

# ST. JOHN'S NEWSLETTER

## May 2026

### YEAR END PICNIC

It's hard to believe that we are nearing the end of our 2025-2026 school year! Now it's time to celebrate the wonderful and memorable year that we have had together. On **Tuesday, June 9th** is our Year End Family Picnic!

Our Year End Family Picnic will begin at 5:30pm. All family members and friends are welcome to attend, and we invite current families and new families who are joining our St. John's Community in the fall.

Please bring a picnic dinner for your family to enjoy and we will provide some light snacks and fruit. Please bring a blanket or lawn chairs as this event will be outside on the lawn if the weather cooperates.

Erick Traplin will be here and starting his show at 6:00pm. There is no cost to attend this event.



We hope to see everyone that night!



### Dates To Remember

**May 7th** - Child Cognition Lab Here

**May 10th** - Mother's Day

**May 15th** - International Family Day

**May 18th** - School is Closed for Victoria Day

**May 20th** - Annual General Meeting 6:30 to 8:00pm

**June 9th** - Year End Picnic

**June 15th-19th** - Last week of School for the summer.

### Snack and Lunch Menu # Each Week

April 27 - May 1      Week # 4

May 4 - May 8      Week # 1

May 11 - May 15      Week # 2

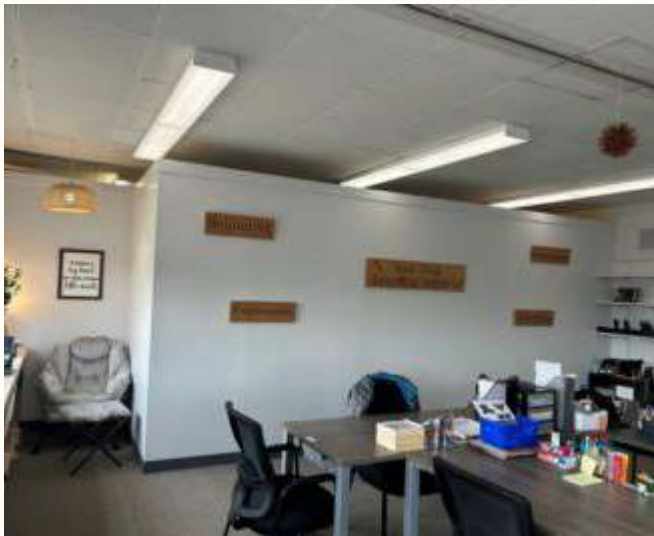
May 19 - May 22      Week # 3

May 25 - May 29      Week # 4

## Recent Renovations

St. John's Nursery School is excited about their recent renovations. The Nursery School board committed to updating a space for the educators. These improvements have made a meaningful difference in our day-to-day experience, creating an environment that is not only more functional, but also warm and welcoming space for educators, students, and volunteers. Having a thoughtfully designed space to gather, plan, and recharge has strengthened our sense of community as educators. It allows us to collaborate more easily, stay organized, and feel supported in the important work we do with children and families. The changes reflect a deep understanding of what educators need to thrive. This investment in our workspace sends a clear message that we are valued, respected, and an integral part of the St. John's community. It fosters a strong sense of belonging and pride in the work we do each day.

Thank you to the board for this wonderful space.



**Inspiration wall and cozy area for reflection.**



**Kitchen area organized with coffee and tea!**



**Sharing our CQI Commitment.**



**Organized material storage and meeting area.**



## Sunscreen

We are seeing warmer days, and we will be spending more time outdoors on the playground. Please ensure that you apply sunscreen on your child before bringing them to school in the morning.

If you arrive at school and have forgotten to apply sunscreen, we have a spare bottles on the playground that you can use.

Educators will apply sunscreen throughout the morning as needed and afternoon when UV is 6 or higher.

St John's will supply SunZone sunscreen with a SPF 50.

You signed consent back when you registered.

## Community ECE Appreciation Event for Our Staff

On Monday June 1st Early Childhood Educators from around the region will be attending the appreciation night. Educators will be treated with a guest speaker, dinner, and door prizes. The Educators are looking forward to this evening together and networking with other educators from around the region.

Marianne is on the committe and her husband Rob will be the DJ for the event.

## Board Update

We are sad to say goodbye to the following board members  
Alister (School Secretary)  
Erin and Emily

Thank you for being a part of our board of directors and your amazing dedication to  
St. John's!

