

WHY AND HOW SHOULD LEARNING FOR PRESCHOOLERS CONTINUE DURING THE PANDEMIC

Developmental Milestones & Skills for 4-year-olds

At a Glance

- Four-year-olds typically get much taller and more coordinated this year.
- Many kids begin to express themselves in longer and more complicated sentences.
- Four-year-olds might start tattling and acting a little bossy.

If you think 4-year-olds are hard to keep up with, it's probably because they develop lots of new skills very quickly this year. Check out these developmental milestones to get a better idea of typical 4-year-old skills.

Physical milestones

At this age, kids grow fast. They might gain close to 5 pounds and grow 4 inches. Their eyesight continues to get better, too, which means their coordination improves.

By the end of this year, most kids can do these things:

Gross motor skills

- Alternate feet on the stairs
- Jump with two feet
- Use door handles

- Control big muscle movements more easily — they may be able to start, stop, turn, and go around obstacles while running
- Log roll, do somersaults, skip, and trot
- Throw and bounce a ball
- Jump over objects and climb playground ladders
- Pedal and steer a tricycle or bike

Fine motor skills

- Get dressed with little help (zippers, snaps, and buttons may still be a little hard)
- Draw or copy basic shapes and crosses (this is a milestone known as “being able to cross the midline”)
- Write some letters or make separated, distinct marks that look like letters
- Draw wavy lines across the page that look like lines of text to make “lists” or write greeting cards
- Put together a simple puzzle
- Begin to use scissors purposefully
- Stack a tower at least 10 blocks high
- String beads or O-shaped cereal to make necklaces
- Pinch and shape clay or play-dough into recognizable objects

Cognitive milestones

This year, kids’ ability to think and learn reaches beyond the basics of the world around them. They start thinking about and understanding things they can’t see or touch. You might notice that kids start to “have an idea” more often than you’d seen before. Most 4-year-olds are developing skills to:

- Start sorting things by attributes like size, shape, and color
- Compare and contrast by things like height, size, or gender
- Begin to understand the difference between real and make-believe, but may still confuse them
- Understand that pictures and symbols stand for real things
- Recognize shapes in the real world

- Count to at least 20 and point to and count items in a group
- Explore relationships between ideas, using words like *if* and *when* to express them
- Start thinking in logical steps, which means seeing the “how-tos” and consequences of things
- Get abstract ideas like “bigger,” “less,” “later,” “ago,” and “soon”
- Put things in order, like from biggest to smallest, shortest to tallest
- Stick with an activity for 10 to 15 minutes

Language milestones:

You’re likely to see — and hear — an explosion of language this year. By the end of this year, kids may have a vocabulary of more than 1,000 words they understand, use, or both. They may start using complicated sentences that combine more than one thought. And they start asking who, what, why, when, and where questions — and may even answer some.

By the end of this year, most kids:

- Sing silly songs, make up goofy words, and start rhyming
- Follow simple, unrelated directions (“Go find your shoes and pick up that toy.”)
- Change speech patterns depending on who is involved in a conversation, like speaking in short sentences to a younger sibling
- Pronounce most sounds correctly, but still have trouble with *s*, *w*, and *r* sounds
- Ask for the definition of unfamiliar words
- Make up stories and talk about what they’re thinking
- Argue, even though the argument might not be logical

Social and emotional milestones:

This is the time kids start developing a unique, recognizable personality. They're more able to get along with peers and work out things that bother them through play. Most kids also:

- Start to show and express a wider range of emotion
- Share, cooperate, be helpful, and take turns
- Start tattling and acting a little bossy
- Enjoy telling silly jokes and find other things funny
- Begin telling small lies to get out of trouble, even though they know it's wrong
- Do or say things they shouldn't to see what the reaction will be
- Have imaginary friends and play the same imaginary games over and over
- Start playing with other kids and separate from parents and caregivers more easily
- May still have tantrums because of changes in routine or not getting what they want

Reading Skills

- Know the correct way to hold and handle a book
- Understand that words are read from left to right and pages are read from top to bottom
- Start noticing words that rhyme
- Retell stories
- Recognize about half the letters of the alphabet
- Start matching letter sounds to letters (like knowing *b* makes a /b/ sound)
- May start to recognize their name in print and other often-seen words, like those on signs and logos

Writing Skills

- Draw wavy lines across the page that look like lines of text from a book
- Make distinct marks that look like letters and that are separated from each other

- Write some actual letters, especially the letters in their name
- May write their name
- May try different kinds of writing, like writing a list or a card
- May start to draw pictures and label them using letters or letter-like marks

Math Skills

- Recognize shapes in the real world
- Start sorting things by colour, shape, size, or purpose
- Compare and contrast using classifications like height, size, or gender
- Count up to at least 20 and accurately point to and count items in a group
- Understand that numerals stand for number names (5 stands for *five*)
- Use spatial awareness to put puzzles together
- Start predicting cause and effect (like what will happen if they drop a toy in a tub full of water)

Remember that kids develop at different rates. They may gain some skills later than other kids or have some skills that are advanced for their age.

But if a 4-year-old hasn't met many of these milestones, it's a good idea for parents and caregivers to talk with their child's health care provider. They can discover whether there are skills that need extra help.

Reference:

Morin, A., n.d. *Understood - For learning and thinking differences.*

[online] Understood.org. Available at:

<<https://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/signs-symptoms/developmental-milestones/skill-development-from-birth-to-age-5>> [Accessed 23 April 2021].