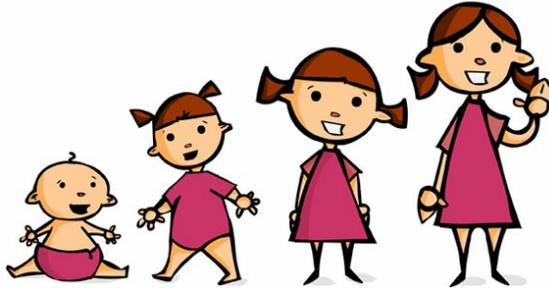


## What to expect from age to age



Every age and season that children go through has particular behavioral and cognitive challenges, and changes that are part of their development.

You may wonder why your child behaves in some ways and it may be frustrating or saddening at times, so today we'll talk about what to expect according to their age and or season of development, so you can understand more about what's going on behind their behavior and maybe, adjust your expectations.

We must clarify, and remind each other that children that were institutionalized are usually a couple of years behind in their development chronologically speaking. So, when we present the ages, that's what usually happens in that period of time, but even in children that weren't institutionalized, it may vary since every child is unique.

It is also important to remember what is happening and why they act in certain ways because it can help us adjust our expectations to where they are today, and know where they should get. As time goes by, along with proper stimulation, felt safety, trust and love, they can catch up, but you must be aware that it doesn't always happen. Remember that you signed up for a **lifetime adventure!** and it's better to know now and choose to learn, so you can be better equipped and increase your level of tolerance, perseverance and love.

### From birth to 2 years old



- They put everything in their mouth, it's a sensitive part of their body and they're exploring and sensing new things.
- They are born with the ability to cry, which is how they communicate for a while. When they cry, it generally tells you they need something.
- Separation anxiety occurs when infants experience separation from the main caregiver, usually mom. So expect them to cry if you

leave them for a while before they calm down.

**What they need:** Constant proximity and skin contact with their mothers or primary caregiver, especially at a time when their brains will grow more than any other time in their lives. By the end of the first year their brain will increase from 25% of the adult brain to 60%. Babies need to know that there's a loving, trustworthy and safe adult that will meet their needs, always.

As they turn two, they will become little explorers of their surroundings, they are curious and want to touch, taste, see, and tear things apart. They're learning and don't understand cause and effect yet. Developmentally, they are not ready to share anything, that's why it seems like they are self-centered and selfish, but everything they have, touch or see is seen as part of them, so in their minds, 'it's theirs'.

They are experimenting their independence so they will test boundaries, and will set theirs too, so you'll hear a lot of 'no!' and 'mine!' You will also see more tantrums because they are experiencing big emotions like frustration, anger, sadness, shame, and they don't know yet how to express themselves using their words.

#### What they need from you:

- That you show them gently what to do and how, instead of just saying 'no'.
- They get distracted easily so if you put another task in front of them to guide them away from the undesired activity, it's very likely you will succeed.
- Use your words to tell them what's not ok, and when they do it right.
- To not overwhelm them by telling them every minute what to do and what not to do, choose the important things first, and move little by little.
- To guide them and lower your expectations, *they're still two*. They may or may not respond the first time.
- Be kind and gentle when you correct them, come close to them, *don't* give them instructions from the other side of the room, they likely won't pay attention to you.

## From 3 to 4 years old

Expect to see tantrums, lots of them.

They start to be a little more independent but will want the benefits of depending on you. You will see them keep practicing the word 'NO!' until they master it.



Some children may develop some fears and/or phobias to different things and also start having imaginary friends since they can't tell yet what's real and what's make believe. In their development, they are not yet ready for sharing and may start experiencing jealousy.

#### What they need from you:

- That you understand it's temporary and will not last forever.
- Assure them when they do something right, they are seeking your approval and acceptance.
- Again, be kind and gentle when you correct them and **see every mistake as an opportunity** to teach them something that will last.
- Stick to the rules you have established. Be consistent and keep the boundaries.
- Give them the freedom to explore, guide them gently and try to minimize the 'no's you give out. Find ways to direct them without using NO.
- Share your power with them, give them the opportunity to choose between few options like:
  - would you like to take a bath first and choose your PJ's or choose your PJ's first and then take a bath?' or,
  - do you want to wear the red or the yellow shirt?
  - do you want to read first and then write, or write and then read?
- Try to have bedtime rituals such as a story, a cuddly, prayer time, a nice smell or massage before sleeping and be consistent with it.
- Take breaks when you need them. If you're burned out, you will not be effective in parenting your child.