**All families are welcome to join us at our Annual General Meeting on:  
Wednesday May 20th  
6:30pm-8:00pm.**

We will close the 2025 budget and vote in new members for the 2026-2027 school year. This meeting will be held at the Nursery School in our staff room.

We would like to ask if any new parents would like to join the Board for the next school year. If you are interested please reach out to Christine.

## Staying Connected

We are hoping we can connect families before all the graduates go off to big school in September. We are also trying to connect returning families over the summer months along with what program they will be in next year, either half day morning preschool or our 6-hour program. Your information will only be shared with participating families.

If you are interested in sharing information with other families, please specify the following and send to Marianne;

- **Your child's name**
- **Your name and email or phone number you would like to share**
- **Name of the big school attending or program they will be in next year at St. John's**

Once we get the information we will only share with families who agreed to share their info.

## Bachlor of Education Students

We will have a new group of Bachlor of Education students from Wilfred Lauier University starting with us April 27 - May 8<sup>th</sup>. We welcome Allison, Grace and Jeremy, along with Patricia joining us from Algonquin College. We are looking forward to getting to know them and having them spend time learning alongside the children in our environment.





## International Family Day



### Celebrating All Families: Honoring International Family Day

At St. John's, we are committed to fostering an inclusive, welcoming environment that reflects the diversity of all the families that belong to your community. As part of our ongoing dedication to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), we will be shifting our focus on some upcoming spring celebrations.

Rather than observing traditional Mother's Day and Father's Day, we are excited to celebrate **International Family Day**. This approach allows us to honor and recognize the many different family structures within our St. John's community, whether children are supported by single parents, grandparents, guardians, foster families, same-gender parents, or other important caregivers.

We believe that every child's family is unique and worthy of celebration. By embracing International Family Day, we aim to ensure that all children and all families feel seen, respected, and included, and that no one feels left out or different because of their family dynamic.

Our classrooms will take part in activities that encourage children to express appreciation for the special people in their lives, whoever they may be. These moments will focus on love, connection, and belonging, which are at the heart of what makes a family.

We appreciate your support as we continue to grow as an inclusive community. If you have any questions or would like to share more about your family, we always welcome your input.

### First Riders On The Bus

For children heading to JK or SK – they can register for the first riders program to learn about riding on a school bus.

[First Riders Program - Student Transportation Services of Waterloo Region](#)

### Parent Survey Results

Thank you to everyone who took the time to complete our recent parent survey. We truly appreciate your input and are grateful for the many positive comments and kind words shared about our educators. Your feedback means a great deal to our team, and we look forward to sharing these encouraging messages with them.

#### **We also wanted to highlight a few updates and changes we are making based on your feedback:**

- **Lunch Program:** Beginning in September, we will be changing our lunch caterer to Stonecrock. We are excited about this transition and look forward to offering a refreshed menu for the children.
- **Morning Communication:** To improve communication, we will be implementing SMS alerts to notify families when we begin the day indoors due to weather conditions.
- **School Refresh:** We are exploring plans to refresh our school environment. This may include painting, adding new signage to make classrooms easier to find, and enhancing our outdoor space with new materials for play and learning.
- **Family Communication & Documentation:** As a team, we will be reviewing how we document children's learning and how we share updates with families, with the goal of improving clarity and connection.

#### **We also wanted to address a few common questions:**

- **Extended Hours:** We received inquiries about extending our program hours. At this time, our license through the Ministry of Education allows us to operate for a maximum of six hours per day, which we must adhere to.
- **Program Growth:** We are excited to share that we are looking to expand our preschool rooms to welcome an additional 8 children. Additionally, we have been asked by the Region of Waterloo to include 2 crisis spots in our program to support families in need within our community.

**Thank you again for your continued support and partnership. Your feedback helps guide our growth and ensures we are providing the best possible experience for your children and families.**

## Welcome Back Emilia



Some families may recognize this smiling face. Emilia was a student with us and also worked as a supply educator with us last year. She will return to our team in May as a supply educator. Please welcome her when you see her around the school. Welcome back to the team Emilia!

## Anxiety workshop updates

Our April parent coffee chat was a huge success with lots of resources about Anxiety provided for families. We have attached the handouts received to this newsletter. Our guest Aimee provided some great children book titles to help support children's regulation. We have ordered the books she suggested to add to our school library.

