



# Let's Grow

## Issue #10: 3 - 3.5 Years

Somewhere in those months between age three and three-and-a-half there is a magic transition from toddler into child. This stage can be dramatic, and some parents eagerly await the development of this small person.

Your 3-year-old is full of humour and original ideas. At this age, children are often self-confident, charming and like talking. They love praise for their accomplishments and are content to be away from their primary caregiver(s) with people they know. This is also a time of developing friendships; taking turns and learning about sharing and playing well with others. Making friends shows a child's readiness to move beyond themselves and their family. It is important to remember that not all children will reach this stage at the same time.

You may think toddlerhood is over... but they are still a child and think differently than an adult. The occasional tantrum will occur, they may still grab, push or bite other children. There will be times of whining and being uncooperative and cranky.

Children learn so much through their active play. They are very aware of the world around them and are curious about the "how's" and "why's". Your child can help. They can set the table, pour their own cereal, help bake muffins. Giving your child small jobs to do with you helps them feel successful. Taking time to encourage participation and responsibility will pay off in later years.



# Feeding & Nutrition

## Snack Time Strategies

Regularly scheduled meals and snacks provide structure to a busy preschooler's day and prevent meltdowns. Choosing snacks that have the nutrients they need to play and grow is important, but snack time is also an opportunity to be creative and have fun. Include at least 2 food groups in the snacks you serve to meet your child's nutrient needs. Have your child sit-down for snacks, preschoolers still need supervision while eating and can choke easily especially if they are running and playing.

Bright coloured vegetables and fruits can add fun and flavour to any snack, try using a crinkle cutter or making different shaped slices to add some play to snack time. Red pepper rings, cucumber slices, frozen peas and melon cubes are just some of the shapes you can make. Pair these fruits or veggies with a protein like hummus or yogurt or whole grain mini pitas or muffins to make a filling snack.

Snack time is a great opportunity for your child to practice their decision-making skills. Give them some choices on what to eat, but not too many (2 choices is plenty). For example, "would you like 3 baby carrots or just 1?" or "do you want bean dip or cheese slices?"



Many foods are marketed to parents as being healthy for children, but they can be very high in sugar, sodium, and saturated fat. There are a lot of convenient snacks that are also full of fibre, vitamins, and minerals. Frozen fruits and vegetables store well and are quick to prepare on their own or in a smoothie. Nut and seed butters can be spread on whole grain crackers or sliced fruit. Hard boiled eggs can be prepared in bulk and stored for a few days in the fridge. Read packaged food labels to help you find choices that are both convenient and packed with the nutrients your child needs (like fibre). Remember a daily value of 5% or less is a little of something and 15% or more is lot. Canada's Food Guide has more information on [label reading](#) and [snacks](#).

### The Grey Bruce Good Food Box

Fresh vegetables and fruits can be expensive. The Good Food Box program makes purchasing vegetables and fruit easy and affordable for everyone in the community through bulk purchasing of produce. It is operated by volunteers across Grey Bruce. Visit [211Ontario.ca](http://211Ontario.ca) or call 211 for more details and to find a location near you.



# Caring For Your Child

## Hand Washing

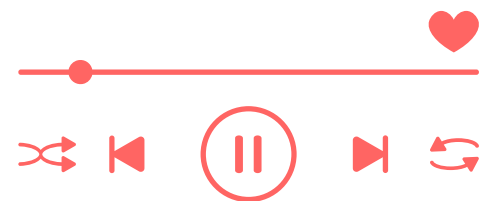
**Hands should always be washed:**

- Before and after meals
- After blowing a nose or coughing
- When they are dirty
- After using the toilet



**A good handwashing song (to the tune of Twinkle Twinkle):**

★  
Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star  
Twinkle, twinkle little star,  
See how clean my two hands are.  
Soap and water, wash and scrub,  
Get those germs off, rub a dub.  
★  
Twinkle, twinkle little star,  
See how clean my two hands are.  
★



By 3 years of age, your child is probably going to the bathroom by themselves, at least some of the time. Teach them to wash their hands. It's important to teach girls to wipe correctly, from front to back. It is natural for your 3-year-old to want to talk about and explore their body. Give the correct name for body parts, this includes the genital area. Teach them to care for and respect their bodies.

