



Ages and Stages: 4 Years

Four-year-olds have come a long way in establishing control over their bodies. They are expert walkers, runners, and climbers. Four-year-olds are also very curious and imaginative. They enjoy playing make-believe and can be extremely creative and sometimes very silly. They need adults who can help them channel their energy and creativity in positive ways.

Look at your child grow!

When your child is 4 years old, he or she may:

- dress him or herself, except for tying shoes.
- balance and hop on one foot.
- skip, gallop, and leap.
- draw shapes that stand for people, buildings, flowers and other things.
- cut with scissors.
- bounce, catch and kick a ball.
- begin to have longer attention spans for things that interest him or her.

Your child wants you to know several things. He or she may:

- be very curious about many things. Answering questions helps him or her learn.
- dress him or herself, but need a little extra time. Children don't do it very well when they are being rushed.
- love books, stories, rhymes, and nonsense words.
- need you to listen when he or she is talking. By listening attentively you are telling the child that his or her thoughts are important.
- enjoy when you talk with him or her and ask questions about what he or she notices, thinks and feels.
- behave better when you set clear and fair rules and show how to follow them.
- are patient with his or her fears, even if you don't understand them.
- still needs lots of hugs, kisses and encouragement from you even though he or she is increasingly independent.
- learn feelings about him or herself by the way you treat him or her. Your care and respect help the child feel worthwhile.
- need your caring attention. Every child is different. If you watch your child closely, you will get clues about how to help him or her grow.

Your child is an active learner who:

- is curious and asks lots of questions.
- can name simple shapes.
- may begin to recognize letters and numbers.
- may think that nonliving things, like trees and the sun, think and feel the way people do.
- can repeat songs, finger plays, and short stories.

Your child is learning to connect with other people and may:

- have a rigid understanding of what is right and wrong.
- want to please and be helpful.
- care about the feelings of others.
- like to imagine him or herself doing adult behavior.
- have an active imagination and occasionally show fear of ordinary things.

Play helps your child learn. He or she may:

- be curious, interested, and enthusiastic about learning new things. Children are natural learners. The best way to teach young children is to provide many opportunities for physical play, new experiences, hands-on activities, games, and pretend play.
- learn by doing, through movement, by being noticed and encouraged, through their senses, by making things, through language and stories, by playing with other children, through imitation, and through pretend play.

Your child may enjoy toys and activities such as:

- Matching games
- Board games
- Balls (all sizes)
- Glue, paint, washable markers and colored chalk
- Scissors
- Play dough
- Dress-up clothes
- Puppets
- Books

* The information is considered typical for this age. If you have questions about your child's development, contact your pediatrician or health care professional. If we do all we can do to help children develop and grow now, they will have the best chance to succeed in life.

Adapted from Alabama Cooperative Extension System by Traci Johnston. Originally developed by Ellen Abell and H. Wallace Goddard.

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