



What to Expect

Between their third and fourth birthdays, children:

- Start to play with other children, instead of next to them;
 - Are more likely to take turns and share and begin to understand that other people have feelings and rights;
 - Are increasingly self-reliant and probably can dress with little help;
 - May develop fears (“Mommy, there’s a monster under my bed.”) and have imaginary companions;
 - Have greater large-muscle control than toddlers and love to run, skip, jump with both feet, catch a ball, climb downstairs and dance to music;
 - Have greater small-muscle control than toddlers, which is reflected in their drawings and scribbles;
 - Match and sort things that are alike and unlike;
 - Recognize numerals;
 - Like silly humor, riddles and practical jokes;
 - Understand and follow spoken directions;
 - Use new words and longer sentences;
 - Are aware of rhyming sounds in words;
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- May attempt to read, calling attention to themselves and showing pride in their accomplishment;
- Recognize print around them on signs or in logos; and
- Know that each alphabet letter has a name and identify at least 10 alphabet letters, especially those in their own names; and “write” or scribble messages.

Between their fourth and fifth birthdays, children :

- Are active and have lots of energy and may be aggressive in their play;
- Enjoy more group activities, because they have longer attention spans;
- Like making faces and being silly;
- May form cliques with friends and may change friendships quickly;
- Have better muscle control in running, jumping and hopping;
- Recognize and write the numerals 1-10;
- Recognize shapes such as circles, squares, rectangles and triangles;
- Love to make rhymes, say nonsense words and tell jokes;
- Know and use words that are important to school work, such as the names for colors, shapes and numbers; know and use words that are important to daily life, such as street names and addresses;
- Know how books are held and read and follow print from left to right and from top to bottom of a page when listening to stories read aloud;



- Recognize the shapes and names of all letters of the alphabet and know the sounds of some letters; and
- Write some letters, particularly those in his own name.

What Preschoolers Need

3- to 4-year-old children require opportunities to:

- Play with other children so they can learn to listen, take turns and share;
- Develop more physical coordination — for example, by hopping on both feet;
- Develop their growing language abilities through books, games, songs, science, math and art activities;
- Develop more self-reliance skills — for example, learning to dress and undress themselves;
- Count and measure;
- Participate actively with adults in reading-aloud activities;
- Explore the alphabet and print; and
- Attempt to write messages.

4- to 5-year-old children require opportunities to:

- Experiment and discover, within limits;
- Develop their growing interest in school subjects, such as science, music, art and math;
- Enjoy activities that involve exploring and investigating;
 - Group items that are similar (for example, by size, color or shape);
 - Use their imaginations and curiosity;
 - Develop their language skills by speaking and listening; and
 - See how reading and writing are both enjoyable and useful (for example, by listening to stories and poems, seeing adults use books to find information and dictating stories to adults).



Getting Along

Learning to get along with others is very important for children's social development.

What to Do

- Give your child lots of personal attention and encouragement. Set aside time when you and your child can do enjoyable things together. Your positive feelings for your child will help him to feel good about himself.
- Set a good example. Show your child what it means to get along with others and to be respectful. Let her hear you say “please” and “thank you” when you talk to others. Treat people in ways that show you care what happens to them.
- Help your child find ways to solve conflicts with others. Help him to figure out what will happen if he shows his anger by hitting a playmate: “James, I know that Zoe took your truck without asking. But if you hit her and you have a big fight, then she will have to go home and the two of you won't be able to play any more today. What's another way that you can let Zoe know you want your truck back?”

Learning to work with and get along with others contributes to children's success in school.



- Make opportunities for your child to share and to care. Let her take charge of providing food for birds. When new families move into the neighborhood, let her help make cookies to welcome them.
- Be physically affectionate. Children need hugs, kisses, an arm over the shoulder and a pat on the back.
- Tell your child that you love him. Don't assume that your loving actions will speak for themselves (although they are very important).

Chores

Any household task can become a good learning game — and can be fun.

What You Need

■ Jobs around the home that need to get done, such as:

- Doing the laundry
- Washing and drying dishes
- Carrying out the garbage
- Setting the dinner table
- Dusting furniture

Home chores can help children learn new words, how to listen and follow directions, how to count and how to sort. Chores can also help children improve their physical coordination and learn responsibility.

What to Do

- Tell your child about the job you will do together. Explain why the family needs the job done. Describe how you will do it and how your child can help.
- Teach your child new words that are associated with each job: “Let’s put the placemats on the table first, then the napkins.”
- Doing laundry together provides many opportunities for your child to learn. Ask him to help you remember all the clothes that need to be washed. See how many things he can name: socks, T-shirts, pajamas, sweater, shirt. Have him help you gather all the dirty clothes, then help you make piles of light and dark colors.
- Show your child how to measure the soap and have him pour the soap into the machine. Let him put the items into the machine, naming each one. Keep out one sock. When the washer is filled with water, take out the mate to the sock. Let your child hold the wet sock and the one that you kept out. Ask him which one feels heavier and which one feels lighter. After the wash is done, have your child sort his own things into piles that are the same (for example, T-shirts, socks).

