

## Your Child at 4: Understanding Developmental Milestones



### Highlights

Development milestones include social and physical skills that children acquire as they grow.

Different skills, emotions, and activities develop at various ages.

Every child follows their own pace of development.

If you have concerns about your child's development, seek professional advice.

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### What are development milestones?

Development milestones are the social and physical skills that children develop over time. Different skills, emotions, and activities emerge at different stages.

Children generally reach milestones in a similar order, but each child follows their own timeline.

If you are concerned about your child's development, consult a healthcare professional.

### **How can I help my child to develop?**

By the age of four, children typically need 10 to 13 hours of sleep daily. While some may still take naps, many no longer need them.

Signs that a child may need more sleep include:

Difficulty waking up in the morning  
Crankiness or overtiredness during the day

A healthy diet is also essential. Some children go through phases of being picky eaters. Encouraging them to try a variety of foods helps them develop healthy eating habits.

Making mealtime enjoyable and offering different flavors and textures can support their willingness to try new foods.

### **What physical skills should my child have at 4 years?**

By the age of 4, most children are:

Toilet trained and able to wash their hands and face  
Learning to brush their teeth with some assistance  
Dressing independently \ (though buttons and shoelaces may still be difficult\)

Their gross motor skills improve, allowing them to:

Balance on one foot and hop  
Climb and play on playground equipment  
Throw and catch balls

Fine motor skills also progress. Children start to:

Use pencils and scissors  
Make drawings

### **What social and emotional milestones should I expect by 4 years?**

At this age, children begin to understand that their bodies and emotions are their own. They develop a greater awareness of feelings such as joy or sadness and learn to express them.

As communication improves, temper tantrums often decrease. Children can better communicate their needs and emotions.

Self-esteem plays a crucial role in their development. Confidence allows them to:

Try new things  
Feel liked and accepted  
Cope with difficult emotions

You can help build self-esteem by praising their efforts rather than just results and providing encouragement.

Children also start forming friendships and playing in small groups. This helps them learn important social skills, such as:

Cooperation and sharing  
Understanding rules in group activities

Many children also develop imaginary friends, which is a normal part of their imagination. These friends may be inspired by books, shows, or toys, or may be entirely made up. Children naturally outgrow imaginary friends when they are ready.

## **What should my child be able to understand and communicate at 4 years?**

By age 4, children's language skills expand significantly. They can:

Use sentences with six or more words

Follow multi-step instructions, such as "Please put your cup on the table"

Be understood by most people

Identify and name objects in books and real life

Understand and use words to describe size ("big" or "small") and location ("in" or "under")

Recite familiar rhymes and sing songs

Ask questions about the world ("why," "where," "when")

Recognize and copy letters, numbers, and colors

Understand basic concepts of time

Say their name and age

## **How can I help my child to learn and develop through play?**

Play helps children develop physically, emotionally, and socially. Encourage activities such as:

Running, tumbling, and climbing

Playing with sand, water, or mud

Dancing and moving to music

Other activities that support development include:

Drawing and painting with pencils, crayons, and paints

Pretend play, such as dressing up and acting out stories

Reading books, singing songs, and reciting rhymes

Cooking together, which introduces early concepts of numbers and measurements

Building with blocks, helping with problem-solving skills

## **What if I am worried about my child?**

Children develop at different rates. However, you may want to seek advice if your 4-year-old:

Doesn't use sentences of more than three words  
Has difficulty understanding two-step instructions  
Doesn't engage in pretend play  
Has frequent, intense tantrums over small things  
Often trips when walking or running  
Struggles to draw simple shapes  
Has difficulty with dressing or using the toilet  
Seems to have trouble seeing or hearing  
Has lost skills they previously had

### **What vaccines does my child need?**

Routine vaccinations are an important part of keeping children healthy. At age 4, children are typically recommended to receive vaccines for:

Diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (whooping cough)  
Polio

Some children with specific health conditions may require additional vaccines. Consult a healthcare provider for recommendations.

### **Tools And Assistance**

Parenting support services and helplines are available to provide guidance on child development and early learning. Some helpful resources include:

**Parenting Helplines** Many countries offer national helplines where parents can receive advice from qualified professionals on child development, behavior management, and parenting challenges. These services are usually available 24/7.

**Developmental Screening Tools** Online tools and questionnaires can help you track your child's developmental milestones. These tools assess various aspects of development, including speech, motor skills, and social behavior. If you notice delays or concerns, you can discuss the results with a healthcare provider.

**Parenting Support Groups** Joining support groups, either in-person or online, can provide emotional support and helpful advice from other parents going through similar experiences. It's also a great way to share parenting tips and resources.

**Local Health Clinics and Pediatricians** Regular check-ups with a pediatrician are crucial for assessing your child's growth and development. Many clinics offer developmental screenings and can provide referrals to specialists if needed.

**Books and Educational Materials** There are many books available on child development, parenting techniques, and how to support children at different stages of growth. Many educational websites and libraries also offer articles, videos, and online courses for parents.

**Early Intervention Programs** If you are concerned about your child's development, early intervention programs offer tailored support to help children reach their full potential. These programs often include speech therapy, physical therapy, and occupational therapy, depending on your child's needs.

**Community Resources** Many local community centers offer parenting workshops, developmental screenings, and activities to support both parents and children. These can be valuable opportunities to engage with professionals and other families.

**Online Parenting Portals** Websites dedicated to child development offer a range of resources such as videos, articles, and expert advice. These platforms can be great for staying up-to-date with the latest research and tips.

**Specialist Referrals** If you notice concerning signs in your child's development, a referral to a specialist—such as a child psychologist, speech therapist, or occupational therapist—can provide a more detailed evaluation and personalized guidance.