

Early Learning and Development Guidelines

# Ages 3 to 4 Years



*“In working in early childhood, I have learned that although some children don’t use verbal communication a lot, all children have their own communication style. You have to observe them exploring and testing their communication abilities and limits as they grow.”*

Yolanda Payne, Assistant Teacher, Multicultural Child & Family Hope Center

## WHAT YOU'LL FIND HERE

First there are some questions for families to reflect on. They offer a springboard for families, caregivers, child care professionals and teachers to talk together about fostering each child's growth and learning.

Next under each area of development, the Guidelines are in two columns. "Children may . . ." provides examples of things that children this age are learning to be, do and know. "Ideas to try with children . . ." offers examples of things families, caregivers, child care professionals, teachers and other caring adults can do to help children learn and develop in healthy ways. Different families may encourage learning and development in different ways.

These Guidelines are a resource. They are not an exhaustive guide to child development, and are not intended to be an assessment tool, a curriculum or a tool to collect data on children.

# What families already know about their children

## Five questions to reflect on

1. What has your child done that surprised you with a new ability, skill or understanding?
2. How does your child go about trying something new?
3. What does your child really enjoy doing?
4. How does your child respond to new situations or challenges?
5. Who among your family and friends does your child enjoy spending time with? What are some of the things that person does with or teaches your child?



*“Life presents us with a rich, sophisticated and complex tapestry of learning. Remember that children explore and learn holistically, without dividing that learning into categories. Take every opportunity to introduce your child to as many experiences as possible and trust that profound learning is taking place and that learning can be fun.”*

Martina Whelshula, Ph.D., Member of the Colville Tribe



**Note:** Child continues the growth and learning from the prior age.

## 1. About me and my family and culture

### ↓ Children may ...

#### Family and culture

- Remember the people who are important in the child's life.
- Name most family members, including extended family.
- Recognize the importance of cultural celebrations and traditions.
- Show or talk about objects from family or culture.

#### Self concept

- Proud to say own first and last name.
- Know self as a part of the family, spiritual group, culture, community, and/or other group to which the family belongs.
- Notice self as an important person to family and friends.

### ↓ Ideas to try with children ...

#### Family and culture

- Give your child the chance to interact with family, friends and community members.
- Share with your child about family members and relationships (such as brother, auntie, grandpa).
- Continue to involve your child in family and cultural traditions, rituals, routines and activities. Include the child in roles in which the child can succeed.

#### Self concept

- Pay attention to your child and listen to the child's ideas.
- Help your child feel good about all the things he or she can do. Acknowledge the child for cooperating in routines.

## ↓ Children may ...

### Self management

- Show personal likes and dislikes.
- Identify favorite and familiar activities.
- Find it hard to cooperate when tense, hungry, scared, sad, angry, etc., resulting in behavior that is hurtful, harmful or withdrawn.
- Release or redirect emotional tensions—cry, laugh, tremble, yawn, sing, jump, walk—becoming more relaxed and cooperative afterward.
- Remember and cooperate in daily routines, such as getting into a car seat, and in changes from one activity to another, with occasional reminders.
- Manage changes in routines and learn new behaviors with a little practice.
- Identify simple rules and expect others to follow them.
- Predict what comes next in the day, when there is a consistent schedule.
- Express delight in own abilities. (“I did it myself!”)
- Be able to identify when something is hard to do.
- Sometimes turn down a treat now if a better treat will be available later.

### Learning to learn

- Copy adults and playmates.
- Enjoy creating own play activities.
- Explore objects new to the child while playing.
- Become engrossed in an activity and ignore distractions briefly.
- Imitate real-life roles/experiences in simple role plays.
- Develop own thought processes and ways to figure things out.
- Identify questions and puzzles, and have ideas about ways to figure them out. Try some of these ideas.
- Recognize when making a mistake and sometimes adjust behavior to correct it.