Aimee VanKoughnett, MSW RSW  
Child, Youth & Family Therapist, Certified Play Therapist (CPT)  
Mental Health Consultant and Trainer



Thank you Aimee for joining us

## Cozy Coupe Cars

Is your family looking for a cozy coupe car for your home? We have some "well-loved and well used" cozy coupe cars we are looking to rehome. Let us know if your interested and we would be happy to give to a St. John's family



Saturday, May 30<sup>th</sup> | 11:00 AM - 5:30 PM

**you're invited**

to join us for a Trillium Community For All Day!  
There will be fun, food & most of all, community!

**free bbq** 

**PRIDE** *painting*

*reLove* Spring/Summer  
Swap + Shop

pre-loved kids clothing + more

**Trillium Lutheran Church | 22 Willow St.**

# Steps to Support Big Feelings



01

## Tune In

Notice your child's feeling and energy. See their underlying need behind the behaviour.

02

## Ground Yourself

Say to yourself:  
"It is not my job to keep my child calm. It is my job to keep my child safe", "This is temporary. I can cope with this"

03

## Contain & Stop Harm

Move to smaller room, block hits/kicks, say to your child:  
"I won't let you \_\_\_\_\_"

04

## Connect

Say to your child:  
"You're a good kid having a hard time and I'm going to stay with you. I love you"

If you need to leave, say:  
"I'm stepping outside and then I'll come check on you. I'm right here. I love you. You're a good kid"

05

## Validate & "Sit in the Yuck"

"It's so hard to \_\_\_\_\_. I get it"  
Say 3 "because" statements of why your child feels this way.

06

## Tune In

Notice if your child's energy has shifted in a positive way, if not, repeat steps 1-5. Stay present, just breathe, say less.

07

## Cue Use of Chill Skills

Once able, invite your child to use a relaxation skill with you, or model it yourself in a genuine way.

08

## Reconnect

"I love you. I'm here. We got through this together."

Say to yourself:  
"What I just did was hard and exhausting. I am a good parent with a good kid"

Adapted from: Kennedy, B (2022) "Good Inside DFK Containment Cheat Sheet" retrieved from: [goodinside.com](https://goodinside.com)



# Communicating About When to Seek Help for a Child's Stress

Young children often communicate their stress and emotional struggles through behaviour rather than words. **As an educator, you are in a unique position to observe behavioural patterns and support caregivers in understanding when their child may need additional help.**

## 1 Use Observations to Guide the Conversation

Start by gently sharing what you've noticed in the child's behaviour. Avoid making assumptions by focusing on specific examples and patterns:

- "I've noticed that [child's name] often seems very upset during transitions."
- "Lately, [child's name] seems more withdrawn and quiet than usual."

These observations can open the door to a supportive conversation.

## 2 Help Caregivers Understand Signs of Stress

Explain that frequent emotional outbursts, sadness, or withdrawal may be signs of stress or emotional difficulty.

Use a simple framework to guide your discussion:

- **Frequency:** "How often is your child feeling this way?"
- **Intensity:** "On a scale of 1 to 10, how upset does your child seem?"
- **Duration:** "How long does it take them to calm down, and do they need a lot of help to do so?"

These questions can help both you and the caregiver assess the level of concern.

## 3 Know When to Recommend Additional Support

Gently guide caregivers toward seeking professional help if:

- Their child's worries are becoming more serious or frequent.
- Their child shows signs of panic, intense fears, or ongoing anxiety.
- Their child seems chronically sad or has lost interest in things they once enjoyed.
- Despite efforts at home or school, there's been little or no improvement.

Let caregivers know that needing support is common and not a reflection of parenting failure. It's a proactive step toward helping their child feel better.

## 4 Share Resources Respectfully

Offer caregivers helpful next steps without overwhelming them. You might say:

- "Some families find it helpful to talk to a public health nurse or their family doctor."
- "Would you be interested in a list of books or resources that other parents have found useful?"

You can also provide a copy of the Stress Tracker (Appendix B, Page \_\_\_\_), which helps caregivers better understand and track their child's emotional patterns. If needed, offer to walk through it with them or explain it verbally to make it more accessible.

## 5 Stay Supportive and Open-Minded

Approach conversations with empathy, not judgment. Caregivers may already feel concerned or unsure.

- **Offer reassurance:** "You know your child best, and we're here to support you."
- **Invite ongoing dialogue:** "Let's keep in touch and see how things go over the next few weeks."

