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# Early Years Developmental Characteristics

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*“Parents are children's first and most enduring educators. When parents and practitioners work together in early years settings, the results have a positive impact on children's development and learning.”*

(Early Years Foundation Stage, Hodder Education, 2013)

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## Supporting Your Child

We hope this guide helps you understand some of the common behavior patterns in early childhood development so that this helps your child's learning at home and at school.

In each section, we describe some of the key characteristics for a child of that age. We then divide each section into four headings to emphasize four different aspects of child development.

Each child goes through developmental stages as they grow. Every child is unique and develops at their own rate. Children may mature more quickly in one area, but more slowly in another. You may find your child shows characteristics from several different stages at any one time. Wherever your child is on their individual journey, usually the stages happen in the same order.

Talk to your child's teacher to find out more about current education research and best practices, to ensure that you are working with the school to provide the best possible support for your child.



# Three to Four-Years-Olds

Three to four-year-olds are extending their circle of people and places they engage with, venturing further away from caregivers and beginning to take care of their personal needs. They are constantly building theories to explain the world around them. They learn best through exploring ideas and materials that excite them.

## Social and Emotional Development

- Feels a strong attachment to home and family, may find it difficult to separate from caregiver
- Begins to play collaboratively with others
- Tries to follow requests, though may struggle to give up their own agenda
- Develops strong likes and dislikes, may develop new fears (e.g. monsters, the dark, animals)
- Often expresses emotions physically
- Enjoys helping adults with simple housekeeping tasks

## Physical Development

- Demonstrates increasing core stability, agility, muscle strength
- Begins to pedal a tricycle though may have some difficulties steering
- Kicks and throws a ball, catch a bouncing ball
- Holds small objects, strings items together, stacks four or more blocks
- Transitions from a palm grip to the pincer grip necessary for later handwriting

## Language Development

- Can be understood by familiar listeners, speech may be unclear to others
- Has a vocabulary of 250- 500 words, uses three to six-word sentences
- Asks 'who', 'what', 'where', 'why' questions, tells their name
- Can have a simple conversation with at least two back-and-forth exchanges
- Uses pronouns, prepositions, and regular plurals

## Language Development

- Engages in imaginative play
- Shows increased curiosity about how the world works, investigates ways to make things happen
- Explores different arrangements of objects, sorting by size, color, shape
- Counts small groups of objects, hold up fingers to indicate age
- Practices an activity many times until successful.

# Four to Five-Years-Olds

Four to five-year-olds are becoming increasingly independent and social, and love being with their friends. They learn best through their own play and by expressing themselves through a wide variety of materials. At this age, learning is transmitted through action, “from hand to head”, so we use paper and pencil tasks sparingly.

## Social and Emotional Development

- Strives for independence, enjoys opportunities to do things for themselves, shows pride in personal achievements
- Learns to express feelings verbally, rather than physically. Expresses anger more dramatically
- Becomes more aware of the feelings and needs of others and show concern, sympathy, regret
- Engages in cooperative play, shares personal belongings though may still struggle to take turns

## Physical Development

- Gains control of running, jumping and other large movements, accidents are still common
- Needs lots of practice with painting, playground chalk, threading etc to develop pincer grip
- Begins to use scissors and other tools, still developing accuracy and precision
- Dresses and undresses independently
- Copies a square, draws a person with at least three body parts

## Language Development

- Follows instructions
- Keeps a conversation going with more than three back-and-forth exchanges
- Enjoys rhymes and word play
- Differentiates between letters and symbols around them, recognizes their name
- Answers simple questions about a book or story

## Cognitive Development

- Focuses for five to ten minutes’ small group activities
- Develops mathematical concepts through “real life” experiences, such as counting to see how many children in the group
- Engages in imaginative play and role play to make sense of the world around them

- Enjoys being read to and reading from picture books, making connections between events in books and their own experiences.

## Five to Six-Year-Olds

Five to six-year-olds are curious and excited to learn about the world around them. They do their best learning through play, repetition and hands-on exploration. They love friends, discoveries and asking questions. They produce a great quantity of work but are less concerned with quality. They have a sense of fairness but find it difficult to lose at games.

### Social and Emotional Development

- Conscientious, seeks approval and permission, benefits from consistent expectations
- Appreciates daily schedules and routines that enables them to predict what is coming next
- Likes doing things for themselves and are ready for more individual responsibility
- May see only one way to do things, sometimes finding it difficult to see other people's viewpoints
- May fear making mistakes when trying new things

### Physical Development

- Highly active, paces themselves and sustains energy levels over long periods of time, finds inactivity difficult
- Good coordination and gross motor control for swimming, bike riding, jump rope, climbing
- Develops fine motor control, handwriting, cutting becoming more accurate and precise
- Draws a triangle, form letters conventionally with practice and drawings become more recognizable

### Language Development

- Speech is clear and intelligible although some immaturities may still be noted
- Tells stories with at least two sequenced events.
- Recognizes simple rhymes (bat-cat, ball-tall)
- Experiments with new words
- Enjoys reading aloud, alone or with a partner, and having books read to them

## Cognitive Development

- Engages in elaborate and imaginative role play, improved recall of past events
- Develops mathematical concepts such as more than, equal to, less than, counting beyond ten
- Sorts objects according to a variety of criteria including texture, size, temperature, distance, size
- Develops an understanding of passing of time, days of the week, months, seasons
- Understands simple classification, such as groups of trees and animals



# How to Harness Digital Technology

Young children today are growing up in a digital context that differs from the way teachers and parents grew up. In the 21st century, technology is a tool for young children, just as we use hands-on creative materials. As with all materials and resources, adults should think carefully about how to manage how children interact with digital resources to enhance their learning and well-being.

We've included some questions below to guide you as you support your child's development. This is from the Department of Education (US), [Guiding Principles for Use of Technology with Early Learners](#)

- How does this help your child learn, express, imagine or explore?
- What kinds of social interactions (such as conversations with parents or peers) are happening before, during, and after the use of the technology?
- Is this technology an appropriate match to what your child needs right now to enhance their growth and development?
- Is the use of technology replacing important social interactions or calming routines that are important for your child's well-being?
- Is your child watching media or playing games that are modeling positive social skills and building language skills?



## Sources:

- Yardsticks: Child and Adolescent Development (4th edition) by Chip Wood
- [Child Development Institute](#) (US)
- [Child developmental landmarks](#) (UK)
- [CDC Milestones](#)
- [Developmental Milestones ACECQA](#) (Australia)