

# Four to Five Years

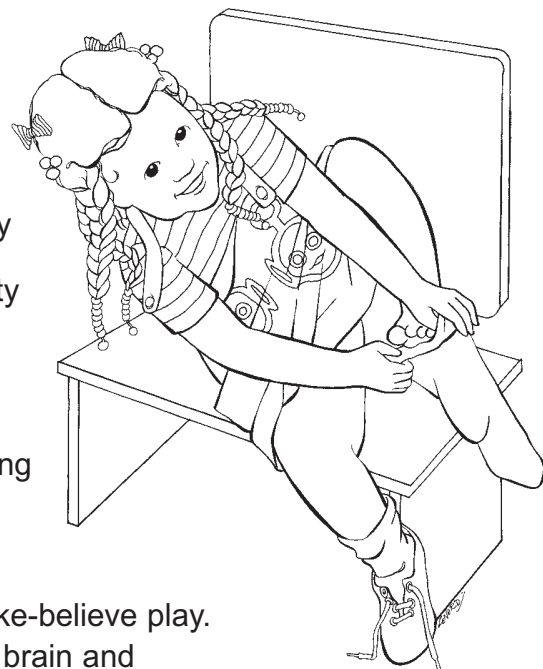
## Developmental Tasks

Learning to distinguish between reality and fantasy

Becoming comfortable with personal sexual identity

Learning to make connections and distinctions between feelings, thoughts, and actions

Learning to solve problems by initiating and creating



## What's Happening in the Brain?

During this stage, a child's brain benefits from make-believe play. This type of play builds important pathways in the brain and allows children to:

- ❖ Build the foundation for abstract thinking by creating symbols (e.g., by using a hairbrush as a microphone)
- ❖ Develop empathy by putting themselves in others' shoes (e.g., how do teachers or doctors feel, think, and act?)
- ❖ Practice categorization and sorting skills (e.g., how many "vegetables" should go into the "soup"?)

## Domains

### Physical

#### Typical Characteristics

Is very active, consistently "on the go," and sometimes physically aggressive

Has rapid muscle growth

#### Suggested Behaviors for Effective Parenting

Provide plenty of play space (both indoors and outside) and (as child tires easily) adequate rest periods.

Provide adequate nutrition (especially ample protein).

Emotional

Typical Characteristics	Suggested Behaviors for Effective Parenting
Exhibits a great deal of name calling; can be demanding and/or threatening	Maintain a sense of humor.
Is often bossy, demanding, and aggressive; goes to extremes (bossy, then shy); frequently whines, cries, and complains	Provide outlets for emotional expression through talking, physical activity, and creative outlets.
Often “tests” others to see who can be controlled	Establish limits and then adhere to them.
Is frequently boastful, especially about him/herself and family	Provide opportunities for talking about him or herself and family.
Has growing confidence in him/herself and world	Strengthen positive self-esteem by pointing out the things child can do for him/herself.
Is beginning to develop some feelings of insecurity	Assure the child that she or he is loved.

Social

Really needs to play with others; will be selective about playmates when playing in groups and often has stormy relationships	Ensure the child is involved in a preschool, playgroup, or Head Start program; if that is not possible, encourage group play, but don't be surprised by disagreements or negative behaviors toward certain playmates.
Has good imagination and likes to imitate adult activities	Allow child to participate in adult activities that s/he can manage (dusting, simple cooking, feeding pets, etc.).
Relies less on physical aggression and is learning to share, accept rules, and take turns	Expect the child to assume some responsibilities and follow simple rules (such as taking turns).

## Mental

Typical Characteristics	Suggested Behaviors for Effective Parenting
Has large vocabulary (1,500 to 2,000 words), and is fascinated by words and silly sounds	Introduce new, interesting “big” words and tell stories with the child as the main character; play word games.
Recognizes familiar words in simple books or signs (e.g., STOP sign), may be able to print own name, begins to count things	Read aloud each day and encourage the child to look at books. Provide paper and crayons to encourage creativity, and display the child’s art. Count out loud.
Likes to shock adults with “bathroom” language	Ignore such language, since paying attention to it only reinforces it.
Is continuously curious; talks all the time and asks lots of questions	Answer questions patiently.
Experiences nightmares	Accept the fright as real, and try to help the child gain power over the experience (by providing a “magic” light to freeze the monsters, etc.).  Caution: If the child has persistent sleep disturbances with regular nightmares, consult your pediatrician, as this may be an indicator of potential lag or trauma.
Has imaginary friends and an active fantasy life	Don't make fun of the child (or underestimate the importance of fantasy in the child's life).

## Moral

Is becoming aware of right and wrong; usually has the desire to do right, but may blame others for personal wrongdoing(s)	Help the child learn to be responsible and discover the consequences of his/her behavior(s); be aware of your feelings and try to understand the child's perspective.
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## **Indicators Related to Developmental Lag or Potential Trauma**

Excessive fears (especially of adults and strangers) and/or extreme separation anxiety

Shyness and/or lack of interest in others; not playing

Threatening or bullying peers

Excessively repetitive behaviors (especially around food)

Persistent speech problems

Bedwetting; toileting problems

Imitating abusive or upsetting behaviors witnessed in adults, especially during play (e.g., hitting dolls, drug play, etc.)

Regular sleep disturbances including night terrors and nightmares