

Parents often worry about the imaginary playmates, not realizing how normal and useful they are. Parents need to be reassured that the child's fantasy is a sign of health that helps differentiate make-believe and reality. Parents can acknowledge the presence of the imaginary companion by calling him or her by name and even agreeing to simple requests such as setting an extra place at the table, but they should not allow the child to use the playmate to avoid punishment or responsibility. For example, if the child blames the companion for messing up a room, parents need to state clearly that the child is the only one they see; therefore, the child is responsible for cleaning up.

Children also benefit from play that occurs between them and a parent. **Mutual play** fosters development from birth through the school years and provides enriched opportunities for learning. Through mutual play, parents can provide tactile and kinesthetic experiences, maximize verbal and language abilities, and offer praise and encouragement for exploration of the world. In addition, mutual play encourages positive interactions between the parent and child, strengthening their relationship.

[Table 12-1](#) summarizes the major developmental achievements for children 3, 4, and 5 years old.

TABLE 12-1
Growth and Development During the Preschool Years

Physical	Gross Motor	Fine Motor	Language	Socialization	Cognition
3 Years Old					
Usual weight gain of 1.8 to 2.7 kg (4 to 6 lbs.) Average weight of 14.5 kg (32 lbs.) Usual gain in height of 7.5 cm (3 inches) per year Average height of 95 cm (3 feet, 1½ inches) May have	Rides tricycle Jumps off bottom step Stands on one foot for few seconds Goes up stairs using alternate feet; may still come down using both feet on	Builds tower of 9 to 10 cubes Builds bridge with three cubes Adeptly places small pellets in narrow-necked bottle In drawing, copies circle, imitates cross,	Has vocabulary of about 900 words Uses primarily "telegraphic" speech Uses complete sentences of three or four words Talks incessantly regardless of whether anyone is paying attention Repeats	Dresses self almost completely if helped with back buttons and told which shoe is right or left Pulls on shoes Has increased attention span Feeds self completely Can prepare simple meals, such as cold cereal and milk Can help set table; can dry dishes without breaking	Is in preconception phase Is egocentric thought behavior Has begun understanding of time; many things oriented Expresses thoughts about past and future as much as present, pretend