PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

Your Child's Development From 3 to 5 Years

This information lists the skills your child will likely learn between ages 3 and 5.

Movement and physical development

Between the ages of 3 and 5, your child may learn to:

- Pedal on a tricycle (3-wheel bicycle).
- Catch a softball-sized ball from up to 5 feet (1.5 meters) away.
- Walk up and down stairs with 1 foot on each step.
- Jump 8 to 12 inches (20 to 30 centimeters) in all directions.
- Balance on 1 foot for up to 3 seconds.
- Walk across a 4-inch (10 centimeters) balance beam.
- Kick a ball.
- Hop.
- Hold a crayon or marker.
- Start to use their hands more, such as be able to cut paper with scissors.

Social-emotional and self-help skills

Between the ages of 3 and 5, your child may:

- Get upset with major changes in their routine.
- Take turns during games.
- Separate easily from parents.

- Rather play with others than alone.
- Enjoy doing new things.
- Talk about things they like.
- Play pretend, such as role playing.
- Want to please friends.
- Like to sing, dance, and act.
- Be toilet trained.
- Remove their socks and shoes.

Learning, thinking, and problem solving skills

Between the ages of 3 and 5, your child may:

- Follow 2 to 3 step directions.
- Say their own name, age, and gender.
- Name friends.
- Build block towers and place basic puzzle pieces correctly to a form board.
- Turn book pages 1 at a time.
- Copy basic shapes.
- Be able to draw a person with 6 body parts.
- Start to understand time.
- Have be able to pay attention and focus on things for a longer amount of time.
- Answer basic questions.
- Match and name some colors.

Speech, language, and communication skills

Between the ages of 3 and 5, your child may:

- Speak clearly enough for strangers to understand what they're saying.
- Use different tenses.
- Tell simple stories using full sentences.

What you can do to help your child's development

Your child may not have a lot of energy during their treatment. But it's still important to help them move, communicate, and play as part of their daily routine.

Here are some things you can do to help them:

- Get your child to be physically active.
- Encourage actions by praising your child when they show good behavior.
- Let your child make choices.
- Have your child play with other children.
- Let your child be as independent as possible.
- Have your child help with simple chores.
- Encourage imagination during play.
- Teach your child to take turns when they play with others.
- Point out and name numbers and letters of the alphabet.
- Have your child color and draw with crayons.

When to call your child’s healthcare provider

Call your child’s healthcare provider if your child:

- Cannot kick, throw, or catch a ball from nearby.
- Trips and falls easily or often.
- Has trouble running.
- Cannot jump in place.
- Has trouble scribbling.
- Shows no interest in games or make-believe.
- Ignores other children or does not respond to people outside the family.
- Does not want to get dressed, sleep, or use the toilet.
- Cannot retell a favorite story.
- Does not follow 3 part commands.
- Does not understand “same” and “different.”
- Does not use “me” and “you” correctly.
- Does not speak clearly.
- Loses skills they once had.
- Does not like changes in their environment, such as changes to the noise level or lighting in the room.
- Does not feel comfortable trying to balance on different types of surfaces.

Contact information

If you have questions about your child's development, talk with their healthcare provider. You can also ask for a referral to MSK's physical, occupational, or speech therapy.

You can reach MSK's Physical and Occupational Therapy department Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. at 212-639-5384. You can reach the Speech and Hearing Rehabilitation department Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at 212-639-5856.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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