By offering understanding and clear, compassionate communication, educators can play a key role in helping families recognize when a child may need additional emotional support and where to find it.



# Local Mental Health Services



Please note: These resources are current as of April 2026, but you are encouraged to contact service providers directly to confirm.

## Front Door Children's Mental Health

[www.frontdoormentalhealth.ca](http://www.frontdoormentalhealth.ca)  
519-749-2932

Centralized intake for most publicly funded child and youth mental health services (0-18yrs) in Waterloo Region. Also offers quick access counselling and short-term parent consultation.

## Camino Wellbeing + Mental Health

[www.caminowellbeing.ca](http://www.caminowellbeing.ca)  
519-743-6333

Publicly funded and private pay counselling for children, adults, and couples. Also offer walk-in counselling, group programs, and other community supports.

## One Stop Talk

[www.onestoptalk.ca](http://www.onestoptalk.ca)  
1-855-416-TALK (8255)  
or online chat

Publicly funded, virtual single-session counselling for children, youth and parents.

## Here 24/7

[www.frontdoormentalhealth.ca](http://www.frontdoormentalhealth.ca)  
1-844-437-3247 (HERE247)

Offers crisis support, intake, assessment, referrals, crisis support, waitlist management, for youth and adult mental health services in Waterloo-Wellington.

## Bloom Child and Family Therapy

[www.bloomkwtherapy.ca](http://www.bloomkwtherapy.ca)  
226-647-7529

Private-pay counselling services for children and families in Waterloo Region. Most staff specialize in creative therapy approaches (i.e. art, play, etc.) and have additional training in neurodiversity.

## Stone Silo Counselling & Wellness

[www.stonesilo.ca](http://www.stonesilo.ca)  
(519) 208-0544

Private-pay counselling services for children, adults and couples. Most child-focused staff have extensive training and formal certification in Play Therapy.



# Further Reading



## Books for Caregivers

- *"Good Inside: A Practical Guide to Resilient Parenting Prioritizing Connection Over Correction"*  
By: Dr. Becky Kennedy
- *"Raising Kids with Big, Baffling Behaviours: Brain-Body-Sensory Strategies That Really Work"*  
By: Robyn Gobbel
- *"The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind"*  
By: Daniel Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson
- *"Raising Securely Attached Kids: Using Connection-Focused Parenting to Create Confidence, Empathy, and Resilience"* By: Eli Harwood

## Books for Children

- *"Breathe Like a Bear -30 Mindful Moments for Kids to Feel Calm and Focused Anytime, Anywhere"* By: Kira Willey
- *"The Colour Monster: A Book of Feelings"* By: Anna Llenas
- *"The Invisible String"*  
By: Patrice Karst
- *"Listening to my Body"*  
By: Gabi Garcia
- *"My Magic Breath: Finding Calm Through Mindful Breathing"*.  
By: Nick Ortner & Alison Taylor
- *"Casey's Greatness Wings: Teaching Mindfulness, Connection & Courage to Children"* By: Tammi Van Hollander
- *"The Very Hungry Worry Monsters"* By: Rosie Greening

## Online Resources

- *Children's Mental Health Ontario (CMHO) Parent Resources*  
[www.family.cmho.org/resources/](http://www.family.cmho.org/resources/)
- *Child Mind Institute Family Resource Center* [www.childmind.org/resources/](http://www.childmind.org/resources/)
- *Harvard Centre on the Developing Child* [www.developingchild.harvard.edu/](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu/)
- *Robyn Gobbel's Free Resource Hub* [www.roblyngobbel.com/freeresources/](http://www.roblyngobbel.com/freeresources/)





# 5

## Brain & Cognitive Development

- Gains in short-term memory
- Is able to connect emotional and factual aspects of memories
- Masters simple planning and organization
- Is talkative and enjoys learning new words
- Learns best through repetition
- Often sees only one way in which to do things
- Ascribes life and movement to inanimate objects, such as stuffed animals
- Learns through active play and hands-on activities such as cutting and gluing
- Thinks intuitively rather than logically
- Loves to be read to by adults and to look at books on his or her own
- Enjoys storytelling, imaginative play, and being creative
- Knows the days of the week, and understands the difference between the past and the future
- Has some difficulty distinguishing between fantasy and reality
- May draw false conclusions about cause and effect

## Physical Development

- Boys and girls are similar height and weight
- Gains more control over body movements
- Colors inside the lines and writes letters
- Tiptoes, rides a bicycle, and skips
- Folds paper in half and cuts interior shapes from large pieces of paper
- Is able to trace hands and holds a pencil

