



# Parenting the Second and Third Years

MONTHS

35-36

## Isn't it amazing how fast your child grows?

Your child is almost 3 years old and growing more independent and capable every day.

She can do many things by herself at this age. She can sort and put away forks and spoons. (Save knives for later.) She can carry piles of clean clothes to the bedroom. She can set the table with napkins, forks, and spoons. It takes time and energy for you to show her how to do a new job safely, but it's worth the effort.

She does love to help, doesn't she? Children often say, "Me do it," as they strongly promote their right to become their own person. Answering this with "Let's do it together," or "I will help, too" usually works better than "You can't do that," "No, I'll do it," or "You're too little."

Encourage your child to cooperate. This will build her confidence and help her grow into a helpful, responsible person.

## Testing hearing

A hearing test is an important part of your child's regular medical checkup. In children less than 3 years old, hearing is tested by watching them respond to sound and learn new words. Three-year-old children can learn how to take formal audiometric hearing screening tests. Be patient with your child until he understands what to do and can cooperate fully.

Language is a vital tool for learning. It allows your child to store information, trade ideas, and express feelings. A hearing problem slows development of normal language and learning.

Infants and toddlers often have colds that can lead to ear infections. If ear infections are not found and treated, the child may have hearing problems. Catching possible hearing problems early is the key to successful treatment. This can prevent hearing loss.

Parents can protect their child's hearing by making sure that ear infections are found and treated and by having his hearing tested regularly by a medical professional.

## Help your child learn in lots of different ways.

♥ **Share your interests with me.** If you enjoy fishing, include me. If you like cooking or gardening, I'd like to help.

♥ **Give me simple instructions,** such as: "Please put the paper in the trash can." After I do it, let me know how pleased you are by saying, "Thank you." I'll learn to be polite, if you are.

♥ **Show me how to take things apart and put them together.** Give me an old coffee percolator or safe pieces of pipe with connecting joints to screw on and off. These things will keep me busy for quite a while.

♥ **Make or buy me a small backpack.** I'll wear it around the house and on walks. I will put my own special treasures in it. Wearing it makes me feel very grown up.

♥ **Let me choose magazine pictures and help me make my own picture book.** Let me change the pictures from time to time. I will like looking at the book and talking about the pictures.

## What is it like to be 3 years old?

### How I grow:

- ♥ I can throw a ball overhead, and I try to catch large balls.
- ♥ I can walk on tiptoes if you show me how.
- ♥ I can kick a ball forward, jump with both feet, and pedal a tricycle.

### How I talk:

- ♥ I use three- to five-word sentences.
- ♥ I ask short questions.
- ♥ I repeat simple rhymes.
- ♥ I use plurals, like “dogs” and “hats.”
- ♥ I name at least ten familiar objects and know at least one color.
- ♥ I know my first and last names and understand “I,” “you,” “he,” and “she.”

### What I have learned:

- ♥ I can pay attention for 3 minutes.
- ♥ I can remember what happened yesterday, and understand what “now,” “soon,” and “later” mean.
- ♥ I know some numbers, but not always in the right order.
- ♥ I substitute one object for another in pretend play, as in pretending a block is a car.
- ♥ I laugh at silly ideas, such as “milking” a dog.

- ♥ I know what is and is not food. But be careful: I may still try to eat dangerous things.
- ♥ I can look through a book alone.
- ♥ I can match circles with circles and squares with squares.
- ♥ I can match objects that I know have the same function, like putting a cup and a plate together.

### How I get along with others:

- ♥ I enjoy it when you read to me.
- ♥ I talk about feelings and mental states. I **remember** things.
- ♥ I try to make others laugh.
- ♥ I will play with two to three children in a group.
- ♥ I give others roles when I pretend play — “You be the mommy; I’ll be the daddy.”
- ♥ I still believe everything centers around me — “If I cover my eyes, no one will see me.”
- ♥ I act ashamed when I’m caught doing something wrong.

