

# your child @™

highlights of what's happening  
at this stage of your child's development...

## 4 years

This year, your child will finish preschool and get ready for kindergarten. It's a big jump, and with it, comes growing pains. Your child will challenge himself to learn new things—like staying dry through the night or tying his shoes. As he does, he will face frustration. Your encouragement and support can ease aggravation and help him accomplish his goals.

### your child's health

**take note:** According to the Academy of Pediatrics, you should let your doctor know if, by the time your child is 5, she exhibits any of the following:

- Very fearful, timid, or extremely aggressive behavior
- Unable to concentrate on one activity for more than five minutes
- Little interest in playing with other children
- General unhappiness or sadness much of the time
- Trouble eating, sleeping or using the toilet
- Can't tell the difference between fantasy and reality

#### The Well Visit

At your child's yearly check-up, her doctor may test her hearing and vision. Also, don't forget to check with the pediatrician about required booster doses for school entry.

#### Sleep

Your child probably sleeps between 10 to 12 hours per night, and no longer takes an afternoon nap.

Those things which most often cause children to wake in the middle of the night include:

- Bad/vivid dreams. If your child wakes in the night from a bad dream, comfort her until she is able to go back to sleep. You also may want to talk to her about the dream.
- Night Terrors. These are episodes in which a child may suddenly bolt upright in bed, cry, scream, moan, mumble, and thrash about with her eyes wide open, even though she is not truly awake. Do not wake your child. Rather, stay with her until the terror ends and she calms down.
- Bedwetting. Reward your child for dry nights, but do not punish her for wet nights. Give her lots of support. Seek professional help if problem persists.

#### Nutrition

Encourage healthy eating by offering:

- three meals per day, plus two small snacks
- small portions
- nutritious food
- explanation about why eating healthy is important for your body. Talk about how eating fruits, vegetables, lean meats and whole grains helps your body stay healthy and lean.
- chances for your child to plan meals and prepare foods. Take your child grocery shopping and let her pick out a new fruit to try. Cook healthy meals together—smoothies with fresh fruit, pizza with cheese, blueberry muffins. Visit an apple orchard or farm, to help your child understand about natural foods.
- a good example. If you chose healthy foods for yourself, your child will likely follow.

#### take note...

The AAP says to see your doctor if your child:

- stays dry at night for a while, but then begins to wet at night again and must go back to wearing training pants
- is 5 and still consistently wets the bed
- is completely toilet trained for at least 6 months but suddenly begins to have many accidents during the day and night.

### your child's growth and development

Your child should be able to do most or all of the following by the time he turns 5 years old:

#### Intellectually

- Use future tense (For example, "Tomorrow I am going to school." or "On my next birthday I will be 5.")
- Tell her full name and address
- Count ten or more objects

#### Socially / Emotionally:

- Want to be like her friends
- Exhibit greater independence, such as a willingness to visit a friend's house alone
- Easily agree to rules
- Enjoy singing, dancing and acting

#### Physically

- Hop on one leg
- Do somersaults
- Copy triangles and other geometric patterns

Sources: *Your Baby's First Year* and *Caring for Your Baby and Young Child*, American Academy of Pediatrics, Steven P. Shelov, MD, FAAP, editor in chief; *Understanding Children*, Civitas and Richard Saul Wurman; *KidBasics*, Civitas; *Healthy Sleep, Happy Child*, Marc Weissbluth, MD.

Civitas thanks Parents as Teachers, an international early childhood parent education and family support program, for their ongoing support.

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### nurturing your child

#### Discipline

*Rules for all ages.* Your child will act out periodically. Whatever the reason, you should handle discipline with the same set of rules:

- Don't say "no". If you constantly tell your child "no", he will stop listening. Use positive wording instead. Say, "Let's jump off the pillows instead of the bed." And, only say no when necessary. Give your child as much freedom to explore as possible.
- Give choices. Choices allow your child to feel in control of his world. But make the choices limited so they are not overwhelming. "Would you like to do a puzzle or read a book after dinner?"
- Make your expectations clear. Set up rules that are easy to understand and enforce them time and again. For example, when dinner starts, tell your child that he can't have dessert unless he eats his vegetables.

*Facing frustrations.* Children this age may fall apart when they can't do certain activities on their own—color in the lines, do a puzzle, put on their shoes. To help prevent these meltdowns, you should:

- understand your child's limits — be aware of what situations might frustrate your child, and suggest your child take time away from difficult tasks.
- offer options that might calm your child. Make yourself aware of activities or behaviors that help your child relax (taking a walk around, breathing deep) and direct him towards them when you see his frustration rising.

Do not, however, do the task for your child. This will prevent your child from learning how to cope with frustration as well as master the skill he is developing.

### your child's safety

#### In the car

Your child should ride in his booster seat until he reaches 80 pounds and 4'9" tall.

#### Around the house

Because your child is more independent at home, safety precautions must be taken to assure he doesn't get hurt while on his own.

- Never leave your child unattended near water, even if he knows how to swim.
- Remove cleaning substances, medicines, vitamins, toxic houseplants out of the child's reach.
- Keep hot food and drink away from your child's reach.
- Keep pots on back burners of the stove.

#### Home fire drills

Plan and practice. In addition to a working fire extinguisher and smoke detectors, your family should have a plan for members to follow in the event of a fire.

- Teach your child that if he is trapped in a room he should lie on the floor close to a bed. This is the first place firefighters will look for him.
- Create several escape routes from the house and select a place to meet right after leaving the home.
- Conduct fire drills every few months. Include any other people who regularly care for your child.



*Born Learning™* is a public engagement and material distribution campaign that provides important information about what young children need every day to ensure quality early learning. Designed to support you in your critical role as a child's first teacher, Born Learning materials are made available through the efforts of United Way, United Way Success By 6 and Civitas.

For more information, visit us online at [bornlearning.org](http://bornlearning.org).



Virginia Coalition for Child Abuse Prevention