4-Year-Olds

FIRST TEACHER:

A Parent's Guide to Growing and Learning



DIVISION OF
Early Learning
LEARN EARLY. LEARN FOR LIFE.

First Teacher: A Parent's Guide to Growing and Learning is a guide to your child's development and has activities for you to support your child's learning during daily routines and play. These activities will help your child's development and provide the building blocks for their future success in school and life. How your child plays, learns, speaks, acts and moves offers important clues about your child's development. Developmental milestones are things most children can do by a certain age.

This booklet addresses eight key areas of your child's development. This resource serves as a guide for the knowledge and skills your child is developing and follows the areas of development in Florida's Early Learning and Developmental Standards, used in early learning programs throughout the state.

1. PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT
General health and development of physical skills involving large and small muscles.

2. APPROACHES TO LEARNING
Attitudes, behaviors and learning styles.

3. SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
The ability to establish and maintain positive relationships with others.

4. LANGUAGE & LITERACY
The ability to understand language, learn to talk and learn about books and reading.

5. MATHEMATICAL THINKING
The ability to think about relationships between objects, numbers, shapes, sizes, weights and other concepts.

6. SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY
The ability to explore the environment using the five senses, connecting what is observed to science concepts and asking questions.

7. SOCIAL STUDIES
The ability to learn about people and the community.

8. CREATIVE EXPRESSION THROUGH THE ARTS
The ability to engage in dance, song, music, dramatic play, and art to express ideas and feelings.

The information in this booklet will help you make the most of the time you spend with your child. The positive relationship you have with your child and the time you spend together will help your child's development in every way.



4-Year-Olds

Family Matters

Being 4 years old is an exciting time for your child but may be both a happy and challenging experience for you. During this year, you may notice a surge of independence, trying new things and welcoming new adventures and challenges. Providing opportunities for exploration supports the development of thinking and problem-solving skills.

Your child will continue to add new words into daily conversations. You may hear sharing of discoveries without you having to ask. Encourage new ways to describe feelings and thoughts about everyday experiences. When you ask about friends or the day at school, ask for more details or ask if anything made your child feel happy or sad about the day.

This booklet offers activities and strategies for you to use daily as your child grows and develops. The easy-to-follow activities will help you build a strong relationship and a foundation for your child's learning and future success. All families are different. Remember to include stories, activities and languages from your own family.

You are your child's first teacher.

1. Physical Development

Physical development refers to your child's general health and development of physical skills involving large and small muscles. Your 4-year-old now has better developed fine motor and gross motor skills and will become more skillful in balance while walking, running or climbing. You will also notice your child is more successful when working on puzzles, lacing small beads or shoes, tying shoes, dressing and putting together small parts on toys.

During this period, provide healthy foods and lots of sleep. Your child can help you plan meals or snacks and prepare and cook food, including washing fruits and vegetables, making a sandwich or helping you measure the ingredients for a recipe. Routines are important to preschoolers, so make good hygiene a routine. Teach them important times to wash their hands and to wash for the duration of the "Happy Birthday" song. Encourage toothbrushing after eating and before bed by providing a timer or a special toothbrush or toothpaste. Make bedtime routine a ritual of taking a bath, brushing teeth and reading a story together every night. Soon you will be reminded of any missed steps.

As your child grows

Your 4-year-old's growth and development will vary. Your child may:

- Pick out clothes and dress and undress without assistance.
- Lace, zip or button shoes or clothing.
- Begin to learn to tie shoes.
- Show left- or right-hand dominance.

Playing and learning

Support your child's physical development by trying these activities:

- Play catch using various sized balls.
- Provide tricycles, scooters or other balancing toys for them to ride.
- Play "Simon Says" (e.g., touch your toes to your nose, balance on your left foot, bounce a ball for a determined length of time).
- Provide child-safe scissors and paper to snip long and short cuts to enhance fine motor skills.
- Provide paper along with crayons, markers, pencils and/or pens to experiment with writing and drawing.