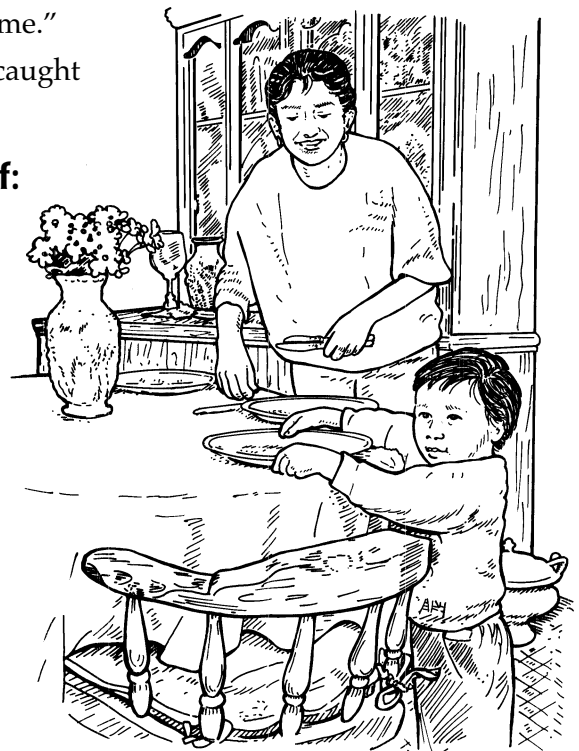
### What I can do for myself:

- ♥ I can feed myself pretty well, but I still spill.
- ♥ I can hold a small cup in one hand.

- ♥ I can wash and dry my hands by myself.
- ♥ I can dress and undress myself and use the toilet, but still need you to help a little.
- ♥ I avoid some dangers, like a hot stove or a moving car. But still watch me and hold my hand when we’re near traffic.

These are skills that most children have by the time they turn 3. If your child is having difficulty with some of these things, check with your child’s doctor, your local health department, tribal maternal-child specialist, or clinic.

You are the most important observer of your child’s development. If your child has special needs, early help is available. And that can make a big difference in your child’s later success.



## Teach good behavior without hurting.

Cooperative, well-behaved and responsible children get that way because their parents teach and guide them. In *Parenting the Second and Third Years*, we have shared the best ways we know to guide children. None of these ways uses physical punishment.

We believe — and studies show — that spanking **does not** teach children well. It usually hurts and angers them more than it instructs.

Punishment such as pinching, hitting, or shaking can seriously hurt a child. This is **abuse**. And, of course, taking away food or care or keeping a child tied up or locked in a room is abusive. But you can also hurt a child with words.

Threats of physical or other feared punishment are abusive. It is abusive to threaten that scary things will happen to the child — that the bogeyman will take her or that loved ones will stop loving her, leave her, or die — if she doesn't behave. It is abusive to make a child believe she is unloved, unwanted, stupid, wicked, or hopeless.

Parents want to do what is best for their child. Some may hurt their child, thinking that this is the best way to help her learn. They may be copying what they learned from their own parents.

Other parents may hurt a child because they lose control of their feelings. Some parents have such stressful and difficult lives that they do not have the will or patience to discipline their child without abuse.

The tips on discipline in these newsletters are written to help parents learn to **teach** their children good behavior without abuse. Stress management suggestions are to help parents control their tensions, so they do not take out their anger and frustration on a child.

There is a saying that “It takes a whole village to raise a child.” There are probably many people in your life who care about your child. If you really need a break, try to find a way to take one by asking someone you trust to help you out. You can do the same for them, too. If you are afraid you might hurt your child, look up “Child Abuse Prevention” in the business section of your phone book. Call. Someone can help you, and you don't have to give your name.

You are not alone. Wherever you are, there are probably other parents like you looking for a friendly face and someone to talk to. Start a play group with families in your neighborhood. Go to a parent support group. Talk to a mom in the park. If your child is giving you a tough time, it helps to talk to someone else who is going through the same thing. You may have advice that will help them, too.

Three-year-olds are lively, curious, and loving. They are also stubborn, trying, and naughty sometimes! We know you are trying hard to help your child become a good person.

## Games for growing

### SILLY QUESTIONS

Encourage your child's **imagination** and **use of words**.

