

Preschooler play: why it's important for movement and motor skills development

Play is one of the main ways that children learn, develop and grow. Play is good for all areas of your preschooler's development, including his motor skills development.

Playing with your preschooler each day strengthens her muscles and bones and gives her the chance to practice physical skills. It's also good for your toddler's confidence, as she tests her abilities and discovers that she can climb higher, run faster and jump further all the time.

And when your preschooler gets lots of physical activity through play, it's good for his overall health and wellbeing.

What to expect: preschoolers and movement

Children of this age generally enjoy being active, although different children prefer different types of play and physical activity.

At **3-4 years**, your preschooler will probably:

- start to [dress on her own](#)
- use scissors quite well
- ride a scooter
- ride a tricycle by four years and start trying to ride a bike
- jump over small objects and swing independently on the swing
- walk up and down stairs without using a hand rail
- be more coordinated – for example, she might be able to kick a ball using her right or left leg
- be able to stand on one foot for short periods of time (both right and left).

At **five years**, your preschooler is more coordinated and stronger. You might find your child can:

- hop well on both his left and right foot
- learn to skip
- dress himself without your help
- learn to [tie shoe laces](#)
- throw, hit a ball with a bat or racquet, and bounce and catch a ball.

At this age, your preschooler might want to play organized games with simple rules with other children. These might be games like chasey or piggy in the middle.

Small bumps and falls are common as your child pushes physical skills to the limit. This is a normal part of how children learn and develop.

Play ideas to get your preschooler moving

Here are some play ideas to develop your preschooler's movement skills – and to help you have fun together!

- Give your preschooler some child-friendly sports equipment, like [balls](#), bats or throwable beanbags.
- Give your preschooler some large [cardboard boxes](#). Your child can climb on top of them, crawl through them and push them around.
- Borrow or buy a [balance bike or a bike with training wheels](#) – your child might want to try this at about four years. And if it isn't too far, walk, scoot or ride to get places – just remember your child's helmet!
- Make time for [outdoor play](#) at a park or [playground](#), in the backyard, on a beach or at a football ground. Moving around on different surfaces develops strength, balance and coordination.
- Listen to music that your child can dance to. You can also learn or make up actions to the songs together. If you give your child some fabric to wave with the music, it can get her moving her body in new ways.
- Do some [rough-and-tumble play](#). Preschoolers are the biggest rough-and-tumblers and enjoy wrestling, rolling and climbing all over you, or over their siblings and friends.
- Go for a [nature walk](#). This gets your child moving, and he can also collect leaves, sticks or pebbles for craft or pretend play when you get home.

Quiet, gentle activities are just as important for your preschooler's development as play that's loud or energetic and encourages bigger movements. For example, preschoolers can practice coordinating the small movements of their fingers through play activities like:

- [peg play](#)
- [playdough play](#)
- [drawing, scribbling and writing activities](#).

Screen time and physical play

Sometimes screen time can mean children sit still for too long without a break. But it doesn't have to be this way – you can [use screen time to get your child moving](#). For example, you can try things like:

- planning a walk with your child using a digital map
- videoing your child learning a new skill like riding a bike, and replaying the footage so your child can see herself learning
- choosing video dance games or virtual sports simulators.

And remember – [healthy preschooler screen time is all about balance](#). It's good for your child's development to do lots of different activities, which include physical play, pretend and creative play, social play and reading, as well as digital play.