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Your Three Year Old

As a parent of a three year old you may begin to notice your child calming down a bit! Much of the erratic, unpredictable, and negative toddler stage begins to melt into a somewhat more consistent, easier to live with child. At least a few of the “No’s” begin to be replaced by “Yes’s”. Some authors call this “coming of age”, a time when many of the facets of earlier development come together and thus emerges a new “self” – a young preschooler!

During this time your child is working on several developmental tasks. Some of these include:

- ✓ Achieving a period of slow but steady growth.
- ✓ Beginning to see themselves as an individual and begin self-governing.
- ✓ Being able to tolerate separations from mother.
- ✓ Developing a conscience.
- ✓ Distinguishing between fantasy and reality.
- ✓ Becoming a bit more socialized.

Your three year old will be working on these day by day for the next few years.

Three year olds are still, however, very immature. For example, even their thinking is different from yours. Your child is unable to reason and solve problems as you do. His/Her thinking is very concrete and egocentric. Three year olds truly believe that everyone sees the world as they do! Magical thinking colors their days and their lines between make believe and real are still blurred. They believe what they wish will actually happen. Many children of this age also concentrate on only one aspect of a situation at a time. For example, if your child concentrates only on the shape of a whole peanut butter and jelly sandwich and you cut it into pieces, your three year old may refuse to eat it believing it is a totally different thing now. Trying to understand how they are thinking may help you resolve everyday conflicts.



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Behavior may again be a challenge around three and a half when many children become somewhat rebellious and enter a wild and wonderful period of strengthening their wills by going against the demands of the people closest to them.

In general, three year olds are a magical, very social group of little people. Enjoy them!

Nutrition

As we have said, your child's growth is slowing down a bit now and so will their appetite. The average weight gain is only about 3-5 pounds per year. Food preferences are strong and may change frequently. Try not to make mealtime a struggle. Provide small portions and make sure protein, fruits, and vegetables are available.

Discipline

In general, we believe that three year olds need consistent, humane discipline. Ideally, our goal is to socialize these little children as best as we can using the most positive of techniques. Volumes have been written on this subject. We suggest you review our list of suggested readings for guidance in this area. Briefly, here are a few techniques that can be useful with preschoolers:

- ✓ Active listening: reflecting feeling back to your child.
- ✓ Ignoring unacceptable behavior that is not dangerous or destructive.
- ✓ Positive reinforcement: compliment your child's good behavior.
- ✓ Catch your child being good and comment on how much you like the good behavior.
- ✓ Substitution: redirecting an activity so that it will be acceptable.
- ✓ Modify your environment so that it is safe and stimulating to your child.
- ✓ Allowing a child to experience natural and logical consequences of their actions.
- ✓ Time out: see Timeout Handout for techniques.



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Dental

Yearly dental visits are recommended along with daily brushing with parental guidance and assistance.

Keeping Your Three Year Old Healthy

Use a car seat.

Facilitate adequate rest and sleep habits.

Provide for active and quiet play – inside and outside with playmates.

Expose to play group, preschool, or Parent's Day Out.

Teach independent hygiene skills – brushing teeth, hand washing, and bathing.

Provide a relaxed and balanced diet (use multivitamins if in doubt).

Use consistent and humane discipline.

Pile on the praise and hugs for appropriate behavior.

Begin to teach “emotional vocabulary” – angry, happy, sad, jealousy, and lonely.

Somehow find time for yourself as a person, parent, husband/wife/partner.

Keep your sense of humor!!!

Safety

Accidents continue to be the principle cause of death, i.e. falls, automobile accidents, burns, and drowning. Remember that a car seat is still imperative. Three year olds also need to begin to learn street and neighborhood safety rules.

A Few Words on Being a Parent



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Many health and developmental issues may arise such as illness, behavior, fears, night walking, bowel/bladder accidents, toilet training, "stealing", "lying", language development, etc. There are numerous books available to help guide you. Please see our suggested reading section for our recommendations and feel free to discuss any issues or concerns you may have with us.

Suggested Reading

NEXT CHECKUP: 4 YEARS OF AGE