## ↓ Ideas to try with children ...

### Self management

- Listen to and reflect on your child’s feelings. For example, “I think you feel mad because you threw the puzzle piece on the floor.”
- Set limits for behavior. Go to the child, say what he or she can or cannot do, while firmly but kindly stopping the unwanted behavior. Stay close and offer connection, making time for your child’s feelings. Remind child what is and is not appropriate behavior.
- Be warm and caring, keeping self and child safe.
- Set up predictable routines for the day—getting dressed, meals, tooth brushing, gathering with friends, or whatever your day entails. Help your child to know what is coming next.

### Learning to learn

- Set a “you-and-me” time each day where you follow the child’s lead for five to 30 minutes. Don’t give advice or change the play except for safety concerns.
- Take turns when playing with your child in leading and following the lead.
- Give your child time to figure things out. Stand by with a look, touch, smile, thumbs up or other gesture to encourage what the child is trying to accomplish.
- Tell your child what you noticed he or she did to figure out a problem. Ask what worked best. The next time there is a similar problem, remind him/her of what worked before.
- Provide opportunities for your child to observe and learn how things are done.
- Celebrate your child’s learning together and help explore new ways of learning. Ask your child: How else might you do this?
- Recognize your child for keeping with a task.
- Develop the thought process by asking “What do you think?” and listening without correcting or giving hints. Tell a story but stop short of the ending, and let the child figure out the ending or moral.



*“Each morning when Sasha’s parents left, she would stand in the doorway and cry. We took her hand and guided her into the classroom. Little by little, she developed a transition skill. Now she can start her day anxiety-free. She may come in slowly but has no separation anxiety.”*

A teacher at an early childhood center

## 2. Building relationships

### ↓ Children may ...

#### Interactions with adults

---

- Separate from important adults, sometimes relying on another adult to feel safe. Release tensions through laughter, tears, trembling, talking, or yawning.
- Initiate interactions and engage in play with adults.
- Show affection for important adults.

#### Interactions with peers

---

- Engage in play with other children. Join in group activities.
- Initiate play with friends, siblings, cousins and/or others.
- Share and take turns with other children.
- Show affection or closeness with peers.
- Make decisions with other children, with adult help.

#### Social behaviors

---

- Respond to directions from adults about putting items away or being careful with them.
- Begin to remember and follow multistep directions.
- Notice where things belong and help put them away (such as toys, putting own dishes in the wash basin).
- Work with others as part of a team.
- Explore, practice and understand social roles through play. Adopt a variety of roles and feelings during pretend play.
- Plan play by identifying different roles needed and who will fill these roles. Consider changing roles to fit the interests of children playing.
- Tell stories and give other children the chance to tell theirs.
- Sing, drum and/or dance with others.
- React to peers' feelings (empathy).

#### Problem solving, conflict resolution

---

- Accept/reach out to children who are different.
- Identify ways to change behavior to respond to another's desires or needs. Remember and follow through on the agreement without further reminders, some of the time.
- Wait for a turn.

### ↓ Ideas to try with children ...

#### Interactions with adults

---

- Accept and return hugs to the extent offered by the child.
- When separating, reassure the child that you will return and that the child will be well cared for. If possible, connect your return with something the child will experience (such as, "I'll come back after story time.")
- Listen to and connect with a crying or trembling child to give time and attention to the child to make separating from a loved one less difficult.

#### Interactions with peers

---

- Provide playtimes with other children where they decide together what they want to do.
- With your child, go to family gatherings or other places where there are other children. Encourage them to connect and play together.
- Sympathize with and coach your child if he/she has trouble sharing or waiting a turn.

#### Social behaviors

---

- Have real conversations with your child about things that interest him or her. Listen to your child and take turns talking and listening so the child experiences the back and forth of conversation. Listen more than you talk at times.
- Help the child understand that conversations have different "wait times" in different families and cultures.
- Encourage your child to have conversations that are child-to-child, child-to-adult, and child-to-elder.
- Take turns telling stories with grandparents, parents and children.
- Read, invent stories or give life examples where people/characters share, take turns and cooperate.
- Share books and pictures of people who look like your child, and books and pictures of people from other cultures.
- Make new friends and include your child. Show your child ways to say hello, share your name and ask theirs, etc.
- Create an orderly environment so the child can see where things go ("You can put that in the garbage"). Describe what you are doing and/or what the child is doing as you pick up and clean up.

