

The Growing Child: Preschool (4 to 5 Years)



Children progress at different rates. They have different interests, abilities, and personalities. But there are some common milestones most children reach from ages 4 to 5.

What can my child do at these ages?

As your child grows, you'll notice them developing new and exciting abilities.

A child age 4:

- Serves their own food or pours water, with adult supervision
- Catches a large ball
- Holds crayon or pencil between fingers and thumb (not a fist)
- Unbuttons some buttons
- Understands the difference between fantasy and reality
- Draws a person with three or more body parts

A child age 5:

- Sings, dances, or acts
- Hops on one foot
- Buttons some buttons
- Dresses themselves
- Writes some letters in their name
- Names some letters when you point to them
- May start to learn to ride a bicycle with training wheels

What can my child say?

Speech development in children is very exciting for parents. They can watch their children become social beings who can interact with others.

Most children at age 4:

- May put 4 or more words together into a sentence
- Says some words from a song, story, or nursery rhyme
- Will answer simple questions like "What is a marker for?"
- Knows a few colors
- Talks about at least one thing that happened during the day, like "I played soccer."

A child age 5:

- May put 6 to 8 words together into a sentence
- May know 4 or more colors
- Counts to 10
- Uses or recognizes simple rhymes (bat-cat, ball-tall)
- Tells a story they heard or made up with at least 2 events. For example, a cat was stuck in a tree and a firefighter saved it.
- Answers simple questions about a book or story after you read or tell it to them
- Keeps a conversation going with more than 3 back-and-forth exchanges

What does my child understand?

As a child's vocabulary gets larger, so does their understanding of the world around them. Children at this age begin to understand concepts and can compare abstract ideas.

A child age 4:

- Begins to understand time
- Begins to become more aware of people around them
- May obey parent's rules, but doesn't understand right from wrong

A child age 5:

- Has more understanding of time. Uses words about time, like "yesterday," "tomorrow," "morning," or "night."
- Is curious about real facts about the world

How will my child interact with others?

An important part of growing up is learning to interact and socialize with others. This can be a frustrating transition for the parent. Children go through different stages. Some of these are not always easy to handle.

A child age 4:

- Is very independent, wants to do things on their own
- Doesn't like to share
- Is moody. Mood swings are common.
- May be aggressive during mood swings and become aggressive to family members
- Has many fears
- May have imaginary friends
- Likes to explore the body and may play doctor
- Might "run away" or threaten to do so
- Fights with siblings
- Will often play with others in groups

A child age 5:

- Is generally more cooperative than a 4-year-old
- Is generally more responsible than a 4-year-old
- Is eager to please others and make them happy
- Has good manners
- Dresses themselves completely without help
- Gets along well with parents
- Likes to cook and play sports
- May become more attached to a parent as they start attending school

How can I encourage my child's social abilities?

You can help boost your preschool child's social abilities by:

- Offering compliments for good behavior and achievements
- Encouraging your child to talk to you and be open with their feelings
- Reading to your child, singing songs, and talking with them
- Spending quality time with your child and showing them new experiences
- Encouraging your child to ask questions and explore
- Encouraging physical activity with supervision
- Arranging times for your child to be with other children, such as in playgroups
- Giving your child the chance to make choices, when appropriate
- Using time-out for behavior that isn't acceptable
- Encouraging your child to express their anger in an appropriate manner
- Limiting TV time (or other screen time) to 1 to 2 hours a day. Encourage free time to be used for other activities.

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