## Dental Care

- Encourage your child to find all the “germs” that are hiding in their mouth.
- Try and get your child to spend about 2 minutes brushing. A clock timer or a song gives them a sense of time.
- Take turns. They brush their own teeth, and a parent brushes their teeth.
- Begin to use a fluoridated toothpaste when your child can spit it out. Never let your child swallow or eat the toothpaste. Only use a rice sized smear of toothpaste.
- Flossing is important too! It might be easier to use a floss pick in their little mouth.
- Your child should visit the dentist regularly. If you do not have dental coverage, call your local health unit to find out more about dental services that may be available.

# Safety

Because your preschooler is easily distracted, this can create lots of potential dangers. In your child's world the focus is on themselves, and they can't always see the bigger picture. This might explain why your preschooler may wander off to look at something neat in the store and expect you to follow. Help your preschooler understand why it is important to stay close. Explain to your child the expectations you have of them and the family rules for keeping safe. In busy places with lots of people, hold their hand or use a stroller/carrier for toddlers and preschoolers. Never ever leave your preschooler alone in a car, even for a moment. For this age, don't allow your child to use a public washroom alone. The other safety tip to practice before it happens is what to do if you do get separated. Teach your child to stay put and to not move.



# Healthy Growth & Development

These developmental milestones have been provided to show some of the skills that mark the progress of young children as they learn to communicate. You may use these milestones to help monitor your child's development.

For more information visit [Early child development | ontario.ca](https://www.earlychilddevelopment.ontario.ca)





### By age 3 most children can:

- understand "who", "what", "where" and "why" questions
- create long sentences using 5 or more words and talk about past events (for example, trip to grandparents' house, day at childcare)
- tell simple stories
- show affection for favourite playmates
- engage in multi-step pretend play (for example, cooking a meal, repairing a car)
- be understood by most people outside of the family, most of the time
- be aware of the function of print (for example, in menus, lists, signs)
- have a beginning interest in, and awareness of, rhyming

### Early Years Check-In

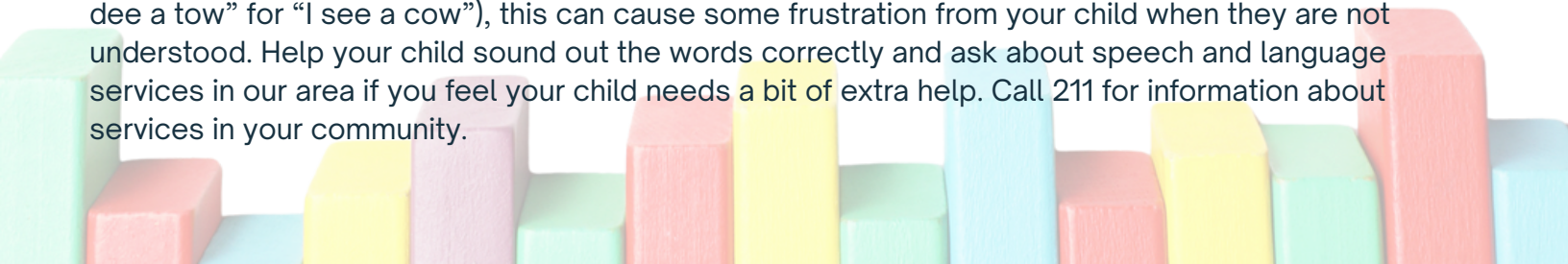
As a parent or caregiver, you play an important role in your child's growth. The Early Years Check-In is a tool that helps you to identify any concerns about your child's development. The results can be used to start a conversation with an early year's professional about any concerns you may have.

Use this simple and convenient tool to quickly identify any concerns you may have about how your child is developing. [Early Years Check-In - Welcome | Health HQ](#)



### Talk with me!

Your preschooler is really using their words now! They are becoming very chatty, using 4 to 5 words together in a sentence. Other people should be able to understand what your child is saying most of the time. Help them by speaking clearly and slowly. If your child's sounds are different (such as, "I dee a tow" for "I see a cow"), this can cause some frustration from your child when they are not understood. Help your child sound out the words correctly and ask about speech and language services in our area if you feel your child needs a bit of extra help. Call 211 for information about services in your community.