#### How to play

Ask your child to imagine what would happen if something silly occurred. “What would happen if I put on my glasses upside down?” Or “What if candy bars grew on trees?” Or “What if people walked on their hands, instead of their feet?”

Let your child make up some silly questions for you, too. Have fun guessing and acting out these silly questions. You might be pleased and surprised with your child's imagination.

### WHAT IS IT?

Help your child **observe** and **understand** the things in his world.

#### How to play

Sit in a familiar room with your child. Look around the room, and pick out something you can talk about in two ways:

1. **What it looks like**
2. **What it does**

Say both, and ask your child to guess what you are thinking of. For example: “I can see something that is red and rolls along the floor,” or “I can see something that is white, and you drink from it,” or “I see something that is tall, and you sit on it.” Then ask: “What is it?” Let your child have a turn asking you to guess, too.



## More guidance ideas

- ♥ **Have a few simple rules, explain them to your child, and stick to them.** Examples: "Hitting hurts people." "Sand is for playing, not for throwing." "We only color on paper."
- ♥ **Try to keep calm** when disciplining your child. When your child raises her voice, lower yours.
- ♥ **Encourage your child's good behavior.** Example: "I saw that you put your coat on the hook all by yourself!"
- ♥ **Tell your child what to do** — "Pick up the book, please" — rather than what not to do — "Don't drop that book on the floor." Show your child how, if you need to.
- ♥ **Give your child reasonable, limited choices.** Examples: "Do you want peanut butter or tuna for lunch?" "Should we go to the park first or the library?"
- ♥ **Prepare your child for new situations.** Examples: Visit the new school and meet the new teacher ahead of time. Have a new sitter come for a visit to meet your child before she starts baby-sitting.
- ♥ **Save "No" for times when your child is in danger**, or might hurt someone or break something.
- ♥ **Childproof, childproof, child-proof.** It's easier to change the situation than your child's behavior.

**Remember: Discipline is teaching.** It's a way to show your child you care.

## What should I do about bed-wetting?

**Q. My son is almost 3 years old. He is dry during the day, but still wets the bed at night. This worries me. What should I do about it?**

**A. Your toddler is right on schedule. Most 3-year-olds are dry during the day. But they usually wet at night until they have passed their third birthday.**

Your child doesn't want to wet the bed. He is simply not yet able to hold his urine, wake up, and get to the toilet at night. It may be some time before he is able to stay dry most nights.

In the meantime, do not scold or punish your child for bed-wetting. That could upset him, making it even harder for him to stay dry at night.

For now, using a diaper at night is still OK. After your child turns 3, you may want to try using training pants covered by waterproof pants. Use a plastic sheet under the regular sheet on the bed.

Many children wet at night until age 5, and some wet even longer. While this is inconvenient for parents, it is not normally a sign of a health problem. Bed-wetting often runs in families, with a parent (or aunt or uncle) who had the same problem. If this is the case, children often begin to stay dry at night around the same age as their parent(s) did. If wetting continues once your child nears kindergarten age, mention it to your child's doctor. The doctor might recommend some remedies that work for older children.

Stay relaxed and understanding about nighttime wetting. Encourage successes and calmly accept failures. In the long run, this will be the best way to help your child stay dry at night and feel successful.



## Teach your child to be safe.

While you still need to be watchful, you can begin to help your child learn to look out for herself. Here's how:

- ♥ **Practice stopping and looking both ways before crossing any street.** Have her remind you what to do.
- ♥ **Keep a bicycle helmet on her tricycle or bike.** Make a rule that she must wear it on every ride.
- ♥ **Teach your child to buckle the belt in her car safety seat.** Don't start the car until everyone is buckled in.
- ♥ **Explain about dangers in the house** — hot water faucets, the stove, fan blades, electricity, medicines, matches — and why it is important to keep away from them.
- ♥ **Help her learn to tell you where she is going to play.** Teach her **why** it is important for you — or another supervising adult — to **always** to know where she is.
- ♥ **Teach your child never to go with anyone**, unless the adult in charge of her says it's OK.

