



# DeafHearie

Services for Deaf & Hard of Hearing People



## Child Development: Years 3-4

A Factsheet for Parents of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children



# Parents Corner



# Child Development: Years 3-4

This factsheet outlines some general developmental milestones for children aged 3-4 years, focussing particularly on language development. Parent behaviours that are effective at supporting child development are described. Also, some parent behaviours that are particularly effective in supporting the development of Deaf and Hard of Hearing children are highlighted. The 'Notes' sections aim to provide more explanation of suggested ideas and strategies.

It is important to remember that every child is different and all children do not develop in the same way or at the same pace. The developmental milestones and parent behaviours are provided as a general guide for parents, to assist parents in deciding and providing the most appropriate support for their child and family.

## Child Development: 2-3 years

| Developmental Milestones:   | Parenting a Hearing Child   | Parenting a Deaf or Hard of Hearing Child  |
|---|---|--|
| <p>By their third birthday most children can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walk backwards, ride a tricycle and build a tower of up to ten blocks.</li> <li>• Count to ten, and can draw a person with a head. Also able to use a pencil and can copy simple diagrams/shapes.</li> <li>• Enjoy helping adults with daily tasks and chores. Also like to do things independently.</li> <li>• Participate in simple conversations using short sentences. Have a vocabulary of 150+ words.</li> <li>• Use personal pronouns and asks many questions: Why? What? Who? Where?</li> <li>• Express how they are feeling: 'I'm hungry' 'I'm sad' 'I'm tired'</li> <li>• Share toys and take turns. Also enjoy playing with other children.</li> <li>• Begin to understand things from another person's point of view.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents name events, interactions and emotions for their child. Naming by parents continues to be essential for the child's language and social and cognitive development. However, naming becomes more sophisticated as the child grows and develops.</li> <li>• Parents name and use language that supports their child's cognitive development, and encourage activities to support this development: e.g. counting teddies, matching cards, drawing and colouring.</li> <li>• Parents repeat and build on their child's language: 'I'm tired'...'Yes pet, you are tired after helping Daddy with the shopping'. Naming in this way supports emotional awareness and aspects of cognitive development, such as reasoning and cause and effect.</li> <li>• Parents name the actions and emotions of others: 'Daddy is looking for his keys' 'Mammy is tired after painting the wall' 'Your sister is cross because her homework is too difficult' 'Your brother wants to play with your car...give him a turn...good boy!' Naming in this way helps the child to develop an awareness of others and their feelings.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents name events, interactions and emotions for their child. Naming by parents continues to be essential for the child's language and social and cognitive development. However, naming becomes more sophisticated as the child grows and develops.</li> <li>• Parents name and use language that supports their child's cognitive development, and encourage activities to support this development: e.g. counting teddies, matching cards, drawing and colouring.</li> <li>• Parents wait for their child to look to them, or tap them on the arm before naming the events and interactions in words/signs.</li> <li>• Parents repeat and build on their child's language. Parents name the actions and emotions of others. This can involve a lot of extra effort for parents if their child cannot understand what is said by others in their environment.</li> <li>• For example, at mealtimes a Deaf or Hard of Hearing child may not be able to understand what others are saying, and may need a parent to repeat what has been said directly to them. It is important that parents try to do this as much as possible: it encourages their child to participate in the communication and is important for the child in order to develop an awareness of others and their feelings.</li> </ul> |



# Child Development: Years 3-4

## Notes:

Naming continues to be important in supporting your child's development in the third year. It is important that your Deaf or Hard of Hearing child has access to the conversations and interactions that are happening around them. This is not only important for language development, but also for social development...so that your child develops an awareness of others and learns to share, take turns and understand others' point of view. This is often referred to as 'Theory of Mind': the ability to understand and empathise with others. For more ideas on developing Theory of Mind see panel on page 5.

During the second and third year, children are developing their independence...but are still dependent on those around them. This can sometimes result in tantrums at this stage: see section on 'Managing Tantrums' for ideas on dealing with tantrums.

It is vital that children are developing language and communication skills at this stage. It is important you, and the professionals working with you, review your child's progress regularly. If your child's language development is not progressing satisfactorily, then you should seek the advice of professionals. However, always remember that you are with your child each day and you are the most important person who can support your child's social and language development.



