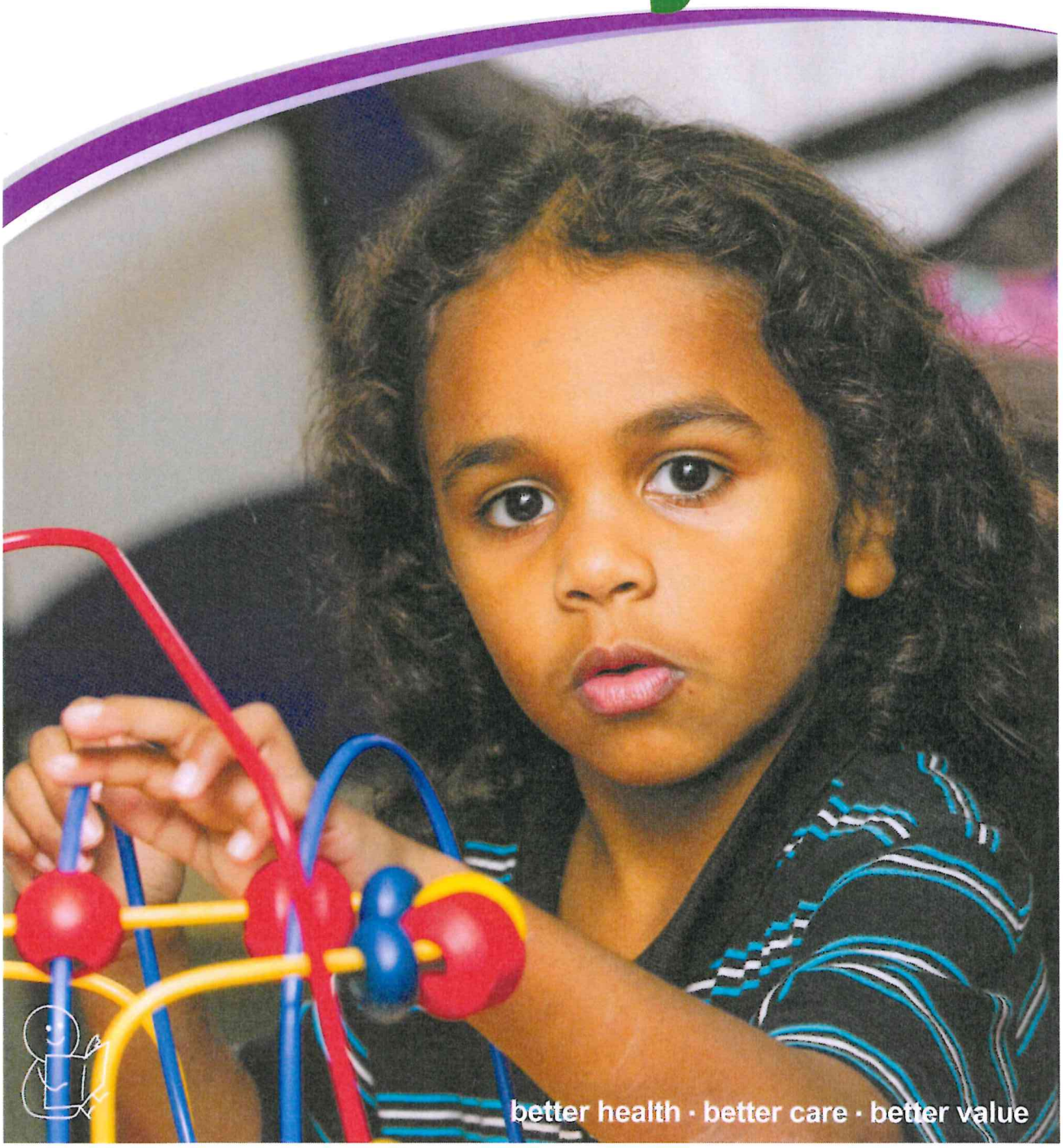
Government of **Western Australia**
Child and Adolescent Health Service
WA Country Health Service

child development
4-5 years



better health · better care · better value

Four is when your child starts getting a 'big picture' view of the world.

Differences between people – relationships, sex, race – these social issues become visible to your 4 year old.

She'll explore these through play, dressing up and asking lots of questions.

The big world seems exciting, but it can be hard to work out where she fits. So getting it wrong – being too big and bold, or too small and frightened – are not uncommon extremes for your 4 year old.

Social and emotional

Four year olds are moving out into the world. They can usually play happily with other children, and enjoy lots of physical games as well as stories.

- Your child is learning to understand about other people's feelings and needs. She can feel empathy for others, and can share toys and take turns, at least some of the time.
- She may sometimes feel jealous of your relationships with other people, such as your partner.
- She may have favourite games like 'mummies and daddies' and 'superman'. These games allow her to try out various adult roles.

  Sometimes these roles may conflict with your values, but if you allow her to play without making her feel that it's wrong, she will probably 'let go' of that role once she's worked through what it means.
- **The world can seem scary to a 4 year old.**

  She needs you to provide a daily routine that gives her a safe base to explore from.