## Talking *to* children and talking *with* children

The way parents talk to their child affects that child's development. Some parents almost always talk to children. Talking **to** a child includes using a lot of **directions** like:

- ♥ **Dos** — "Let's take the dishes off the table now."
- ♥ **Don'ts** — "Don't pull the cat's tail."
- ♥ **Refusals** — "Not now."

### Talking *to* children also includes a lot of:

- ♥ **Teaching** — "This cat is black."
- ♥ **Asking questions** — "What shape is this block?"

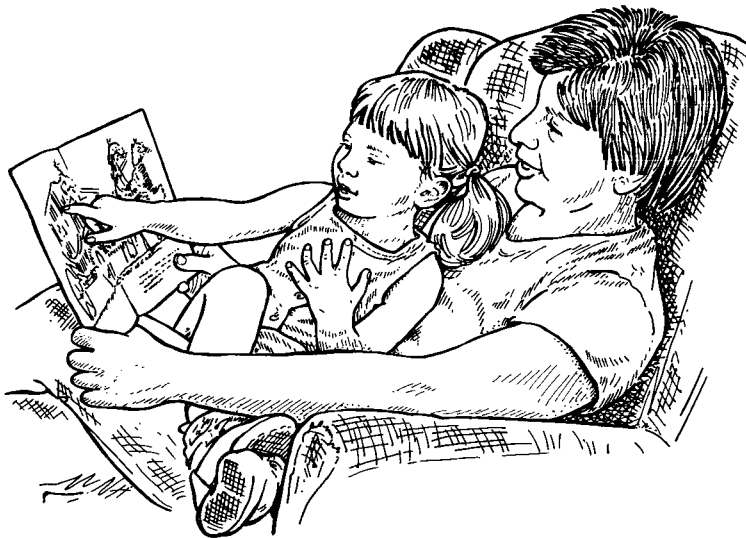
Talking **to** children is OK. However, studies show that when parents nearly always talk *to* their child — and **not** *with* the child — the child's language learning is limited.

Parents talk **with** their child when they match their words to the child's questions and activities. This may mean talking about something your child brings up or starting a new talk based on what your child seems to be interested in. For example: "Oh, yes! Look at that kitty jumping."

In talking **with** the child, you show you care about your child's interest and needs and that you want to learn more about them. As you talk *with* a child, each of you speaks and listens to the other.

You take turns. You can start these talks with such comments as: "Tell me about your visit to Grandma," "You seem to be sleepy," or "What do you want to do with that box?" These are questions your child can answer, but you can't.

Talking **with** children helps them gain confidence and feel important.



## Are you listening?

Are you really listening to your child? Sometimes, young children feel that instead of listening to them, their parents mostly interrupt, instruct, advise, or criticize. They are often right!

This can lead to misunderstanding and anger. Children whose parents don't listen well can feel that they and their ideas are not very important. **Check yourself:** Do you talk before you listen? If so, try active listening.

**Active listening** is trying hard to hear and understand the other person without interrupting, jumping to conclusions, judging, preaching, or getting angry. It means showing respect for the other person and his or her ideas, even if you don't agree with them. It means waiting to talk until others have finished speaking.

Listening is a vital part of the good communication you want to have with your child. It takes **patience** and **practice** to develop good listening skills. But try it! You may find your talks with your child both easier and less stressful.

As an extra reward, your child may imitate your good example and start listening more to what you have to say.

### Good book on growing children:

*Touchpoints 3 to 6: Your Child's Emotional and Behavioral Development* by T. Berry Brazelton and Joshua D. Sparrow (Perseus Publishing), 2001.



## What about computers?

Research suggests that until children are about 3 years old they don't have the visual, motor, or thinking skills needed to use the computer. If you decide to let your child start using the computer, keep these things in mind:

- ♥ Limit how much time your child plays computer/video games. Overuse of the computer means young children spend less time reading or being read to, playing actively, or interacting with other children — activities that are important for learning.
- ♥ Computer games that simply drill children on skills are not very helpful. But games that require your child's active participation solving problems can be helpful, especially if you talk with your child about the game.
- ♥ Violent content leads to more aggressive behavior. Select games carefully.
- ♥ If you have Internet access, be sure to monitor your child's use.



