As parents it is our goal to teach important behaviors and set limits while building positive relationships and supporting our child’s self-esteem.

Information was compiled from:

Beyond Time-Out from Chaos to Calm by Beth Grosshans, Ph.D and Janet Burton L.C.S.W.

Is this a phase? Child Development and Parent Strategies: Birth to 6 years by Helen F. Neville B.S RN

Your Child-Birth to 6 by Alexander Dodson

Have you ever asked yourself, “Why is my 3-year old acting like this?”

If you answered yes, read on…Life with a three year old is pleasant and fun. They say funny things and make humorous observations. Things go well until they start nearing 4 years of age. They may become more withdrawn at this point in order to prepare for the next stage.

What a 3-year old is like:

- Period of time marked by passing from babyhood to childhood
- Less domineering and less like a dictator
- Delightful and wonderful person at peace with self and world
- Loves parents and life; feels positive about self
- Loves to please
- Able to share and cooperate (will not always do this)
- Able to accept suggestions and follow directions
- Trying to develop impulse control system
- Needs order
What a 3.5-year old is like:

- More fearful
- Gets frustrated easily
- Begins whining
- Seems to need constant reassurance of mother’s love
- Time of rapid growth, less control over body
- May begin stuttering
- Constant “whys”

Realistic expectations for your 3-year old:

Knowing what to expect from your child will help you to distinguish between normal, developmental behavior and acting-out behavior.

- Tears at parting (daycare, bedtime, etc.)
- Entertain self for about 3-8 minutes
- Can sit and pay attention for about 5 minutes
- Can undress themselves, dressing is still difficult
- Hard for them to separate reality from fantasy
- Will begin playing with other children vs. playing next to them
- May want to try potty training
- Speech may not be completely understood by other adults
- Will not be able to follow verbal directions
- Responds to verbal explanations somewhat; keep short and simple
- Routines are essential to their happiness
- Able to understand simple rules
- Can’t stop impulse to do wrong thing

A word about order; children this age seem obsessed with order. If they see a wadded up food wrapper on the sidewalk they have to pick it up. Why? Because it doesn’t belong there. Take advantage of this stage and have them help you keep things tidy around home and the neighborhood—this will pay off greatly when they are older and have to keep their room clean.

Discipline 101

Remain calm—remember they are children and you are the adult. You have to model self control and respect so they can reciprocate it. When you get angry your child gets scared and learning stops.

Consistency—this is extremely important. Your child needs to know what will happen, when and how in order to learn self control, respect, and cooperation.

Set Guidelines—let your child know exactly what they can do and how you expect them to behave before entering into situations. Young minds work visually; describe the picture you want to happen.

Follow Through—if a consequence has been issued, make sure it happens or your child will come to ignore your authority.

Be Respectful—use Discipline (teaching, directing, and correcting) instead of Punishment (an unpleasant consequence to unwanted behavior). Criticize the actions not the individual.

Be Realistic—don’t expect a 3-year old to be happy about sitting in a grocery cart if it’s near naptime and snack time has passed with no snack. Know what your child is capable of and plan ahead. Make sure to have a snack handy if you will be out during snack time and go home for a nap. Shopping will go better if your child is fed and rested.

Offer Choices—make sure you can live with the choices. Allow the child limited choices (no more than 2) for everyday things (which pj’s to wear, which cup to drink from, etc.) so they will feel like they have some control and will not dig in their heels every time you expect cooperation.

Find the Good—let your child know what they are doing well, so they’ll keep doing it. This gives them internal rewards for correct behavior.

Give Hope—let them know that next time you know they will remember or do better.

Physical Touch—make sure your child is getting hugs and kisses every day. Even during out of control tantrums your child needs you to hold them in order to get back the control they don’t have.
As parents it is our goal to teach important behaviors and set limits while building positive relationships and supporting our child’s self-esteem.

Have you ever asked yourself, “Why is my 4-year old acting like this?”

If you answered yes, read on... your 4-year old child needs firm parents, not as a dictator but this is no time to be tentative as a parent or you will be bowled over. 4-year olds need variety and lots of it, being prepared with new and interesting activities can help when things get out of control. Keep in mind to tell children what to do rather than what not to do. This is the time when your child will really try to push the boundaries to see how far you will let him/her go.

