



Characteristics: Developmental Milestones of Twos, Threes, Fours and Fives

“Aren’t all three-year-olds alike?” The answer to that question is both yes and no! Every child develops in a unique way. At any given chronological age, children’s developmental differences will vary greatly. But some basic developmental guidelines can help you become both a better observer and a more effective helper.

Twos

Physical: Twos are able to walk, climb, scribble on paper, build block towers, fill a container with small objects and turn pages in a book. Although large muscles are fairly well developed, twos often stumble and fall. They move all the time! Small muscles are not yet well developed. Twos are often in the process of being potty trained. They enjoy simple songs with movement and large-muscle activities and need room to roam as well as quiet time activities.

Mental and Emotional: Twos have a short attention span, and they learn best through using all their senses. A two is often eager to do things without help and uses “no” frequently as a way to define his or her separate identity. Twos may say many words and some simple sentences and recognize their names in print. Twos enjoy retelling a story or activity, which increases their sense of mastery.

Social: Twos have very little concept about other people’s rights or feelings. “MINE!” is a favorite word. Using distraction and redirection works far better than reasoning when there are disputes. Twos play mainly by themselves or play next to but not with other children. Get on their eye level. Talk about what you see them doing to help them know you notice them and love them.

Spiritual: Twos can learn that God made everything, that God cares about them, that Jesus is God’s special Son, that the Bible is God’s special book and that Jesus and Bible stories are true. Talk and sing about God often.

Threes

Physical: Threes have increased small-muscle ability, can unlace and remove shoes and button and unbutton clothing, draw pictures and name the people and items which they draw. They build more complicated block structures and are usually completely potty trained. Threes enjoy stringing big beads, putting together simple puzzles and playing with dough, as well as singing songs and hearing simple stories. They may begin to use scissors.





Mental and Emotional: Threes may be able to write part of their names and can usually identify colors and repeat simple rhymes and songs. Threes begin to imitate and pretend. They can wait for short periods of time and may show more sympathy for others.

Social: Threes may interact with other children more as they play, although sharing and taking turns are still not habitual. Give good eye contact at eye level and be sure to show you see, hear and love them.

Spiritual: Threes can understand that Jesus was born as a baby and grew up to do kind things, that God is good and that Jesus loves us. Threes understand more about God's love and nature through loving actions than through spoken words.

Fours

Physical: Fours begin a period of rapid growth. Coordination catches up in both small and large muscles. They still need a great deal of space and time to explore and enjoy the creative process.

Mental and Emotional: Fours begin to ask why and how. Their attention spans are still short, but they can concentrate for longer periods. Fours may often test the limits of what is acceptable behavior.

Social: Fours begin to enjoy being with other children in group activities. They want to please adults and usually love their teachers. Give each child a chance to feel successful by helping in some way. Provide ways they can sing, pray and talk together.

Spiritual: Fours begin to understand more about Jesus: that He is God's Son, that He lived on Earth to show God's love for us, that He died but rose again and is still alive. Fours can also be taught that the Bible tells us ways to obey God and that we can talk to God in prayer.

Fives

Physical: Fives are learning to tie their own shoes, to cut with scissors successfully and to draw pictures that are recognizable to others. Girls move ahead of boys in development. Coordination has usually become excellent.

Mental and Emotional: Fives are often able to write their own names, copy words and letters and may even read some words. Fives can talk accurately about recent events and speak understandably. They love to learn why, still seek adult approval and love to discover for themselves through play and experimenting. Encourage them to think by asking what-could-happen-next and how-could-you-solve-this open-ended questions.

Social: Fives enjoy extended periods of cooperative play, usually with one or two others. They enjoy group activities and need to feel that they are seen and heard. Need for attention may cause them to act in negative ways. Give attention before negative actions occur. Give good eye contact at eye level and be sure to show you see, hear and love them.

Spiritual: Fives are the most likely to respond by talking about the Bible story or Bible verse, and some children will understand that being kind as Jesus was is something they can do. Some children, especially those from Christian homes, may be interested in becoming members of God's family. Help them feel confident that God hears their prayers and that God wants to help them. As with all young children, they think literally and concretely and cannot understand abstract ideas like "Jesus in my heart" or "born again."

The most important way we teach young children about God's love is to show them! As we get on their level, listen to them, encourage them and make them feel secure, they begin to link God's love with the joy, excitement and security they feel from you.