Taking care of your child

Active children need lots of rest and nourishment. Your 4-year-old should get between 10-13 hours of sleep a day, between naps and evening sleep. Encourage them to dress themselves and brush their hair and teeth every morning. Praise all efforts – even when not successful (e.g., buttons aren't lined up correctly). Be sure to take your child for annual doctor's visits as planned by your health care provider.

2. Approaches to Learning

Approaches to learning is a set of behaviors or characteristics related to how young children interact with their environment, such as curiosity, persistence and creativity. Some of these behaviors occur naturally, but you can encourage the development of others by providing a supportive environment.

During this year of development, you will want to provide your child with opportunities to be curious, creative and ready to tackle new skills. Your child will use imagination to "pretend play" in a more complex manner and for extended lengths of time as attention span grows. At this age, children often begin to plan and learn based on past experiences.

Help your child develop curiosity and eagerness by:

- Allowing your child to make simple choices, such as which snack to pack in their lunch or which shirt to wear to school.
- Giving simple jobs, such as gathering laundry, collecting trash or sorting toys into bins.
- Acting out unexpected situations, such as getting lost in the grocery store or finding something that doesn't belong to them. This will help your child become aware of surroundings and be responsible and respectful of others.

As your child grows

Your 4-year-old demonstrates learning by:

- Showing interest in learning new skills, such as letter, sound, number and shape recognition.
- Stretching beyond the comfort zone when it comes to tackling new experiences or challenges (e.g., attempting a new puzzle, building a taller tower or playing a new game without asking for help).

- Problem solving and asking for help from adults or friends if necessary.

Playing and learning

Help support your child's development by trying these activities:

- Use cardboard boxes to create an obstacle course.
- Host a pretend picnic or campout in the backyard.
- Staple large pieces of craft paper on a privacy fence or roll out craft paper on a sidewalk for painting.
- Decorate riding toys or push toys for a parade and play "marching" music.
- Provide a large bin filled with sand, pasta or beans so your child can pour, measure and fill other containers provided in the bin.
- Provide "dress up" clothes to use in dramatic play.

Taking care of your child

Provide paint, markers and crayons for them to draw pictures of themself and other family members. Write the names of the people on the paper next to their pictures. Let your child dictate a sentence or two about the picture and help write it on the page.

3. Social Development

Social development refers to your child's thoughts, behaviors and relationships. You truly are your child's first teacher as your child is watching and learning from you and other adults. Your interactions with friends and family can impact how your child manages emotions. By modeling and talking about good behavior, your child learns how to manage and express emotions and can handle longer lengths of time away from you and home.

You are a role model for your child, as your child watches your interactions with others as you go about your day. Reflect on how you interact with others. Are you pleasant and kind? Are you able to maintain a calm manner even when you are angry?

As your child grows

Your 4-year-old shows development in forming relationships by:

- Willingly sharing with others.

- Making suggestions to help solve a problem.
- Responding with care and compassion to friends who may be hurt or upset.
- Showing a willingness to build and nurture friendships.

Playing and learning

Support your child's development by trying these activities:

- Play fun board games with friends or family and talk about how to take turns winning and losing. Focus on the "fun" in the game and not the "winning" of the game.
- Provide your child with opportunities to socialize with other children of the same age. Encourage sharing and planning with friends on a project, such as building a tower with blocks.
- Read books about friends and discuss the lessons in the stories (e.g., sharing, being a good friend, helping others).

Taking care of your child

Your child's growth and development milestones and relationships with others are key to learning. Take time to ask about making relationships at school, with friends and with family. Your child should be able to express thoughts in words to you, other family members, teachers and friends. If you have questions or concerns, talk with your child's preschool teacher or pediatrician.

4. Language & Literacy

Language and literacy refer to your child's ability to understand words, listen, talk and read. Your 4-year-old will have conversations with you, other adults and friends, using longer sentences, rarely mispronouncing words and able to understand and follow multi-step directions. Talk to your child as you go about daily routines and ask questions about friends, teachers and activities.

