

## Developmental Tasks for 4 - 5 Year Olds

Over the next few newsletters we plan to look at the developmental tasks of childhood and adolescence. When our children are small, we are very keen to mark their milestones. We pay careful attention to and even record such important dates as when they start smiling, sitting up, talking and walking.

Understanding developmental tasks is also important because it helps us to see certain behaviours which might otherwise cause us concern or frustration, in a different light. As these developmental tasks are accomplished at appropriate times our children are learning life skills and growing and maturing emotionally.

Children work through their tasks at different rates and often with a degree of overlap. Their progression through these stages is not only determined by biological growth and change, but also by temperament and personality, adult expectations, and social influences. Understanding what tasks they are working on can help us to deliberately be more tolerant, patient and supportive, and prompt us to model and teach the skills they are needing to learn.

Psychoanalysts / Psychologists Erik Erikson and Sigmund Freud wrote a lot about these developmental stages and tasks, and they do make interesting reading, if you want to explore further. For our article, however, we have tried to apply this theory to the everyday world of your child.

We will start with the tasks of the 4-5 year old.

(Erikson says the 4-5 year old is asking 'Is it Ok to be me?' They are experiencing initiative vs guilt. Family is very important. Your child has mastered movement and is now off to explore/master the world around him/her.)

So your child will:

- be active and on the move. They will want to be riding bikes, playing ball games & chasings
- want to master their own dressing; including buttons, zips and shoe laces.
- start taking initiative and want to be involved in things.
- ask lots (and lots and lots) of questions. Why? How? When? How long? Who?
- have an active imagination.
- learn how to use power and learn that behaviours have consequences.
- experience guilt. Possibly even feeling guilty for things that logically should not cause guilt.
- develop courage and independence and possibly display feelings or behaviours of frustration as they struggle with judgement and the mastery of new tasks. Some behaviours may involve risk-taking. Children this age may want to run at speed, climb ladders and trees, cross the road without holding your hand, or not wear their bike helmet.
- learn and develop socially appropriate behaviour.

Children of this age will enjoy taking on identities by role playing and engaging in fantasy play. They can also start resisting parental directives as they experiment with power in relationships. This age is also often when the merry go round of activities like little athletics, dancing and music lessons gets into full swing as your child is keen to be involved in new and social activities.

How you can help and support your child through this stage:

- Do your best to answer the endless questions. Keep your answers truthful, simple and brief. If they want more information than you give, they'll ask.
- Correct misinformation.
- Provide information about the world. Children this age love trips to the museum, making things, blowing bubbles, collecting insect, shells and crabs at the beach. Give them freedom (with safe boundaries) to explore and experiment.
- Follow through with appropriate consequences for behaviour (positive and negative) to teach about cause and effect, and to teach your children to be accountable for their actions and decisions.
- Encourage their fantasy play, but at the same time help them to distinguish between fantasy and reality. An imaginary friend might come into the picture.
- Support your child's involvement in things that interest them.
- Encourage relationships with peers, making play dates and creating opportunities for your child to socialise with other children. Don't be surprised if they have disagreements.
- Provide opportunities for development of new skills. Get out in the back yard together, or go to the park for climbing, running, ball games, swinging and bike riding. Teach hop scotch. Make play dough. Cook.
- Expect him/her to take simple responsibilities and follow simple rules, such as taking turns.
- Give your child opportunities to make decisions about things that affect them. This will help them to gain a sense of control and power over their lives. Help them to be realistic about their choices, expectations and goals, so as to avoid unnecessary frustration or guilt at failure.
- Your child's vocabulary is developing at a rapid rate. He/she may be fascinated by words and silly sounds. Play word games and tell stories and read books. Ignore bad language as far as possible, as it is normal to want to shock adults "naughty" words.
- Nightmares are common. Help your child gain power over the experience. (e.g. a magic light to "freeze" the monster)

Most importantly, spend time with your child. Teach these skills/tasks by playing with them, not giving "lessons". Remember all children are different and develop at different rates. Don't be overly concerned if your child seems to be developing at a different rate to those

around him/her. Above all, keep your sense of humour and at all times assure your child that they are loved.

If you are worried, or things seemed to have stalled or be going backwards, talk to their teacher at school, and a health professional.

References and further reading.

<http://centerforparentingeducation.org/library-of-articles/child-development/developmental-tasks/>

<http://www.kidspot.com.au/familyhealth/Development-Preschool-4-5-years-physical-development+2556+214+article.htm>

[http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref\\_Child\\_Guide\\_Four/](http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_Child_Guide_Four/)

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