

Your  
3 1/2 to 4  
Year-Old  
Child



School Readiness Program  
Provided by the WIC Program and First 5 LA

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# Getting Ready for School!



I am still learning shapes, colors and numbers.

I have better balance and better control over my body.

I learn best when you encourage me.

I am getting better at making friends. My friends and I like to pretend when we play.

I use the toilet, but I still have accidents. Please be patient with me.

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Help me get ready for Kindergarten. Read to me every day. Talk and sing in every language you know. Have fun with me!

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**QUESTION: My neighbor's 3 year-old talks better than my child talks. Do I need to worry?**

**ANSWER: Every child is different.** 3 year-olds are beginning to understand “same” and “different”. Most 3 year-olds also use plurals (words that mean more than one, for example, “dogs” or “cats”). 3 year-olds use pronouns (he, she, you, I, him, her), but will sometimes make mistakes. 3 year-olds are starting to use words that end in “-ing” like, playing, running and eating. They learn to talk about what is happening now, what has happened in the past and what will happen in the future. Many 3 year-olds ask questions starting with: who, what, where, when and why. Most children can name at least one color by the time they turn 4. If you are concerned, be sure to talk to your child's doctor.

### Try this!

When your child talks about something, he or she is showing interest. Respond first by repeating what your child says. Then add new words that describe the object. For example, if your child says, “Look, the moon!” you can answer, “Yes! That is the moon. See, it is round like a circle. It is like a moon in your book, Goodnight, Moon. Should we say, “goodnight” to it? Goodnight, Moon.” Your answer teaches your child about shapes and reminds your child of the book.



**QUESTION: How can I help my child learn to communicate better?**

**ANSWER: Listen** to what your child says to you. When you answer your child, try to include the words that your child said. You are teaching your child that his or her words are important. This shows respect. When you answer your child, you can also add new words and phrases. Listening and answering also teaches your child that it is important to take turns during conversations.

### Try this!

3 year-olds are beginning to learn to count. Children often learn to name the numbers from 1 to 10 before they can really count. Help your child learn to count objects. Count the steps as you walk up and down stairs. Count the napkins or plates as you set the table. (Your child will feel proud giving everyone a napkin and plate). Count the people in the room. Count the chairs in the house. The more counting you do with your child, the sooner your child will be able to count on his or her own.



### Try this!

#### NUMBER TREASURE HUNT

Go on 1 hunt, or a 2 hunt, or a 3 hunt. For example, you can say, “We’re going on a 2 hunt. Find 2 of something!” Your child will amaze you with what he or she finds: 2 children, 2 doors, 2 windows, 2 cats, 2 ears, 2 eyes, 2 hands, but not 2 belly buttons!

**QUESTION: How is my child's body growing and changing?**

**ANSWER:** Your doctor has been measuring your child's growth and development. Your 3½ to 4 year-old can walk easily, hop, stand on one foot, and go up stairs and down stairs without help. Your child can kick a ball, and can usually catch a large ball after it bounces. Climbing and running every day helps your child grow strong and healthy. Children this age enjoy games such as tag, the Farmer in the Dell, Ring Around the Rosy and Duck, Duck, Goose.

Your child also has better control over his or her fingers. Your child can hold a crayon or pencil between his or her thumb and fingers instead of in a fist. Your child may be beginning to copy some capital letters and to use child-safe scissors. Doing artwork is a great way for your child to develop hand and finger control.



**Try this!**

Try to praise and encourage behavior that you like. Instead of saying “no,” use phrases such as “good try,” “you’re so close,” or “you’re working so hard.”



**QUESTION: How can I teach my child good behavior by using praise and encouragement?**

**ANSWER:** Praise and encouragement are both ways to help your child learn good behavior. Praise can be used to reward them. When you praise your child, you are telling them that they are behaving well. Children learn better from praise than from punishment. Punishment teaches your child what not to do. It does not teach your child the behaviors that you want your child to do. Catch your child being good!

**Encouragement** shows your child that you believe in their abilities. “You worked hard to make that circle” tells your child that their own effort produced the result. “You are getting better at hopping” tells your child that you noticed improvement and have faith in their ability to learn. “You look proud of your drawing” tells your child that their opinion is important. These are ways of encouraging that help your child want to try harder. Encourage them especially when they make a mistake. “Wow! You put on your shoes yourself! They are on the wrong feet. Let’s try again. I know that you can fix them.” Praise and encouragement help your child know what pleases you.

**QUESTION: How important is it for my child to be around other children?**

**ANSWER:** Your 3½ to 4 year-old needs to be around other children. This is a great age for your child to go to preschool, or to meet children at a park. They are learning to make friends but still need help to learn to treat other children kindly and fairly. When 3½ to 4 year-olds play, they like to pretend to do the same activities that they see around them. For example, they might play house, or pretend to make dinner or pretend to go shopping. By pretending, they are learning about social relationships and friends.



**Try this!**

**TEACH PROBLEM-SOLVING**

This is an example of how you can teach problem-solving.

If Victoria and Michael argue about taking turns on a swing, you can say “You both want to go first, but only one of you can go first. What can you do to solve this problem?” Then give the children a choice. They could both find somewhere else to play. Or, you could suggest that the child who goes first gets to swing for 2 minutes, and the child who goes second gets to swing for 4 minutes. Explain that going second will mean a longer turn. (This also helps the children learn about numbers and time.) Then ask the children, “Which idea do you want to try?” Talk with the children about what they like and don’t like about each idea. Then help them come up with a plan.

For children ages 2-5 years, it is recommended to limit screen time to no more than 1 hour per day of educational media. Parents should co-view media with children to help them understand what they are seeing and apply it to the world around them.



Parents who keep the TV on or focus on their phones miss opportunities to interact with their children and help them learn.

**HINT: Put down your phone.**

**Safety Corner**



Many 3½ to 4 year-olds love to play in water. Here are some tips to keep your child safe:

- Never leave your child alone in or near a bathtub, swimming pool, or any other water, even for a moment.
- Avoid distraction, put down your phone.
- Stay very close to your child around water.
- Keep the bathroom doors closed.
- If you are close to a swimming pool, make sure there is a fence on all 4 sides and be sure all pool gates are closed. It only takes a moment for your child to fall into a pool.



**First 5 LA**

First 5 LA is a child advocacy and grant making organization created by California voters to invest Proposition 10 tobacco tax revenues in programs for improving the lives of children from prenatal through age 5 in Los Angeles County. First 5 LA champions health, education and safety causes concerning young children and families. For more information, please visit [www.first5la.org](http://www.first5la.org).



**The WIC Program**

WIC provides nutrition and health education services, breastfeeding support, referrals to community agencies and healthy food to eligible women, infants and children under age five. This institution is an equal opportunity provider. For more information, please visit [www.wicworks.ca.gov](http://www.wicworks.ca.gov).