

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” or challenging 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 help your child become successful and enjoy learning.

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 and 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 4 to 8 years old and some questions to ask yourself as you determine what learning activities are right for your child and your family.

Ask your child’s teacher and doctor for ideas specific to your child’s needs.



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.
<p>4-5 years</p>	<p>The ages of 4-5 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.</p> <p>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.</p>  <p>Watch digital media with your child because they learn from watching & talking with you. Limit screen time and use only high-quality programming.</p> <p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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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<p>5-6 years</p>	<p>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.</p>  <p>They begin to build fine motor skills that will assist in helping the child begin handwriting, cutting, and drawing.</p> <p>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</p> <p>They are building language and literacy skills that will later turn into reading and spelling.</p> <p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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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<p>6-7 years</p>	<p>The child enjoys exploring, reading, reasoning, problem solving, communicating through conversation, writing and developing lasting friendships.</p>  <p>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.</p> <p>Show that you care about their needs, interests and their relationship with you.</p> <p>Demonstrate genuine enthusiasm for the task at hand.</p> <p>Encourage persistence, support the child when they try new tasks.</p> <p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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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<p>7-8 Years</p>	<p>Physical, mental and social skills are rapidly developing.</p> <p>Attention Span is about 16 minutes. Screen Time should be limited to about 1.5 hours a day.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The child is emotionally sensitive and may have strong emotional reactions.</p>  <p>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.</p> <p>The child is developing morals and a value system.</p> <p>Show support by talking with your child about future goals, responsibility, and patience.</p> <p>Take time to have fun with your child such as playing board games and reading.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ 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 cannot 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
- Cannot 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
- Cannot retell a favorite story
- Does not follow 3-part commands
- Does not understand "same" and "different"
- Does not 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!



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



Download CDC's
Milestone Tracker App



Learn the Signs. Act Early.

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 school 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 do not know the answer, say "I do not 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 Shelov 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.

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Learn the Signs. Act Early.

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

You Know Your Child Best.

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

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

- Is missing milestones
- Does not 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
- Does not respond to people, or responds only superficially
- Cannot tell what's real and what's make-believe
- Does not play a variety of games and activities
- Cannot give first and last name
- Does not use plurals or past tense properly
- Does not talk about daily activities or experiences
- Does not draw pictures
- Cannot 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.

If you or the doctor is still concerned

1. Ask for a referral to a specialist and,
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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 5-year-old child today.

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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Positive Parenting Tips for Healthy Child Development

Middle Childhood (6-8 years of age)

Developmental Milestones

Middle childhood brings many changes in a child's life. By this time, children can dress themselves, catch a ball more easily using only their hands, and tie their shoes. Having independence from family becomes more important now. Events such as starting school bring children this age into regular contact with the larger world. Friendships become more and more important. Physical, social, and mental skills develop quickly at this time. This is a critical time for children to develop confidence in all areas of life, such as through friends, schoolwork, and sports.

Here is some information on how children develop during middle childhood:

Emotional/Social Changes

Children in this age group might:

- Show more independence from parents and family.
- Start to think about the future.
- Understand more about his or her place in the world.
- Pay more attention to friendships and teamwork.
- Want to be liked and accepted by friends.

Thinking and Learning

Children in this age group might:

- Show rapid development of mental skills.
- Learn better ways to describe experiences and talk about thoughts and feelings.
- Have less focus on one's self and more concern for others.

Positive Parenting Tips

Following are some things you, as a parent, can do to help your child during this time:

- Show affection for your child. Recognize her accomplishments.
- Help your child develop a sense of responsibility—ask him to help with household tasks, such as setting the table.
- Talk with your child about school, friends, and things she looks forward to in the future.
- Talk with your child about respecting others. Encourage him to help people in need.
- Help your child set her own achievable goals—she'll learn to take pride in herself and rely less on approval or reward from others.
- Help your child learn patience by letting others go first or by finishing a task before going out to play. Encourage him to think about possible consequences before acting.
- Make clear rules and stick to them, such as how long your child can watch TV or when she has to go to bed. Be clear about what behavior is okay and what is not okay.
- Do fun things together as a family, such as playing games, reading, and going to events in your community.



- Get involved with your child's school. Meet the teachers and staff and get to understand their learning goals and how you and the school can work together to help your child do well.
- Continue reading to your child. As your child learns to read, take turns reading to each other.
- Use discipline to guide and protect your child, rather than punishment to make him feel bad about himself. Follow up any discussion about what *not* to do with a discussion of what *to* do instead.
- Praise your child for good behavior. It's best to focus praise more on what your child does ("you worked hard to figure this out") than on traits she can't change ("you are smart").
- Support your child in taking on new challenges. Encourage her to solve problems, such as a disagreement with another child, on her own.
- Encourage your child to join school and community groups, such as a team sports, or to take advantage of volunteer opportunities.

Child Safety First

More physical ability and more independence can put children at risk for injuries from falls and other accidents. Motor vehicle crashes are the most common cause of death from unintentional injury among children this age.

- Protect your child properly in the car. For detailed information, see the American Academy of Pediatrics' Car Safety Seats: A Guide for Families.
- Teach your child to watch out for traffic and how to be safe when walking to school, riding a bike, and playing outside.
- Make sure your child understands water safety, and always supervise her when she's swimming or playing near water.
- Supervise your child when he's engaged in risky activities, such as climbing.
- Talk with your child about how to ask for help when she needs it.
- Keep potentially harmful household products, tools, equipment, and firearms out of your child's reach.

Healthy Bodies

- Parents can help make schools healthier. Work with your child's school to limit access to foods and drinks with added sugar, solid fat, and salt that can be purchased outside the school lunch program.
- Make sure your child has 1 hour or more of physical activity each day.
- Limit screen time for your child to no more than 1 to 2 hours per day of quality programming, at home, school, or afterschool care.
- Practice healthy eating habits and physical activity early. Encourage active play, and be a role model by eating healthy at family mealtimes and having an active lifestyle.

A pdf of this document for reprinting is available free of charge from
<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/positiveparenting/middle.html>

Additional Information:

<http://www.cdc.gov/childdevelopment>
 1-800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636) <http://www.cdc.gov/info>