## Homemade toys that teach

### SOUND MATCH

Sound match is a fun learning game your child can play with you or with an older friend. Children learn to **match sounds** and tell one sound from another. It takes only simple, no-cost supplies, and it's very easy to make.

### Materials

- ♥ **Six plastic containers** that you can't see through.
- ♥ **Fillings** to make three pairs of containers rattle the same: dry beans, dry peas, or small pebbles; rice; and coffee grounds or sand.
- ♥ **Duct tape, not transparent tape**

### Making the toy

Partly fill two containers with something hard and rattly like beans. Be sure each container sounds like the other when you shake it. Then, partly fill two more containers with grains of rice. Check to see that they sound the same. Partly fill the last two containers with coffee grounds or sand. Coffee grounds make a soft, swishy sound. When you shake the three kinds of containers, you will find that each pair sounds different from the other pairs.

Tape the tops closed if you think your child will be playing with them alone.

### Playing the game

Give your child three of the containers — one with each kind of filling. You keep the other three. Take turns rattling one of the containers, having the other person find the matching sound in their own set.

Another way to play this game is to put all six containers between you. Pick them up one at a time, and shake them. Encourage your child to do the same. Together, pick up and shake, pick up and shake — until you have a sound match for each. Point out that these are the same sounds. Point out when the sounds are different. Your child may want to see what is inside the containers making the noise.

The two of you can think of other sound-making items to put into pairs of containers.

**Remember:** Do not put harmful materials in the containers.

### BIG BAG BLOCKS

Paper bag blocks can be used for tossing or hiding behind and-making houses, mountains, and castles.

To make each block, crumple sheets of newspaper and stuff them into a paper bag. Large paper grocery bags make the best blocks. Keep stuffing until the bag is nearly full. Then, fold over the open end, and tape it shut securely. Make at least ten big bag blocks. The more the better!

**Important:** Use paper, not plastic, which can suffocate a child.

## Keeping fit family-style

Being active is a habit that we learn. Children learn early to choose between sitting indoors and watching TV or going outside to run and play. Parents teach fitness by example.

Now is a good time to start to stay fit as a family. What activities does your family enjoy? Have you tried hiking, swimming, bicycling, playing ball, running, walking, roller-skating, gardening, etc.? Walking together each day is wonderful exercise, and you can enjoy talking as you walk. Choose an activity your family enjoys so you'll stick with it.

It may be hard to find time in a busy schedule to be active, but the benefits are definitely worth the effort. Regular exercise helps you look and feel better and helps you handle stress. Take time now to help your child, and family, start a lifetime of fitness.

## Looking ahead

Your child is 3 years old — no longer a toddler. You may wonder what's ahead and what you can do to help your child grow up healthy, happy, and responsible.

He is off to a good start already. During these first three years, you have helped your child feel important and successful. You have helped him learn about himself and his world. You have taught him to trust, respect, and enjoy others. This foundation has prepared him to be the kind of person you want him to be.

The good relationship you have will help you continue to support and guide him, as he grows to face future choices about school, friends, drugs, sex, and other important issues.

Building your child's self-esteem now will help him resist problems later on. Keeping communication open now will help him feel he can talk to you about difficult and confusing questions in the years to come. Helping your child like language and learning now will help him do well in school.

Parenthood is a rich, exciting chance for you to grow with your child. Trust yourself. You can offer your child the support, values, and skills to handle whatever comes along in the future.

This is the last issue of *Parenting the Second and Third Years*. We hope the series has been helpful to you in your very important and exciting job as parents. In the years ahead, remember your county or area extension office offers a wealth of information on parenting.

If you have Internet access, visit the University of Wisconsin-Extension Parenting home page at [www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/parenting](http://www.uwex.edu/ces/flp/parenting). Look for issues of *Parenting the Preschooler* on the web site. These two-page newsletters include information on numerous topics, including child development, discipline, safety/health, school readiness, personality styles, and feeding/nutrition.

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Produced by Cooperative Extension Publications, UW-Extension: Erica Schock, editor. Illustrations by Nancy Lynch.

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Funded in part by a federal Title V MCH Block Grant from the Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Section.

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**B3791—Months 35-36**

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