

FROM THREE TO FOUR YEARS TODDLERS ENTER CHILDHOOD

Keeping three year olds healthy

Routine vaccinations should be received at 3 years and four months

Below are the vaccinations recommended by NHS direct. (www.nhsdirect.gov.uk)

Measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine, second dose

4-in-1 (DTaP/IPV) pre-school booster, given as a single jab containing vaccines against diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough (pertussis) and polio

Model good habits for future life

At home in their family is where young children can learn good habits for a healthy future life. Young children will see parents, older children and other adults in the family washing their hands and cleaning their teeth and will learn that these things are important especially when they are given the explanations for doing them. A healthy diet of food cooked with only a little sugar and salt is important too, as well as having lots of exercise and sleep. It is better for children to drink water rather than sugary drinks. A calm and consistent environment is important and children need to know they are loved so that they can thrive and develop.

Young children need to have lots of access to the outdoors

Enjoying activities in the outdoors is really important for the well being of young children. To have the freedom to run, jump and climb and be physically active keeps their body, especially the heart, healthy and all this supports the development of a healthy brain. Being in touch with nature and the rhythms of the seasons can benefit them emotionally and can protect them against “nature deficiency syndrome”. Young children learn so much from being outdoors and the freedom of being outside can give them the confidence to perform skills to a higher level than indoors.

Young children need to be taught how to take care of themselves

As children become more grown up, independent and articulate they will want to do more on their own and may not be supervised by their parents all the time. They need to have learnt how to look after themselves, such as going to the toilet and cleaning themselves and knowing how to wash and dry their hands. They also need to be able to ask other adults to help them, for example asking for a drink or saying that they do not feel well or that something is not right. They need to begin to learn how to express and control their emotions, using words like unhappy, sad, cross, hurt as well happy, better, not sad anymore. Having the language to express their feelings helps them to develop resilience, the confidence they need to cope with situations they will find themselves in as they grow up.

Children become increasingly aware of their bodies and gender

Children start to become aware of their bodies and how they function at this stage and clear simple explanations maybe accompanied by suitable age-appropriate books that can be shared. They start to realise that there are differences in the world for example between boys and girls. Factually correct answers are the best answers to questions and they will move on to other areas of interest when they feel that they know enough. It is important to understand that young children at this age will want to explore many areas of interest and it is important to value and encourage these and to try not to impose stereotypes e.g. that boys don't play with dolls or girls don't like to play with cars.

Keeping three year olds safe

Children continue to be dependent upon adults for safety

Children continue to be dependent upon adults for their safety but the older they become the more they can understand what they are told and hold these things in mind. Therefore parents should explain risk to children whilst trying to maintain a positive attitude and a world of possibilities. Risks will be particular to each individual child dependent on their personal situations and parents need to be aware of the risks for their child and take the necessary steps to safeguard them. Unfortunately the biggest dangers to children are sometimes from people known to them. Children need to be given guidance on their own personal safety (for example not to touch animals unless an adult is with them) but also what to do if they are not happy or don't feel safe. They need to know their name, surname and address, and should be taught how to call 999 in an emergency. This means learning to recognise these numbers and being shown what to do in an emergency. Lives have been saved by teaching young children emergency procedures.

Risks should be lessened as children come to be secure in their own skills

In terms of their own every day safety children will be increasing their ability to assess their own capabilities as they will have mentally measured their skills with each "risky" experience they have had. They will know to try not to fall on a hard surface as it will hurt, or not to climb too high as they might not be able to get down, or not to jump something that is too high or wide. They will also know their skills will increase with time and practice. The more minor risks children experience when they are small the more they will be able to deal with situations using their own realistic assessments. Minor bumps or accidents will increase a child's resilience in later life.

Road safety should be taught to children

Children should be taught road safety so that if they find themselves by chance on a busy road alone they will be aware of the dangers and be able to look after themselves. Since so many children go everywhere by car nowadays it is easy whilst travelling to point out hazards and explain how pedestrians should take care on the roads.

Children should learn to swim as soon as possible

Teaching young children to swim is always a good idea as it is beneficial physically and a skill which we should all have. Even though we may think our child will never need this skill it is surprising how many times it has saved a life.