#### Problem solving, conflict resolution

---

- Model respect and ways to include people from diverse backgrounds and cultures, and people with disabilities.





*“I think with special needs kids that they learn when they are able. We as parents learned early on that we can’t put time parameters on our daughter’s learning. She will do things when she is ready and learn in her own way. It took a while for us to accept that our daughter wasn’t going to be able to do things as quickly as other kids, but watching her figure something out and get so excited about it is always worth the wait.”*

Shannin Strom Henry

## 3. Touching, seeing, hearing and moving around

### ↓ Children may ...

#### Using the large muscles (gross motor skills)

- Further develop movement skills using the whole body, such as walking, jumping, running, throwing and climbing. A child in a wheelchair might start and stop the chair, and hold the body upright.
- Use both hands to grasp an object, such as catching a large ball.
- Balance briefly on one leg, such as for kicking a ball.
- Show coordination and balance, such as in walking along a line or a beam.
- Enjoy vigorous play with peers and/or adults.
- Enjoy the challenge of trying new skills.

#### Using the small muscles (fine motor skills)

- Draw some shapes and lines using a crayon or pencil.
- Work puzzles of three or four pieces.
- Develop eye-hand coordination, such as in stringing large beads.
- Button large buttons, zip and unzip clothing, and open and close other fasteners.
- Persist some of the time in practicing skills that are difficult.

#### Using the senses (sensorimotor skills)

- Move body to music or rhythm.
- Drum, sing, play musical instruments and listen to music from different cultures.

### ↓ Ideas to try with children ...

#### Using the large muscles (gross motor skills)

- Provide safe places to play.
- Support your child in learning new physical skills.
- Provide one to two hours of daily physical activity. See Let’s Move for ideas (<http://www.letsmove.gov/get-active>).
- Adapt activities as needed for children with special needs.
- Give your child opportunities to try new challenges.

#### Using the small muscles (fine motor skills)

- Help your child learn to do tasks with the hands (such as puzzles, buttons, zippers, other fasteners; making things with clay, yarn, paper, etc.).
- Provide your child with writing/drawing tools and paper.

#### Using the senses (sensorimotor skills)

- Give your child the chance to use the senses in natural places, such as seeing, smelling and feeling plants outdoors. Encourage your child to share what he or she experiences.
- Give your child opportunities to listen to, watch and join in music and movement activities.

# 4. Growing up healthy

## ↓ Children may ...

### Daily living skills (personal health and hygiene)

- Dress and undress with help. Take off coat and put it where it belongs.
- Begin to take care of own toileting needs.
- Wash hands and use a towel to dry them.

### Nutrition and health

- Try different healthy foods from a variety of cultures.
- Help to set and clear the table for meals. Self serve meal items.
- Engage in a variety of active play and movement activities. Play outdoor games.

### Safety

- Hold parent's/caregiver's hand when walking in public places.
- Begin to learn safety rules for the child's daily activities.

## ↓ Ideas to try with children ...

### Daily living skills (personal health and hygiene)

- Provide child-height hooks, baskets, dresser drawer or other space for coats and clothing.
- Help your child learn the skills of going to the bathroom, washing hands, and getting dressed.
- Make sure your child gets adequate sleep.

### Nutrition and health

- Make sure your child gets a healthy variety of foods and adequate sleep. Offer healthy foods from different cultures, when possible.
- Teach your child the words to tell caregivers when he or she needs to go to the bathroom or is feeling sick or hurt.
- Take your child for regular dental, vision and health checkups, including immunizations and developmental screenings (See Child Profile <http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/childprofile/default.htm>)
- Provide regular opportunities for physical play, indoors and out, including in parks and other natural spaces.
- Limit screen time (television, DVDs, computers, tablets, games) at child care to 30 minutes per week, and at home to two hours per day. Consider following the American Academy of Pediatrics recommendation not to have a television in the child's bedroom. (See <http://aappolicy.aappublications.org/cgi/content/full/pediatrics;126/5/1012>)

### Safety

- Teach your child about holding hands to cross the street.
- Teach your child about safety outdoors, not wandering off, and not going to the water alone.
- Help the child use a helmet for riding a tricycle, and use sunscreen for outdoor activities.
- Provide a safe environment (remove choking hazards and poisons; avoid asthma triggers such as smoke and mold, etc.).
- Define to the child what a "trusted adult" means. Communicate about personal safety, and to say "no" and tell a trusted adult if uncomfortable with any unsafe touching.