Respond to questions and encourage your child to respond in expanded sentences. If your child tells you about a book the teacher read, ask for details about the story. Go for a walk and talk about what you see, as in, "Look, there's a bird. What kind of bird do you think it is?" If it is a red bird, you can expand on the conversation and say, "Yes, it is red and it is called a cardinal because cardinal is another word for a shade of red."

It is important to talk, read and sing with your child daily. Make books, poetry and songs a regular part of your interactions with your child.

Write notes to your child and leave them around the house. You can put them in lunch boxes or leave them on the table for breakfast or dinner. Read the notes and encourage notes back to you.

As your child grows

You see many changes in your child's language and literacy skills as they:

- Ask more specific questions.
- Play with the sounds of language, identifying rhymes and recognizing the beginning sounds of words.
- Listen to others in a group discussion for a period.
- Understand and use information presented in books and on signs.

Playing and learning

Help your child develop skills in the areas of language and literacy by trying these activities:

- Ask your child to speak at the appropriate level using an "inside voice" or "outside voice" and demonstrate how to do so.
- Provide materials for creative play that encourage using new words and writing notes or stories (e.g., pencil, crayons, paper, toy phones, voice recorders and story props).
- Use fingerplay, nursery rhymes, songs and poetry that incorporate new words.
- Use facial expressions, gestures and descriptive words when speaking and reading together.
- Read signs and billboards as you travel, pointing out numbers and letters.

Taking care of your child

Have daily conversations with your child. Listen carefully and respond to thoughts and questions. Ask open-ended questions. Read together daily. Reading aloud together is the most significant contribution to your child's future reading and learning success.

If you have concerns about your child's language development, contact your local early learning coalition or talk to your child's preschool teacher or pediatrician.

5. Mathematical Thinking

Mathematical thinking refers to your child's ability to think about relationships between objects, numbers, shapes and other concepts. Providing your 4-year-old with opportunities to expand math skills can be fun and easy at home. Baking cookies, washing dishes, emptying the dishwasher and sorting laundry are ways to introduce new math concepts. Use math terms during these activities to expand your child's math vocabulary and skills. While sorting laundry, put like colors together or fold a towel in half and quarters. When emptying the dishwasher, count and sort silverware into like piles. While washing dishes, talk about concepts such as empty and full or more and less.

Help your child find patterns around the house or on clothes. Have your child count napkins while setting the table or measure ingredients while you cook.

Provide toys that involve measurement and spatial relationships (e.g., blocks, puzzles, measuring cups). Cardboard boxes can turn into a city or a tower.

Ask your child to look for numbers around the house (e.g., clock faces, digital clocks, sizes in shoes or on clothes, addresses, labels on food containers, scales, calendars, thermometers). Playing cards can assist with matching and comparing numbers.

As your child grows

Your child may demonstrate their thinking and reasoning skills by:

- Using words representing order or positions (e.g., first, next, after, over, under, next to, above, below).
- Discovering hidden objects in photos or drawings.
- Completing increasingly more challenging puzzles.
- Building three-dimensional objects using a variety of items and sizes.
- Using terms such as certain, maybe, unsure, possible and impossible.

Playing and learning

Help your child develop skills in the areas of thinking and reasoning by trying these activities:

- Play matching games.
- Play games where they are looking for what's missing.
- Provide safe, everyday objects that can be used for counting and sorting (e.g., buttons, blocks, coins, small plastic animals).
- Create a game with small paper plates with the numbers 1-10 written on them. Your child can count and place small items on the proper plate (e.g., three blocks on the number 3 plate).
- Make cookies in the shape of numbers, putting the corresponding number of chocolate chips on the top for decoration.

Taking care of your child

Provide a variety of hands-on experiences that are related to the way you use math in your daily life (telling time, cooking, buying gas for your car). Spend time together using timers, calendars, rulers and scales to measure things at home. Keep a chart with your child's height and weight measured monthly and discuss what the numbers mean.

