



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime



4 Years **ON THEIR WAY**

Your child at 4–5 Years

At 4 years old, your child is full of energy and curiosity. They love to talk, ask questions, make friends, and learn new things every day.

What your child can do

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

- They can use sentences of 4 to 6 words and tell stories about things that happened to them
- Most people can understand almost everything they say
- They ask "why" and "how" questions all the time and want real answers

Your child is **moving in new ways**:

- They can hop on one foot, catch a bounced ball, and use children's scissors
- They are getting better at drawing shapes and may be able to draw a person

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

- Pretend play is very creative now — they can act out long stories with made-up characters and settings
- Friendships are very important, and they may have a best friend
- They can often work out small conflicts with friends on their own
- They can follow 3-step directions and are learning the rules of simple games

Your child is **growing emotionally**:

- They are getting better at understanding how others feel and may try to help a friend who is upset
- They are starting to use words to solve problems instead of acting out
- They can count 10 or more objects and recognize letters, especially the ones in their name

Every child grows at their own pace. Your child may reach milestones sooner or later than other kids and still be doing just fine.

What you can do

- **Read together as much as you can.** Ask your child what they think will happen next. This builds language and thinking skills.
- **Ask open-ended questions**, like "What was the best part of your day?" This gives your child a chance to think and share.
- **Make time for pretend play.** Art supplies, blocks, and dress-up clothes help build imagination and problem-solving skills.
- **Talk about feelings** — yours, theirs, and others'. Help your child find words for how they feel. "It looks like you are frustrated. What can we do?" This builds important skills over time.



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- **When your child has a conflict with a friend, think it through together.** Asking "What could you do next?" builds skills they will use for years.
- **Around this age, children can start to understand death.** Use simple, honest words to explain. Sharing your own sadness helps children feel less alone and builds trust.
- **Calm, consistent limits help children feel safe.** Explain the reason behind rules in simple terms and stay calm when your child pushes back.
- **Running, jumping, and moving each day is good for the body and the brain.** Group sports can be fun — and learning self-control along the way is all part of growing up.
- **Playing with other children builds friendship and sharing skills.** Ask your child who they want to play with — this gives them a voice in their social world.

Other things to know and try

- Build learning into everyday activities—you can help your child count objects or practice writing their name
- Point out letters on signs when you're out and about
- Play simple board games to build patience, turn-taking, and rule-following in a fun way
- Take trips to the library, park, or farmer's market to spark curiosity and build vocabulary
- Limit screen time and make sure what they watch is right for their age

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 growth, sleep, eating, and safety — and there will be time for your questions.

What comes next

Between 4 and 5 years, your child will get ready for kindergarten in big ways. Their sentences will get longer, and they will love telling stories and jokes. They will start to recognize more letters and numbers and may begin to write simple words. Friendships will become even more important, and your child will get much better at taking turns and following rules. They will also be able to do more on their own — like getting dressed, brushing their teeth, and helping with simple chores. Reading every day, playing with other kids, and keeping a simple routine will help them feel ready for school.

Have more questions?

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

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