



What to expect in the Early Years Foundation Stage: *a guide for parents*

3 & 4-year-olds: Communication and Language

- I like listening to longer stories and I can remember a lot of what happens.
- If I am really busy in my play, I can find it difficult to switch my attention and listen to what you say to me. It helps me if you use my name and say: “Please stop and listen.”
- I can use lots of different words. I like to learn new words.
- It helps me if you explain what new words mean.
- I can understand questions and instructions that are more complicated and have two parts, like: “Please get your coat and wait at the door.”
- When you ask me questions about why something happened, I understand, e.g. “Why do you think the caterpillar got so big?”



3 & 4-year-olds: Communication and Language

- I know lots of songs and enjoy singing them.
- I can tell you a long story and talk about my favourite books. I know lots of nursery rhymes.
- I am still learning how to use word endings. I might still make mistakes such as 'runned' for 'ran'. Instead of correcting me, please reply and use the right ending, e.g. "Yes, I saw how fast you ran!"
- I am still learning to pronounce some words. These are sounds that I might still find tricky, e.g. j, th, ch, and sh.



3 & 4-year-olds: Communication and Language

- I can use long sentences of four to six words.
- I can use words and actions to explain my thoughts and ideas. I can give my point of view and disagree.
- I like having long conversations with you and my friends.
- When I am playing I talk to pretend: “Let’s go on a bus... you sit there... I’ll be the driver.”



3 & 4-year-olds: Personal, Social and Emotional Development

- I am becoming more and more independent and enjoy being given resources and activities that I can use by myself.
- I like to be given responsibility and to help with jobs like fetching the fruit for everyone or washing up my plate after snack.
- I am becoming more confident interacting with new people.
- I am confident to go out on short walks and trips.
- I like to play with other children and I can build on the ideas in our play.
- When playing with my friends, I can find ways to solve conflicts, e.g. I know that we can't all be Spider-Man in the game, and I can suggest other ideas.



3 & 4-year-olds: Personal, Social and Emotional Development

- I am learning about why rules are important and can follow rules most of the time.
- I can remember the rules and I don't need an adult to remind me.
- I am learning about how to assert myself in appropriate ways.
- I talk to my friends to solve problems that might happen when we are playing.
- I can use different words to explain how I am feeling.
- I am developing an understanding of how other people might be feeling.
- I can use my fine motor skills to do up buttons, zips and to pour myself a drink.



3 & 4-year-olds: Personal, Social and Emotional Development

- I am keen to be independent. Especially around dressing and feeding myself.
- I am beginning to eat independently, and I am learning to use a knife and fork.
- I am becoming more and more independent in getting dressed and undressed. I can put my coat on and do up my zip.
- I am becoming more and more independent in looking after myself. I can brush my teeth and wash and dry my hands thoroughly.
- I understand about how important it is to brush my teeth. I can make healthy choices about food drink and exercise.



3 & 4-year-olds: Physical Development

- I am continuing to develop a range of physical skills - balancing, riding and ball skills.
- I can walk up steps and stairs and climbing equipment using alternate feet.
- I can skip, hop, stand on one leg and hold a pose for a game like musical statues.
- I can wave flags and streamers using large muscle movements and paint and make marks on a big scale.
- I like to join in with group and team activities. Sometimes I like to make these up with my friends.



3 & 4-year-olds:

Physical Development

- I am learning to use and remember sequences and patterns of movements which are related to music and rhythm.
- I can think carefully about which movement I need to make, for example whether to crawl, walk or run across a plank, depending on its length and width.
- I can choose the right tools for what I need to do.
- I can work with my friends to move and carry large objects such as big wooden blocks.
- I can use one handed tools such as scissors.
- When holding pens and pencils I have a comfortable grip and good control.
- I am showing whether I am left or right-handed.



