

# UNDERSTANDING YOUR CHILD

## 3-4 YEARS

MILESTONES OF  
DEVELOPMENT

Big muscle movement  
Small muscle movement  
Talking and understanding  
Social  
Thinking



**Act for kids**

[actforkids.com.au](http://actforkids.com.au)



## Introduction

Parenting a two to three year old can be an enormous joy. Your little one becomes more nimble as their fine motor skills improve. They also begin to develop creative skills as they learn to express themselves through drawing.

Raising a child at this new life stage can also come with a new set of challenges. By now your little one can usually make themselves clearly understood through speech, which can lead to some embarrassing situations in the supermarket. Your child will also be able to express their feelings and independence with greater determination. While this is a good thing and entirely normal, you'll begin to understand what's meant by the phrase 'terrible twos'.

This booklet is part of the *Understanding your child* series, published by Act for Kids.

For more information about child development, or to get additional copies, use the contact details on the back of this booklet.

Copyright © 2003 Child Development Network. Reproduced with permission. The milestone checklists provided in this booklet are to assist with monitoring your child's development. The majority of children will achieve these milestones by the time they reach the age mentioned. All children develop at different rates. Some children are slower than others (developmentally delayed) but catch up with time. Other children, however, may have an underlying problem that causes their delayed development, and they may not catch up. It is important for these children to get as much treatment (early intervention) as possible. So if you are concerned about any aspect of your child's development, see your doctor. If in doubt, it is better to have your concerns checked than to 'wait and see'.

# Big muscle movement

## By 4 years

### ✓ An average child can:

- walk alone up and down stairs, one foot per step.
- run well on a flat surface, turning sharp corners.
- climb playground ladders and other equipment easily.
- ride a tricycle and pedal easily.
- catch, bounce, throw and kick a ball.

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- they're not able to walk up and down stairs with one foot per step.
- awkward, heavy running, with lots of arm movements.
- not able to climb (may be fearful, anxious).
- can't pedal a tricycle.
- can't catch, throw, or kick a ball.

# Small muscle movement

## By 4 years

### ✓ An average child can:

- hold a pencil between their thumb and one to three other fingers.
- draw a basic human figure.
- draw other simple pictures (like a house).
- brush their teeth with supervision.
- wipe after using the toilet.
- dress, except for hard to reach buttons, bows and shoelaces.

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- not holding a pencil at all, or still holding in a fist with the pencil in the palm of their hand.
- not interested in drawing simple pictures.
- not assisting or interested in trying to groom and bath.
- unable to dress.

# Talking and understanding

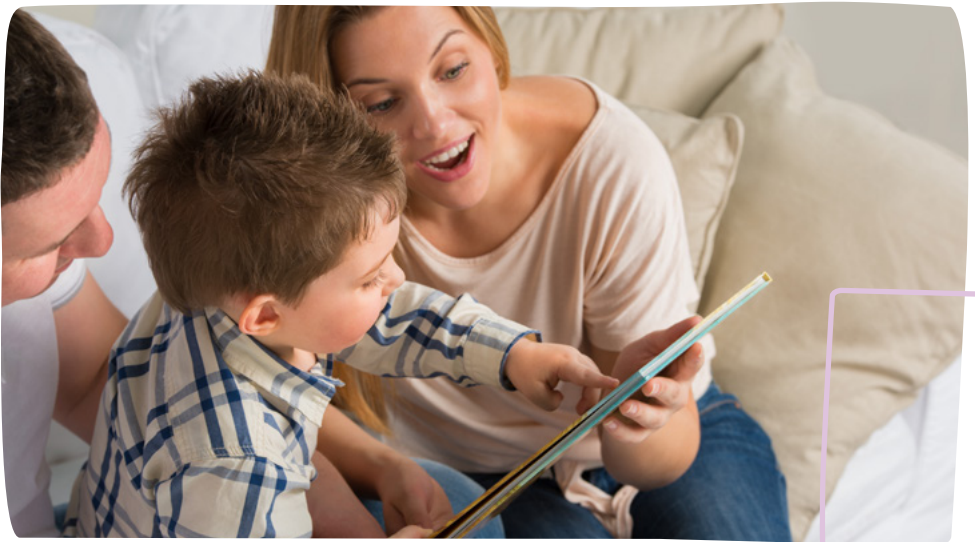
## By 4 years

### ✓ An average child can:

- use two or more personal pronouns (I, you, he, she etc.)
- name colours and shapes.
- hold conversations.
- tell stories in past and future tense.
- repeat back a sentence of 10 sounds.
- be easily understood by strangers.
- understand human feelings (like cold, tired, hungry).
- give their first and last name.
- understand prepositions (like in, out and beside).

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- awkward sentences, missing grammatical elements.
- talks on and on rather than taking turns with talking.
- can't tell a simple story of recent events.
- strangers are not able to understand them.
- limited or very fixed interests.
- frustration at not being able to express thoughts.
- you still need to simplify what you say for them to understand.



# Social

## By 4 years

### ✓ An average child can:

- do up buttons, put on socks and shoes.
- name age in years.
- play cooperatively with other children.
- begin to play games in groups with simple rules.
- fully undress.
- create play reflecting complex social situations.

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- plays alone or alongside other children rather than cooperating.
- unable to take turns or share.
- persisting frustration if other children attempt to participate in play.
- can't separate from parents without crying.
- play remains repetitive and physical, with little play representing what people do (like shopping, police officer, driving a truck).



# Thinking

## By 4 years

### ✓ An average child can:

- create play with stories with different roles.
- compare objects as higher or longer.
- count to five.
- count objects as well as rote counting.
- repeat back four numbers.

### ✗ Signs of possible problems include:

- play doesn't ever represent what people do (like shopping, police officer, driving a truck).
- no recognition of written numbers/letters.
- unable to point to and count objects.
- unable to draw a human face.





Act for Kids is a for-purpose organisation that delivers evidence-led professional therapy and support services to young people and their families.

We help keep kids safe, heal from trauma and lead happy lives through professional counselling, parenting programs, resources and advocacy.

For more information, visit **actforkids.com.au** or phone **1300 228 000**.

## Child development resources

[www.bubhub.com.au](http://www.bubhub.com.au)

[www.cd.net.au](http://www.cd.net.au)

[www.cyh.com](http://www.cyh.com)

[www.raisingchildren.net.au](http://www.raisingchildren.net.au)

For more information please call 1300 228 000  
or visit our website [actforkids.com.au](http://actforkids.com.au)



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