As they turn four years old, they start knowing what's right and wrong, good or bad, and classify things, situations and people. They start to understand they words and actions have an effect on others. Just don't expect them to communicate perfectly when they're angry, they may still hit, yell or push at times. You will see traces of competitiveness and may start to experiment with lies, test the boundaries, and will continue to express their personality and find some independence. Their fears may continue. Also, they may be more helpful doing some chores alongside an adult.

#### What they need from you:

- Use your words to explain in a simple yet concise way, the rules and why are they important. Don't expect them to understand the first time so be prepared to repeat.
- Give instructions in a simple way, and only one instruction at a time.
- Don't argue with a 4 year old. You will lose your patience and it won't be productive.
- When they misbehave or make a mistake, don't ask why they did it, ask what happened. If you ask why, it's very likely they will lie.
- Be consistent with the consequences, and also explain to them why their behavior was wrong and teach them to do what is right. When possible, give them the opportunity to repeat the behavior in the proper way.
- Help them explore, but don't think that because they look so big and smart now, they are mature, they are still little and learning.

## From 5 to 6 years old



You will notice they are a little bit more like little adults, a bit more social, humorous and understanding that others are different.

They're still competitive in games to the point they may break rules in order to win.

They will want to make their own choices regarding clothes and food options.

Their attention span should be increasing so now you can explain a little more.

If they start school, expect them to be a little more tired, moody or sensitive, it's a big change and you can make the necessary arrangements for them to rest, maybe adding nap time to the daily routine.

#### What they need from you:

- For you to be fully present and able to connect while you play with them.
- Allow them to have opportunities to interact with peers in a way they can learn social skills like taking turns, patience, respect, team work, negotiation, and how to win and lose with a good attitude.
- Play with them without technology or distractions. Play is the best way of knowing what's in their mind. Let them lead, if a flower is a phone, it's a phone, you're just playing!
- Keep teaching them self-regulation:
  - name the feeling, use your words and help them calm down:
    - It seems you're angry/sad/disappointed because it started raining and we couldn't go to the park.
    - I know it's sad when mommy has to go to work, but I'll be back and we will be able to play then (keep your word!)
- Use your words with kindness and direct them on what they must do but also give them natural rewards as well as natural consequences:

- What about you help me clear the table and then we have dessert?
- We have to clean up these toys before using the others. (keep your word, they shouldn't be able to take other ones before cleaning the other ones first)

## For ALL parents and ALL children

When a child misbehaves, before you do anything, always ask yourself, *what does my child need most right now?*

- Does my child need me?

Special one-on-one time with mom or dad might be a more urgent priority than discipline, since children will often act up if they've been feeling a little neglected.

- Is my child tired, hungry, thirsty or sick?
- **Keep it short and simple:** – your child will have trouble following what you are saying if you introduce complex thoughts (i.e. give a lecture). Short, simple phrases are much easier for your child to process and remember.

### Our ultimate goal is connection.

As parents, we must lovingly, intentionally and firmly take our children by the hand and lead them into a relationship of trust and healing.

It is through this process, and as a result of this renewed relationship, that we and our children will discover real, life-changing hope.

### What does the Word say?

When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.

1 Corinthians 13:11

Even the Word of God tells us the difference between children and adults, there are specific ways of thinking, behaving and being and when you go through the steps or seasons of development you leave those behind. This message goes for parents and adults in charge of children. It reminds us of two things, one, if there are childish ways in us, we must acknowledge them and leave them behind! And also, children are children, and one day they will grow and leave. So we must treat them like they are and walk with them towards what they will become.

We are also reminded that God loves his children with a balance of nurture and structure:

"God is kind, but he's not soft. In kindness he takes us by the hand and leads us into radical life-change."

Romans 2:4 (The Message translation)

Another version of that verse says:

Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?

And we are called to do the same with our children: "...bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. "

Ephesians 6:4

We are called to be patient, loving, but also lead them in the way they should go,

and that requires structure and guide. It also means to be with them in their mistakes and failures, help them get back up and teach how to change their ways, and remember just as it has taken you and me months or even years to get victory over certain thought or behavior patterns, and we may fall every once in a while, it's likely it will take some time for them to grow, heal, and learn what you have to teach.

Keep up the good work!

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