3 & 4-year-olds: Literacy

I understand five important things about print:

- *print has meaning;*
- *print can have different purposes;*
- *we read English text from left to right and from top to bottom;*
- *the names of the different parts of a book;*
- *we read pages in story books one at a time.*

I am learning to tune into the different sounds in English.
I am developing my phonological awareness, so that I can:

- *spot and suggest rhymes;*
- *count or clap syllables in a word;*
- *recognise words with the same initial sound, such as money and mother.*



3 & 4-year-olds: Literacy

- I enjoy having long conversations about stories and learning new words.
- In my play, I am learning to use my knowledge of sounds and letters in my early writing.
- I can write some or all of my name.
- I can write some letters accurately.



3 & 4-year-olds: Mathematics

- I can quickly recognise groups of up to 3 objects, without having to count them individually (*this is called 'subitising'*).
- I can say numbers in order past five.
- I can say one number for each item in order: 1,2,3,4,5.
- I know that the last number I reach when counting a small set of objects tells me how many there are in total (*this is called the 'cardinal principle'*).
- I can show 'finger numbers' up to 5.
- I can match the correct numeral (number symbol) to the right amount, up to 5, e.g. point to the number 3 when I count 3 snails.

"Look, 3 snails!"



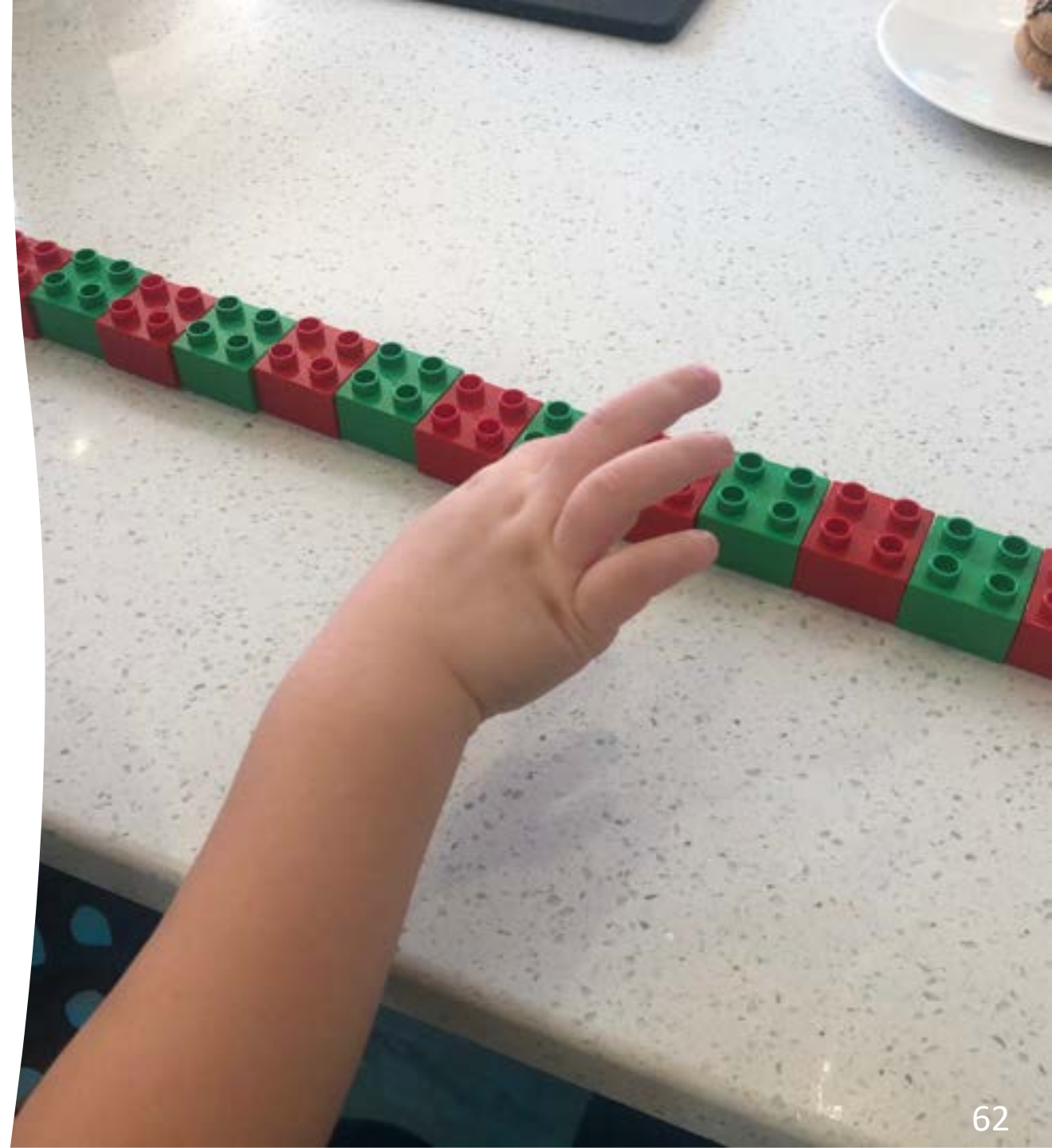
3 & 4-year-olds: Mathematics

- I like to experiment with making my own marks and symbols as well as numerals.
- I can use mathematical words to compare amounts 'more than', 'fewer than'.
- I like to explore 2D (flat) and 3D (solid) shapes. I can talk about shapes using everyday words like 'pointy'. I can use mathematical words like: 'sides', 'corners', 'straight', 'flat', 'round'.
- I can understand position through words alone, e.g. "The bag is under the table." – with no pointing.
- I can describe a familiar route.
- I can talk about routes and locations, using words like 'in front of' and 'behind'.



3 & 4-year-olds: Mathematics

- I can make comparisons between objects relating to size, length, weight and capacity.
- I can choose the right shape when building, e.g. triangular prism for a roof.
- I can combine shapes to make new ones - an arch, a bigger triangle etc.
- I can talk about and identify patterns that I see around me, e.g. stripes on clothes, designs on wallpaper. I use everyday language like 'pointy', 'spotty', 'blobs' etc.
- I can make and extend ABAB patterns – stick, leaf, stick, leaf.
- I can spot an error in a repeating pattern and correct it.
- I am learning to use words such as 'first', 'then' 'after' to describe a pattern of events.



3 & 4-year-olds: Understanding the World

