



Welcome Words for your 3 1/2 to 4 Year Old

TEACHING RESPONSIBILITY

Parents want to rear their children to become responsible and independent — kids who will learn to pick up after themselves and willingly do their share of whatever needs to be done. But for most of us, figuring out how much a preschooler can do, and how to best encourage him to do it, is tricky. Since 4-year-olds are generally cooperative and enthusiastic, this is a good age to begin introducing chores. Here are some suggestions.

- Assign reasonable chores (or let your preschooler choose a couple of jobs from a list). With minimal guidance, many 4-year-olds can dust, water plants, tear lettuce for a salad, stir cookie dough or mix a cake, pick up toys, sort laundry, put dirty clothes in a hamper, sweep (a sidewalk, porch or deck may be most appealing), help clear the table, place newspapers and cans in recycling bins, put some groceries away, and pull weeds.
- Work together. It's easier to get a chore done when everyone's pitching in. Be sure that the job isn't too much for your preschooler to handle, then set aside a chore time (maybe Saturday morning) when everyone gets their work done.
- Respect his efforts. Don't go behind your child redoing what he's done. Respect that he's done his best and find something positive to comment on ("You got all your dirty clothes in the laundry basket" or "You got all the dust off the dining room table. It really shines.")
- Whistle while you work or even if you don't feel like whistling, don't gripe. If you're negative about household chores, your child will be too.
Should chores be tied to an allowance? Opinions differ. Some parents begin offering a modest allowance to preschoolers and connecting it to doing weekly jobs. Other parents feel that everyone should work for the mutual good of the family. If children receive an allowance in these families, there are no strings attached.

At 4, I am

- very active and need lots of outdoor play.
- like rules, routines and boundaries.
- love adventure, excursions and anything new.
- enjoy imaginative play, especially dress-up and fantasies involving super heroes and monsters.
- may repeat profanity and enjoy "bathroom" humor.
- am silly and loud.
- tell tall tales and boast.
- am still sorting out fact from fantasy.
- can probably draw a circle and square and may be able to write my name.
- show interest in male/female differences and "playing doctor."
- may be afraid of darkness, nightmares and imaginary creatures.
- am more obedient with others than with parents.
- may still not be dry through the night.

Give me

- ♦ hand puppets.
- ♦ fit-together toys like Legos or Tinkertoys.
- ♦ a flashlight.
- ♦ a dollhouse and stroller.
- ♦ simple board games ("Candyland," "Chutes and Ladders," "Uncle Wiggly").
- ♦ simple card games like "Go Fish" and "Old Maid".
- ♦ magnets.
- ♦ jigsaw puzzles.
- ♦ a scrapbook.
- ♦ small garden tools.
- ♦ a prominent place to display my artwork and lots of art supplies.

MAKING THE MOST OF TV

If you want to avoid the TV-as-babysitter syndrome but aren't ready to throw out the tube, don't worry: You can find a happy medium. Here are some tips that will help:

- Limit preschoolers to an hour of worthwhile TV shows a day.
- Preview shows, or at least join your child the first time she sees a program.
- If you feel something is inappropriate, turn the television off and offer a different activity you can do together — maybe reading a story.
- Watching with your child, and helping her understand what she sees, will help her develop a healthy attitude about TV.
- Use what you've seen as a springboard for further talks. As Fred Rogers of Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood says, Television may be the only electrified appliance that's more useful after it's turned off."
- Pay close attention to how shows affect your child. Is she upbeat and talkative afterwards, or does she seem anxious and withdrawn, but beg for more TV? Make programs that have a negative affect off-limits. Extend what you've seen with follow-up activities. Whether this is a hands-on activity from *Sesame Street* or checking out a *Reading Rainbow* book from the library, TV can inspire active learning.

Why limit and supervise television? In his book, *The Smart Parent's Guide to Kids' TV*, Milton Chen, Ph.D., reports: Unlimited TV and high-calorie munchies often go hand in hand, which can lead to unhealthy weight gain and inactivity.

Playing Doctor

If you've never walked in to find your preschooler and a friend, "playing doctor," there's a good chance you will.

Curiosity about other children's bodies is normal and frequently occurs between the ages of 3 and 6. For a child, this investigation is just as natural as comparing apples and oranges, or anything else in nature.

It's a good idea to plan a response since, while it's not universal, this behavior is typical of 4-year-olds. Even though you may feel shocked, try to remain calm and matter of fact. You might say, "I see you two are comparing each other's bodies. You both have penises." (Or, "Boys have a penis and girls have a vagina.") "These are private parts of our body, so we don't let other people see them or touch them."

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends teaching children that "No other person, including close friends and relatives, may touch his private parts. The exceptions to this rule are doctors and nurses during exams, and his parents when they are trying to find the cause of pain or discomfort he's feeling in the genital area."

Then ask the children to get their clothes back on and suggest an alternative form of play that you can supervise — "Now let's read a story (or go to the park)."

Later in the day, ask your child if he has any questions. A book on the human body is a good way to extend the discussion. (Ask your librarian for suggested titles for your child's age.) You could also let the other child's parents know how you handled this situation, which may help prepare them for a similar incident. If you have concerns about your child's interest in sex, talk about them with his doctor.

Suggested Reading

Caring for Your Baby and Young Child: Birth to Age 5
The American Academy of Pediatrics,
Steven P. Shelov, M.D., Ed.

I'm Three Years Old
by Jerri Wolfe

Wonderful Ways to Love a Child
by Judy Ford

The Smart Parent's Guide to Kids' TV
by Milton Chen

FABULOUS AT FOUR

Most parents find 4 a wonderful age. Perhaps it has something to do with moving beyond the emotional roller coaster of life with a 3 1/2-year-old, or maybe it's the reflected pleasure that shines from the typically energetic 4-year-old.

By his fourth birthday, your child will probably have strong opinions on everything from food and clothes to books and superheroes. If he's especially attached to you, he may dislike anything different about your appearance -- whether it's a new hairstyle or a new watch.



His questions will seem endless, but they can lead to conversations that you'll both enjoy. He tends to be on the move -- things are done quickly and then he's on to something else. Even in drawing he may change his picture from a tree to a house to a boat.

His high energy can lead to out-of-bounds behavior, which may involve hitting, kicking or spitting, and also verbal exaggeration -- he'll boast that he caught "a million fireflies" or that he ate "100 cookies." When angry, a 4-year-old may threaten to run away from home. Profanity seems especially attractive and parents are often dismayed to hear four-letter words repeated at the least welcome time, such as when grandparents or other guests are visiting. Because of all this out-of-bounds behavior, children at this age are reassured by boundaries. Knowing the house rules and having clear and firm limits ("You can go as far as that sliding board" or "You can watch one TV show") comforts 4-year-olds.

Beyond safe and predictable limits, one of your best strategies at this age is to make the most of your child's love of silly words and rhymes. If he calls you something rude, you might counter with, "You're a wet noodle riding a caboodle." If your child's behavior doesn't compromise his or another's safety, relax, and if possible, play along.

GIVING UP THE NAP

Before their fourth birthday, many children seem to outgrow the need for an afternoon nap. As long as your child is sleeping well at night and seems happy and rested through most of the day, he can probably do without a nap.

But if he's easily frustrated or cranky and seems overtired, insist on a quiet time spent in his room each afternoon. He can spend this time, perhaps 30 minutes, listening to a soothing cassette, drawing with markers, or looking at his favorite books. This will also give you a much-needed break from your lively preschooler.



