



Four-Year Visit

This is an exciting year as your child gets ready for kindergarten. Children this age are beginning to develop even more independence and a clearer sense of self.

School Readiness!

- Most children start kindergarten at 5. In some cases, it will be later, depending on school cut-off dates or parental preference. Consider enrolling your child in preschool or Head Start now so they will be ready for kindergarten. If you have specific concerns about school readiness for your child, discuss them with your pediatrician.
- Specific skills that will make your child's first year at school go more smoothly include the ability to:
 - Play well with other children with little fighting or crying
 - Follow directions and listen quietly when being read a story
 - Care for themselves (use the toilet, wash their hands and get dressed)
- Give your child the chance to play with other children as much as possible. (Check the library, community websites and billboards for postings about child play groups, story times, sing-a-longs, etc.)
- Plan a special trip to visit your child's new school and meet the teachers.

Development

- Children vary greatly in development. By age 4-5, most children:
 - Speak in sentences and recall parts of stories
 - Stand on one foot for 10 seconds, hop, swing, climb and throw a ball overhand
 - Copy a triangle and square, use scissors, draw a person with a body and print some letters
 - Want to play more with other children, please others, share and take turns
- Try these tips to help with development
 - Take your child to the library on a regular basis and let them choose the book they want to read and take home. Read together every day and ask your child questions about what happened in the story.
 - Limit screen time (TV, tablets, computers, video games, cell phones) to about 1 hour a day. Try to watch shows or use apps with your child so you can discuss them together. Keep screens out of the bedroom. Consider making a family media plan (see website list) to balance screentime with other activities.
 - Take time to talk and listen. This helps your child feel important and gain self-esteem. It is important for them to tell you about their feelings. Ask them about the best and worst parts of their day. Teach them that everyone has ups and downs, and that is okay to have sad or negative feelings.

Sleep

- Preschoolers should sleep for 10-13 hours per day.
- Although most children this age no longer nap, it is still important to have "quiet time" in the afternoon to relax.
- Stick to routines with fixed times for going to bed, waking up and quiet time. Choose a quiet activity (such as reading and not screen time) for the half hour before bedtime.

Sexuality

- This is typically the age when children become interested in how boys and girls are different. Use the correct terms for body parts.
- Teach your child that no one should ask to see their body parts or ask for secrets to be kept from adults.
- Self-exploration at this age is normal. Ask your doctor if you are worried about your child's sexual behavior.



Behavior and Discipline

- Praise your child when they are kind and behaving well. Model the behavior you expect. Listen to your child and treat them with respect. Demonstrate apologizing and help your child to say "I'm sorry" after hurting someone's feelings.
- Stick to daily routines. Children behave better when they know what to expect every day. Schedule limited time for screen time so your child doesn't constantly try to push you for more.
- Set limits. When a rule is broken, a logical consequence needs to follow. Spanking or hitting are not advised and won't help. Be consistent. When your child does something wrong, explain that what they did was wrong and what happens if it continues. (For example, if they won't share a toy, it will be taken away.) Time outs (for 4-5 minutes) are appropriate at this age.

Eating Healthy and Being Active!



- Preschoolers can be very opinionated about what they eat. Most would be happy with a bland, white, starchy diet (pasta, rice, chicken nuggets and fries). Now is the time to talk more with your child about healthy eating. Get them involved in food shopping and meal prep. Encourage fruits, vegetables, whole grains and beans. These high-fiber foods also help with digestion and prevent constipation.
- Mealtime Habits: Healthy eating should be something the whole family works on together. Your child is more likely to eat healthy foods if they see you eating them. Whenever possible, eat meals as a family with all screens (TVs, phones and tablets) off. Avoid fatty and fried items, and don't keep junk food and sugary drinks in the home. Instead, save them for special events.
- Plate Planner: Your child's lunch and dinner plate should be $\frac{1}{2}$ fruits and vegetables, $\frac{1}{4}$ protein (meat, fish or tofu) and $\frac{1}{4}$ grains. (Whole grains, like brown rice or pasta, are best.)
- Drinks: Offer your child 2-3 cups a day of unsweetened milk. Juice (even 100%) has a lot of sugar and isn't recommended. Give your child fruit to eat instead. Don't offer sweetened drinks (Capri Sun®, Gatorade®, Hawaiian Punch®, Sunny D®, soda, iced-tea, lemonade). These are full of sugar and may contribute to unhealthy weight gain. Instead, offer water between meals. If there is a special occasion and you decide to give a sweet drink, limit it to 4 ounces or less.
- Make sure your child is physically active for 1 hour or more every day. Turn off the electronics and go play outside with your child! Take them to the park, offer swimming lessons or help them learn to ride a bike (always with a helmet).

Vaccines (*vaccine schedule may vary slightly by practice)

Today:

- DtaP
- IPV (polio)
- MMR (measles, mumps and rubella)
- Varicella (chicken pox)
- The flu vaccine is recommended during flu season
- If you live in a high-risk town, your child may have a blood test to screen for lead poisoning.



Important Numbers

- Poison Control
800-222-1222
- Parental Stress Line
800-632-8188
- HAVEN Domestic Violence Help Line
617-724-0054
- Smoking Quit Line (free)
800-TRY-TO-STOP
- Your doctor's office

Websites

- AAP Healthy Children | www.healthychildren.org
(Health topics and news updates from the American Academy of Pediatrics)
- Kids Eat Right | www.eatright.org/kids
(American Dietetic Association tips on smart shopping and healthy cooking)
- Family Media Use Plan | www.healthychildren.org/mediauseplan
(Info from the AAP on how to create a family media plan custom for your family needs)
- One Tough Job | www.onetoughjob.org
(Information on development and a variety of parenting topics created by the Massachusetts Children's Trust Fund)

Oral Health Tips

Your child should brush their teeth twice a day with a soft, child-sized brush and a small, pea-sized amount of fluoridated toothpaste. After they are done, teach them to spit out the toothpaste. Don't have them rinse their mouth with water because this washes off the fluoride. Your child should see a dentist every 6 months.

Safety Tips

- Use a forward-facing car seat with a harness for as long as possible, up to the highest weight or height allowed by the maker. Then, switch to a belt-positioning booster seat until your child reaches 4'9" or is 8-12 years old.
- Teach your child to wear a helmet **every time** they ride a bike or anything else with wheels (scooters, rollerblades, etc.)
- Teach your child to swim and to never go into water unsupervised.
- Never leave your child alone in the car, house or yard. Supervise play closely near streets, driveways and bodies of water.
- It is best to keep all guns out of the home. If you must have a gun, store it unloaded and locked with ammunition locked separately. Make sure this is the case wherever your child plays.
- Install smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Test them monthly and change batteries yearly.
- Keep medicines completely out of reach and locked up.

Your child's next routine visit will be at 5 years old.