- I enjoy exploring natural materials using all of my senses.
- I explore and investigate collections of natural materials with similar and/or different properties.
- I can talk about what I explore and investigate using a wide range of words.
- I am learning about my own life-story and my family's history.
- I am interested in the different jobs people do.
- I am interested in exploring how things work.
- I enjoy planting seeds and caring for growing plants.
- I can understand the important parts of life cycles of both plants and animals, e.g. a bean, a caterpillar or a chick.



3 & 4-year-olds: Understanding the World

- I am learning that it is important to respect and care for the natural environment and all living things.
- I am learning about different forces I can feel, e.g. how the water pushes up when I try to push a plastic boat under it.
- I can talk about the differences between materials and changes I notice, e.g. when cooking.
- I am learning to develop positive attitudes about the differences between people.
- I know that there are different countries in the world. I can talk about differences I have experienced or seen in photos.



3 & 4-year-olds: Expressive Arts and Design

- I take part in simple pretend play, using an object to represent something else even though they are not similar.
- I am beginning to make up complex 'small worlds' using animal sets, dolls and dolls houses etc.
- I enjoy making detailed, imaginative 'small worlds' with blocks and construction kits, such as a city with different buildings and a park.
- I enjoy exploring different materials freely. I am learning to develop my ideas about how to use them and what to make.
- I can join different materials together. I explore the textures of different materials.



3 & 4-year-olds: Expressive Arts and Design

- I can create closed shapes with continuous lines.
- I am learning to use these shapes to represent objects.
- I can draw with increasing complexity and detail, such as representing a face with a circle including details.
- I can use drawings to show ideas like movement or loud noises.
- I can show different emotions in my drawings and paintings, like happiness, sadness, fear etc.
- I enjoy exploring colour and colour mixing.



3 & 4-year-olds: Expressive Arts and Design

- I can listen to sounds with increased attention.
- I respond to what I hear and express my thoughts and feelings.
- I can remember and sing entire songs.
- I can sing the pitch of a tone sung by another person ('pitch match').
- I can sing the melodic shape (moving melody, such as up and down, down and up) of familiar songs.
- I enjoy creating my own songs. I can make up a song around one that I already know.
- I can play instruments with increasing control to express my feelings and ideas.