## Managing Tantrums

Around the age of two to three years young children become more independent. They also tend to experience and express emotions in a strong way: at times they can be very happy and boisterous, while at other times they be very angry and out of control. This latter behaviour is often referred to as a 'temper tantrum'. Tantrums tend to occur most around two to three years of age, but older children can have tantrums too. A key to reducing tantrums is to be able to communicate and reason with your child.

Child psychologists have studied tantrum behaviour and identified some circumstances that can lead to tantrums in young children:

- Desire for independence: everyday things such as putting on your child's coat when going outside may be resisted because your child wants to assert their independence and not wear a coat.
- Hunger/tiredness: your child may get angry more easily simply because they are uncomfortable/irritable.
- Seeking attention: young children like to be the centre of attention...and may even use tantrums to get attention.
- Frustration: young children can become frustrated if they cannot do things for themselves, such as tie their shoe laces, or communicate what they want to others.

Some tips for avoiding tantrums:

- Keep calm and set a good example: children copy behaviour and learn through example, so although this may be difficult to do in a supermarket, try your best and count to ten!
- Give lots of praise: praising good behaviour is one of the most effective ways to encourage good behaviour.
- Watch for clues: if your young child is becoming tired or irritable, try to intervene early to avoid a scene.
- Offer choices whenever possible: children can get frustrated if they feel they have no choice or say in decisions. Giving some control to the child ('you can have this one or that one') is less likely to result in a tantrum.

**Most of these tips involve communication between parent and child.  
Good communication is vital to keeping tantrums to a minimum.**

# Child Development: Years 3-4

## Child Development: 3-4 years

| Developmental Milestones:  | Parenting a Hearing Child   | Parenting a Deaf or Hard of Hearing Child   |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By their fourth birthday most children can:</li> <li>• Run and skip and are able to use a scissors. Also enjoy physical activity.</li> <li>• Draw simple objects.</li> <li>• Understand concepts of over and under, longer and larger.</li> <li>• Understand over 1,000 words and can use complete sentences.</li> <li>• Name common objects and animals in picture books.</li> <li>• Play simple games and enjoy playing with other children.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents name events, interactions and emotions for their child. Naming by parents continues to be important for the child's language and social and cognitive development.</li> <li>• Children are becoming more independent and spend less time in the company of their parents. They make friends and enjoy playing with other children.</li> <li>• It is important for parents to ensure that there are times for them and their children to communicate and share about their day. A routine involving mealtimes, bedtimes and playtimes together is very important to achieve this. This is also a good way for parents to identify any worries or concerns their child has about their experiences and to discuss ways to resolve them.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents name events, interactions and emotions for their child. Naming by parents continues to be important for the child's language and social and cognitive development.</li> <li>• Children are becoming more independent and spend less time in the company of their parents. They make friends and enjoy playing with other children. Parents of Deaf or Hard of Hearing children will need to check that their child is included and can enjoy playing with others.</li> <li>• It is particularly important that parents of children with hearing loss create quiet periods during the day to make it as easy as possible to communicate and share with their child about their day. A routine involving structured mealtimes, bedtimes and playtimes together is very important to achieve this. It can also help identify any problems or issues your child has and help you to resolve them as soon as possible.</li> </ul> |

### Notes:

By the end of the fourth year children are usually much more independent than in earlier years. They can play and cooperate with other children, and are not dependent on their parents or other adults all of the time. This means that it is important that children with hearing loss have access to communication not only with their parents, but also with significant others. It is important for parents to ensure that significant others, adults and children, are aware and understand what they need to do to include and support your child (see panel on choosing a pre-school).

Deaf and Hard of Hearing children can sometimes feel left out if they don't know what is happening around them. Keep an extra eye on your child at play with other children... and if necessary, intervene occasionally to inform your child what is going on. This will provide a little extra encouragement and reduce the chances of your child feeling excluded. It will also help other children to be more aware of how to include your child in their play activities.



