

Developmental Skills for Ages 2 to 3 Years

*When it comes to child development, there is a wide range of normal.
If younger children don't have these skills yet, they should develop them by 3 years of age.*

Gross motor (big body and movement) skills

Your child is learning to:

- Stand on one leg briefly. (By 30 months, he or she can stand on one leg for 4 seconds.)
- Walk on tiptoes for five steps. (By 30 months, he or she can walk on tiptoes for 8 feet.)
- Walk up stairs, one step over the other, while holding your hand or a rail. (By 30 months, your child can do this without a rail.)
- Jump forward 4 inches. Jump up into the air 2 inches. Jump down from a height of 18 inches.
- Stop in the middle of a full run.
- Ride on toy or tricycle.
- Kick a ball 6 feet using one foot. (By 30 months, your child tries to kick a moving ball.)

By 30 to 36 months, your child is learning to:

- Jump forward 2 feet, starting with and landing on both feet at the same time.
- Catch a ball with arms and body.
- Hop twice on one foot.

Fine motor (play and self-help) skills

Your child is learning to:

- Prefer one hand over the other. He or she may keep switching hands until age 3½ years.
- Grasp a crayon with thumb, index finger and middle finger. He or she may still hold the crayon in different ways.
- Copy a straight line with a crayon. (By 30 months, he or she tries to copy a circle and a plus sign.)
- Snip with scissors. (By age 30 months, he or she is learning to snip along a line.)
- Do more with his or her hands (work buttons, fasteners, doorknobs and lids).
- String beads.
- Build a tower with 8 to 10 cubes. (By 30 months, he or she starts building more complex structures, like a bridge or train.)



Language, social and brain development

Your child:

- Learns language skills more quickly.
- Begins forming sentences with two to four words.
- May speak 50 to 100 words, but will understand hundreds more by age 30 months.
- Will ask for help.
- Can follow two-step commands.
- Responds with words to questions that begin with “what,” “who” and “where.” (Will learn “what” first, “who” second and “where” third.)

By age 3, your child:

- Answers questions with “yes” or “no.”
- Names one color, counts to 3 and names four body parts or items of clothing.

Sensory development

Your child:

- Will touch a variety of textures and doesn't mind getting messy.
- Allows hair brushing, teeth brushing and the feeling of clothes against the skin.
- Can be in the mall, grocery store and other multi-sensory places without distress.
- Can move smoothly from one activity to another.

When should I be concerned?

Speak to your doctor if your child:

- Has trouble with walking, running, balance or changing speed.
- Has trouble with small jumps after age 30 months.
- Must be in control—can't change from one activity to another without distress and a lot of help preparing.
- Can't calm him- or herself or needs a lot of help falling asleep.
- Is in constant motion and unable to keep still.
- Is afraid of swings or merry-go-rounds.
- Feels distressed when having his or her hair or face washed.
- Is sensitive to bright lights.
- Has trouble with simple puzzles.
- Seems too distressed by tags or seams in clothing.
- Seems too distressed when his or her hands or face are messy.
- Falls more than 10 times a day.
- Does not use any words by age 2, or is only using single words (no phrases) by age 3.
- Uses more gestures than words.
- Has trouble with simple directions.
- Cannot be understood by his or her main caregivers.

Activities

For gross motor skills

- Playing catch with a large ball. (Start by handing the ball to your child. Progress to gentle tosses from 2 to 5 feet away. Your child will likely catch the ball by trapping it against his or her body. If your child has trouble, use a beach ball or a balloon, since these move more slowly.)
- Throwing a ball from a short distance.
- Playing “soccer,” which helps your child learn to kick a ball.
- Standing on one foot “like a flamingo.”
- Playing “red light, green light” and other running games that require fast stops or changes in direction.
- Jumping like a frog or bunny, jumping over small objects, or jumping off the bottom stair or a curb. (Hold your child’s hand until he or she is comfortable and safe while jumping.)
- Climbing on small, safe furniture or play equipment. You might make a “fort” and let your child practice climbing in it.
- Pushing, pulling, lifting and carrying to build your child’s strength. Place favorite items in a backpack for your child to wear. Or load up a child’s grocery cart for the child to push around.
- Riding a trike (tricycle). Your child may start by pushing forward with his or her feet. By 30 months, help your child start using the pedals.

For fine motor skills

- Copying lines and circles.
- Coloring with broken crayons on an easel (or other upright surface).
- Stringing beads or stacking Cheerios on a straw.

- Playing with puzzle boards. Start with puzzle pieces that don’t interlock, then progress to pieces that do.
- Playing with building blocks, Duplos and other toys that require the use of your child’s hands.

For language, social and brain development

- Reading together and talking about the pictures in books. Ask, “What do you see? Where is the balloon?”
- Talking about your activities as you move through the day. Name your actions as you complete them.
- Playing with toys that mimic real activities (farm sets, kitchen sets, doll houses, play tools). Talk to your child while you play together. Start with simple, two-word sentences like “Cow walking” or “Cooking pizza.”
- Singing simple songs such as “Old MacDonald” and the “Wheels on the Bus.” Urge your child to sing with you and follow the hand and body movements.

Try these tips to increase your child’s vocabulary.

- When your child points to an object, name the object before responding to the gesture.
- Rather than ask yes-or-no questions, offer a choice between two options. Instead of asking, “Do you want the toy car?”, you might say, “Do you want the car or the ball?”
- If your child does more pointing than speaking, ask him or her to “use your words.” Ask the child to say “help” if he or she needs help.
- Ask your child to follow directions for simple, well-known tasks: “Go get your coat and bring it to mom” or “Pick up your toys and put them on the shelf.”

continued

For sensory development

- Playing with Play-Doh, sandboxes and finger paints.
- Walking barefoot through grass or on a sandy beach.
- Swimming and playing in water.
- Doing “heavy work” such as climbing, jumping, lifting, pushing, animals crawls and crab walks.

Give your child verbal or visual warnings before moving on to a new activity.

For self-help skills

Children are often ready for toilet training at this age. You should also urge your child to:

- Help put on his or her clothes.
- Feed him- or herself with a spoon and fork.
- Try drinking from an open cup.
- Help with bathing and teeth brushing.

Toys for your child

- Stacking blocks and other toys
- Duplos, Pop Beads and other simple building toys
- Puzzles with large pieces
- Farm sets, kitchen sets, dolls
- Balls
- Paints and color crayons
- Trikes (tricycles) and ride-on toys
- Large beads to string
- Toys with different shapes to sort and insert
- Musical toys (toy drums, toy pianos)
- Small swings, slides and jungle gyms
- Simple crafts



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