

Is it Developmentally Appropriate?

Facilitating Learning at Home



A Home/School Conversation about Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)

In early childhood education, “Developmentally Appropriate Practice” is a term that describes beneficial learning activities for each level of a young child’s development. It doesn’t matter if children are in school or learning outside of school, if schools are open or closed, families can select developmentally appropriate activities that help their children learn more and grow more.

When families help children learn outside of school, developmentally appropriate experiences and expectations are a very important part of a child’s learning habits and abilities.

Parents and families know their children best. However, it is hard to know how to select learning activities or create “teachable moments” where your child can learn from you and the life your family has created. Many activities look cute but might not be the best match for your child’s developmental level. With the expertise of teachers and some information about childhood development, you will be able to select developmentally appropriate learning activities that look like fun and games.

When reading any description of childhood developmental milestones, it is important to understand that no child is at the same learning point, even if they are the exact same age. Families, their child’s doctors and educators are the best team to share information and make decisions about where a child is on any developmental scale. If a learning activity is too hard, a child can get frustrated and may get angry or give up which creates a negative feeling about learning. If activities are too easy, a child becomes bored and is unlikely to pay attention and be motivated to learn. The magic space is a “*developmentally appropriate*” activity because we want the activity to be both realistic and challenging enough so learning happens and the brain grows strong!

So, how does a parent select developmentally appropriate activities that help their child learn? This document provides information on the general developmental stages of children from preschool to third grade and some questions to ask yourself as you determine what learning activities are right for your child and your family.

Selecting Developmentally Appropriate Activities to Help Your Child Learn

Age of Child	Focus of Development	Ask yourself: Is this a good activity to do with my child (Developmentally Appropriate)? If you answer yes to any of the questions, then it shows quality.
3-5 years	The ages of 3-5 are known as the “Magic Years” because children use more words, their imagination soars, their bodies start to get stronger, they can plan and create. Attention span develops up to 10 to 15 minutes, but this takes time to develop over these two years. Three-year-olds will have about 6-8 minutes.  Watch digital media with your child because they learn from watching & talking with you. Limit screen time and use only high-quality programming. Viewing with your child is best when possible. Young children learn best when they can experience what they saw on the screen in the real world, so re-teach what was presented on the screen in a real-world, hands-on way.	○ Does this activity allow your child to create with materials such as paints, markers, crayons? ○ Does this activity ask you to look for problem solving opportunities and then ask your child for some ideas? ○ Does this activity ask your child to write or attempt to write in a meaningful way? ○ Does this activity ask your child to pretend play with different props? ○ Does this activity ask your child to use numbers in a meaningful or fun way? ○ Does this activity ask your child to use their whole body to play? ○ Does this activity ask your child to create a game and rules for you to play together? ○ Does this activity ask your child to learn a new song or make one up? ○ Does this activity ask your child to use their fingers in stacking, building, legos, or other quiet activities? ○ Does this activity ask your child to create their own stories and you to write them down for them? ○ Does this activity ask your child to use their imagination? 

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5-6 years	Children in this age group enjoy pushing the limits on what their bodies can do. They want to know how high they can jump, how fast they can run, or how far they can throw.  They begin to build fine motor skills that will assist in helping the child begin handwriting, cutting, and drawing. They are interested in forming relationships with their peers and adults. They are starting to be concerned with how others feel about them and how they feel about others. They are also learning to problem solve on their own but will need some assistance from adults They are building language and literacy skills that will later turn into reading and spelling. Watch digital media with your child. Co-viewing is best when possible. Young children learn best when they can experience what they hear and see on the screen in the real world.	- Does the activity include a safe place and the freedom for the child to jump, run, and throw while also teaching boundaries and limits? - Does the activity allow the child to use their hands, including activities that allow the child to freely write, draw and cut paper? - Does the activity allow for discussion and practice around group play and healthy relationships? - Does the activity allow the adult to offer praise or encouragement to the child? - Does the activity allow for problem solving with assistance and encouragement from an adult? - Does the activity introduce letter recognition, letter-sound recognition and sight word recognition? 

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6-7 years	The child enjoys exploring, reading, reasoning, problem solving, communicating through conversation, writing and developing lasting friendships.  The child is building on social skills and physical abilities. Competition should be at an individual level. For example: meeting their own goals and doing better. Show that you care about their needs, interests and their relationship with you. Demonstrate genuine enthusiasm for the task at hand. Encourage persistence, support the child when they try new tasks. Watch digital media with your child. Limit screen time and allow only high-quality programming. Co-viewing is best when possible. Young children learn best when they can experience what they hear and see on the screen in the real world.	○ Does the child have a desire to read? ○ Does the child have the motivation to solve mathematic problems? ○ Does this activity allow the child to use mental representations and think in concepts of height, length, etc.? ○ Does this physical activity promote cooperation and validation? ○ Does this activity build on empathy skills, express respect and appreciation for diversity? ○ Does this activity help to develop collaboration with others? ○ Does this activity help build a sense of connection between the child and another person (an adult or another child)? 

