



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime



3 Years

INDEPENDENCE & IMAGINATION

Your child at 3-4 years

At 3 years old, your child is talking more, playing with friends, and starting to understand how other people feel.

What your child can do

Your child's **language is growing fast:**

- They can use sentences of 3 to 5 words and may know over 1,000 words
- Most people outside your family can understand what they say
- They ask "who," "what," "where," and "why" questions constantly — they want to understand everything

Your child is **moving with more confidence:**

- They can run, jump, climb, kick a ball, and go up and down stairs one foot at a time
- They are getting better at using their hands for drawing, using scissors, and getting dressed

Your child is **growing in play and social skills:**

- They love pretend play and can act out creative stories, playing roles like parent, doctor, or superhero
- They enjoy playing with other kids and are getting better at sharing and taking turns — though they still need some help
- They can follow simple 2- to 3-step directions like "Put on your shoes and wait by the door."

Your child is **beginning to understand feelings:**

- They notice how other people feel and may try to comfort a friend who is sad
- They can recognize some letters, count a few objects, and sort things by color or shape

Every child develops at their own pace. Your child may reach milestones faster or slower than other children and still be growing just fine.



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime



What you can do

Read stories together. Even a few minutes make a big difference. Ask questions about the story and let your child tell it back in their own words.

Keep talking and introduce new words. The more words your child hears in everyday conversation, the more they will learn.

Encourage pretend play. Let your child lead. Dress-up, blocks, and toy figures all help build creativity and social skills.

Talk about feelings they feel and see. Help your child name their own feelings and notice others'. "It looks like your friend is sad. How do you think we can help?"

Give simple choices when you can. Offering two options helps your child feel in control. "Would you like carrots or green beans?"

Set clear and calm limits. Be consistent with rules and stay calm when your child acts out. Short, simple consequences work best at this age.

Get moving every day. Aim for at least 60 minutes of active play. Running, jumping, and climbing are great for both body and brain.

Other things to know and try

- Give your child regular time to play with other kids. This builds friendship skills and helps them learn to share and solve problems
- Limit screen time — choose high-quality, age-appropriate content and watch together when you can
- Simple daily routines around meals, bedtime, and transitions help children feel safe and calm
- Count things you see every day and point out letters on signs and in books — keep it playful and fun

At this visit

The care team will measure your child's length, weight, and head size, and check their heart, eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. Your healthcare provider will discuss vaccines with you at today's visit.

The team will talk with you about your child's development, sleep, eating, and safety — and there will be time for any questions or concerns you have.

What comes next

Between 3 and 4 years, your child will learn many new words and start using longer sentences. They will ask even more questions and want to understand how and why things work. Friendships will become more important, and they may start to have one or two close friends. Big feelings can still be hard. Meltdowns may still happen, especially when they are tired or hungry. You can help your child grow and thrive by reading every day, getting outside to play, and keeping a simple routine.

Have more questions?

Talk to your child's healthcare provider or one of the professionals supporting your family.

©2026 by the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. All rights reserved.

Receive messages like this on your phone

Text **SPARKS**
to **274 448**