I like that I can do things on my own!

I can dress myself, brush my teeth and go to the bathroom. I am learning to take turns and follow directions. I like playing with other children and can comfort them when they are sad. Please stay close I still need your love and guidance!

Say
- More than 1,000 words
- First and last name
- His gender, age, interests and strengths
- Sentences of four or five words
- Past tense
- “He” and “she” correctly
- Numbers to four, and names colors
- More questions than any age
- Words that aren’t fully understood
- Vulgar words
- Says a poem but not know meaning or sing a song from memory
- Something about personal family matters to others
- What she likes and what she is interested in

Do
- Improved balance
- Hop on one foot without losing balance
- Throw a ball overhand with coordination
- Cut out a picture using scissors
- May still wet the bed (normal)
- Try to be very independent
- May show increased aggressive behavior
- Would rather play with other children than by himself
- Comfort playmate in distress
- Remember parts of a story
- Draws a person with 2 to 4 body parts
- Dress independently when asked
- Play board games
- Walk down stairs by placing 1 foot on each step (alternating gait)
- Pour, cut with supervision and mash own food
- Demonstrate hand preference
- Holds marker/crayon with thumb, index and middle finger

Understand
- Commonly has imaginary playmates
- Time
- Difference between two objects based on things like size and weight, same and different
- Lacks moral concepts of right and wrong
- Is more creative with make-believe play
- How to cooperate with other children
- The idea of counting
- Tell you what he thinks is going to happen next in book
- Verbalizes feelings prior to physical expression

See
- Vision is 20/20
Sleep

4 year-olds enjoy being recognized as being “big enough” to assume greater independence in daily routines. Nightmares and night terrors are common at this age. Some things that children see on TV can affect their sleep. If your child is experiencing trouble sleeping reflect on stressors in the home or what your child has been viewing, or hearing.

What is the difference between a night terror and a nightmare? A nightmare is a scary dream that completely wakes up a child after he has been asleep for a while. A night terror usually happens just after a child falls into a deep sleep, early in the night. A child is not really awake during a night terror, and may not respond to the parent. A child may cry, scream, thrash about and generally act very afraid. The fear ends when the child wakes up or goes back to sleep. Usually children remember nightmares the next day, but they don’t remember night terrors.

Create a calm bedtime routine that includes reading or telling stories, this will promote language development and pre-reading skills. Pleasant stories will help your child sleep peacefully.

Feed

Just like the toddler the 4 year olds eating patterns can vary from day to day, meal to meal. A poor appetite or limited food preference is not a major concern if your child’s growth rate has been normal. Create a pleasant atmosphere at mealtimes by sharing conversation that includes your child.

Development

Fears

Between the third and fourth year, your child’s imagination becomes extremely active. It is not uncommon to see this age group have imaginary friends, be concerned about monsters or have a fear of burglars. Typical fears involve the dark, scary, noises, masks, TV monsters, animals, being alone and worry about being harmed by superhuman creatures. These young children have a hard time differentiating between fantasy and reality. They truly believe that monsters they may see on TV are real and are going to hurt them. Halloween costumes that are scary or morbid will terrify this age as they believe they are real. Because they are fearful of the dark they can be easily disoriented if they wake during the night in darkness. Even the quietest sound or shadow can be easily exaggerated. They are also beginning to become afraid about losing the primary care giver. Not all fears will be experienced by all children in an age group. These are the average or typical fears for a 4 year old. If you feel that your child’s fear is not age-appropriate, or if a fear is interfering with normal development it would be important to discuss with your primary care provider. When fears seem maladaptive or are causing problems in daily functioning, this can affect a young child’s self-esteem and may require further assessment or treatment.
4 Year Milestones

School guidance

Readiness for school is a lengthy process that begins at birth. The 4 year old is developing early literacy skills as they show interest in letters and play with sounds making rhymes of real and nonsense words. Many 4 year olds attend pre-school giving them an opportunity to have a structured learning experience, opportunities to socialize with other children and increase their fluency. Below are some simple guides to help you know if your child is ready for school and prepare them for the transition.