Travel always carries risk

All forms of travel can be dangerous so laws and recommendations should be adhered to. Safety belts or seats should always be used in a car, crash helmets should always be used on bikes, and life jackets should be worn in boats. Hands should be held when crossing roads and safety crossings used where possible.

Helping three year olds learn

Play is the main way in which children learn

Play continues to be of particular importance for young children and is one of the main ways in which they learn. Play is a child's work and they better understand things when they are able to enjoy active learning. By investigating, experimenting and discovering children are able to understand in ways which would be impossible if they were simply told facts. "To do is to understand" for young children and it is the opportunities in play and creativity which lead to advances in knowledge in later life. Because playing is necessary for all young mammals, including children, any significant lack of play can be damaging to their well-being. Play contributes to the whole development of the child and is very therapeutic and beneficial, on levels we may not always understand. It is wise to give children time to play on their own as well as playing with them.

At this stage fine manipulative skills are sufficiently developed for children to be able to hold a pencil

As they play children's physical skills develop and as their gross motor skills develop, so their finer manipulative skills become more controlled. Children become more precise in handling small objects, they may enjoy threading beads, doing jigsaws and assembling Lego bricks. They begin to use tools more accurately for example painting with large brushes, drawing with large chalks and making marks with a large pencil. As children practise their pencil skills they will begin to draw more precisely and eventually make marks that resemble letters. Children will go through these stages at their own speed and there should be no pressure to hasten their natural rhythm of development.

Children begin to socialise and make friends

Children will become more sociable at this age and enjoy playing with other children for longer periods. They may start to have special friends at nursery and enjoy the company of specific children. They may begin to understand conflict. Stories can help children understand feelings and compassion and sometimes particular stories can help in situations which the child is struggling to understand or is finding painful.

At this age we can begin to support our children to become tolerant and compassionate people – people who will respect the diversity of the world they live in. They will begin to understand that different individuals have their own minds and needs and that there are differences as well as similarities in people's lives. They will begin to appreciate feelings and develop empathy for others, realising that we can hurt other living things.

A love of books and well developed language skills are what children need to be ready to begin reading

Children will enjoy both group and individual stories at nursery but will particularly enjoy stories cuddling up with a special person and being able to experience that intimate one to one attention whilst joining in holding the book, pointing to pictures and maybe to words. The extent to which a child enjoys books, stories and language will very much affect the motivation and readiness to begin reading. If children grow to love stories and books they will want to understand the magic code which is reading so that they can enjoy reading for themselves. They may also begin to understand that they can find things out through reading. If they have not experienced the magic of stories and books why should they want to read?

Children learn a lot from becoming acquainted with the local environment

Wherever children live there is always much to see and learn about. Every visit you make into the local environment can be an exciting learning journey for your child, made more valuable as you chat and explain things. Children may well read words that they regularly see in the environment before any others such as "Asda" and making use of the local environment in all respects is helpful in stimulating the child's developing brain. Children will enjoy visiting the supermarket if they are helped to feel involved by being asked to search for certain foods, or to decide what the family could have for tea. Visiting the greengrocers is a good opportunity to find out if your child knows the names of fruit and vegetables or can identify colours and shapes, by for example asking "What's long and yellow and a monkey likes eating?" The local library is an excellent place to visit as you can really share with your child the magic and value of all the books there. Many nurseries also have library books that you can borrow. Visiting the local health centre to see a younger baby sister or brother weighed, watching fire engines as they whiz by, collecting a magazine from the newsagents or watching the washing spinning round in the local launderette can all be fascinating experiences for the young child. Car journeys with explanations about traffic lights etc, or short train or bus journeys can be an exciting and stimulating time for the young child to share with an interested companion.

By now your child is becoming ready for the next stage in their lives. You will have done much that is needed to support their interest in learning about the world they live in and will have given them many skills that they will need in the future. Continue to enjoy being with your child and they will enjoy being with you! And continue to be the interested partner in your child's school life throughout.



Midland Road

Nursery School and Children's Centre