## Keep me active!

### Children 3-4 years of age require:

#### Movement

- At least 180 minutes spent in a variety of physical activities spread throughout the day, of which at least 60 minutes is energetic play—more is better.

#### Lots of Sleep

- 10 to 13 hours of good-quality sleep, which may include a nap, with consistent bedtimes and wake-up times.

#### Less Sitting

- Not being restrained for more than 1 hour at a time (e.g., in a stroller or car seat) or sitting for extended periods.
- Screen time while sitting should be no more than 1 hour—less is better.
- When sitting, engaging in pursuits such as reading and storytelling with a caregiver is encouraged.

Replacing time restrained or screen time while sitting with additional energetic play, and trading indoor for outdoor time, while keeping enough sleep, can provide greater health benefits.

The Canadian 24-Hour Movement Guidelines for the Early Years outline the recommended balance of physical activity, high-quality sedentary behaviour, and sufficient sleep to support healthy growth and development. For more information visit: [Early Years 0-4 Years – 24-Hour Movement Guidelines \(csepguidelines.ca\)](https://csepguidelines.ca).





## Let's Play

Your preschooler will love to hop, jump, gallop and somersault. Throwing a ball or kicking a soccer ball are all great outlets of energy for your child. Riding a tricycle or bicycle with a helmet will build balance and develop gross-motor skills. Building towers with blocks or lego and then knocking it down is super fun.

Items of different shapes and colours to string together, or cutting and pasting shapes on paper, can help develop fine-motor skills as well as help your preschooler learn their colours, shapes, and counting. Pouring liquids is a lot of fun too, so let your 3-year-old practice in the kitchen sink or the bath. Your preschooler will feel so proud of their accomplishments, so be specific when offering your praise (eg. "I love the macaroni necklace you made me today; I'm going to wear it all day so everyone can see it").

Your preschooler understands "taking turns" now, and when they are playing with friends and/or siblings, they can use words like "stop it" instead of striking out when things aren't going their way. You can help your children before they get together to play by reminding them of the rules and taking turns.

We live in a technological time - screen time refers to TV, smart phones, tablets, computers, video games and other handheld devices. What do we do instead? Here are some suggestions:

- Play with Lego, blocks, and building sets.
- Create an arts and crafts box, with a special space for your child's craft work.
- Sign out books from the library that you can read together
- Do puzzles
- Spend time outside every day. Playing in a park or going for adventure walks

Taking the time to help your preschooler develop other interests will make it a lot easier to suggest alternatives as they get older.

Visit Play & Learn for expert reviewed games and activities to do with your child to help them develop their skills. [Play & Learn - Games and Activities-Early Child Development | Health HQ](#)



## Toys

By three years of age, your child is interested in creating a product rather than just enjoying the process.

For example, make a book with all their artwork. Your child can tell you about the picture and you could help write a story to match. Don't forget the date!

Have fun making sound shakers together. Use paper cups, toilet paper tubes, film containers, yogurt or margarine tubs. Gather things like sand, gravel, dirt, pieces of paper, buttons and anything else you have. Put the same amount of sand into two containers, the same amount of gravel in two more containers, and so on. Put the tops on the containers and tape paper across the ends of the toilet paper tubes. Now try to find the two containers that sound the same. (This game works best using the same containers for all the sounds). These sound shakers can also be used with music.

### Here are some other things to try:

- Several different kinds of markers, chalk, paints, pastels, crayons (all non-toxic and washable)
- Non-toxic glue, children's scissors and beautiful junk
- Books, simple interlocking puzzles
- Felt board and felt story pieces
- Chalk and chalk board
- Paint easel



## Getting ready for School

It is soon time to register for kindergarten, check with your school board for more information. To find out more about schools in Grey and Bruce Counties, which school your child will attend and if they can ride a bus visit: [Home Page - BusPlanner Web \(mybrucegreyschoolbus.ca\)](https://mybrucegreyschoolbus.ca).

