

## What's Up? Your Baby's Development

# 36-Month Visit



Three-year-olds are feisty and opinionated. This is why some say that difficult behavior peaks at about 3½ years old. But 3-year-olds are also funny and curious, and are becoming more independent every day. *What does your child love doing? What does he find frustrating?*

### What Your Baby Can Do

#### My body is even more active and able.

- I can run forwards.
- I have good balance and can stand on one foot for up to 5 seconds.
- I can draw some shapes or even a face.
- I have likely mastered going up and down stairs on my feet.

#### I use language to express my thoughts and feelings.

- I may use more than 1,000 words.
- Most people can understand my speech more than 80% of the time
- I ask a lot of questions. Sometimes repetitively.

#### I know a lot, but am still unable to regulate my emotions consistently.

- I am sometimes cooperative and can follow directions, but often I want to do things my way.
- I may move very quickly from calm to upset.

### What You Can Do

**Introduce different learning materials** like string and chunky beads, or varied sensory experiences such as cornstarch and water or shaving cream.

**Give your child chances to practice small and large motor skills** such as using a pencil and climbing a play structure.

**Encourage your child when he gets frustrated.** He may want to be more competent at skills than he currently is.

**Play story games where each family member adds to the narrative.** *The dog wanted to go exploring so he squeezed through a hole in the fence, and then...*

**Reinforce knowledge and introduce new concepts.** "Yes, that is a blue circle. Let's see what color it makes when we add some red paint to the blue..."

**Help children manage their big feelings by staying calm when they are emotional:** "You are feeling so frustrated. You didn't want your tower to fall over after you worked so hard on it. I won't let you throw blocks, but I will stay right here and keep everyone safe."

## Did you know...

A 3-year-old's brain has the most brain synapses (connections) that she'll ever have in her life? After that, a pruning process begins to help the brain function more efficiently.

*As you use the HealthySteps handouts, remember that your child may develop skills faster or slower than indicated and still be growing just fine. Every child develops at his own pace—and your HealthySteps Specialist will be available to answer any questions you may have. Your family's cultural beliefs and values are also important factors that shape your child's development.*



**ZERO TO THREE**  
Early connections last a lifetime

Copyright © 2017 by ZERO TO THREE. All rights reserved.  
Developed and powered by ZERO TO THREE [www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)

### 36 Months: What's on Your Mind

**My 3-year-old never wants to leave what she's doing. Whether we are home or out, she just wants to stay put. Even though she has a good time wherever we go, she still resists going—help!**

This can be so frustrating! Many children want to stay engaged in whatever it is that they are doing. Transitions can be particularly tough at this stage. Sometimes giving warnings ahead of time and offering choices just don't work. Sometimes what *does* work is to simply plan for the resistance and upset. Meaning, leave extra time for the emotional explosion. Repeat the limit and what's expected: "I put the toys away because it's time to get in the car and go to swimming class. I will listen to you cry as long as you like, but then it will be time to get in the car." The important parts of this strategy are to make sure you leave enough time and don't get too upset or angered by your child's intense feelings. If you stay calm and encouraging, your child will have an easier time recovering and making the transition.

## Spotlight on Defiance

Between 3 and 3 ½ years old, young children have an incredibly active brain and also have a lot of difficulty managing their emotions. They are feeling more independent and capable, which can lead to displays of defiance.



Children this age benefit from empathy and validation. Parents do well to grow their patience as much as possible—think of it like building a muscle at the gym. Each time you stay calm through your child's defiance or meltdown, you increase your "patience muscle." Deep breaths and a mantra about how young children are always growing and doing their best may help. Remember that it's good and necessary for parents to set limits for a child and it's also okay for children to protest and have strong feelings. That is a natural reflection of their development. How adults respond shapes how children learn.

### What You Can Do:

**Don't take it personally.** Almost every child this age is defiant. It is a natural stage of development and not a reflection on you as a parent.

**Aim for prevention.** Offer your child a heads-up on transitions so he knows what's coming next as this may sometimes (but not always) alleviate distress at changing gears.

**Set firm limits and offer empathy.**

It is reasonable and necessary to set limits but it can't be expected that young children will quietly accept the limits. Validate your child's feelings and stay calm: "I took the toy away because you threw it, and you are upset that it is gone."

**Use humor.** Sometimes adults can dodge a power struggle by responding in a silly way to defiance. For example, pretending to brush the nose of a child who refuses to brush her teeth, or putting shoes on her hands instead of her feet. Getting the laughter going can go a long way in relieving stress.

**Avoid giving in.** If you give in to tantrums, your child learns that if he pushes hard enough, he'll get what he wants. This will also make it more difficult for you the next time you try to enforce a limit.

### What It Means for You:

Keep in mind that while your child's brain is very active at this age, he is still young and learning. Skills such as sharing and taking turns are just beginning to emerge, and children will still need your help and modeling for how to handle these situations. By staying consistent

and being a good role model yourself for managing emotions, your child will continue learning these critical social-emotional skills.

*What might help you remember that your child is doing her best with a very busy brain?*

*At this visit the pediatric team will measure your baby's length, weight, and head. They'll listen to your baby's heart and look at her eyes, ears, nose and mouth. Your baby will receive any needed immunizations. We will talk about your baby's development and routines like sleeping and eating. We'll also review safety guidelines. And, of course, we'll make time to discuss any questions or concerns you might have!*