

EARLY CHILDHOOD – 3 YEARS

Promotion of healthy habits

Injury prevention

Continue to use an age-appropriate car seat that is properly secured at all times.

Ensure that the child wears a life vest if boating. Inflatable flotation devices or "knowing how to swim" do not make a child safe in the water.

Ensure that swimming pools in the child's community, in her apartment complex, or at her home have a four-sided fence with a self-closing, self-latching gate. Children should be supervised by an adult whenever they are in or near water.

Continue to put sunscreen on the child before she goes outside to play or swim.

Continue to keep the child's environment free of smoke. Keep the home and car nonsmoking zones.

Test smoke detectors to ensure that they work properly. Change batteries yearly.

Keep cooking utensils, hot liquids, knives, and hot pots on the stove out of reach.

Ensure that electric wires, outlets, and appliances are inaccessible or protected.

Keep cigarettes, lighters, matches, alcohol, and electrical tools locked up and/or out of the child's sight and reach.

Exclude poisons, medications, and toxic household products from the home or keep them in locked cabinets. Have safety caps on all medications. Keep the number of the poison control center near the telephone.

Ensure that guns, if in the home, are locked up and that ammunition is stored separately. A trigger lock is an additional important precaution.

Never leave the child alone in the car or the house or while taking a bath.

Do not expect young children to supervise the three year old.

Supervise all play near streets or driveways.

Know where your child is at all times. She is too young to be roaming the neighborhood alone.

Teach your child pedestrian safety skills.

Ensure that a child riding in a seat on an adult's bicycle is wearing a helmet.

Ensure that playgrounds are safe. Check for impact- or energy-absorbing surfaces under playground equipment. Make sure that playground equipment is not over three feet tall and not made of pressure-treated wood.

Choose caregivers carefully. Discuss with them their attitudes about and behavior in relation to discipline. Prohibit corporal punishment.

Teach the child not to talk to strangers.

Nutrition

Serve the child meals with the family and give her two to three nutritious snacks per day.

Make mealtimes pleasant and companionable. Encourage conversation.

Provide nutritious snacks rich in complex carbohydrates, and limit sweets and high-fat snacks.

Offer the child nutritious foods and let her decide what and how much to eat. Children will have an increasing list of accepted foods.

Serve a variety of healthy foods and model for the child how to eat them.

Ensure that the child's caregiver feeds her nutritious foods.

Oral health

Teach the child to brush her teeth with a pea-size amount of fluoridated toothpaste.

Give the child fluoride supplements as recommended by the health professional based on the level of fluoride in the child's drinking water.

Schedule a dental appointment for the child every six months, unless her dentist determines otherwise based on her individual needs/susceptibility to disease.

Sexuality education

Anticipate the child's normal curiosity about genital differences between boys and girls and about masturbation.

Use correct terms for genitalia.

Answer questions about "where babies come from."

Introduce the notion that some areas of the body are private.

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Promotion of social competence

- Praise the child for good behavior and accomplishments.
- Encourage the child to talk with you about her preschool, friends, or observations. Answer her questions.
- Encourage interactive reading with the child.
- Spend individual time with the child, doing something you both enjoy.
- Provide opportunities for exploration.
- Provide opportunities for the three year old to socialize with other children in play groups, preschool, or other community activities.
- Promote physical activity in a safe environment.
- Give the child opportunities to make choices (e.g. which clothes to wear, books to read, places to go).
- Reinforce limits and appropriate behavior. Try to be consistent in expectations and discipline.
- Use time out or remove source of conflict for unacceptable behavior.
- Encourage self-discipline.
- Anticipate that your child may have many fears, including night terrors.
- Limit television watching to an average of one hour per day of appropriate programs. Watch the programs together and discuss them.

Promotion of constructive family relationships and parental health

- If another baby is expected, discuss with the health professional how to prepare the three-year-old child for the new baby.
- Spend some time playing with the child each day. Focus on activities that she expresses interest in and enjoys.
- Listen to and show respect for the child.
- Show interest in preschool and/or child care activities.
- Show affection in the family.
- Spend some individual time with each child.
- Participate in games and other activities with the child.
- Encourage the development of good sibling relationships. Acknowledge conflicts between siblings. Whenever possible, attempt to resolve conflicts without taking sides. Do not allow hitting, biting, or other violent behavior.
- Share meals as a family whenever possible. Spend time talking to each other.
- Handle anger constructively in the family.

Discuss with the health professional your own preventive and health-promoting practices (e.g., using seat belts, avoiding tobacco, eating properly, exercising and doing breast self-exams or testicular self-exams).

Promotion of community interactions

- Ask about resources or referrals for food (e.g. WIC), housing, or transportation if needed.
- Discuss with the health professional possible programs for your child: preschools, early intervention programs, Head Start (most programs start at age four), swimming and other exercise programs, or other community programs.
- Learn about and consider attending parent education classes or parent support groups.
- Maintain or expand ties to your community through social, religious, cultural, volunteer, and recreational organizations.
- Discuss with the health professional choosing and evaluating child care programs. Discuss the child care arrangements you have made.
- Find out what you can do to make your community safer. Advocate for and participate in a neighborhood watch program.