

# Your Child at Four Years Old

**FOUR-YEAR-OLDS MAY NOT BE GROWING PHYSICALLY AS FAST AS THEY DID AS AN INFANT**, but they are making leaps and bounds both socially and emotionally. Your child can be easily frustrated, but is learning to gain self control. You can help by providing encouragement and support while maintaining patience during those frustrating moments.

**Sleep** Four-year-olds need at least 12 hours of sleep a day. They may or may not be napping; it all depends on the child. It is common for four-year-olds to get out of bed at night with many excuses not to go to sleep. The best thing to do is stick to the bedtime routine and when your little ones need a drink for the sixth time, be calm but firm with them and let them know it is bedtime and that you will see them in the morning.

**Nutrition** Proper nutrition includes:

- › Three meals a day, plus two nutritious snacks
- › Limiting high sugar and high fat foods
- › Eating fruits, vegetables, lean meats and low fat dairy products

### Physical Development

- › Walks backwards
- › Jumps forwards many times
- › Walks up and down stairs
- › Somersaults
- › Uses safety scissors
- › Cuts on line continuously
- › Copies squares and crosses
- › Prints a few capital letters
- › Draws a person

### Social and Emotional Development

- › Enjoys playing with other children
- › Takes turns and shares (most of the time); may still be rather bossy
- › Seeks out adult approval
- › Understands and obeys simple rules (most of the time)
- › Likes to talk and carries on detailed conversations
- › Understands jealousy
- › Fears the dark and monsters
- › Begins to understand danger
- › Has difficulty separating make-believe from reality
- › Feels anger and frustration and may still throw tantrums
- › Enjoys pretending
- › Has a vivid imagination and sometimes imaginary playmates

### Cognitive Development

- › Groups and matches objects
- › Organizes materials
- › Asks “why” and “how”
- › Tells their own name and age
- › Pays attention for longer periods of time
- › Learns by watching and listening
- › Shows awareness of past and present
- › Follows a series of two to four directions
- › Points to and names colors
- › Understands order and process
- › Counts to five
- › Knows the names of their street and town

## ADDITIONAL SAFETY TIPS FOR YOUR CHILD AT FOUR YEARS OLD

A Home Safety Checklist should be completed at each stage of your child's development. A sample checklist is provided for you on page 70.

- ▶ Always supervise while your child is in and around water—both in and outside of the home
- ▶ Teach pedestrian behavior such as crossing streets and using sidewalks and crosswalks
- ▶ If you must have a gun in the house, keep it separate from the bullets in a different locked place

## Positive Parenting Activities that Promote Nurturing and Attachment

Your child is quickly leaving behind baby behaviors. There are new skills your children must learn and behaviors they are learning to control. They are beginning to solve problems and learning to follow rules. How are they processing all this new information? They are imitating the adults around them as they begin to understand many different functions in their world.

- ▶ Give your child a specific chore in the house that needs to be done each day; like feeding the fish, helping set the table, cleaning up toys or checking the mail.
- ▶ Teach them to always say please and thank you when asking for something.
- ▶ Teach the importance of not interrupting others when they are speaking unless it is something important.

Children this age need to learn healthy ways to deal with anger and the importance of self-control. Children may feel very angry and not understand how to let it out. Help them label their emotions and explain that it is ok to feel that way, but that we must still follow all the rules.



## When to be Concerned

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, you should let your doctor know if at four years old your child:

- ▶ Still clings or cries whenever his parents leave him
- ▶ Shows no interest in interactive games
- ▶ Ignores other children
- ▶ Doesn't respond to people outside the family
- ▶ Doesn't engage in fantasy play
- ▶ Resists dressing, sleeping or using the toilet
- ▶ Lashes out without any self-control when angry or upset
- ▶ Cannot copy a circle
- ▶ Doesn't use sentences of more than three words
- ▶ Doesn't use "me" and "you" appropriately
- ▶ Can't tell the difference between fantasy and reality
- ▶ Cannot understand two-part commands using prepositions ("Put the cup on the table"; "Get the ball under the couch.")
- ▶ Can't correctly give first and last name

## HERE'S HELP



Use the **Family Resources on pages 72–78** to learn about a variety of family support services available in your community.