



Welcome Words for your 4-4 1/2 Years Old

Expecting Extremes from Your 4 year Old

One minute your preschooler is loud, bossy and out-of-bounds. The next she's surprisingly calm, quiet and cooperative. What, you're wondering, is *real* 4 1/2-year-old behavior?

The answer is "Both." Although her play may be less wild and frustration easier for her to tolerate, 4 1/2 is often an age of disequilibrium. Emotions can change rapidly from laughter to tears, and there may also be an exasperating determination to do (or have) something that's off-limits, such as sparklers at the Fourth of July. When refused something she *really* wants, she'll show you her unhappiness: she may even stick out her tongue and make faces.

Her periods of calm, however, are a promise of 5-year-old behavior. Until then, she's likely to get along better with friends her own age than with siblings. She's beginning to understand the difference between good and bad behavior. She'll especially enjoy stories about your own childhood adventures. Share the things you did that were either off-limits or particularly good.

At 4, I am

- working to sort out what's real from what is make-believe.
- more self-motivated and have a longer attention span.
- enjoy discussing details about many subjects.
- may be catching up with others my age in areas of language, motor or intellectual development.
- may still not stay dry though the night.

Give me

- coloring books (but don't stress about staying within the lines)
- age-appropriate games such as Memory and Animal Lotto
- props for dramatic play -- dress-up clothes, hats, dolls, jewelry, hand-bags
- jigsaw puzzles
- a jump rope and roller skates
- books such as any by Dr. Seuss, Berenstain Bears, Amelia Bedelia, and Where the Wild Things Are.

Pre-School Profanity %*!?!&

Even if your child never heard an obscenity at home, chances are by four she would have learned more than a few four-letter words. They seem to crop up everywhere -- on TV, on the playground and within earshot at the mall.

While preschoolers rarely understand what an obscenity means, they quickly pick up its shock appeal. When one father asked his son the meaning of an expression making the rounds at preschool, he was told, "That's just what you say to get someone's attention."

And giving your child attention, especially negative attention, is likely to prolong the use of bad language. The best response, hard as it may be, is to ignore it.

You can also try:

Cleaning up your own act. Rather than resorting to the shorthand of a four-letter word, let your child hear you say, "I'm really frustrated!" Or, substitute a less offensive and silly expression, such as "Oh, fudge!" or, "Oh, fiddlesticks!"

Setting limits on when and where certain words are allowed. Some families permit children to use four-letter words only in private -- perhaps in the child's bedroom with the door closed.

Lies and Learning to Wait

The whole truth and nothing but the truth? Don't expect it from your preschooler. At this age, your child is still learning the difference between what's real and what's not. Most fours will pin the blame for misbehavior elsewhere -- even on a pet -- rather than 'fess up. This isn't a conscious lie as much as it is a wish -- your child wishes she hadn't spilled the can of paint you asked her not to go near.

Preschoolers also live in the present. Your child wants what she wants NOW, not for her next birthday. This makes taking a badly wanted toy from a friend's house hard to resist. Remember that this is a phase nearly all preschoolers go through. In time, your child will learn to wait, and, most likely, she'll share your standards of honesty.

In the meantime, try to:

- Focus on solutions, not blame. If your child has taken something that belongs to another child, ask her to take it back. Tell her, "We need to check with your friend and her parents before you take her toys. You need to take it back and ask them."
- Beware of your own little white lies. If you don't want to open the door to a salesperson, say so through the closed door rather than pretending no one's at home.
- Let your child know that everyone makes mistakes and has accidents -- even grown-ups! Let her see you accept responsibility, apologize (or clean up the mess), and move on. She'll learn to do the same.
- Share stories about moral behavior. There's the old story of the boy who cried wolf, the tale of Pinocchio, examples from your own past, and a number of good books for preschoolers on this theme at the public library. Ask the librarian for suggestions.



Pre-School Skills

If you're worried about helping your child master her ABCs and numbers before she starts kindergarten, relax.

Leave the academics to her future teachers, but ask yourself the following questions.

- ⇒ How are my child's social and group skills?
- ⇒ How can I help her learn to respect others, sit quietly for a few minutes and pay attention, follow directions and take turns?
- ⇒ Does my child have organizing skills?
- ⇒ How does my child handle herself personally?
- ⇒ What can I do to help her handle frustration and disappointment?

Chances are that you and your child's caregiver or preschool teacher are already doing many things to build these skills, but here are a few other suggestions:

Social and Group Skills

- At mealtime, make sure everyone in the family gets time to talk. Start with 30 seconds of talking and listening, then increase it to a minute or minute and a half.
- Choose a TV show or book you and your child will both enjoy. Take turns asking each other questions such as, "What might happen to the characters after this show or book ends?"
- Play "Mother May I" or "Simon Says." These games are a fun way to practice following directions.

Organizing Skills

- Give your child a calendar and help her mark special events with stickers or colored markers. Refer to it daily, noting the month, date and day of the week.
- Help her organize her room with a shelf or bin for specific toys, puzzles, books and games. When it's time for clean up, have her start with a single category and tackle them one at a time: "Put all your books on the book shelf. Now put away all the blocks."

Personal Skills

- Help her organize her room with a shelf or bin for specific toys, puzzles, books and games.
- Let her know that everyone has bad days. You might read Judith Viorst's book *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*.
- When she's disappointed, tell her that you love her, but be upbeat about her ability to move ahead.
- Help her identify her anger. If she yells, 'I hate you,' chances are she's saying, "I'm angry and I need help to sort out my feelings." Try saying, "You sound very angry about not going to your friend's house. Would you like to talk about it?"