

# Development: Promoting Thinking Skills for 3s, 4s and 5s

Preschoolers are filled with a sense of wonder, curiosity and a desire to make sense of their world. They are constantly learning from the world around them. During this time in a child's life, there is a tremendous increase in the number of dendrite connections in the brain. As myelination of the nerves continues, messages travel more efficiently. This tremendous period of brain development accounts for the spectacular learning that takes place during the preschool years.

Preschoolers are creative and love to experiment. They are beginning to develop their problem-solving skills through trial and error, manipulation and experimentation of the environment. They are unable to distinguish fantasy from reality before the age of four, which means they may tell some very tall tales and continue to be sensitive to what they see on television. Their ability to stay focused will expand from five minutes as a three-year-old, to ten minutes as a four-year-old, to the ability to stay with a task until it is complete as a five-year-old.

Preschoolers continue to learn through hands-on exploration and from the people around them. They need plenty of uninterrupted time to explore and create with a variety of materials. They need to have interactions with adults and other children as they explore their world.



## *Three-year-olds are learning . . .*

To **match, sort, and classify** when they help to put the dishes and silverware away.

To **name colors** when they are provided with opportunities to talk about the colors they are wearing, the colors of the flowers, the colors in the books you read together.

**Counting** when you help them use counting in daily tasks. How many plates do we need on the table for dinner? How many forks and spoons? How many carrots do you have?



To **represent ideas** through pretend play. Provide a box of "props" for your child with dress-up clothes, tools for a variety of occupations, writing supplies, and more.

## *Four-year-olds are learning . . .*

**Matching, sorting, and classifying** as they start collections of rocks, leaves, bottle caps, buttons and put them into groups according to shape, size, or length.



**Concepts and patterns** as you use beads, blocks, pasta, or household items to make a simple pattern for them

to copy, such as red-block, blue-block, red-block, blue-block, red-block, then ask your child what would come next. You may name the colors and shapes as you place them. Have them create a pattern for you to copy.

To **count** ten items out loud when you play board games together, having your child count the squares to move ahead.

**Exploration and experimentation** when you let your child help in the kitchen with baking. Ask questions such as "What dissolves?" "What floats?" "Before we bake the cake it is liquid. What happens after it is baked?"



To **share thoughts and ideas** when drawing pictures, making lists, or building with blocks. Ask them to tell you about their drawings and buildings. Leave those buildings up when possible.

## *Five-year-olds are learning . . .*

To **arrange objects** in order of size. Have your child find the smallest item in a group of toy animals. Which is the biggest? Compare the sizes in between and arrange them in order of size.

To **understand opposites** as they separate their collections into opposites: big cars and little cars; smooth shells and rough shells.

To **write numbers** as they write grandma's phone number, help with a grocery list (four apples), and learn their address.



To **predict and think critically** as they explore art materials, musical instruments, and building materials. Ask them questions such as "How did you make that?" "What would happen if you . . .?" or "How could you . . .?"