Scribble, Draw, Paint and Paste

Young children are natural artists and art projects can spark young imaginations and help children to express themselves. Scribbling also prepares them.

What You Need

- Crayons, water-soluble felt-tipped markers
- Different kinds of paper (including construction paper and butcher paper)
- Tape
- Finger paints
- Paste
- Safety scissors
- Fabric scraps or objects that can be glued to paper (string, cotton balls, sticks, yarn)



What to Do

- Give your child different kinds of paper and different writing materials to scribble with. Coloring books are not needed. Crayons are good to begin with. Water-soluble felt-tipped marking pens are fun for your child to use because she doesn't have to use much pressure to get a bright color.
- Tape a large piece of butcher paper onto a tabletop and let your child scribble to her heart's content!
- Spread out newspapers or a large piece of plastic over a table or on the floor and tape a big piece of construction paper or butcher paper on top. Cover your child with a large smock or apron and let him finger paint.
- Have your child paste fabric scraps or other objects such as yarn, string or cotton balls to the paper (in any pattern). Let her feel the different textures and tell you about them.

Art projects also help children to develop the eye and hand coordination they will later need as they begin to write.

Here are a few tips about introducing your child to art:

- Don't tell the child what to draw or paint.
- Don't "fix up" your child's drawings. It will take lots of practice before you can recognize what he has drawn — but let him be creative! Invite your child to talk to you about what he is drawing and to identify by name each object in the picture.
- Give your child lots of different materials to work with. Show her how to use new types of materials.
- Find an art activity that's at the right level for your child and let him do as much of the project as possible.
- Display your child's art prominently in your home. Point it out to visitors when your child is near to hear the praise.

Letters, Letters, Everywhere

Sharing the alphabet with children helps them begin to learn the letter names, recognize their shapes and link the letters with the sounds of spoken language.

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What You Need

- Alphabet book
- Alphabet blocks
- ABC magnets
- Paper, pencils, crayons, markers, safety scissors
- Glue

Children who know the names and the shapes of the letters of the alphabet when they enter school usually have an easier time when learning to read.



What to Do

- With your child sitting with you, print the letters of her name on paper and say each letter as you write it. Make a name sign for her room or other special place. Have her decorate the sign.
- Teach your child “The Alphabet Song” and play games with him using the alphabet. Some alphabet books have songs and games that you can learn together.
- Look for educational videos, DVDs, CDs and TV shows such as “Between the Lions,” “Blue’s Clues,” and “Sesame Street” that feature letter-learning activities for young children. Watch such programs with your child and join in with him on the rhymes and songs.
- Place alphabet magnets on your refrigerator or on another smooth, safe metal surface. Ask your child to name the letters she plays with and the words she may be trying to spell.
- Wherever you are with your child, point out individual letters in signs, billboards, posters, food containers, books and magazines.
- Encourage your child to spell and write her name. At first, she may use just a few letters for her name; for example, Jenny might use the letters JNY.
- Line up several alphabet blocks and have your child say the name of each letter. Have her use alphabet blocks to spell her name.
- Give your child a page from an old magazine. Circle a letter on the page and have him circle matching letters.



Rhyme It!

Rhyming helps children start to pay attention to the sounds in words, which is an important first step in learning to read.

What You Need

- Books with rhyming words, word games or songs

What to Do

- Play rhyming games and sing rhyming songs with your child. Many songs and games include clapping and bouncing and tossing balls.
- Read nursery rhymes to your child. As you read, stop before a rhyming word and encourage her to fill in the blank. When she does, praise her.
- Listen for rhymes in songs that you know or hear on the radio, TV or at family or other gatherings. Sing the songs with your child.
- Around the home, point to objects and say their names, for example, sink. Then ask your child to say as many words as he can that rhyme with the name. Other good easily rhymed words are ball, bread, rug, clock and bread. Let him use some silly or nonsense words as well: ball-tall, call, small, dall, jall, nall.
- Say three words such as cat, dog and sat and ask your child which words sound the same — rhyme.
- If your child has an easy-to-rhyme name, ask her to say words that rhyme with it: Kate-plate, late, wait, date, gate.
- If a computer is available, encourage your child to download and run rhyming games.

Say the Sound

Listening for and saying sounds in words helps children learn that spoken words are made up of sounds, which gets them ready to match spoken sounds to written letters. This, in turn, gets them ready to read.