3 & 4-year-olds: how you can help me with my learning?

Communication & Language

- Have conversations with me about things that I am interested in. Encourage me to keep talking by nodding, smiling and making comments.
- Introduce new words when we are playing, eating or when we are out and about. Explain what new words mean to me.
- Talk to me about things that have already happened and what might happen soon.
- Play listening games with me such as 'Simon Says'.

Personal, Social & Emotional Development

- Give me tasks to carry out, e.g. washing my plate after snack.
- Model how you manage your own feelings, e.g. *"I'm feeling a bit angry so I am going to take a deep breath."* Help me to understand why I am feeling sad or frustrated.
- Make a ['calm down jar'](#).



Physical Development

- Help me with dressing but let me do the last steps, e.g. pulling up my zip after you have started it off.
- Give me lots of opportunities to be active and practise running, jumping, balancing, climbing and swinging.
- Encourage me to walk, scoot or bike to my nursery or childminder.

3 & 4-year-olds: how you can help me with my learning?

Mathematics

- [Point out the number of things rather than just the names](#), e.g. "We have **two** apples!"
- Give me lots of opportunities to count for a real reason and always emphasise the last number – "*There are **3** cookies.*"
- Cut out a large shape from a cereal box (circle, triangle), then cut that shape into 2-4 smaller pieces to make a simple puzzle.
- When we're at the park, use words like 'up', 'under', and 'between' to talk about what we see.
- [Make playdough with me.](#)

Understanding the World

- Help me make collections of interesting natural materials, e.g. pebbles, shells.
- Let me explore ice, once it has melted a bit (so I don't get frostbite)
- Plant seeds and bulbs with me.
- Take me to different places such as the library.

Literacy

- Talk about stories with me, what is happening in the pictures? Give me time to think and share my ideas.
- Play around with words. Make up fun rhyming sentences with me.
- Let me help you write birthday cards and shopping lists.



Expressive Arts & Design

- Make [home-made paintbrushes](#) using clothes pegs and items from around the house and outdoors.
- Join in pretend play with me.
- Give me a cardboard box and some fabric to build a den with.

Communication and Language *checkpoints*

Around 3 years:

- Can I link up to 5 words together?
- Do I use pronouns ('me', 'him', 'she'), and plurals?
- Do I use prepositions ('in', 'on', 'under') - these may not always be used correctly to start with.
- Can I follow instructions with three key words like: *"Can you wash dolly's face?"*
- Can I switch my attention from one activity to another if you use my name?



Personal, Social and Emotional Development *checkpoints*

Towards my third birthday:

- Can I sometimes share or take turns with others? (with guidance from you) Do I show an understanding of 'yours' and 'mine'?
- Can I settle to some activities for a while?

Around the age of 4:

- Do I play alongside others or do I always want to play by myself?
- Do I take part in pretend play (e.g. being 'mummy' or 'daddy'?)
- Do I take part in other pretend play with different roles? Such as being the Gruffalo, for example?
- Can I generally solve conflicts in my play?



Physical Development *checkpoints*

- As a baby, can I move around with ease and enjoyment?
- At around 12 months, can I pull myself upright from a sitting position and sit down?
- Can I use my first finger and thumb to pick something up?
- Around my second birthday, can I run, kick a ball and jump with both feet off the ground at the same time?
- Around my third birthday, am I a confident climber, can I catch a large ball and pedal a tricycle?



Physical Development *checkpoints*

- If I find it tricky to sit on a chair comfortably, I might need some help to develop my core tummy muscles.
- You can help me by encouraging me to scoot on sit-down trikes without pedals and jumping on soft play equipment.
- Your child's key person or childminder will be looking out for babies and toddlers who appear underweight, overweight or to have poor dental health. If they are worried, they will need to work closely with you and your health visitor to help your child's health.