6. Scientific Inquiry

Scientific inquiry refers to your child's ability to explore the environment using the five senses, connecting what is observed to science concepts and asking questions. Your 4-year-old is beginning to have a deeper understanding of the world and becoming more aware of the needs within the environment such as providing care to plants and animals. Your child may develop an interest in bugs, insects or dinosaurs and may want to experiment with objects to determine which ones will sink or float or how objects change from when frozen versus a liquid. This is a fun and exciting time for your little scientist.

Your child may be interested in measuring and recording the length or height of objects using connecting cubes, connecting links, blocks, beads, yarn or string. Plant seeds together, watch them grow, measure their height and talk about the importance of sun in helping plants grow.

You can encourage your child's scientific exploration by having simple tools and toys for learning more about the world. Spark scientific curiosity in preschoolers with bubbles, bubble wands, eye droppers, magnifying glasses, small mirrors, balls and magnets.

As your child grows

Your child may show interest in solving problems and observing nature by:

- Describing and sharing observations made about living things (e.g., worms live in the dirt).
- Gardening.
- Participating in simple experiments to discover information.
- Using tools to explore the environment (e.g., binoculars, magnifying glasses, magnets, etc.).

Playing and learning

Use these activities to encourage your child's scientific thinking by:

- Give your child a calendar so they can draw the phases of the moon each evening throughout the month. At the end of the month, talk about how the moon changed and why.
- Plant a garden and discuss the seeds and other parts of a plant. Talk about favorite foods to plant and watch grow.
- Help your child record their observations or the results of experiments using drawings or photographs.

Taking care of your child

Your child's body is constantly changing and growing. Take this time to chart their height, weight and even the kinds of foods they eat. Plan healthy meals and snacks together. Just like garden plants need sunlight and water, their body needs healthy foods and water too.

7. Social Studies

Social studies refer to your child's ability to learn about the people around them and in their community. Four-year-old children can apply many social studies skills both at home and in their pre-school settings. Your child can identify differences and similarities among peers as well as identify changes in routines and sequences of events. You may routinely walk the dog every day after you arrive home, and when this doesn't occur your 4-year-old notices and asks questions about the change in routines. Talk about why routines change and allow your child time to adapt to the changes. You can also allow your child to make suggestions about the changes that you want to make.

Your child is also becoming more aware of holidays and important family events, such as birthdays. Provide props such as clothing and toys to allow your child to create and reenact family roles, relationships, routines and rituals (e.g., pretending to be the babysitter, store clerk or chef). Use a large calendar to note special and routine events involving your family, such as birthdays and holidays.

Your child is beginning to become more aware of rules and laws. Talk about rules used in games or sports. Discuss the role of law enforcement officers as people who enforce laws and rules, such as those related to driving. Talk about cultural differences in people in your neighborhood or in school.

As your child grows

You may see:

- Recognition of the differences between a want and a need (e.g., needing a coat on a cold day versus wanting to wear shorts when it is cold outside, or eating healthy snacks versus wanting ice cream for dinner).
- Understanding of the importance and use of technology in your home and the rules for its use.
- Awareness of the different roles in the family, at school and in the community.
- Recognition of patriotic symbols (e.g., the American flag).

Playing and learning

Help your child develop community concepts:

- Talk about your surroundings as you travel through town. Use words such as far/close, over/under and up/down.
- Use a globe or map to find where your house/apartment, town, state and country are.
- Talk about the places that you pass on your way to grandma's house or a favorite location.
- Talk about the importance of respecting others. This may include family, neighbors, friends, law enforcement officers, doctors, teachers and firefighters.
- Provide your child with opportunities to talk about the rules you have in place at home and why it's important to follow the rules to remain safe.

Taking care of your child

Four-year-olds are curious and enjoy learning. This is a great time to instill values and respect for others as you read books and talk about situations or challenges that may occur in interactions with friends. Model cooperation and negotiation as you involve your child in family discussions and decisions.

8. Creative Expression Through the Arts

Creative expression refers to your child's ability to engage in dance, song, music, dramatic play and art to express ideas and feelings. Most 4-year-olds love playing musical instruments as well as singing along with others. They can hear different parts that make up music such as pitch, tempo and volume. They love making up silly songs or dancing to fun music. Use music to show your child how to express feelings. Play happy music and dance. Play both fast and slow music and encourage different movements.

