3-year-olds

Growing and Moving

WEIGHT: 25-44 pounds
HEIGHT: 34-43 inches
• develops a taller, thinner, adult-like appearance
• develops a full set of baby teeth
• sleeps through most nights without wetting the bed (with occasional accidents)
• uses the toilet with some help (many boys may not be ready until age 3-1/2 years)
• puts on shoes (but cannot tie laces)
• dresses self with some help (buttons, snaps, zippers)
• feeds self (with some spilling)
• throws a ball overhand
• tries to catch and kick a large ball forward
• jumps with both feet; walks short distance on tiptoe
• climbs up and down a small slide by self
• enjoys slow paced swinging
• pedals a tricycle
• holds a crayon with first two fingers and thumb.
• enjoys playing with clay or play dough (pounds, rolls, and squeezes it)
• enjoys playing in sand or water (pouring, dumping, sifting)

Thinking and Learning

• understands “now,” “soon,” and “later” – but not yesterday or tomorrow
• asks who, what, where, and why questions
• stacks 5-7 blocks
• sorts objects by shape and size
• puts together a 6-piece puzzle
• draws a circle and square
• recognizes everyday sounds
• interested in similarities and differences, especially with animals unique features
• identifies common colors: red, blue, yellow and green
• can touch and count 2-3 objects – usually out loud
• likes realistic toys, but can pretend that a block is a cup, or a wash cloth is a hat
Listening, Talking, and Reading

- 75-80 percent of speech is understandable; talks in complete sentences of 3–5 words. “Mommy is drinking juice.” “There’s a big dog.”
- stumbles over words sometimes—usually not a sign of stuttering
- enjoys listening to stories, but only for about 8–12 minutes
- likes familiar stories told without any changes in words
- enjoys retelling simple stories from pictures or books
- delights in repeating words, sounds and simple rhymes
- enjoys singing and can carry a simple tune

Feeling and Relating

- accepts suggestions and follows simple directions
- sometimes shows preference for one parent (often the parent of the opposite sex)
- seeks adult attention and approval
- enjoys helping with simple tasks
- can make simple choices between two things
- enjoys making others laugh and being silly
- enjoys playing alone, but nearby or alongside other children
- spends a great deal of time watching, observing and imitating other children and adults
- enjoys playing with other children briefly, but still does not cooperate or share well
- enjoys hearing stories about self
- likes to play house, but not yet ready for complex pretend play

LET’S TALK!

Ideas to help children build communication skills

Give children specific feedback. Rather than make general comments, try giving specific directions or feedback, “It looks like the wagon’s wheel is stuck. What happens if you lift it? What else could you try?” Talk together about what works and what doesn’t work.

Toys

- nesting toys, cups that stack, puzzles (3–6 pieces)
- matching games, pegboard
- large wheeled toys, tricycle, slide, wagon
- small table and chairs
- crayons, felt tip markers, play dough, glue and paper, paint, paint brushes
- puppets, toy animals, dolls
- balls (different sizes), blocks (medium and large)
**IDEAS TO ENCOURAGE DEVELOPMENT**

- Help little fingers learn to do small tasks by stringing beads, stacking small blocks or buttoning a coat.
- Make brushing teeth a part of your child’s daily routine.
- Be patient with toileting — accidents will still happen for a while.
- Encourage sand and water play.
- Show your child how to throw, catch, and kick a large, soft ball.
- Show your child how to hop like a rabbit, tiptoe like a bird, waddle like a duck, slither like a snake, and run like a deer.
- Read together daily. Demonstrate that books are read from left to right, point out that pictures connect to words, and discuss how books have titles, authors and illustrators.
- Ask your child to tell you a story or retell the story using pictures as clues.
- Have many back-and-forth conversations, use short sentences, ask questions, and listen.
- Add new information to your child’s sentences. “Yes, that’s a flower — it’s a tall, red flower and it smells so lovely.”
- Talk about colors, numbers, and shapes in your everyday conversations. “We need ONE egg. That’s a RED car. The butter is in this SQUARE box.”
- Take a nature walk; look for shapes, sizes, colors, textures, smells and sounds.
- Teach your child to memorize his or her first and last name.
- Sing simple songs and silly rhymes.
- Look at baby pictures together and talk about “when you were a baby.”
- Ask for help with simple tasks such as putting the napkins by each plate, socks in the drawer, or stirring the muffin batter.

**BOOKS**

**Books for Children**

- Bear Snores On  
  Karma Wilson and Jane Chapman
- Caps for Sale  
  Esphyr Slobodkina
- Chica Chica Boom Boom  
  Bill Martin Jr. and John Archambault
- If You Give a Mouse a Cookie  
  Laura Joffe Numeroff and Felicia Bond
- Is Your Mama a Llama?  
  Deborah Guarino and Steven Kellogg
- Harold and the Purple Crayon  
  Crockett Johnson
- Napping House  
  Audrey Wood and Don Wood
- Peter’s Chair  
  Ezra Jack Keats
- The Rainbow Fish  
  Marcus Pfister and J. Alison James
- The Snowy Day  
  Ezra Jack Keats
- The Very Hungry Caterpillar  
  Eric Carle

**A Word on Development**

Every child is unique. Each child’s learning and growth rates may differ slightly from other children the same age. If, however, you notice a child is unable to do many of the skills listed for his or her age group, you may wish to talk with a health professional.

In Iowa, you may request a free evaluation and assessment from Early ACCESS at 1-888-425-4371. [www.iafamilysupportnetwork.org/early-access-iowa](http://www.iafamilysupportnetwork.org/early-access-iowa)

If your child has special needs, early help can make a difference.

**Resources**

Iowa State University Extension and Outreach
- Human Sciences [www.extension.iastate.edu/humansciences](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/humansciences)
- Extension Store [store.extension.iastate.edu](http://store.extension.iastate.edu)

Search “Ages and Stages” for information about specific development milestones.

The developmental information provided in this bulletin has been combined from a variety of professional resources to help you understand your child's overall growth. It is not a standardized measurement tool.

Written by Lesia Oesterreich, Human Sciences Specialist, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach.