

Three to four years

Concentration and listening

They are still better at concentrating on something they have chosen but are becoming more able to switch their focus to something you are saying/want them to do.

They might also find it harder to concentrate in groups of children or if there are other things going on around them but they should be able to sit and enjoy a story. They should be staying at activities for longer rather than 'flitting' about from one thing to another.

Understanding words and sentences

They can understand when you use longer or more complicated sentences but will still need you to use a gesture to help when they hear a new word. They can understand simple question words like 'what', 'who' or 'where' and sometimes 'why' but mainly when the question is linked to the here and now eg "what is on your t-shirt", "who do you want to sit by" or "where are the bubbles going?"

Using words and sentences

They should now be able to use sentences with at least 4 words regularly. You should be able to have a simple; connected conversation together, taking turns and sticking to the same topic.

They should still use new words regularly (though this is likely to be at a slower rate than previously)

They are likely to be asking lots of questions!

Speech Sounds

You should be able to understand what they say most of the time but they are still likely to mix up some of the sounds, especially in longer, more complicated words. Here are the most typical:

(3 – 3 and a half)

k, g, r, w, l, f, th, sh, ch and dz may still be tricky

(3 and a half - 4)

sh, z, v, ch, j, l, r, and th may still be tricky

2 consonants together eg fl, sp, sm, gr, str will still be tricky

Possibly starting to use k, g, s, f

Big muscles and movement skills (gross motor skills)

By the age of 4, most children will be able to hop and stand on one foot for up to five seconds. They can go up and downstairs without support as well as move backwards and forwards with agility. They can kick a ball forward, throw a ball overhand and catch a bounced ball most of the time.

Hand and finger skills (these can be referred to as Fine motor skills)

By the age of 4, most children should have a clear hand preference, picking most things up with their dominant hand. They should hold a pencil with their thumb, index and middle finger and draw a person with a head and several other body parts. They can copy vertical and horizontal lines and circles, and thread laces through a card. In addition they should be able to use scissors to cut along a straight line, and be able to feed themselves with a spoon or fork.

Making sense of what you're looking at (this can be referred to as visual perception)

By the age of 4, most children should be able to put several items in order of size. They can copy a simple pattern of toy blocks (e.g. three in a row and one on top)

Social and emotional development

At this age, children develop quickly as they gain greater awareness of themselves and the world around them.

Self-control – between 3 and 4 years of age, children are usually less rebellious than they were at two and are usually friendly and helpful. They have reached some level of self control and are now able to use words to express what they want. Children also become more independent.

Emotions – Separation anxiety has usually faded away, but it is still quite possible that they will dissolve into tears when first setting off to pre-school or nursery. Three year olds are capable of being anxious or jealous for surprisingly long periods of time.

Imagination – A child's imagination begins to develop between the ages of three and a half to four years, and they may have frightening dreams. Their biggest fear is that their parent or carer will abandon them, especially at night. Other fears can also set in, e.g. of spiders, the dark.

Play – at this stage, children are more able to enjoy playing on their own. They also become more interested in other children and begin to interact more directly with them. Children constantly move between real life and fantasy play. They are now more likely to share toys and take turn, initiate or join in play with other children and begin dramatic play.

Relationships with other children – Children are very interested in relationships with other children. They develop friendship, enjoy imaginative play with others and show interest in exploring gender differences. Children's friends begin to have a real influence on their behaviours and preferences.

Behaviour Management

At this age trying to distract your child is no longer an effective way of managing their behaviour. It is also unlikely that reasoning will work – children generally need to be older before they are able to understand this.

However, bargaining can be successful, for example "If you do this now, we can do that afterwards"

A 'calm-down' or 'time-out' chair may be introduced to help your child regain some self-control.

As a general guide a time out should be one minute for each year, e.g. four minutes for a four year old.

Concerns? Check out the following advice:

Carry out activities on the **Balance Sheet** sheet if your toddler:

- Has more difficulty with balance and big muscle and movement skills than peers

Carry out activities on the **Sensory Processing** sheet if your toddler:

- Does not like playing on playground equipment
- becomes very upset and distressed either by messy play or the textures of clothes
- Your child is easily distressed by loud noises

Carry out activities on **Dressing Skills** sheet and the **Developing Hand Skills** sheet if your child:

- Is unable to attempt to do up their clothes using buttons or zips

Carry out activities on the **Learning to Ride a Tricycle** sheet if your toddler:

- Cannot pedal a bike

Carry out the activities on the **Developing Pre-writing Skills** sheet and the **Developing Hand Skills** sheet if your child:

- Cannot draw straight or vertical lines or circles and does not hold a crayon pencil

Carry out the activities on the **Making Your Home Safe** sheet if you:

- Feel your child is unsafe in your home

Carry out the activities on the **Car Safety** sheet if you:

- Feel your child is unsafe travelling in your car

Carry out the activities on the **First Words** sheet and the **Listening and Attention** sheet if your child:

- Often looks puzzled and/or doesn't do what you've asked

Carry out the activities on the **Sentence Building** sheet if your child:

- Doesn't use sentences which are at least three to our words long by three and a half
- Isn't using sentences of four to six words at four

Carry out the activities on the **Speech Sounds** sheet if your child:

- Is difficult to understand when talking

Refer to CFHDevon if your child:

- Has continued difficulty walking as far as peers, possibly complaining that the legs are painful
- Is struggling to get their words out (stammering)

Carry out the activities on the **Potty Training sheet** if your child:

- Has continued difficulty staying dry throughout the day
- Appears to be slower than their peers

Carry out the activities on the **Ways to play sheet** if your child:

- Needs more support than their peers to play
- Does not engage with toys easily

Carry out the activities on the **Sleep sheet** if your child:

- Has difficulty settling to sleep
- Wakes frequently in the night