes saying good-bye easier.

Children look to you for cues about the world. If they see that you are feeling worried or unsure about leaving they will most likely have a harder time saying good-bye. Take the time to get to know your child's teacher or caregiver. It is best to phase them in slowly to school or time with a new caregiver. This will not only give your child time to adjust, but it will also give you time to get to know the person who will be taking care of your child. It is always hard to leave when children are crying, but if you trust the person you're leaving them with can take care of them, it will make it easier.

Learning to deal with separation is a lifelong process and not a one-time event.

We are saying good-bye to people, things, and routines throughout our life. Your child's experience and age will affect how he or she will say good-bye and deal with separation. How your child says good-bye will change as your child moves through different developmental stages. External events such as a parent on a business trip, a new sibling, or even a bad morning may affect the way your



child says good-bye. *A good separation doesn't always mean there will be no tears.*

Children's reactions to separation may take many forms. As your child starts school or has a new caregiver, he may react by sulking, withdrawing, being aggressive, being oppositional, regressing, or having sleep disturbances. Children may have mixed feelings, like being angry or sad, or grieving. Starting school may also be exciting for a child and scary at the same time.

Reuniting at the end of the day is the flip side of saying good-bye. Sometimes children react just as strongly to reuniting as they do to saying good-bye. A child may not react at all at the good-bye but let you see anger or sadness when you return. This is normal and should be dealt with in much the same way as saying good-bye, by establishing routines and validating your child's feelings.

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Toys for Growing

(Check garage sales, thrift stores, and around your house!)

For Active Play and Physical Development

Assorted blocks
Balls and beanbags
Dump trucks
Workbench and tools
Balls
Wheelbarrow
Trikes, bikes or pedal riding toys
Big Boxes or crates

For Dramatic and Imaginative Play

Dolls and accessories
Children's house play materials: small suitcases, laundry, toys

Animals and farmyards (collections of small toys)
Costumes
Telephones
Puppets and stage
Tents or "caves"

For Creative and Constructive Play

Painting materials
Blunt scissors
Crayons
Colored cubes
Simple puzzles
Tool set or golf tees and styrofoam
Easel, paints and brushes
Paper, newspaper, wrapping paper
Musical instruments

Games for Growing

Magic Pictures

Draw a pattern on a piece of paper with an unlit wax candle or white crayon. Have your child paint the entire paper with watercolor paint to expose the "magic picture" that will appear.

Finding the Difference

To help your child become more aware of observing detail (a valuable pre-reading skill) play this simple game. Draw a simple picture or trace one from a coloring book. Make a second copy, changing one detail. Ask your child to spot the difference between the two pictures.

Leap Into Literacy (Easy Pre-Reading Skills to Practice)

Many children this age have moved beyond the small world of your household to child care or preschool. They may even be enrolled in lessons or classes. Read-aloud time can be a chance to slow down and spend time together.

Try to have set times to read together. Before bed works well, or do at other "down" times in the day – when your child first gets up in the morning, or after meals. Your child will enjoy cuddling with you, hearing your voice, feeling nurtured, and receiving your undivided attention.

Children between the ages of 3 and 5 are eager to show off what they know and love to be



praised. Continue to choose some books with simple plots and repetitive text that your child can learn and retell. Encourage your child to "read" to you and praise the attempts.

Here are some additional tips:

- Yes, you should read that book for the millionth time – and try not to sound bored. Your child is mastering many skills with each re-reading.
- When you are looking at a new book, introduce it. Look at the cover, and talk about what it might be about. Mention the author by name.
- Ask your child why a character may have taken a specific action.
- Ask what part of the story your child liked best and why.
- Talk to your child about parts of the story – how did it begin? What happened in the middle? What did he or she think of the ending?
- Move your fingers under the words as you read to demonstrate the connections between what you are saying and the text.
- When you come to familiar or repetitive lines, let your child finish them. ("I do not like green eggs and... I do not like them, Sam...")
- Ask your child to point out letters or words he or she might recognize. You might also occasionally point to words and sound them out slowly while your child watches.

But even as you ask your child more complicated questions, your top goal should be to enjoy reading and have fun. Don't make reading a book like a test your child needs to pass. Look at the pictures, make up alternative words together, and be playful and relaxed.

Also, remember that reading comes to different kids at different time. Some children fall in love with books earlier than others. So if your child is one who doesn't seem as interested right away, just keep reading and showing how wonderful it can be.

15 Minute Reading Activities

- *Better than TV.* Swap evening TV for a good action story or tale of adventure.

- *Look and Listen.* Too tired to read aloud? Listen to a book on tape and turn the book's pages with your children. You'll still be reading with them!
- *Pack a snack, pack a book.* Going someplace where there might be a long wait? Bring along snack and a bag of favorite books.
- *Your long-distance lap.* Away on a business trip? Take a few books with you, call home, and have your child curl up by the phone for a good night story.

A Note About Toilet Training

The American Academy of Pediatrics says to see your medical provider if your child:

- Stays dry at night for a while, but then begins to wet at night again and must go back to wearing training pants.
- Is completely toilet trained for at least six months but suddenly begins to have many accidents during the day and night.