Your child seeks to express creativity through music, painting, dancing and dramatic play. Encourage your child's creativity by having art supplies like crayons, markers, paint, paper, play dough, pencils, paintbrushes, scissors and glue. Prepare a space in your home or outside for "messy" activities.

Have props for creative dress-up play that your child can use to become a firefighter, a teacher, a chef or a dancer. You can be a customer in a restaurant, a student in a class or a friend. Encourage perspective and imagination in various roles.

Have stuffed animals or puppets your child can use in play. Use the puppets to reenact stories or songs.

As your child grows

Encourage your child's creative expression through:

- Music to express thoughts and feelings about something going on with a friend or loved one.
- Drawings that are detailed and express hurts and worries as well as joys and successes.
- Creative play to act out stories and experiences.

Playing and learning

Help your child's creative development:

- Provide your child with materials for pretend play with real and imaginary friends or stuffed animals.
- Pretend you are the customer at a restaurant, and they are the server.
- Play fun music and dance around the room copying each other's moves.
- Encourage your child to talk about or share their creative expressions with others.

Taking care of your child

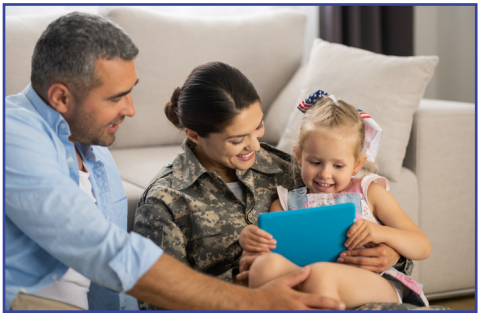
Creativity helps your child express feelings. Discuss ways to show happiness, sadness or fear. Explain it is okay to feel sad or disappointed and to express these feelings in art, music, dance and creative play.

The Importance of Family

Learning starts at home with you as your child's first teacher. Infants, toddlers and preschoolers learn by observing and listening to family members as they go about their daily routines.

Families shape a child's development of values, learning skills and social skills. Your child is watching everything you do and listening to everything you say.





Learning occurs naturally for children through play. Children are happiest when they play and playing is one of the best tools for learning new skills. Join in your child's play by playing with them. Get down on the floor and encourage imagination.

Use objects around your house for pretend play such as an empty paper towel tube as a horn or a telescope. A plastic spoon and a

pot for cooking can become a drum. Play enhances imagination, physical development, social skills and more. Playing outside is important. As a child grows, running, jumping and climbing will help build muscles and coordination. Your child will enjoy the time spent together and so will you!

Housework is a never-ending cycle. Allow your little one to help with the work. Just remember that it's the effort that counts! Below are easy chores for you to introduce to your child:

- Help set the table.
- Help fold and put away laundry.
- Make their bed with a little help.
- Pick up toys and put them away.
- Feed and fill the water bowl for pets.
- Help with yard work.





All these activities encourage your child to learn new skills and to be a contributing member of your family. Feeling part of a family develops self-confidence and a sense of responsibility.

Remember, you are your child's first teacher. All children develop differently and at different times. If you have questions or concerns about your child's development or behavior, it is important to act early. Developmental screenings can help identify areas of your child's development that might need some extra help. Talk to a doctor, your child's teacher or your local early learning coalition about your concerns and request to have your child screened. If the screening indicates any area that needs extra help, your child may qualify for early intervention services. Your child's doctor or your early learning coalition can help connect you to those services.

You are your child's greatest advocate!



Contact Us

For more information, please contact your local early learning coalition. The CCR&R State Network can help connect you with your coalition.

CCR&R

Child Care Resource and Referral

Florida Department of Education Division of Early Learning
325 West Gaines Street Tallahassee, FL 32399
Toll Free: 1-866-357-3239
Email: CCRRHelp@del.fldoe.org
Website: DEL (floridaearlylearning.com)

Locate Your Early Learning Coalition