*"Providing good learning opportunities for children in their earliest years is every bit as important as in their school years, arguably more."*

Mike Sheehan, Early Childhood Educator





# 5. Communicating (literacy)

Note: Communication skills begin before birth. Language is an important part of cultural identity. Language skills begin in the child's home language(s). Tribal children may be learning their tribal language at the same time as a home language. Bilingual and bicultural families may speak more than one language at home.

## ↓ Children may ...

### Speaking and listening (language development)

- Communicate with body language, facial expression, tone of voice and in words.
- Say name, tribal or religious name if the child has one, age and sex.
- Show preference for the home language.
- Name most familiar things.
- Name one or more friends and relatives.
- Ask the meaning of new words, then try using them.
- Speak so most people can understand.
- Use words like “I,” “me,” “we,” and “you” and some plurals (such as cars, dogs).
- Use multi-word sentences, phrases, and gestures to communicate needs, ideas, actions and feelings.
- Respond to questions verbally or with gestures.
- Ask questions for information or clarification.
- Enjoy repeating rhyming words or word patterns in songs, poems or stories.
- Show awareness of separate syllables in words by tapping or clapping for each syllable.
- Remember and follow directions of one or two steps. Struggle to remember and follow complicated or multi-step directions.
- Know three to seven words in tribal language (if the family has one) and use them regularly.
- Participate in conversations. Take turn in group conversations, and listen to others in group for a short period of time.
- Recognize rising and falling intonations, and what these mean.

## ↓ Ideas to try with children ...

### Speaking and listening (language development)

- Watch for and listen to all of your child's ways of communicating.
- Help your child learn new words. Play naming games using things in the room or outdoors.
- Ask what your child is doing, listening to and seeing.
- Ask questions that call for more than a “yes” or “no” answer (such as “What do you think?”) and listen to your child's responses.
- Talk about daily events with your child. Engage your child in conversation. Consider using mealtime as a regular time to talk.
- Include nonverbal as well as verbal communication. For example, when saying “Go get your shoes,” point in that direction.
- Help your child notice that sometimes verbal language and non-verbal/body language are not the same. Children understand body language and facial expressions.
- Tell stories, read or recite poems and/or rhymes with your child. Sing rhyming songs.
- Help your child clap or tap out the beats (syllables) for a name or word.
- Give your child instructions with two steps. For example, “Go to the closet and get your coat.”
- Use tribal language or home language for frequently used terms, such as “yes,” “wash your hands,” “hello,” “see you later,” “thank you,” “are you hungry,” and so on.



*“During circle time, we shared a story about a canoe. We talked about the water, how we interact with water, how if you take care of it, it will take care of you. The children had fun sharing their own experiences: ‘I was on a canoe.’ ‘I got a button blanket.’ ‘I went to my first fish ceremony.’”*

Rebecca Kreth, Manager of the Native American Early Learning Program, Puget Sound Educational Service District



## ↓ Children may ...

### Reading

- Identify print on signs, etc., asking “What does that say?”
- Identify own name as a whole word.
- Match the beginning sounds of some words. Find objects in a picture that have the same beginning sound, with some adult help.
- Decide whether two words rhyme.
- Request a favorite book.
- Enjoy picture books and being read to. Enjoy looking at books on own. Use pictures to predict a story.
- Listen to and follow along with books in a different language.
- Turn book pages one at a time.
- Use own experiences to comment on a story, though the comments might not follow the story line.
- Retell simple, familiar stories from memory while looking at the book.

### Writing

- Make marks or scribbles when an adult suggests writing.
- Attempt to copy one or more letters or characters of the home language.
- Draw pictures and tell their story.

