

# Who is the Preschool Child?

The development of three-, four- and five-year-olds varies greatly from child to child. Children in these age groups tend to enjoy the same active learning techniques. However, as you read these developmental descriptions, consider that three-year-olds may be at an entry level while five-year-olds are more likely to be working on mastery. Remember that typical preschoolers vary greatly in their development.

## Physical Development

While older children may take physical development for granted, young children are generally very proud of their physical accomplishments. Whether growing taller, learning to catch a ball or climbing the ladder of a slide, these physical feats mean a lot to three-, four- and five-year-olds. Activities that capitalize on the preschooler's interest in and need for movement are necessary for instruction to be effective for this age group. In order to do this, be sure to expect your preschoolers:

- To be developing body awareness including the parts of their body and the ability to navigate their body gracefully through space.
- To be unaware of safety issues related to physical activity.
- To be developing both large muscle and small muscle (eye-hand) coordination.
- To enjoy moving their body to music.
- To enjoy some small motor skills, such as scribbling, pretend writing, cutting and gluing, coloring and painting. These skills are just emerging so reward the children's efforts and not the product.

## Cognitive Development and Learning Skills

Young three-, four- and five-year-olds make great strides in cognitive development which refers to their growing ability to make meaning of the world around them. They start with what they know and they learn new concepts by comparing new concepts to those with which they are familiar. During these early years, children enjoy opportunities that develop their ability to reason, acquire new knowledge and to solve problems. You can expect your preschoolers:

- To be interested in nature but have gaps in their understanding of the world around them, especially the physical laws of nature.
- To use both fact and fantasy to make sense of their world and, at times, not be able to distinguish between truth and fiction.
- To look at the world through their eyes alone and have limited ability to understand the perspectives of others.
- To learn by touching and manipulating objects.
- To learn by talking to others and by asking a lot of questions.





## Language Development

Preschoolers develop language at a rate that is astonishing to most adults. They are learning to share their thoughts, feelings and ideas through language, gestures and facial expressions. Language development is important to both cognitive development and to social and emotional development. If language and communication skills are underdeveloped, young children will likely struggle to understand the language of others or to express their own ideas and feelings. As you support your preschoolers' language development, you can expect them:

- To be learning the rules of language as well as the meaning of words.
- To practice new words, concepts and voice tones in pretend play.
- To copy adults as they imitate their words and expressions.
- To talk in short sentences.
- To understand one-step and some two-step directions.
- To listen to an interesting story for eight to ten minutes.

## Social and Emotional Development

Social development refers to the preschoolers' ability to get along with others while emotional development speaks to their ability to develop a concept of "self." This self-concept is the child's mental image of their characteristics and capabilities. The child's understanding of "self" is important in their learning how to interact with others. The feelings that children develop about themselves and about the people around them lay the foundation for their ability to take the risk to make mistakes or learn new things. This "self-concept" is newly forming and is fragile. To help children develop both a positive view of themselves and of others, it is important to know that preschoolers are likely:

- To need to have their feelings and the feelings of others labeled and explained.
- To need positive support from others in order to learn to resolve conflicts.
- To be just developing the language of interaction.

## Spiritual Growth and Development

As young children grow and develop spiritually, it is important to remember the cognitive limitations that exist in young children. This series is designed to help children lay a positive foundation for faith formation. The concepts are presented in a positive way that allows children to explore new ideas in safe and familiar terms. Maintaining a positive and responsive classroom will allow young children to explore the concepts while growing stronger in their relationship with God and the Church community.

