

Education later in this chapter and in [Chapter 14](#)).

Social Development

During the preschool period, the separation-individuation process is completed. Preschoolers have overcome much of the anxiety associated with strangers and the fear of separation of earlier years. They relate to unfamiliar people easily and tolerate brief separations from their parents with little or no protest. However, they still need parental security, reassurance, guidance, and approval, especially when entering preschool or elementary school. Prolonged separation, such as that imposed by illness and hospitalization, is difficult, but preschoolers respond to anticipatory preparation and concrete explanation. They can cope with changes in daily routine much better than toddlers, although they may develop more imaginary fears. Preschoolers gain security and comfort from familiar objects, such as toys, dolls, or photographs of family members. They are able to work through many of their unresolved fears, fantasies, and anxieties through play, especially if guided with appropriate play objects (e.g., dolls, puppets) that represent family members, health care professionals, and other children.

Language

During the preschool years, language becomes more sophisticated and complex and becomes a major mode of communication and social interaction ([Fig. 12-2](#)). Through language, preschool children learn to express feelings of frustration or anger without acting them out. Both cognitive ability and environment—particularly, consistent role models—influence vocabulary, speech, and comprehension. Vocabulary increases dramatically, from 300 words at 2 years old to more than 2100 words at the end of 5 years. Sentence structure, grammatical usage, and intelligibility also advance to a more adult level. Language development during these early years predicts school readiness ([Harrison and McLeod, 2010](#)) and sets the stage for later success in school ([Reilly, Wake, Ukoumunne, et al, 2010](#)).