Where to go to learn more

Source	Link	Support offered
Action for Children	https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk	Range of resources to support with your child's development.
Book Trust	https://www.booktrust.org.uk/books-and-reading/bookfinder/ https://www.booktrust.org.uk/books-and-reading/tips-and-advice/reading-tips/	Find children's books for every age. Tips, advice, reading guides.
Bilingualism Matters	http://www.bilingualism-matters.ppls.ed.ac.uk/parents-questions/	Frequently asked questions from parents about raising bilingual children. (In eight languages).
Boromi	https://www.boromi.co.uk/dailyplay-2	Daily emails during school holidays share simple, accessible and play-based activities.
Cbeebies Grown-ups	https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/grownups	Tips and ideas for parents.

The East London Research School and DfE are not responsible for the content, maintenance and reliability of these sites and resources. We do not necessarily endorse views expressed within them.

Where to go to learn more

Source	Link	Support offered
DREME Family Maths	https://familymath.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Math-Snacks.pdf	Finding the maths in everyday activities.
Early Movers	https://www.earlymovers.org.uk/activities	Information and activities for children 0-5.
Easy Peasy	https://www.easypeasyapp.com	App: ideas, advice and inspiration.
Family Lives	https://www.familylives.org.uk/advice/early-years-development/	Advice and information on early years development.
Foundation Years	https://foundationyears.org.uk/2019/09/resources-for-parents/	Resources for parents about the EYFS.
Formy Books	https://www.formybooks.com	Diverse range of inclusive children's books.

The East London Research School and DfE are not responsible for the content, maintenance and reliability of these sites and resources. We do not necessarily endorse views expressed within them.

Where to go to learn more

Source	Link	Support offered
Harvard Centre	https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/how-to-5-steps-for-brain-building-serve-and-return/	Video explaining how interactions build babies brains.
Hungry Little Minds	https://hungrylittleminds.campaign.gov.uk	Simple, fun activities for kids, from newborn to five.
ICAN: Talking Point	https://ican.org.uk/i-cans-talking-point/parents/	For parents who are concerned about their child's development.
Literacy Trust	https://wordsforlife.org.uk/activities/	Activities and videos.
Love My Books	http://www.lovelymybooks.co.uk	Newsletter, activities and videos.
Mantralingua	https://uk.mantralingua.com	Bilingual books in 65 languages.

The East London Research School and DfE are not responsible for the content, maintenance and reliability of these sites and resources. We do not necessarily endorse views expressed within them.

Where to go to learn more

Source	Link	Support offered
Mattel (Laura Henry-Allain MBE & Emma Worrollo)	https://www.mattel.com/sites/mattel_mattelcom/files/2020-07/Supporting_you_to_raise_antiracist_children2.pdf	Parents' guide: supporting you to raise anti-racist children.
National Childbirth Trust	https://www.nct.org.uk	Parenting support.
NHS – Children's Teeth	https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/taking-care-of-childrens-teeth/	Dental health advice.
NHS Change 4 Life	https://www.nhs.uk/change4life	Easy ways to eat well and move more.
Tiny Happy People	https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people	Child development advice, activities and videos.
Unicef Parenting	https://www.unicef.org/parenting/	Child development advice, activities and videos
50 Things to do before you're five	https://www.50thingstodo.org/about/the-app	App: low/no-cost experiences.

The East London Research School and DfE are not responsible for the content, maintenance and reliability of these sites and resources. We do not necessarily endorse views expressed within them.

With thanks to

Fliss James, Evidence Lead in Education at East London Research School and Doctor Julian Grenier, Director of East London Research School for their work in developing this guidance, alongside the steering group of early years practitioners, consultants and academics who generously gave their time to shape and review this guide with feedback and suggestions:

Liz Pemberton, Sarah Read, Sue Robb OBE, Jean Gross CBE, Professor Ted Melhuish OBE, Doctors Amelia Roberts, Lala Manners and Sally Smith, Alison Henderson, Wendy Ratcliff HMI, Eowyn Crisfield, Chengetai Sharif, Laura Henry-Allain MBE, Ashlee Teakle, Donna Gaywood, Konstantinos Skordas, Gill Holden, Clare Lishman and Allison Jones.

We thank the parents who contributed to the writing of this guide.

We acknowledge this publication builds on the work of 4Children and the Department for Education's Strategic Partnership 'What to expect, when?' (2015).

