

Child development and trauma guide

3 - 5 years

Developmental trends

The following information needs to be understood in the context of the overview statement on child development:

Between 3-4 years

- communicates freely with family members and familiar others
- seeks comfort, and reassurance from familiar family and carers, and is able to be soothed by them
- has developing capacity to self soothe when distressed
- understands the cause of feelings and can label them
- extends the circle of special adults eg. to grandparents, baby-sitter
- needs adult help to negotiate conflict
- is starting to manage emotions
- is starting to play with other children and share
- has real friendships with other children
- is becoming more coordinated at running, climbing, and other large-muscle play
- can walk up steps, throw and catch a large ball using two hands and body
- use play tools and may be able to ride a tricycle
- holds crayons with fingers, not fists
- dresses and undresses without much help
- communicates well in simple sentences and may understand about 1000 words
- pronunciation has improved, likes to talk about own interests
- fine motor skill increases, can mark with crayons, turn pages in a book
- day time toilet training often attained

Between 4-5 years

- knows own name and age
- is becoming more independent from family
- needs structure, routine and limits to manage intense emotions
- is asking lots of questions
- is learning about differences between people
- takes time making up his mind
- is developing confidence in physical feats but can misjudge abilities
- likes active play and exercise and needs at least 60 minutes of this per day
- eye-hand coordination is becoming more practised and refined
- cuts along the line with scissors/can draw people with at least four 'parts'
- shows a preference for being right-handed or left-handed
- converses about topics and understands 2500 to 3000 words
- loves silly jokes and 'rude' words
- is curious about body and sexuality and role-plays at being grown-up
- may show pride in accomplishing tasks
- conscience is starting to develop, child weighs risks and actions; "I would take it but my parents would find out"



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Possible indicators of trauma

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • behavioural change • increased tension, irritability, reactivity and inability to relax • regression to behaviour of younger child • uncharacteristic aggression • Reduced eye contact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • loss of focus, lack of concentration and inattentiveness • complains of bodily aches, pains or illness with no explanation • loss of recently acquired skills (toileting, eating, self-care) • enuresis, encopresis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sleep disturbances, nightmares, night terrors, sleepwalking • fearfulness of going to sleep and being alone at night • inability to seek comfort or to be comforted
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mood and personality changes • obvious anxiety and fearfulness • withdrawal and quieting • specific, trauma-related fears; general fearfulness • intense repetitive play often obvious • involvement of playmates in trauma-related play at school and day care • separation anxiety with parents/others • loss of self-esteem and self confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduced capacity to feel emotions – may appear ‘numb’, limp, apathetic • repeated retelling of traumatic event • loss of recently acquired language and vocabulary • loss of interest in activities • loss of energy and concentration at school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sudden intense masturbation • demonstration of adult sexual knowledge through inappropriate sexualised behaviour • genital pain, inflammation, bruising, bleeding or diagnosis of sexually transmitted disease • sexualised play with toys • may verbally describe sexual abuse, pointing to body parts and telling about the ‘game’ they played • sexualised drawing

Trauma impact

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • behavioural changes • hyperarousal, hypervigilance, hyperactivity • loss of toileting and eating skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • regression in recently acquired developmental gains • sleep disturbances, night terrors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enuresis and encopresis • delayed gross motor and visual-perceptual skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fear of trauma recurring • mood and personality changes • loss of, or reduced capacity to attune with caregiver • loss of, or reduced capacity to manage emotional states or self soothe • increased need for control • fear of separation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • loss of self-esteem and self confidence • confusion about trauma evident in play...magical explanations and unclear understanding of causes of bad events • vulnerable to anniversary reactions set off by seasonal reminders, holidays, and other events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • memory of intrusive visual images from traumatic event may be demonstrated/ recalled in words and play • at the older end of this age range, children are more likely to have lasting, accurate verbal and pictorial memory for central events of trauma • speech, cognitive and auditory processing delays

Parental/carer support following trauma

<p>Encourage parent(s)/carers to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seek, accept and increase support for themselves to manage their own shock and emotional responses • remain calm. Listen to and tolerate child’s retelling of event • respect child’s fears; give child time to cope with fears • protect child from re-exposure to frightening situations and reminders of trauma, including scary T.V. programs, movies, stories, and physical or locational reminders of trauma 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accept and help the child to name strong feelings during brief conversations (the child cannot talk about these feelings or the experience for long) • expect and understand child’s regression while maintaining basic household rules • expect some difficult or uncharacteristic behaviour • seek information and advice about child’s developmental and educational progress • take time out to recharge
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