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7-8 Years	Physical, mental and social skills are rapidly developing. Attention Span is about 16 minutes. Screen Time should be limited to about 1.5 hours a day. The child enjoys answering open-ended questions, discussions about the family's values, making independent decisions, uses a vocabulary of several thousand words, and solves more complex problems. The child is emotionally sensitive and may have strong emotional reactions.  The child is very curious about the world we live in. He enjoys projects and play that build on interest about the world around him. The child is developing morals and a value system. Show support by talking with your child about future goals, responsibility, and patience. Take time to have fun with your child such as playing board games and reading.	○ Does this activity help to build a sense of responsibility? ○ Does this activity allow him to express experiences or thoughts? ○ Does this activity help build concern for others? ○ Does this activity help build self-control? ○ Does this activity help develop independence? ○ Does this activity aid in understanding his/her place in the world? ○ Is this cultural experience centered around the child's interest? ○ Does this activity have clear rules and directions to follow? 

Your Child at 4 Years



Child's Name _____

Child's Age _____

Today's Date _____

Milestones matter! How your child plays, learns, speaks, acts, and moves offers important clues about his or her development. Check the milestones your child has reached by age 4. Take this with you and talk with your child's doctor at every well-child visit about the milestones your child has reached and what to expect next.

What Most Children Do by this Age:

Social/Emotional

- ☐ Enjoys doing new things
- ☐ Plays "Mom" and "Dad"
- ☐ Is more and more creative with make-believe play
- ☐ Would rather play with other children than by himself
- ☐ Cooperates with other children
- ☐ Often can't tell what's real and what's make-believe
- ☐ Talks about what she likes and what she is interested in

Language/Communication

- ☐ Knows some basic rules of grammar, such as correctly using "he" and "she"
- ☐ Sings a song or says a poem from memory such as the "Itsy Bitsy Spider" or the "Wheels on the Bus"
- ☐ Tells stories
- ☐ Can say first and last name

Cognitive (learning, thinking, problem-solving)

- ☐ Names some colors and some numbers
- ☐ Understands the idea of counting
- ☐ Starts to understand time
- ☐ Remembers parts of a story
- ☐ Understands the idea of "same" and "different"
- ☐ Draws a person with 2 to 4 body parts
- ☐ Uses scissors
- ☐ Starts to copy some capital letters
- ☐ Plays board or card games
- ☐ Tells you what he thinks is going to happen next in a book

Movement/Physical Development

- ☐ Hops and stands on one foot up to 2 seconds

- ☐ Catches a bounced ball most of the time
- ☐ Pours, cuts with supervision, and mashes own food

You Know Your Child Best.

Act early if you have concerns about the way your child plays, learns, speaks, acts, or moves, or if your child:

- ☐ Is missing milestones
- ☐ Can't jump in place
- ☐ Has trouble scribbling
- ☐ Shows no interest in interactive games or make-believe
- ☐ Ignores other children or doesn't respond to people outside the family
- ☐ Resists dressing, sleeping, and using the toilet
- ☐ Can't retell a favorite story
- ☐ Doesn't follow 3-part commands
- ☐ Doesn't understand "same" and "different"
- ☐ Doesn't use "me" and "you" correctly
- ☐ Speaks unclearly
- ☐ Loses skills he once had

Tell your child's doctor or nurse if you notice any of these signs of possible developmental delay and ask for a developmental screening.

If you or the doctor is still concerned

1. Ask for a referral to a specialist and,
2. Call any local public elementary school for a free evaluation to find out if your child can get services to help.

For more information, go to cdc.gov/Concerned.

DON'T WAIT.
Acting early can make a real difference!



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Learn the Signs. Act Early.



Download CDC's
Milestone Tracker App



Help Your Child Learn and Grow

You can help your child learn and grow. Talk, read, sing, and play together every day. Below are some activities to enjoy with your 4-year-old child today.



What You Can Do for Your 4-Year-Old:

- ☐ Play make-believe with your child. Let her be the leader and copy what she is doing.
- ☐ Suggest your child pretend play an upcoming event that might make him nervous, like going to preschool or staying overnight at a grandparent's house.
- ☐ Give your child simple choices whenever you can. Let your child choose what to wear, play, or eat for a snack. Limit choices to 2 or 3.
- ☐ During play dates, let your child solve her own problems with friends, but be nearby to help out if needed.
- ☐ Encourage your child to use words, share toys, and take turns playing games of one another's choice.
- ☐ Give your child toys to build imagination, like dress-up clothes, kitchen sets, and blocks.
- ☐ Use good grammar when speaking to your child. Instead of "Mommy wants you to come here," say, "I want you to come here."
- ☐ Use words like "first," "second," and "finally" when talking about everyday activities. This will help your child learn about sequence of events.
- ☐ Take time to answer your child's "why" questions. If you don't know the answer, say "I don't know," or help your child find the answer in a book, on the Internet, or from another adult.
- ☐ When you read with your child, ask him to tell you what happened in the story as you go.
- ☐ Say colors in books, pictures, and things at home. Count common items, like the number of snack crackers, stairs, or toy trains.
- ☐ Teach your child to play outdoor games like tag, follow the leader, and duck, duck, goose.
- ☐ Play your child's favorite music and dance with your child. Take turns copying each other's moves.