4 year olds

- Ask a multitude of questions regarding the world around them. Because of their ability to use their imagination, it is best to keep answers short, simple and factual.
- Can be very sensitive and get hurt easily by what people say or do to them. Observe how your child interacts with other children, this will provide you with an idea of her social understanding and skills. Listen to and always treat your child with respect. Modeling respectful behavior along with modeling apologies if you have hurt someone’s feelings, demonstrates sensitivity to the feeling of others. Praise your child when she shows sensitivity.
- Are very busy and their socialization skills are blooming. Understanding how your child behaves in social situations will give you an idea of her confidence. Give your child opportunities to interact with other children and play; joining playgroups, attending preschool or other community activities. Praise your child for her cooperation with others and her accomplishments. Help your child to express what they are feeling; joy, anger, sadness, fear and frustration. Spend time alone with your child doing something you both enjoy.
- Speech and vocabulary have exploded, but it is not uncommon for there to be some lack of fluency (stuttering) when speaking. As speech and language skills develop it is not unusual for children to have repetitions of whole words. Most children outgrow stuttering, however if it lasts for 6 months with no improvement it may be necessary for a speech evaluation, especially if the child is struggling to get words out and showing signs of distress about having trouble speaking. Encourage your child’s language skills by talking with her about her friends and her experiences during different activities. Read together daily, point out letters in her name and play with silly sounds of nonsense words (“oodles and boodles of noodles and foodles”). Take trips to the library and have her pick out books that interest her. Provide plenty of time for your child to tell a story or respond to a question, be patient, many times stuttering occurs if your child feels rushed. Try not to interrupt your child, allowing them to finish their thoughts and sentences.

Play

- Encourage and provide space for physical activity
- Be physically active as a family, go on walks, play in the park or ride bikes.
- Show the child how to participate in, and follow the rules of sporting activities
- Encourage play and sharing with other children
- Encourage creative play
- Teach children to do small chores, such as setting the table
- Read together
- Limit television watching to 2 hours a day of quality programs/2hours also includes use of computers, iPad, phones or other screened devices. Always monitor what your child is watching or playing

Advocate Children’s Hospital
Guidance/Concerns

Health Routines

All of your child’s primary teeth are in and it is good practice to protect those teeth from damaging cavities. Have your child brush his teeth twice a day with a pea-sized amount of fluoridated toothpaste. He should spit out the toothpaste after brushing, and try not to rinse his mouth with water. It is important that an adult supervises tooth brushing each time.

Screen Time

Television, computers, video games are very appealing to all children. Research has shown that children who spend too much time with these activities have a risk of being overweight and may lead to an increase in violence in children and decrease time for physical activity. Short amounts of quality screen time can be useful in improving school readiness. Limit screen time to no more than 2 hours total per day. View what your child is watching or playing to be sure that the content is appropriate. Watch TV with your child and talk together about the programs. More importantly, encourage your child to be as active as possible in a variety of activities. Along with your child’s individual activity, like running, jumping, marching, plan family activities such as walking, hiking, playing in the park, or riding bikes.

Safety and Exploration

As your 4 year old becomes more independent and more social a whole new world of experiences will unfold. They may become more active with friends in the neighborhood, attend preschool, or join activities through the community. As these experiences broaden their knowledge of the world around them it also presents itself with its own set of safety concerns.

- Talk with other parents about preschools or other programs you may be interested in, what their experiences have been and how their children. Do site visits to preschools or park districts to observe classes that are in session.
- Advocate and participate in neighborhood safety programs.
- Continue to use the appropriate car safety seat for your child’s age, height and weight. Car seats should be positioned in the rear seat according to the manufacturer’s instructions and your vehicle owner’s manual.
- Always wear a helmet when riding a bike. Modeling the importance of wearing helmets by having all members of the family wear a helmet.
- Never leave your child alone when she is outside.
- Supervise all play near streets or driveways. Your child is not ready to cross the street alone.
- Water safety: teach your child to swim, do not let your child play around any water (lake, pool, ocean etc.) without adult supervision (even if he is a good swimmer), always wear a safety vest or life preserver on a boat, and childproof the pool by enclosing it in a fence with a self-closing/self-latching door.
Apply sunscreen to exposed skin surfaces 30 minutes before going outside. Apply a generous amount of sunscreen and reapply if your child has been in the water. Choose a sunscreen that provides a broad spectrum UVA and UVB protection, is water resistant, hypoallergenic and fragrance free.

Natural curiosity at this age will entice the child to get into everything. Keep medications, cleaning solutions and insecticides out of children’s reach. Have the Poison Control Center number near all home phones or programmed in your cell phone for quick access (1-800-222-1222).

Many homes have guns, the best way to keep your child from harm is to not have a gun in the home. Young children do not understand how dangerous guns can be. If you do have a gun in your home make sure that it is kept in a secure location unloaded. The gun and ammunition should be locked in separate locations. Make sure you know if there are guns in other homes where your child may play or visit. If there are make sure that the unloaded gun and ammunition are in separate locked cabinets.

Know the adults and older children whom your child may be in contact with. Keep your child away from anyone that you feel may be dangerous.

Your child will be curious about their own body parts and the differences between boys and girls. Speak honestly to your child about their body parts and use the correct terminology. Explain to your child that certain parts of the body (those areas normally covered by a bathing suit) are private and should not be touched by others without permission.

Strangers offer their own type of danger, however it is more common for abusers to be a person that you or your child trusts. Teach your child rules for how to be safe with other adults, using these 3 principles: (1) no adult should tell a child to keep secrets from parents, (2) no adult should express interest in private parts, and (3) no adult should ask a child for help with his or her own private parts.