



Stimulating Cognitive and Physical Development in the 3 and 4 Year Old Child

Language Development

Your child should now be speaking in short, full sentences, and be able to put paragraphs together. Go to the public library once each week and check out ten to twenty books. Make sure they are interesting and colorful. Remember, you, the parent, will be reading the book many times. Have your pre-schooler make the sounds of animals, pat the bunny, etc. Learning needs to be participatory. Encourage your child to talk about what he or she did at school. Encourage your child to tell stories; they have active imaginations and you will be amazed at their stories if you take the time to listen. Encourage talk as they play. Have a tea party. Role play with dolls. Wooden blocks can be used in so many imaginative ways. As your child grows older, the blocks can be used in more sophisticated play.

Fine Motor Skills

Most three year olds are not ready to write. They need to develop fine motor control of their hands and fingers first. Play dough is a wonderful modality to help develop and strengthen fine motor control of the hands and fingers. Legos also help develop fine motor control. Pipe cleaners are great for fine motor development and can be used when your child needs to be quiet. Stringing macaroni and painting the noodles is another fun way to encourage fine motor development. Of course there are the traditional scissors and crayons. Once your child's project is completed, make sure you display it prominently, perhaps on the refrigerator, or even in the child's bedroom. Your child's self-esteem will improve when they see their artwork being used to decorate and improve their home.

Gross Motor Skills

Your child is becoming stronger and is better able to try more complicated activities. They love to climb on toddler playgrounds. The summer is a great time to teach your child to swim. Play toss with a large beach ball; they should be able to catch it successfully most of the time. Pedaling a tricycle is another accomplishment. Short hikes are a great family activity that increase endurance and strength. Family activities like these encourage an active lifestyle later when your child is a teen.

Cognitive Development

Again, the more active and fun you can make learning, the more quickly your child will learn. Hide and seek is a wonderful game to teach counting. If your pre-schooler is the seeker, teach them to count to twenty while everyone else hides. Because they are having so much fun playing the game, learning to count will progress almost effortlessly. Take your child to the zoo. Read about animals before you go, then talk and ask questions while they observe the animals up close. The grocery store is full of teachable moments. Have your three year old smell the different kinds of fruit, and then have them close their eyes and see if they can identify the fruit by its smell. Have them help you weigh the vegetables so they start thinking in terms of pounds and ounces. Ask them to name the colors of the fruits and vegetables. Have them feel the various textures of different foods. Talk to them about healthy foods versus junk foods. Teach them which vitamins are found in the different foods. Show them how you read labels to discover additives, food content, calories, etc. Hopefully, your trips to the grocery store will go better if your child is actively learning.

The above activities take time and patience. However, if you take the time to encourage your pre-schooler's speech, fine motor, gross motor and cognitive development, he or she will be more than ready for kindergarten. Additionally, you will have spent many fun, enjoyable hours with your child and you can watch with pride as he or she matures into a competent and secure school-age child.