## ↓ Ideas to try with children ...

### Reading

- Read, tell stories, give examples to your child every day. Use different tones of voice and character voices. Ask questions about what the child has heard, and answer the child’s questions.
- Read alphabet books and solve alphabet puzzles with your child.
- Play rhyming games.
- Show words from different languages for the same picture or object.
- Take your child to the library, if available, and explore children’s books.
- When reading books, pay attention to your child and his or her interests and connection. Read fewer words if needed to keep your child engaged.
- Read favorite books aloud over and over, and encourage your child to look at them on his or her own.
- Ask your child to point out signs that he or she recognizes, and to tell you what each one means.

### Writing

- Write down what your child says and read it back.
- Write your child’s name and read it to him or her.
- Show words from child’s home language or tribal language if it has a written form.
- Show words in a variety of other languages, including languages that use different alphabets and writing systems.

# 6. Learning about my world

## ↓ Children may ...

### Knowledge (cognition)

- Ask a lot of “why” and “what” questions.
- Learn by doing hands-on and through the senses.
- Learn through play.
- Recall several items after they have been put out of sight.
- Draw on own past experiences to choose current actions.
- Make plans for ways to do something. May or may not follow through.
- Think of a different way to do something, when confronting a problem, with adult help.

## ↓ Ideas to try with children ...

### Knowledge (cognition)

- Listen to your child about things he or she is learning to do. Be encouraging. Ask what he or she is doing and why.
- When your child is frustrated by an activity, talk about what might be making the activity difficult, and ask how else he or she might do it. Make suggestions if your child cannot think of a different approach.
- Show how to do something, then give your child a chance to try it.
- Identify and help explore your child’s interests. Find related library books.
- Explain to your child whom to ask for information and when is appropriate to ask.
- Take your child to a park, zoo or your favorite places outside. Let your child explore these new places. Make walks to the grocery store and/or other places in your community into opportunities to explore.

## ↓ Children may ...

### Math

---

- Count to 10 and beyond by rote. Count up to five items. Point to objects while counting.
- Identify by sight how many are in a small group of items, up to three.
- Understand that the whole is larger than one of its parts (for example, an apple is larger than an apple slice).
- Identify up to four objects or pictures that are the same. Take objects or pictures that are different out of the group.
- Sort and describe items by size, color and/or shape.
- Match simple flat shapes (circles, squares, triangles).
- Compare size by sight, feel and comparing to hands, feet, etc. (visual and tactile math).
- Use gestures or words to make comparisons (larger, smaller, shorter, taller).
- Compare two objects by length, weight or size.
- Find the total sum of small groups of items.
- Understand words that tell where things are (such as behind, under, in, on). Use these words to identify locations.

### Science

---

- Play with materials of different texture (such as sand, water, leaves) and conditions (such as wet, dry, warm, cold), with adult encouragement and supervision.
- Recognize that different forms of life have different needs.
- Begin to understand that some animals share similar characteristics (for example, a tiger and a pet cat share common features).
- Notice and ask questions about what is the same and different between categories of plants and animals. Notice their appearance, behavior and habitat.

### Social Studies

---

- Name family members by relationship (such as father, sister, cousin, auntie, etc.).
- Make a drawing of own family as the child sees it.
- Recognize whose parent is whose when parents come for their children or in photos of each others' families.
- Take on family roles in play, identify how each person should behave and act out the part for a brief time. Enjoy changing roles.

## ↓ Ideas to try with children ...

### Math

---

- Play matching games. Ask your child to help set the table with safe items, such as spoons and paper plates, or to find objects around the house/classroom or in books that are the same.
- Play counting games. Count body parts, stairs and other things you use or see every day.
- Explore outdoors with your child and look for shapes and colors.
- Point out numbers on signs, in the grocery store, etc.
- Have your child use body parts (hands, thumbs, feet, arms) to judge the size or length of something.
- Show your child different objects and pictures, and figure out which one is larger by sight (visual math). Show your child how to use body parts (hand, feet, arms, etc.) to measure.
- Ask your child “Which is larger?” or “Which is more?” and listen to the answer. Ask why.
- Ask your child to tell the total of two small groups of items, up to  $3 + 2$ .
- Play “placing” games with your child with location words (such as “Put the ball under/on top of/beside the table.”). Take turns giving the directions.

