

DEVELOPMENTAL MILESTONES

3-4 YEARS OLD

LANGUAGE

- Tells you a story from a book or a video
- Identifies colors
- Compares things with words like “bigger” or “shorter”
- Has a vocabulary of at least 1000 words
- Uses words like “a” or “the” when talking (Example: “I like the book” or “I saw a dog”)
- Understands and uses more location words like “inside,” “on,” “behind,” and “under”
- Says sentences with four or more words
- Talks with you in conversation using at least two back-and-forth exchanges
- Says what action is happening in a picture or book when asked
- Talks about at least one thing that happened during their day (Example: “I played soccer”)
- Pretends to read alone or with others
- Understands, asks, and answers both simple and complex *wh-* questions (*who, what, when, where, why, how come*)
- Pretends to write or spell and can write some letters
- Answers simple questions like “What is a coat for?” or “What is a crayon for?”
- Recognizes signs and logos, like STOP
- Follows 2-step directions, including directions regarding location, equality, and quantity



SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL

- Calms down within 10 minutes after you leave them, like at a childcare drop off
- Pretends to be something else during play (teacher, superhero, dog)
- Asks to play with other children if no other children are present
- Comforts others who are hurt or sad, like hugging a crying friend
- Avoids danger (Example: will not jump from tall heights at the playground)
- Likes to be a “helper”
- Changes behavior based on where they are (Example: library, playground, place of worship, etc.)
- Takes turns and plays cooperatively
- Relates personal experiences through verbalization
- Shows frustration if not understood
- Begins dramatic play, acting out whole scenes
- Expresses ideas and feelings



SPEECH

- Correctly produces earlier consonants along with /l/, /j/, /v/, /s/, /z/, “sh,” and “ch” in words (by 4 years old)
- Says all the syllables in a word
- Says the sounds at the beginning, middle, and end of words
- Talks smoothly and does not repeat sounds, words, or phrases most of the time (by 4 years old)
- Is at least 50% understandable (by 4 years old)
- Says all sounds in a consonant cluster containing two or more consonants in a row (Example: “Snow”)

Note: these milestones are meant to be a helpful resource to provide you with a general sense of how most children develop. However, they do not always account for individual differences such as neurodivergence and culture. These lists should be used to identify areas in which a child needs support to navigate their environment with ease and functionality, and not as absolute goalposts.

Milestone information is from ASHA.org (2024), CDC.gov (2024), Crowe, K., & McLeod, S. (2020), and LinguiSystems Guide to Communication Milestones (2012th ed.) - curated by Happy Little Speech.