



SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR DEVELOPMENT IN YOUNG CHILDREN

At 36 months (3 years) . . .

- There are many things your child can do for herself, and she will tell you, “I can do it myself!”
- Although he is more independent, your child is still learning to follow simple rules—and he may need gentle reminders.
- She now plays briefly *with* other children. She is learning more about sharing and taking turns.
- He may have a special friend that he prefers playing with. Boys may prefer playing with boys, and girls with girls.
- She is becoming more independent. When you go on outings, she won’t always hold your hand and stay by your side.
- Your child’s emotions may shift suddenly, from happy to sad, from mad to silly. He’s trying to learn how to handle his emotions.
- She can sometimes express with words the feelings that she is having. She is beginning to think about the feelings of others and may be able to identify their feelings, too.
- Your child uses his imagination to create stories through pretend play with dolls, toy telephones, and action figures.
- Your child may boss people around and make demands. This shows not only that she is independent but also that she values herself. She might do something that is asked of her but may be more willing if she thinks it’s her idea.
- Your child may be fearful and have nightmares. Television shows (even scary cartoons) can give him nightmares.
- Your child’s attention span is increasing, and she often stays with an activity for at least 5 minutes.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN 36 MONTHS OLD (3 YEARS OLD)

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| Tell your child a simple story about something she did that was funny or interesting. See if your child can tell a different story about herself. | Encourage your child to identify and label his emotions and those of other children or adults. | Provide opportunities for your child to play with other children in your neighborhood or at a park.* | Many children this age have imaginary friends. Let your child talk and play with these pretend playmates. |
| Give your child choices. For example, when dressing, let him choose between two shirts or during snack time, let him choose between two snacks. | When you and your child are cooking, dressing, or cleaning,* give her directions that have at least two steps: "Put that pan in the sink and then pick up the red spoon." | Write a letter together to grandparents, a pen pal, or friend. See if your child can tell you what to write about himself to include in the letter. | Play games with your child that involve taking turns, such as Follow the Leader and Hopscotch. |
| With stuffed animals or dolls, create conflict situations. Talk with your child about what happened, feelings, and how best to work out problems when they come up. | Have a special reading time each day. Snuggle up and get close. Slowly increase the length of the stories so your child can sit and listen a little longer. | Every day, let your child know you love her and how great she is. Give her a "high five," a big smile, a pat on the back, or a hug. Tell her she is super, cool, sweet, and fun. | Tell your child a favorite story such as the Three Little Pigs or Goldilocks and the Three Bears. See if your child can tell you how the animals felt in the story. |
| Draw and cut out different feeling faces, and then glue them on Popsicle sticks. Let your child act out the different feelings with the puppets. | Get down on the floor and play with your child. Try to follow your child's lead by playing with toys he wants to play with and trying his ideas. | Play games such as Mother May I and Red Light, Green Light that involve following simple directions. | Tell silly jokes with your child. Simple "What am I?" riddles are also fun. Have a good time and laugh with your child. |

*Be sure to review safety guidelines with your health care provider at each new age level.