What a 4-year old is like:
- Your child is not a civilized human being yet
- Age of extremes
- Seems “out of bounds”
- Very physical
- Begins to defy orders and requests
- Loves to hear self talk; talks compulsively and powerfully
- Seems to be very opinionated

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What a 4-year old is like (con’t)

- Fascinated by words
- Active imagination
- Learning how real world works
- May become more fearful than before, worrying about self or parents well-being
- Insatiable need to play with other children
- Want to run their parents lives
- Curious about how the world works
- Will save worst behavior for parents
- “All or nothing” thinking
- Can’t separate who they are and what they do
- Still self-centered
- Speaks bluntly
- Wants to be in charge

Realistic expectations for your 4-year old:

Knowing what to expect from your child will help you to distinguish between normal, developmental behavior and acting-out behavior.

- You will need to keep teaching them what to do
- Can dress themselves quickly
- May entertain self for 8-10 minutes
- Sit and pay attention for 5-10 minutes
- May be interested in printing
- Likes to make up stories and games
- Will be a poor sport if loses games
- Due to “all or nothing” thinking, will think many things are not fair
- Will have strong emotions (they are either “great” or “terrible”)
- Potty training will be in full swing if not complete
- About 70% of speech should be understood by other adults
- Can follow 1 step directions easily
- Beginning to see connections between misbehavior and consequences
- Can follow rules more easily if knows an adult will notice and there will be consequences
- Know what they are supposed to do, but still lack complete impulse control.

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Consistency—this is extremely important. Your child needs to know what will happen, when and how in order to learn self control, respect, and cooperation.

Set Guidelines—let your child know exactly what they can do and how you expect them to behave before entering into situations. Young minds work visually, describe the picture you want to happen.

Follow Through—if a consequence has been issued, make sure it happens or your child will come to ignore your authority.

Be Respectful—use Discipline (teaching, directing, and correcting) instead of Punishment (an unpleasant consequence to unwanted behavior). Criticize the actions not the individual.

Be Realistic—don’t expect a 4-year old to walk down the aisles in the grocery store, they will run. Know what your child is capable of and plan ahead. Hold your child by the hand and tell them they will need to walk, promise a run in the park later (if possible).

Offer Choices—make sure you can live with the choices. Allow the child limited choices (no more than 2) for everyday things (what to wear, what to read, etc.) so they will feel like they have some control and will not dig in their heels every time you expect cooperation.

Find the Good—let your child know what they are doing well, so they’ll keep doing it. This gives them internal rewards for correct behavior.

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Have you ever asked yourself, “Why is my 5-year old acting like this?”

If you answered yes, read on… Your 5-year old needs support and help during difficult times and needs to know that you, as a parent will not tolerate undesirable behaviors. Discipline can be on a more rational level, your child is ready to be reasoned with. Remember your child is still a child and will still have accidents and make mistakes.

What a 5-year old looks like:

- Age of equilibrium
- Less “out of bounds” behavior
- Quieter, more secure and more dependable
- Showing more maturity
- More cooperative and flexible in thinking
- Loves home and parents
- Ready for enlarged community experiences
- Enjoys playing with neighborhood children
- Still “all or nothing” thinking
- Ready for intellectual growth
- End of preschool age
Realistic expectations for your 5-year old:

Knowing what to expect from your child will help you to distinguish between normal developmental behavior and acting-out behavior.

- Easily separates from parents (time to adjustment)
- Will take turns more easily
- Able to show more impulse control
- Entertain self for 10-15 minutes
- Reality is still blurred—due to increase awareness of world and it’s dangers—can cause more anxiety
- Able to contribute to society (give toys as hand-me-downs, take food to elderly, etc)
- Able to help with chores at home
- Time to begin reasoning with child
- Bragging will lessen
- Telling untruths will still be a problem
- Potty training will be complete—but may still have accidents or need to be reminded
- Able to dress/feed self with little or no help
- Speech is easily understood by other adults
- Can follow 2 step directions easily
- Can generalize rules and brainstorm solutions
- Understands that rules change with the situation
- Begin to learn that even if they do something wrong, it doesn’t determine who they are
- Feel they are able to fix their mistakes
- Good time to start Kindergarten

Discipline 101

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Be Realistic—don’t expect a 5-year old to have an adult perspective on situations. Know what your child is capable of and plan ahead.

Offer Choices—make sure you can live with the choices. Allow the child limited choices (no more than 2) for everyday things (what to wear, what to read, etc.) so they will feel like they have some control and will not dig in their heels every time you expect cooperation.

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