Milestones adapted from *CARING FOR YOUR BABY AND YOUNG CHILD: BIRTH TO AGE 5*, Fifth Edition, edited by Steven Sheiow and Tanya Remer Altmann © 1991, 1993, 1998, 2004, 2009 by the American Academy of Pediatrics and *BRIGHT FUTURES: GUIDELINES FOR HEALTH SUPERVISION OF INFANTS, CHILDREN, AND ADOLESCENTS*, Third Edition, edited by Joseph Hagan, Jr., Judith S. Shaw, and Paula M. Duncan, 2008, Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics.

This milestone checklist is not a substitute for a standardized, validated developmental screening tool.

www.cdc.gov/ActEarly | 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)



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Your Child at 5 Years



Child's Name _____

Child's Age _____

Today's Date _____

Milestones matter! How your child plays, learns, speaks, acts, and moves offers important clues about his or her development. Check the milestones your child has reached by age 5. Take this with you and talk with your child's doctor at every well-child visit about the milestones your child has reached and what to expect next.

What Most Children Do by this Age:

Social/Emotional

- ☐ Wants to please friends
- ☐ Wants to be like friends
- ☐ More likely to agree with rules
- ☐ Likes to sing, dance, and act
- ☐ Is aware of gender
- ☐ Can tell what's real and what's make-believe
- ☐ Shows more independence (for example, may visit a next-door neighbor by himself [adult supervision is still needed])
- ☐ Is sometimes demanding and sometimes very cooperative

Language/Communication

- ☐ Speaks very clearly
- ☐ Tells a simple story using full sentences
- ☐ Uses future tense; for example, "Grandma will be here."
- ☐ Says name and address

Cognitive (learning, thinking, problem-solving)

- ☐ Counts 10 or more things
- ☐ Can draw a person with at least 6 body parts
- ☐ Can print some letters or numbers
- ☐ Copies a triangle and other geometric shapes
- ☐ Knows about things used every day, like money and food

Movement/Physical Development

- ☐ Stands on one foot for 10 seconds or longer
- ☐ Hops; may be able to skip
- ☐ Can do a somersault
- ☐ Uses a fork and spoon and sometimes a table knife
- ☐ Can use the toilet on her own
- ☐ Swings and climbs

You Know Your Child Best.

Act early if you have concerns about the way your child plays, learns, speaks, acts, or moves, or if your child:

- ☐ Is missing milestones
- ☐ Doesn't show a wide range of emotions
- ☐ Shows extreme behavior (unusually fearful, aggressive, shy or sad)
- ☐ Unusually withdrawn and not active
- ☐ Is easily distracted, has trouble focusing on one activity for more than 5 minutes
- ☐ Doesn't respond to people, or responds only superficially
- ☐ Can't tell what's real and what's make-believe
- ☐ Doesn't play a variety of games and activities
- ☐ Can't give first and last name
- ☐ Doesn't use plurals or past tense properly
- ☐ Doesn't talk about daily activities or experiences
- ☐ Doesn't draw pictures
- ☐ Can't brush teeth, wash and dry hands, or get undressed without help
- ☐ Loses skills he once had

Tell your child's doctor or nurse if you notice any of these signs of possible developmental delay and ask for a developmental screening.

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What You Can Do for Your 5-Year-Old:

- ☐ Continue to arrange play dates, trips to the park, or play groups. Give your child more freedom to choose activities to play with friends, and let your child work out problems on her own.
- ☐ Your child might start to talk back or use profanity (swear words) as a way to feel independent. Do not give a lot of attention to this talk, other than a brief time out. Instead, praise your child when he asks for things nicely and calmly takes "no" for an answer.
- ☐ This is a good time to talk to your child about safe touch. No one should touch "private parts" except doctors or nurses during an exam or parents when they are trying to keep the child clean.
- ☐ Teach your child her address and phone number.
- ☐ When reading to your child, ask him to predict what will happen next in the story.
- ☐ Encourage your child to "read" by looking at the pictures and telling the story.
- ☐ Teach your child time concepts like morning, afternoon, evening, today, tomorrow, and yesterday. Start teaching the days of the week.
- ☐ Explore your child's interests in your community. For example, if your child loves animals, visit the zoo or petting farm. Go to the library or look on the Internet to learn about these topics.
- ☐ Keep a handy box of crayons, paper, paint, child scissors, and paste. Encourage your child to draw and make art projects with different supplies.
- ☐ Play with toys that encourage your child to put things together.
- ☐ Teach your child how to pump her legs back and forth on a swing.
- ☐ Help your child climb on the monkey bars.
- ☐ Go on walks with your child, do a scavenger hunt in your neighborhood or park, help him ride a bike with training wheels (wearing a helmet).

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