What You Need

- Old magazine
 - Book of nursery or nonsense rhymes
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What to Do

- Say four words that begin with the same sound, such as big, ball, basket and balloon. Ask your child to tell you the first sound in each word, /b/*.
- Say four words, such as cap, hop, cake and camera. Ask your child which of the words starts with a different sound.
- Say four words, such as stop, top, mop and hop. Ask your child to tell you what the last sound is in each word, /p/.
- Give your child an old magazine. Sit with him and point out objects in the pictures. Ask him to say the sounds that the objects start with. Change the game by saying a sound and having him find an object in a picture that starts with that sound.
- Have fun by helping your child say tongue twisters such as “Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers,” and nonsense rhymes such as “Hey Diddle, Diddle,” as well as more modern nonsense rhymes such as those of Dr. Seuss.
- As you read a story or poem, ask your child to listen for and say the words that begin with the same sound. Then have her think of and say another word that begins with the sound.
- Help your child to make up and say silly sentences with lots of words that start with the same sound, such as, “Tom took ten toy trucks to town.”

* Please note: A letter between slash marks, /b/, shows the sound that the letter represents and not the name of the letter.



Helping your child learn to pay attention to sounds in words can prevent reading problems later on.

Matching Sounds and Letters

Although children can be taught to match most letters with the sounds that they represent, be prepared to give them lots of help.



As you read to your child, point out words that begin with the same letter as her name.

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What You Need

- Pieces of paper
- Paper bag

What to Do

- Say some sounds for letters, such as /p/, /h/ and /t/ and have your child write the letter that matches the sound.
- As you read to your child, point out words that begin with the same letter as her name: Megan and morning, Liza and land, Sophie and save. Have her find other words that begin with that sound.
- Write letters on pieces of paper and put them in a paper bag. Have your child take a piece of paper from the bag and say the name of the letter and the sound that it represents. Then have him say a word that begins with that sound.
- Sit with your child and play “I Spy.” Look around the room and say, “I spy something that starts with /s/. What is it?” If you like, add clues such as “We use it to cook our food.” (stove) “It’s where we wash the dishes.” (sink)

My Book

Many preschoolers like to talk and have a lot to say. Although most can't yet write words themselves, they enjoy dictating stories for others to write for them.

What You Need

- Paper
- Paper punch
- Safety scissors
- Pencil, pen, crayons
- Yarn, pipe cleaners or staples
- Paste

Making this book will help your child develop both spoken and written language skills and give him more practice using the small muscles in his hands.

What to Do

- Make a booklet of five or six pages. Your child can help punch holes close to one edge and thread yarn through the holes to keep the pages together. You can also bind the book with twisted pipe cleaners or you can staple the pages together.
- On the outside cover of the booklet, print your child's name. Explain to him that this is going to be a book about him.
- Let your child talk about what he will draw on each page. As he talks, print on the page what he says. Here are some examples:
 - Other people in my family
 - My favorite toys
 - My favorite books
 - My friends
 - My pet
 - My neighborhood
 - My home (or My bedroom)
- Encourage your child to read his books to family members and visitors.



Hands-on Math

Hands-on activities that involve counting, measuring and using number words are a good way to introduce your preschooler to math.

What You Need

- Blocks
- Dice or dominoes

What to Do

- Talk about numbers and use number concepts in daily routines with your child. For example:
 - “Let’s divide the dough into two parts so we can bake some cookies now and put the rest of the dough in the freezer for cookies next week.”
 - “We’re going to hang this picture six inches above the bookshelf in your room. Let’s use this ruler to measure.”
 - “How many plates do we need on the table? Let’s count: One for Mommy, one for Daddy and one for Jenny. How many plates does that make? Three! Great!”
- Talk about numbers that matter most to your child — her age, her address, her phone number, her height and weight. Focusing on these personal numbers helps your child learn many important math concepts, including:



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- Time (hours, days, months, years; older, younger; yesterday, today, tomorrow). To a young child, you might say, “At 2 o’clock, we’ll take a nap.” When you plan with a preschooler, you could point out, “It’s only three days until we go to Grandma’s house. Let’s put an X on the calendar so we’ll know the day we’re going.”

- Lengths (inches, feet; longer, taller, shorter): “This ribbon is too short to fit the present for Aunt Susan. Let’s cut a longer ribbon.”
- Weight (ounces, pounds, grams; heavier, lighter; using scales): “You already weigh 30 pounds. I can hardly lift such a big girl.”
- Where you live (addresses, telephone numbers): “These shiny numbers on our apartment door are 2-1-4. We live in apartment number 214.” Or: “When you go to play at Terry’s house, take this note along with you. It’s our phone number: 253-6711. Some day soon you will know our phone number so you can call me when you are at your friend’s.”

■ Provide opportunities for your child to learn math as he plays. For example:

- Playing with blocks can teach your child to classify objects by color and shape. Blocks can also help him to learn about depth, width, height and length.
- Playing games that have scoring, such as throwing balls into a basket, requires your child to count. Introduce him to games that use dice or dominoes. Have him roll the dice and count the dots. Let him try to roll the dice and match numbers.
- Counting favorite toys.