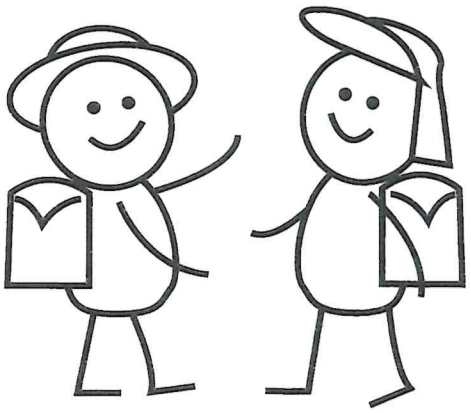
  For example, she needs to know what happens at breakfast, what she'll be doing during the day, and what special things happen at bedtime.

  She also needs to know that you will set safe limits to her behaviour. Even though they may seem confident, it is very scary for young children to feel that their parents cannot manage them.
- Your 4 year old will begin to organise games and make friends.
- She can be quite bossy with other children, and may still have a few tantrums when she doesn't get what she wants.

- She can usually separate from you without getting upset, although not if there have been upsetting separations in the past.
- She's developing a sense of humour, and will laugh at funny situations.
- Some of her behaviour may be 'over the top' – noisy, boasting, exuberant.
- She'll play quite complicated make-believe and pretend games – daddy and mummy.

  She might have imaginary playmates, particularly if she doesn't have other children to play with. This is nothing to worry about.

  She still hasn't worked out what is real and what is fantasy, so may tell stories (lies) in order to please you.
- Your 4 or 5 year old can go to the toilet by herself, use toilet paper properly and flush the toilet.



Developing understanding

Your 4 year old will ask lots of questions about the world and why it is the way it is. Sometimes his questions can be embarrassing or difficult to answer, such as questions about death or sex. He may be interested in where babies come from and may experiment by looking at his and other children's bodies.

Children's sexual behaviour

Try to answer his questions as simply and honestly as you can without telling him much more than he's asked.

While telling him simply about your family's beliefs, help him to understand that life has different stages. Explain that people live differently and have different values, and this is all normal and part of life's richness.

Your 4 year old can probably:

- understand 2 or 3 simple things to do at once – 'Get a cup of water, take it to Daddy and then put the cup back on the table'
- understand what '3' means – 'There are 3 motor bikes'

- sort objects by size, colour or shape and type (animal, car)
- compare 2 things to work out which is heavier
- understand taller and smaller, but not be able to arrange things in order of smallest to biggest
- may be able to copy his name
- draw a person with a head, body, legs and arms
- tell the difference between morning and afternoon
- say numbers up to 20 and is beginning to count a few objects by touching them
- hold a pencil well
- cut on a line
- name and match 4 colours
- recognise some words they see a lot – 'STOP' on stop signs

By the time he is 5, your child can:

- tell you his name, age and address (if you've taught these to him)
- copy a square, a cross and a triangle.

Physical development

Your 4 year old is developing confidence in her physical ability but, as with her emotions, she can be too bold or too timid, and still needs to be supervised during active play.

Your child can:

- walk easily up and down steps, one foot to a step
- throw, catch, bounce and kick a ball, and use a bat
- climb ladders and trees
- stand on tiptoe, walk and run on tiptoe, and run quite fast
- jump over small objects
- walk along a line for a short distance
- ride her tricycle very well and may try a bicycle with trainer wheels
- stand on one foot for a few seconds, and probably hop
- thread beads to make a necklace
- swing herself on a swing
- dress herself if the fastenings are not too difficult
- manage her own toilet needs during the day, but still may not always be dry at night.

Speech and language development

Your 4 year old will probably love to have conversations and talk in detail about all sorts of things. He needs to find out about all aspects of life, and talking is an important way of understanding how the world works.

Your 4 year old:

- speaks clearly on the whole, but may still not use some sounds correctly – says 'th' for 's', or 'w' for 'r'
- asks 'Why', 'When' and 'How' questions, and asks what words mean
- tells long stories which may be partly true and partly made up
- is interested in questions, and can argue and give his own ideas about things
- talks about what might happen or what he'd like to have happen
- knows a few nursery rhymes which he can say, repeat or sing.

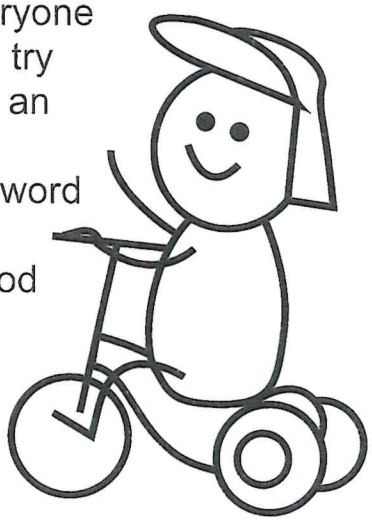
What they enjoy

Children have their own unique personalities and things they enjoy – it's important to support them in their own interests.