Questions Parents Ask: My Child Seems to Be Left-Handed. Should I Try to Change Her to Her Right?

By the age of 4 years, a child is generally showing a preference for using either her right or her left hand. Approximately 90 percent of all children are right handed. If a child is left-handed, it is not recommended that you force her to use her right hand. She will have fewer emotional upsets and perform better at drawing, cutting, writing, and other fine motor activities if she is allowed to use the hand she prefers.

Nutrition

Encourage healthy eating by offering:

- Three meals per day, plus two small snacks
- Small portions.
- Nutritious food
- Explanation about why eating healthy is important for your body. Talk about how eating fruits, vegetables, low-fat meats, and whole grains help your body stay healthy.
- Get your children accustomed to drinking water instead of soda or juice when they're thirsty.
- Turn off the TV during meals.



Healthy Snack Ideas

Fruit Kabobs

Make a fruit skewer to dip into yogurt or fruit dip. There is no sugar or additives, but this treat is still sweet.

Carrot Sticks with Peanut Butter

A variation of the old favorite...celery, peanut butter and raisins "ants on a log".

Frozen Grapes

This fun frozen treat is healthy too!

Seasoned Popcorn

Air-popped corn with seasoning salt instead of butter. Keeps all the taste but loses the fat.

Health and Safety Tips

At your child's well child check up, her medical provider may test her hearing and vision. Ask your provider or contact your school district's Early Childhood Program about Early Childhood Screening. This is a required screening before attending Kindergarten. Also, don't forget to check with your provider about required immunizations for school entry.

Your child probably is sleeping between 10 and 12 hours per night and no longer takes an afternoon nap. Things which often cause children to wake in the middle of the night include:

- *Bad/vivid dreams.* If your child wakes in the night from a bad dream, comfort her until she is able to go back to sleep. You also may want to talk to her about the dream.
- *Night terrors.* These are episodes in which a child may suddenly bolt upright in bed, cry, scream, moan, mumble, and thrash about with her eyes wide open even though she is not truly awake. Do not wake your child. Rather, stay with her until the terror ends and she calms down.
- *Bedwetting.* Reward your child for dry nights, but do not punish her for wet nights. Give her lots of support. Seek professional help if the problem persists.

Because your child is more independent at home, safety precautions must be taken to assure he doesn't get hurt while on her own.

- Never leave your child unattended near water, even if she knows how to swim.
- Remove cleaning substances, medicines, vitamins, and toxic houseplants out of the child's reach.
- Keep hot food and drink away from your child's reach.
- Keep pots on back burners of the stove.

Pearl of Wisdom

Do Too Many Kids Have Nature Deficit-Disorder?



Can you remember when you were a child? Were you excited to go outside to play in the neighborhood, in the sand, splash in the puddles or skip in the rain with or without your boots? Did you ever wade in a creek turning over the rocks in anticipation of discovering what lived under there? Did you catch lightning bugs and put them in a jar? Can you remember the outdoor games you invented with your brother, sister or friend?

Today too many kids spend much of their time indoors in order to be protected from the kidnappers, sex offenders, and bullies we hear about on television news. Journalist and author Richard Louv coined the term "nature-deficit disorder" to focus attention to the absence of nature in children's lives.

In his book Last Children in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder, Louv proposes that the lack of outdoor exploration is tied to today's raising incidence of childhood obesity and too many childhood psychological disorders. He also points out that, "Studies suggest that kids are safer outdoors than we believe... That's not to say that there aren't bad people out there, but we can't allow fear to drive us indoors. We are raising a generation of children under virtual house arrest."

Our children are becoming more wired to electronics too. Before they enter kindergarten many children have video games, computers and television sets in their bedrooms. They could spend hours watching videos not only at home, but on every car ride since so many vehicles are equipped with DVD players. How are children going to learn about the world



outside the car window when they are mesmerized by cartoons?

The outdoors, and this includes your backyard, is a child's natural experiment with risk taking. Risk taking is pushed by children's curiosity to make sense of the "what ifs" of their world. These "what ifs" teach logical thinking and problem solving skills. Children know what they know from doing, touching, tasting, and jumping up and down.

At three and four years old children love to try new physical feats. Build your child's skills by playing catch together with a large ball or beanbag. If it's warm, and you have the space, dig a small outdoor garden together with easy-to-grow plants. Walk around the block together at varying speeds. Talk with your

child; say we're going to walk slow like a turtle or fast like a cheetah.

This summer, create a safe outdoor place for your children and their friends to play and learn with each other. A fabulous quote I found sums it up, "It's not just the spotted owl that's endangered in nature; it's the human child. And if children aren't going outside today, who is going to care about the spotted owl fifteen years from now?"

Happy Parenting!

Vicki Thrasher Cronin

(Owl quote found in SUN Magazine, February 2007 www.THESUNMAGAZINE.org)

Vicki Thrasher Cronin is a Parent Educator and Early Childhood Educator. This article was reprinted with permission from Ready 4 K.

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Remember, this developmental mailing describes a typical child at each child. 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 developmental 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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