

At a Glance

- Three-year-olds usually get better at using fine motor skills to do things like draw with a crayon.
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- They may be able to use up to five or six words in a sentence as they approach age 4.
 - Kids this age may also start to be more interested in playing with other kids.

It can be hard not to compare your 3-year-old with other kids—or to listen when other people tell you what they think he should be doing at this age. If you're not completely sure what skills are typical for 3-year-olds, check out these developmental milestones.

You'll get a better idea of which skills are typically expected to develop this year. You'll also learn whether there are possible developmental trouble spots to discuss with the pediatrician.

Physical Milestones

This year children are working to get better at the gross and fine motor [skills they developed as 2-year-olds](#). They start doing some new things, too. Most 3-year-olds learn to do things like these by the time they're 4:

Gross Motor Skills

- Run and walk without tripping over own feet
- Jump, hop and stand on one foot
- Walk backwards and climb stairs one foot after the other
- Kick and throw a small ball; catch a bigger ball most of the time
- Climb
- Start pedaling a tricycle or bike

Fine Motor Skills

- Draw a circle with a crayon, pencil or marker (Get [tips to help young kids learn to write](#).)
- Play with toys with small moving parts and buttons
- Turn the pages of a book one at a time
- Build with Mega Bloks and create towers of six or more blocks
- Work door handles and twist-on bottle tops

Learn more about [how coordination and motor skills develop at different ages](#).

Cognitive Milestones

This year, children [start learning new things](#) about the world. They often think of creative approaches to tasks and activities. By the end of this year, typical cognitive milestones include being able to do things like:

- Name the eight colors in a crayon box (red, yellow, blue, green, orange, purple, brown, black)
- Recite numbers to 10 and start counting groups of things
- Start understanding time in terms of morning, night and days of the week
- Remember and retell favorite stories
- Understand and talk about things that are the “same” and “different”
- Follow simple three-step directions (“Brush your teeth, wash your face and put on your pajamas.”)

Read [tips to help your child follow directions](#).

Language Milestones

By the end of the year, 3-year-olds typically have a lot to say. They also understand more of what *you* say—but [may not always follow your directions](#). Kids this age typically use language like this:

- Use the basic rules of grammar, but make mistakes with words that don’t follow the rules, like saying “mouses” instead of “mice”
- Speak well enough that most strangers can understand what they’re saying
- Use five or six words in a sentence and have a two- to three-sentence conversation
- Tell you their name, the name of at least one friend and the names of most common objects
- Understand words like “in,” “on,” “behind” and “next”
- Ask “wh” questions, like “why,” to get more information about things

Social and Emotional Milestones

Three-year-olds are an interesting mix of independent, playful and fearful. By the end of their fourth year, most 3-year-olds do these things:

- Be interested—although hesitant—about going new places and trying new things
- Start to play with children (as opposed to only playing side-by-side)
- Start being able to comfort and show concern for an unhappy friend without prompting

- Take turns while playing (even if they don't like to)
- Play "real life" with toys like play kitchens
- Start finding simple ways to solve arguments and disagreements
- Show (but maybe not name) a variety of emotions beyond happy, sad and mad