Your 4 year old may enjoy:

- jokes (especially toilet jokes). She will laugh at and say nonsense or silly words.
- books and stories with interesting rhymes and words. She may make up rhymes.
- playing with other children
- physical activities
- simple computer games.

Ignoring toilet jokes, or giving them an alternative word if she keeps using words you don't like, is often the best way to help them through this stage. If your child says 'You're a poo' to everyone she meets, try suggesting an interesting, alternative word – 'I know another good word. Why not say "You're a banana?"'



Activities

The main thing your child needs from playing with you is to have fun. It's important not to turn play into 'lessons'. Try and provide an interesting environment and enough time to play, and follow your child's lead.

- Talk to your child about what he does and where he's been. What did he do and see? Listen with interest when he talks to you and join in conversations.
- Read books to your child. Talk about what's happening in the pictures – let him act out the story.
- Tell stories about when you were a child.
- Your 4 to 5 year old is learning to sort things into groups, so play sorting games – sort spare buttons into shapes and colours, play animal lotto.
- Give him the chance to learn to ride a tricycle or a bicycle with trainer wheels.
- Make time for outdoor physical activity such as walks in the park, ball games or visiting playgrounds.
- Give him the materials for painting and drawing.
- Praise and encourage him when he's considered or played well with others, and help him to think about how others feel.

Starting kindy

Your child may start kindy (kindergarten) this year.

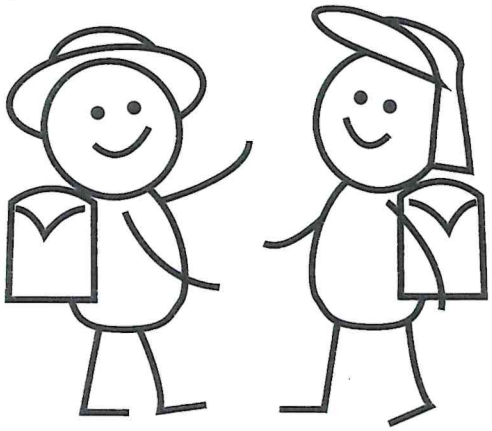
It may just be like an extension of child care for both of you or it may be the first time you've been separated.

How he reacts to separation will depend on his personality and if he's used to being away from you.

If you have a new baby at home, your 4 year old may feel he's 'missing out' by going to kindy and needs to know that he will still have 'special time' with you.

It will help your child if you:

- celebrate his start of 'school' in some small way
- go to kindy with him at least twice before he starts
- stay a while if you have time
- buy him a new bag or lunch box even if he doesn't need one
- listen to his stories about the experience.



ALERT

Talk to your doctor or child health nurse if:

- your child's understanding and skills go backward for more than a short time
- he doesn't speak clearly enough to be understood by other people
- he can't hear a whisper or keeps asking people to repeat things – says 'What?
- he's not interested in other children and what is happening around him
- he's behind other children of the same age in some areas
- he screws up his eyes to see some things, or has trouble seeing them, or his eyes are looking in different directions
- you have any worries or concerns about your child's development.

Summary

Social and emotional

Your 4 year old:

- learns lots about the world and how it works, and about people and relationships
- makes friends (often short-term) and plays group games
- needs structure and a routine to feel safe
- needs you to set limits and bring them back to earth without making them feel bad when their behaviour is 'over the top'.

Developing understanding

Your 4 year old:

- asks lots of questions, some difficult and embarrassing
- learns about differences between people
- can remember more than a single thought at one time
- still cannot always tell the difference between what happened in their head and what happened in reality
- likes to make up her mind slowly sometimes.

Physical development

Your 4 year old:

- loves to throw and catch a ball
- loves to ride her trike
- is developing confidence in her physical ability
- easily misjudges her physical capacities.

Speech and language development

Your 4 year old:

- can make conversation about lots of different topics
- loves silly jokes and 'rude' words.

Your child is unique

Every child is different and may develop at different rates.

So, if your child does not do all these things, he may be 'working' on a different area of his learning and development.

However, children usually follow the same pattern of development, and it's good to feel that your child is developing normally, in his own unique way.

If you are worried about your child's development, or if your child is very different from other children, talk with your doctor or child health nurse. If there is a problem, it's better to get help early.

For more information contact

- **HealthyWA**
  www.healthywa.wa.gov.au
- **Local child health nurse**
- **Local family doctor**
- **Ngala Helpline** (8am–8pm everyday)
  (08) 9368 9368 (Outside metro 1800 111 546)
  www.ngala.com.au
- **Raising Children Network**
  www.raisingchildren.net.au
- **Kidsafe WA** (8.30am–5pm weekdays)
  (08) 9340 8509 (Outside metro 1800 802 244)
  www.kidsafewa.com.au

We've used 'he' and 'she' in turn – please change to suit your child.

This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with a disability.

This publication is provided for general education and information purposes. Contact a qualified healthcare professional for any medical advice needed.

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