## Emotional Development

- Is calm and confident in his or her own abilities
- Feels safe with consistent guidelines and routine
- Is positive and optimistic about self and life

- Is quieter and at times more withdrawn
- Avoids overstimulation
- Is able to express feelings verbally
- Demonstrates more self-control and less impulsivity
- Becomes more independent and gains sense of competence

## Relationship & Social Development

- Likes to help, cooperate, follow rules, and be "good"
- Seeks approval from adults
- Is kind and accepting toward others
- Is eager to please others and compliant
- Is adoring and affectionate toward parents
- Is polite and friendly toward new people
- Plays well with older siblings, and is kind and protective toward younger siblings
- Engages other children in play and conversation
- Gets along well with peers and plays well with others
- Enjoys spending time at home or in familiar environments

## Normal Challenges at 5

Five-year-olds often have behaviors that parents find challenging or concerning, but which are a normal part of development, such as:

- Frequent nightmares, and often waking up screaming and crying
- Enjoying watching television and playing on the computer and needing limits on screen time
- Sometimes too obedient and should be protected from overly dominating or aggressive playmates
- Lying to avoid punishment
- Stealing items from other people

Readiness for kindergarten can also be difficult to determine, but not all children are ready to start when they are 5. It is important to consider your child's overall development, in addition to his or her chronological age, birthday, and cognitive abilities, when deciding the best time for your child to start kindergarten.



# 5 1/2

## Brain & Cognitive Development

- Frequently reverses numbers and letters, even if he or she did not do so earlier in the year
- Questions and desires explanations
- Has growing cognitive abilities with which to determine right and wrong
- Gives more elaborate answers to questions

## Physical Development

- Appears clumsier and more awkward
- Struggles to keep his or her balance
- Is more restless and disorganized
- Has difficulty sitting still for long periods of time
- Tires easily

## Emotional Development

- Is still eager to do activities, but less motivated to please than earlier in the year
- Displays extremes in behaviors, both positive and negative
- May seem overly demanding and disobedient
- Experiences intense range and fluctuations in emotions
- May bite nails, pull hair, or cry to relieve anxiety
- Is indecisive
- Is hesitant and insecure

## Relationship & Social Development

- Can be disobedient with adults, especially parents, which is markedly different from earlier in the year
- Can be oppositional when playing with others
- Is increasingly attuned to others and developing a sense of empathy toward others

## Normal Challenges at 5 1/2

- Opposition to adults and peers
- Complaining frequently

- Becoming easily overwhelmed with choices
- Tattling

## Tips for Parents & Caregivers

- Spend one-on-one time with your child doing things you both enjoy
- Limit his or her exposure to emotionally intense or violent shows or media
- Model socially appropriate behaviors when your child lies or steals, but avoid harsh punishment
- Provide consistent and structured schedules for daily routines
- Provide opportunities for unstructured, creative play alone, with friends, and with parents
- Give limited choices to avoid overwhelming your child
- Read to him or her, and possibly with him or her, frequently
- Maintain regular bedtime routines
- Be patient with oppositional behavior, and reflect the child's need to exert his or her will
- Provide consistent limits and consequences

## When to Seek Help

- Your child's behavior or abilities seem significantly different from those of other children his or her age
- Your child experiences severe or prolonged anxiety or sadness
- Your child does not show interest in developing friendships or playing with friends
- Your child has problems in school or another academic environment
- Your child displays extreme disobedience or defiance
- Your child has frequent accidents or difficulties toileting during the day
- You need parenting support to address concerns or issues related to discipline
- Your child experiences a significant change or traumatic experience, including loss, disruption in the home or family environment, abuse, or a medical emergency
- You frequently feel disconnected and stressed in your relationship with your child
- Your child demonstrates highly aggressive behavior toward you or others
- You are having a difficult time deciding whether your child is ready for kindergarten



# 4 1/2

## Brain & Cognitive Development

- Starts to tell the difference between fantasy and reality with more ease
- Starts to see that letters and numbers have meaning, but probably is not yet ready to read
- Shows more competency in skills
- Loves to learn new information

## Physical Development

- Holds pencil tightly and writes more firmly
- Still active, but a little calmer than earlier in the year

## Emotional Development

- Is often fearful or anxious
- May have frequent nightmares
- May develop phobias
- Can stay on-task for a longer period of time, yet still not long
- Is dramatic

