

How children develop: 2-3 years: Play and safety

Every child is an individual. Every child develops at their own pace, usually through the same stages and milestones, and in the same order. Children grow and learn continually, but not in a smooth flowing pattern. Sometimes they practise skills for quite a while and seem as if they will never move on. At other times they learn many skills very quickly. This fact sheet is a general guide to child development. If you have any concerns about your child's development, seek advice from your child health nurse or doctor.

Learning through play

Play is essential to a child's development. This is the way they learn about many things, such as size, weight, length, volume, feel and colour. Children will find out some of these things themselves, but will need your help to find out about other things. A balance between helping too much and too little is important, so they can try things without too many failures. The two-year old needs active physical play and should be encouraged to explore surroundings. Remember, your support and praise will boost their confidence.

Ideal toys for this age

Some playthings for your child this age are:

- Boxes and cartons to pull, push, carry around, crawl through and sit in
- Balls to throw and kick
- Sand to play in
- Water to splash, pour and fill containers (always with adult supervision)
- Large beads for threading
- Old clothes for dressing up
- Building blocks
- Junk materials for sorting, such as ice cream containers, pegs, cotton reels and plastic bottle tops
- Paper and crayons
- Dolls
- Puzzles with big pieces
- Finger paints
- Gyms
- Playground equipment
- Ride-on toys.

Playing with adults

Children love playing with adults. You could try:

- Playing hide-and-seek
- Singing songs and nursery rhymes
- Make believe games - e.g. pretend to be different animals
- Catch or kick a ball
- Reading books, or simple art, like glueing and colouring
- Going for short walks - talking about the things you see as you walk, or making up funny walks and copying each other.

Keeping your child safe

Children of this age are so active that they need parents and adults to constantly watch them and keep them safe. They are not well coordinated and cannot understand the idea of danger. They will not tell you before they are about to do things, so you will need to anticipate them and stay one jump ahead. Here are some hints for keeping your child safe:

Caring for your child

- Always know where your child is, whether indoors or outdoors.
- Never expose your child directly to the sun for the therapeutic treatment of nappy rash, jaundice or other medical conditions.
- Avoid being out in the sun between 10am and 3pm, and seek shade where possible from permanent or portable shade structures, including strollers and pram covers.
- Always adopt sun safe behaviours whenever you and your child are outdoors:
 - Slip on protective clothing (long-sleeved shirts with a collar, shorts and skirts)
 - Slap on sunscreen (a broad spectrum SPF 30+)
 - Slap on a hat (broad brim or legionnaire style)

- Wrap on some sunglasses (AS 1067).

Toy safety

- Allow your child only those toys suitable for this age group.
- Be aware that your child may be able to get hold of older children's toys.
- Avoid toys with small parts that could be swallowed or inhaled. Toys in this category are usually labelled 'not recommended for children under three years'.
- Toys should be safe, durable and washable.
- Supervise all play with ropes and toys with strings, such as pull-along toys.
- Cuddly toys should be stuffed with old stockings, dacron or polyester. (Crumbled foam, beans and beads can all be swallowed or pushed into ears or noses.)

Bath time

- Always check the temperature of the water before putting your child in the bath. Use your elbow to test.
- Never leave your child alone during bath time - not even for a second. Take the phone off the hook.
- Children should not be left in the care of older children no matter how reliable they seem.

Your home

- Make sure your child is never left unsupervised near the family dog, if you have one.
- Always make sure your child is strapped in securely when he or she is in a high chair, to prevent falls.
- Fence your swimming pool with an approved fence and selflocking gate. Check your fence and gate regularly. When visiting places with swimming pools, ensure the fence and gate are adequate.
- Stay with your child at all times when he or she is in or near any body of water, such as a pool, the ocean, a bath, backyard water feature, bucket of water, dam or a wading pool.
- Make sure there are no objects small enough to swallow within reach of your child.
- Place your child in a playpen for short periods each day to help them understand and accept safety limitations later.
- Remove temptation - and the chance for breakages - by putting delicate things away.
- Use safety barriers for steps, stairs and rooms you don't want your child to enter, and to keep them away from fireplaces and heaters and kitchens.
- Keep kettle and iron cords out of your child's reach.
- Cover power points when they're not in use.
- Make sure all low cupboards have child resistant latches.
- Ensure that furniture - like TVs in cabinets and coffee tables - is sturdy enough for your child to pull up on.
- Store medicines, cleaning aids, pool chemicals and garden poisons - as well as any sharp or dangerous items - well out of reach, or in a cupboard with a child resistant latch.
- Be aware of medicines and pills that are kept in handbags, especially those of visitors.
- Don't keep pills on the bedside table or refer to pills as 'lollies'.
- Dangerous objects, like heaters, fans and hot drinks should be kept out of reach.
- Keep the toilet door closed and nappy buckets out of reach, as small children can fall into them head first.
- Keep the bathroom door closed so your child can't touch the hot taps. Tempering valves should be fitted to your hot water system, reducing the temperature to a child-safe 50 degrees C.

Out and about

- Always check where your child is before reversing the car.
- Every time your child travels in a car, they must be in an approved and properly fitted child restraint.
- Make sure your child is always strapped in securely when they're in a shopping trolley or a stroller, and stay with them. This will help prevent falls.
- Never leave your child alone in the car - not even for a minute.

Remember...

It takes children a long time to learn, remember and recognise dangerous situations. Until then, keeping a close watch on your child is the only way to be sure they are safe.

For more information

If you would like more information on your child's development or if you are concerned about your child, contact your local child health nurse. You could also ask at your local library for books on child development.

Remember these telephone numbers. You might like to store them in your phone's speed dial:

URL: <http://conditions.health.qld.gov.au/HealthCondition/condition/8/96/375/how-children-develop-2-3-years-play-and-safet>

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Emergency 000
Poisons Information Centre 13 1126

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