### Science

---

- Help your child explore with the senses—seeing, hearing, touching, and smelling.
- Play a guessing game with different smells.
- Let your child play with different materials. Explore nature and look at leaves, rocks, flowers, etc.
- Cook together.
- Set up a spot to watch plants grow. Invite your child to watch the changes, and explore the look, touch and smell.
- Give your child the chance to care for plants and animals (with supervision), such as watering plants and helping to feed pets. Talk about how animals need many of the same things that people do.
- Point out similarities between familiar animals.

### Social Studies

---

- Give examples, or read or tell stories about families.
- Include a variety of family configurations in your stories.
- Help your child make a picture album (such as a stapled booklet), using photos or the child's drawings of family, friends, classmates and/or community members.
- Play family games with your child. Talk about what role you each will take and what actions each person will take. When done, suggest changing roles and playing again.



## ↓ Children may ...

### Arts

- Draw something familiar. Begin to draw representational figures.
- Do beadwork with appropriately sized beads.
- Play make-believe with dolls, toy animals and people.
- Dance, sing, drum, use rattles, draw or paint.
- Look at artwork from different cultures.

## ↓ Ideas to try with children ...

### Arts

- Provide your child a variety of materials to use to draw, such as pencils, markers, crayons, paint brushes, paper.
- Provide a variety of materials for your child to explore and use, such as blocks, cups, small boxes, sand, clay, yarn, cloth, tape, glue.
- Look for artwork in the community with your child, share art in books.
- Sing and dance together. Use drums, rattles and instruments from different traditions.
- Play music from different styles, cultures and countries.

See also Parent Help 123 on child development and school readiness, <http://www.parenthelp123.org/families/child-development>, and more in the Information Resources section.

# DIFFERENCES IN DEVELOPMENT

As a parent, you know your child best.

You notice things such as how and when your child learns new skills, eats new foods and plays with others. What you are seeing is how your child is growing through different stages of development.

Every child grows and develops at his or her own pace. It is important to talk with your child's healthcare provider at every visit about the milestones your child has reached and what to expect next. It is important to tell your child's healthcare provider if you notice any of these signs of possible developmental delay. Please make sure to discuss your concerns if:

## By age 4, your child:

- Can't jump in place
- Has trouble scribbling
- Shows no interest in interactive games or make-believe
- Ignores other children or doesn't respond to people outside of the family
- Resists dressing, sleeping, and using the toilet
- Doesn't understand "same" and "different"
- Doesn't use "me" and "you" correctly
- Doesn't follow three-part commands
- Can't retell a favorite story
- Speaks unclearly
- Loses skills he or she once had

## For more information:

---

Talk to your child's health care provider about your concerns. You can also call the Family Health Hotline at 1-800-322-2588. This hotline can tell you about free developmental screening and connect you to your local school district. Your school district can tell you if your child might be eligible to have an evaluation to determine the need for special education (for ages 3 to 5 years).

The Family Health Hotline can also provide information about immunizations, state-sponsored health insurance and other resources.

You can also find information from the state Department of Early Learning at <http://www.del.wa.gov/development/Default.aspx>, or go to [http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/esit/docs/PrescreenChart\\_English.pdf](http://www.del.wa.gov/publications/esit/docs/PrescreenChart_English.pdf)

Parent Help 123 offers information on child development and school readiness: <http://www.parenthelp123.org/families/child-development>.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at 1-800-CDC-INFO or at [www.cdc.gov/concerned](http://www.cdc.gov/concerned) also offers information. See CDC's *Milestone Moments* brochure: [http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/parents\\_pdfs/MilestoneMomentsEng508.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/parents_pdfs/MilestoneMomentsEng508.pdf)



**For children who may be eligible for services offered by the local school district (Part B):** Family involvement has a positive impact on educational outcomes for all students. To support family involvement in special education, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction provides web visitors with user-friendly information and resources on various special education topics. Visit the website at <http://www.k12.wa.us/SpecialEd/Families/default.aspx> to find information and guidance for families on “What To Do If You Think Your Child Needs Special Education.” Also see the “Differences in Development” section for Age 5 and Kindergarten in these Guidelines for the steps involved in a special education evaluation.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