## Relationship & Social Development

- Having friends becomes important
- Will cooperate more if not pressured
- Initiates interactions and learning
- Plays collaboratively with others

## Normal Challenges at 4½

- Seeming "at odds" with environment
- Frequent fears
- Fears developing into phobias (typical for this age)
- Fears regarding what is real and what is not
- Inconsistency, making them hard to predict

## Tips for Parents & Caregivers

- Spend one-on-one time with your child, doing things you both enjoy

- Give your child encouragement and support as he or she learns new skills
- Provide consistent routines for your child, including morning and bedtime
- Provide consistent limits and consequences for problem behaviors
- Don't worry too much if your child lies, swears, or exaggerates; model appropriate behavior and he or she will grow out of it
- Read to your child, and honor his or her natural curiosity and questions, but avoid putting pressure on your child or yourself to learn to read, write, etc.
- Reassure your child with your presence when worries/fears are prevalent, rather than trying to reason with them, which is not helpful
- Spend at least a few minutes a day playing with your child.
- Many children wet the bed until the age of 5 or 6; use bed pads or pullups to minimize cleanup

## When to Seek Help

- Your child's behaviors or abilities seem significantly different from those of other children his or her age
- Your child experiences severe or prolonged anxiety or sadness
- Your child experiences excessive phobias that interfere with daily functioning
- You need parenting support to address concerns or issues related to discipline
- Your child experiences a significant change or traumatic experience, including loss, disruption in the home or family environment, abuse, or a medical emergency
- You frequently feel disconnected and stressed in your relationship with your child
- Your child demonstrates highly aggressive behavior toward you or others
- Your child shows little interest in play or playing with others

## 4

**Brain & Cognitive Development**

- Is experiencing a peak period of brain development
- Is experiencing increased integration and communication across right and left brain hemispheres
- Has a short attention span
- Learns new words each day and has an expanding vocabulary
- Asks lots of questions
- Learns best by doing
- Engages in imaginative, dramatic play and enjoys make-believe
- Needs to play and explore; loves dressing up and drama
- Often has rigid and illogical thinking
- Struggles to take other's perspectives
- Enjoys singing, dancing, rhyming, and being read to
- Needs many hands-on experiences, such as with puzzles, sand, and paint
- Moves quickly from one thing to another
- Talks in complete sentences
- Can count between three and six objects
- Tells fantastical lies; has trouble distinguishing between fact and fiction

**Physical Development**

- Maintains a high energy level without tiring easily
- Is constantly moving; needs lots of room to move
- Is clumsy and accident-prone
- Is able to eat and get dressed independently
- Is able to throw and catch a ball, kick, jump, and climb
- Is able to string beads, stack blocks, and use scissors
- Grows 3–4 inches taller
- Likes to explore his or her body (both boys and girls may masturbate as they discover themselves)

**Emotional Development**

- Often reacts strongly, with intense feelings of happiness, silliness, anger, and sadness
- Needs adult help to find words to express needs, instead of reacting physically
- Can be aggressive and bossy
- Loves and hates many things
- Has a growing sense of humor, and enjoys laughter and silliness
- Learns from modeling; needs chances to practice new behavior
- May throw temper tantrums

**Relationship & Social Development**

- Wants to please others
- Likes to talk, but not to listen
- Needs to explore and take the initiative
- Is increasingly concerned about "right" and "wrong"
- Is able to share and take turns with others
- Has increased awareness of differences between self and others
- Develops stronger friendships with other children
- Enjoys pretending and has an active imagination in play
- Is interested in differences between boys and girls
- Can be aggressive with siblings at times
- Plays in groups of mixed sex/gender

**Normal Challenges at 4**

Four-year-olds often have behaviors that parents find challenging or concerning, but which are a normal part of development. Knowing what to expect from your 4-year-old can reassure you that even when lying, crying, or kicking, he or she is doing exactly what 4-year-olds are supposed to do – and will grow out of these behaviors.