# Child Development: Years 3-4

## 'Theory of Mind' Explained

Theory of Mind (ToM) is defined as the ability to attribute mental states – beliefs, intents, desires, emotions, pretending, knowledge and so on to oneself and to others and to understand that others have beliefs, desires and goals different from our own. A child who has developed ToM is able to reflect on and have some understanding of the contents of their own and others' minds. This ability is very important in a child's social development: without ToM developing social relationships will be difficult as a child gets older.

One of the important milestones in the development of ToM is being able to understand the concept of 'false-belief'. This means that the child understands that different people can have different beliefs about different things. Traditionally researchers believed children started to develop ToM between three to four years of age, but recent studies have found that children under two years can demonstrate some ToM abilities (Meristo et al, 2010).

The classic experiment to assess ToM ability in young children is the 'Sally-Anne' task. A child is told (or views) a story about two dolls named Sally and Anne. The dolls are in a room: Sally has a basket and Anne has a box. Sally places a marble in the basket and leaves the room. While Sally is out of the room Anne takes the marble from the basket and puts it in the box. Sally comes back to the room and the child is asked where will Sally look first for the marble.

The child demonstrates ToM ability if she says that Sally will look in the basket: this means the child is aware and understands Sally's mistaken belief that the marble is still in the basket and is able to understand that another's mental representation of the world can differ from their own. Young children who have not developed ToM sufficiently will say that Sally will look first in the box. These children still believe that others have the same beliefs and perception of the world as themselves. Most children can pass this task by 4 years of age.

## Theory of Mind and your Child's Development

Theory of Mind requires the ability to understand that other people may think and feel differently from ourselves. Developing ToM has been linked to access to language. Naming by parents is the key mechanism to support a child's development in this area. Specifically, it is important during the second, third and subsequent years that parents name not only their child's actions and emotions...but also those of other people:

- 'Oh your brother is sad because he has lost his football'.
- 'Look, the man is angry because his coat was torn by the dog'.
- 'Your sister is happy because this is her favourite dinner'.
- 'Daddy is running because he is late for work'

Naming in this way supports your child to be more aware of others and their feelings, which is an important aspect of a child's social development during the second, third and fourth years, and is linked to the development of ToM. Reading books and looking at pictures provides a rich source of material to support young children's learning in this area. Most hearing children will also learn new knowledge by listening to and observing others...but this avenue of learning may not be as accessible for Deaf and Hard of Hearing children. This means that parents' naming behaviour, particularly naming what other people are doing and experiencing, is even particularly important for their young children with hearing loss.

Meristo et al (2010) found that Deaf and Hard of Hearing children of hearing parents were less likely to experience the type of language that supports the development of ToM, and that these children were slower to develop ToM abilities. They found that hearing parents were more likely to use 'more orienting, repetition and more physical state talk' with their children (e.g. 'here is your coat' 'sit at the table' 'good boy, you are a good boy'); and less 'emotional state talk...think and know talk' ('Oh your brother is sad because he has lost his football', as in examples above).

Therefore it is important that parents name the actions, emotions and perspectives of other people for their Deaf and Hard of Hearing children to help them develop Theory of Mind on a par with their hearing peers.

### Reference:

Meristo et al (2010). **Belief-attribution in deaf and hearing infants: Evidence for the importance of conversational input.** Cognitive Development Center Conference, Jan 2010, Budapest, Hungary.



# Child Development: Years 3-4

## Play 'Hide the Thimble'!

This game can help your child learn that other people may have a different perspective and understanding of the world...and help develop Theory of Mind!

In order to play 'Hide the Thimble' all you need is a sewing thimble or any other small object. Everyone is sent out of the room except the child whose turn it is to hide the thimble. If this is a young child, a parent can stay in the room and help them hide the thimble. The child should hide the thimble in a place where it can be seen without moving anything. When the other children are called back into the room, they look for the thimble without moving anything or touching anything. The player who finds the thimble wins the game and becomes the next child to hide it.



In this game, the child hiding the thimble is able to observe the other children searching for the thimble. A young child who has hidden the thimble will be tempted to 'tell' or 'point' to the location...because they don't fully grasp the idea that they know something that the other children don't! Over time, young children will learn the concept of the game. Hence, playing this game...which most children enjoy...can help develop Theory of Mind! Also, Hide the Thimble is a game that does not require a lot of communication to play, so it can easily be played by children who find it difficult to communicate with other children.



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