### Children With Special Needs:

Information about early intervention and supportive programs that assist with planning for entry to formal school can be found by calling 211 or accessing 211 online. You can also visit: [Thames Valley Children's Centre: Home | Thames Valley Children's Centre \(tvcc.on.ca\)](https://tvcc.on.ca).



# Positive Parenting

Anger, jealousy, and love are all strong emotions that your little preschooler feels and can express. Try to be patient and understanding and allow your child to express these feelings in a safe way. Your preschooler is learning how emotions are interpreted by others, how they feel to them and how it makes other people feel. Your child still likes things to go their own way and can get really upset when they don't. Your child wants your attention and will also like to know that they are behaving well. Here are some suggestions which will make the days go more smoothly while still having fun:

**Stick to a routine.** Create structure to the day. Having day-to-day consistency will help your preschooler predict routines and rituals and this will in-turn reduce their stress level and increase cooperation and self-regulation. Things like regular meals and bedtimes with bedtime rituals all help avoid difficult behaviour.

**Offer choices.** Encouraging independence with some activities is a good way for parents to build self-esteem. Simple choices such as, "Milk or water?" gives them some control. Choices such as, "We are going to pick up your sister from school, OK?" is not such a good idea. You might not like the answer. Also, stick to offering only 2 options at a time. Too many options are overwhelming for a preschooler.

**Tell them what they CAN do.** Suggestions such as, "You can't run around in here, but when we go outside you can run in the yard."

**Setting an Example.** Your child is constantly watching every move you make! If you lower your voice, chances are, your child will do the same. Since your preschooler is now interested in being with other children (not just to watch but to play), this is a good time to introduce them to fun activities where they can make new friends. Some places to visit include: our local EarlyON Child and Family Centre, the library, or a playgroup with friends. Your preschooler will still want you close by, but it's also becoming lots of fun to be with friends. Remember to give your child some warning before it is time to leave their friends. This allows your child to prepare themselves to say goodbye nicely.







## For More Information

- The Healthy Babies Healthy Children program provides information and home visits to parents who are eligible and need more support during pregnancy, after their baby is born and as their child grows. For more information or to self-refer to the program visit Grey Bruce Public Health's website at [Home Visiting Program](https://publichealthgreybruce.on.ca) (publichealthgreybruce.on.ca) Call Grey Bruce Public Health at 519-376-9420 or 1-800-263-3456 extension 5.
- 211 quickly and confidentially connects people to social services and community programs across Ontario. 211 is available by phone for those looking to speak to a friendly voice or by text, online search, email or chat. Service is available in multiple languages.
- Call 811 to find health services or information or get health advice from a registered nurse. Toll free TTY line: [1-866-797-0007](tel:1-866-797-0007). Live chat is also available. [Health811 - Health811 \(ontario.ca\)](https://www.health811.on.ca)
- Looking for guidance about food and nutrition, including infant and child feeding? Residents of Ontario can connect with a Registered Dietitian to access free nutrition information and advice by calling 811 or starting a chat at [Health811](https://www.health811.on.ca).
- Caring for Kids, a website developed by the Canadian Paediatric Society, provides parents with information about their child's health and well-being. [Home | Caring for kids \(cps.ca\)](https://www.caringforkids.ca)
- EarlyON Child and Family Centres offer free programs for families and children from birth to 6 years old. You can learn and play with your child, meet people and get advice from early childhood professionals.
- Find an EarlyON child and family centre: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/find-earlyon-child-and-family-centre>
  - For more information about Grey County: <https://www.grey.ca/resident-services/community-services/early-learning-and-child-care/earlyon>
  - For more information about Bruce County: <https://www.brucecounty.on.ca/human-services/earlyon>
- Discover how to prevent injuries before they happen – [Parachute: www.parachutecanada.org/injury-topics](https://www.parachutecanada.org/injury-topics)
- Eat Right Be Active – [A Guide for Caregivers of Preschoolers Ages 3-5: ERBA-3-5-2018.pdf](https://www.nutritionconnections.ca/ERBA-3-5-2018.pdf) ([nutritionconnections.ca](https://www.nutritionconnections.ca))