- Aggressive behavior including hitting, kicking, and throwing temper tantrums when angry
- Lying when in trouble
- Frequent nightmares stemming from new feelings and experiences
- Imaginary friends
- Fascination with their own bodies and masturbation
- Fascination with going to the bathroom and using "potty" words or name-calling
- Constant motion and noise



# 3 1/2

## Brain & Cognitive Development

- Is imaginative, playful, and prone to fantasy
- Often stutters
- May report difficulty seeing because of growth of depth perception
- May appear to have difficulty hearing because of self-focus/concentration

## Physical Development

- Is clumsier and falls more frequently
- Is hesitant to approach tasks
- Finds drawing and building with blocks more difficult because of decreased muscle control
- Has fewer toilet training accidents and is able to sleep through the night without wetting the bed

## Emotional Development

- Expresses emotions more intensely
- Cries, whines, or has more difficulty separating from parents
- Is very determined and strong-willed
- May have imaginary friends
- Seems sensitive and becomes upset easily
- Can be inflexible; responds negatively to changes in schedule

## Relationship & Social Development

- May try to control others through language
- Likes to play with friends
- Can be argumentative
- Becomes more aggressive and defiant in relationships

## Normal Challenges at 3½

- Biting nails, picking nose, sucking thumb, or chewing on clothes to self-soothe
- Excessively blinking or developing facial tics

- Refusing to be cooperative or flexible
- Whining and complaining

## Tips for Parents & Caregivers

- Maintain a consistent and predictable daily routine
- Expect your child to be willful, playful, and sometimes silly
- Be patient with toilet training and accidents
- Ask your child to help with simple tasks such as setting the table
- Encourage his or her efforts and don't expect perfection
- Provide appropriate and consistent limits to promote the child's sense of safety and security
- Follow through with consequences
- Avoid using physical punishments, threats, or yelling to prevent unwanted behaviors
- Encourage your child's awareness of others' feelings and needs
- Make time to play with your child at least a few minutes every day

## When to Seek Help

- Your child's behavior or abilities seem significantly different from those of other children his or her age
- Your child demonstrates extreme separation anxiety, or withdraws from friends or play
- You need parenting support to address concerns or issues related to discipline
- Your child experiences a significant change or traumatic experience, including loss, disruption in the home or family environment, abuse, or a medical emergency
- You frequently feel disconnected and stressed in your relationship with your child
- Your child has extreme temper tantrums or lacks self-control
- Your child has significant difficulties sleeping or toilet training



# 3

## Brain & Cognitive Development

- Has a brain that is two-and-a-half times more active than the adult brain
- Learns and uses many new vocabulary words
- Speaks in sentences of between three and six words
- Masters basic grammar rules and pronouns
- Understands numbers and basic counting
- Follows simple directions with no more than three steps
- Struggles with problem-solving skills
- Names colors and recalls parts of familiar stories
- Enjoys repetition, rhymes, sounds, and new words
- Plays make-believe with dolls, animals, and playmates
- Has a vivid fantasy life and sometimes struggles to distinguish fantasy from reality

## Physical Development

- Appears taller and thinner – less toddler-like
- Sleeps through the night for 10–12 hours
- Feeds, dresses, washes hands, and brushes own teeth, with some help from adults
- Has greater coordination, and is able to walk, run, jump, climb, and swing with ease
- Walks on tiptoes, and stands and hops on one foot
- Is able to ride a tricycle, throw a ball overarm, and kick a ball
- Is active and plays until exhausted
- Holds crayons and markers with fingers instead of fists
- Completes large-piece puzzles
- Is able to master toilet training, with some accidents

## Emotional Development

- Is often silly and enjoys laughing
- Experiences a wide range of emotions with intensity

- Identifies own and others' feelings
- Shows concern by offering hugs or comfort
- Struggles to regulate emotions when tired, stressed, or experiences changes in routine
- Throws fewer tantrums than at 2½

## Relationship & Social Development

- Begins to identify peers as friends
- Loves playing with other children
- Understands taking turns, but struggles to put other's needs before his or her own
- Has difficulty sharing and engaging in cooperative play
- May prefer to play alone to avoid social conflicts
- Often pushes, hits, yells, cries, or displays physical aggression during playtime
- Observes other's behavior and play, and imitates that behavior
- Desires to please his or her parents
- Prefers to be with one parent than the other
- Imitates the actions of parents and other adults
- Displays more independence from parents and caregivers

## Normal Challenges at 3

Three-year-olds often have behaviors that parents find challenging or concerning, but which are a normal part of development, such as:

- Frequent potty training accidents when engaged in play, or withholding to avoid missing out on activities
- Masturbating in private or in public
- Enjoying being naked and frequently taking off their clothes
- Asking questions about genitalia and where babies come from or being fascinated with body parts
- Wanting to wear costumes or pretending to be a fictional character or animal

feeding the cycle of anxiety, just ask open-ended questions: "How are you feeling about the science fair?"

#### **6. Don't reinforce the child's fears.**

What you don't want to do is be saying, with your tone of voice or body language: "Maybe this is something that you should be afraid of." Let's say a child has had a negative experience with a dog. Next time she's around a dog, you might be anxious about how she will respond, and you might unintentionally send a message that she should, indeed, be worried.

#### **7. Encourage the child to tolerate her anxiety.**

Let your child know that you appreciate the work it takes to tolerate anxiety in order to do what he wants or needs to do. It's really encouraging him to engage in life and to let anxiety take its natural curve. We call it the 'habituation curve'-it will drop over time as he continues to have contact with the stressor. It might not drop to zero, it might not drop as quickly as you would like, but that's how we get over our fears.

#### **8. Try to keep the anticipatory period short.**

When we're afraid of something, the hardest time is really *before* we do it. So another rule of thumb for parents is to really try to eliminate or reduce the anticipatory period. If a child is nervous about going to a doctor's appointment, you don't want to launch into a discussion about it two hours before you go; that's likely to get your child more keyed up. So try to shorten that period to a minimum.

#### **9. Think things through with the child.**

Sometimes it helps to talk through what would happen if a child's fear came true-how would she handle it? A child who's anxious about separating from her parents might worry about what would happen if they didn't come to pick her up. So we talk about that. If your mom doesn't come at the end of soccer practice, what would you do? "Well I would tell the coach my mom's not here." And what do you think the coach would do? "Well he would call my mom. Or her would wait with me." A child who's afraid that a stranger might be sent to pick her up can have a code word from her parents that anyone they sent would know. For some kids, having a plan can reduce the uncertainty in a healthy, effective way.

#### **10. Try to model healthy ways of handling anxiety.**

There are multiple ways you can help kids handle anxiety by letting them see how you cope with anxiety yourself. Kids are perceptive, and they're going to take it in if you keep complaining on the phone to a friend or you can't handle the stress or anxiety. I'm not saying to pretend that you don't have stress and anxiety, but let kids hear or see you managing it calmly, tolerating it, feeling good about getting through it.

## What to Do (and Not Do) When Children Are Anxious

### How to respect feelings without empowering fears

-Clark Goldstein, PhD

When children are chronically anxious, even the most well-meaning parents can fall into a negative cycle and, not wanting a child to suffer, actually exacerbate the youngster's anxiety. It happens when parents, anticipating a child's fears, try to protect her from them. Here are pointers for helping children escape the cycle of anxiety.

#### **1. The goal isn't to eliminate anxiety, but to help a child manage it.**

None of us wants to see a child unhappy, but the best way to help kids overcome anxiety isn't to try to remove stressors that trigger it. It's to help them learn to tolerate their anxiety and function as well as they can, even when they're anxious. And as a byproduct of that, the anxiety will decrease or fall away over time.

#### **2. Don't avoid things just because they make a child anxious.**

Helping children avoid the things they are afraid of will make them feel better in the short term, but it reinforces the anxiety over the long run. If a child in an uncomfortable situation gets upset, starts to cry—not to be manipulative, but just because that's how they feel—and their parents whisk them out of there, or remove the thing they're afraid of, they're learned that coping mechanism, and that cycle has the potential to repeat itself.

#### **3. Express positive—but realistic—expectations.**

You can't promise a child that their fears are unrealistic—that they won't fail a test, that they'll have fun ice skating, or that another child won't laugh at them during show & tell. But you can express confidence that they're going to be okay, they will be able to manage it, and that, as they face their fears, the anxiety level will drop over time. This gives them confidence that your expectations are realistic, and that you're not going to ask them to do something they can't handle.

#### **4. Respect the feelings, but don't empower them.**

It's important to understand that validation doesn't always mean agreement. So if a child is terrified about going to the doctor because they're due for a shot, you don't want to belittle their fears, but you also don't want to amplify them. You want to listen and be empathetic, help them understand what they're anxious about, and encourage them to feel that they can face their fears. The message you want to send is, "I know you're scared, and that's okay, and I'm here, and I'm going to help you get through this."

#### **5. Don't ask leading questions.**

Encourage your child to talk about their feelings, but try not to ask leading questions—"Are you anxious about the big test? Are you worried about the science fair?" To avoid