

Caring for... your preschooler (3-5 years)

Caring for children is challenging and it's hard to know what is and isn't normal behaviour.

Below are some normal preschooler behaviours, with tips on how to manage them.

1

Child won't sit still

Children have a lot of energy and like to be vocal and move around. They have a very short attention span, of around two to five minutes per year of age e.g. a two year old can only stay focussed on a task for between five and 10 minutes.

Try:

- Checking if your child needs to use the toilet. They're often so busy with an activity, they avoid going to the bathroom for fear of missing out
- Taking your child to the park or playground to play and explore outside
- Planning and mixing indoor activities, so your child is exposed to a variety of toys and play and doesn't bore too quickly
- Reading a book with them

2

Talking constantly and asking 'WHY?' questions and saying 'NO'

A child's curiosity about the world helps to build concepts, vocabulary and understanding.

Try:

- Asking your child, "what do you think?" – this turns the 'why' question around so your child has a chance to think about and come up with their own answer
- Saying "let's read this book," or "let's play"
- When your child is being very defiant or constantly says 'no,' if it's safe, let your child know you need quiet time to feel calm and that you are ending the conversation

3

Story telling and ‘bending the truth’

Story telling is normal in pre-schoolers because of their active imaginations. Pretending and imagining are important to a child’s development.

When first asked, some children may lie or avoid telling the full story, as they don’t want to get in trouble.

If your child fibs, try:

- Explaining they will not get into trouble and encourage them to tell the truth
- Saying “I wonder if you are afraid to tell me what happened?”

4

Being curious about private parts and asking questions

This is a normal part of a child’s development. It’s also normal for children to touch their private parts, as a self-soothing strategy when they’re anxious or because it feels good.

Try:

- Staying calm if you see your child touching their private parts. This is part of their normal development.
- You could say, “I noticed you’re curious about your body. Maybe we can find a book about bodies that we can read together?”
- Teaching your child the correct names of their body parts, including all private parts

5

Having many fears (the dark, going to bed, monsters, animals)

It’s common for young children to be afraid of the dark or to be scared of monsters, particularly when they’re transitioning to sleep in their own room.

Try:

- Saying: “It’s okay to have fears. Let’s figure this out together”
- Reassuring your child and talking to them about their worries
- Monitoring your child’s feelings, for example, “you feel afraid. Maybe a nightlight would help you feel better?”
- Giving your child a weighted blanket or comfort toy, to help create a sense of safety

6

Won’t go to bed

A consistent early bedtime routine and a safe sleeping space are key to a happy bedtime.

Try:

- Make going to bed an enjoyable experience. Learn what helps your child go to sleep. Consider their sensory needs. Do they like dark and quiet, or do they prefer light and sounds of the ocean? Do they need a heavy blanket?
- Saying:
 - » “It’s 8 o’clock and you’re in bed already, well done!”
 - » “Let’s read a book”
 - » “Do you want to walk or tiptoe to bed?”

7

Bedwetting and day time toileting accidents

Toilet training varies from child to child. It's not uncommon for children to still rely on nappies at night in this age group. Stressful events such as a new sibling or moving house can bring on bedwetting or day time 'accidents', even after a child has been fully toilet trained. If your child has difficulty with toilet training or has day time 'accidents', consider the following:

Try

- Gently saying:
 - » "I see you're holding yourself or pacing back and forth, why not try sitting on the toilet?"
 - » "Oopsy, you have an accident. Let's change your pyjamas and get back to bed"
- If your child has an accident, say something like "it's OK, it happens, it'll happen less over time"

For more information or advice, visit reputable parenting websites such as:

- **Kids Health**
kidshealth.schn.health.nsw.gov.au
- **Tresillian**
tresillian.org.au
- **Karitane**
karitane.com.au
- **Raising Children**
raisingchildren.net.au
- **Triple P**
triplep-parenting.net.au
- **Family Connect and Support**
familyconnectsupport.dcj.nsw.gov.au
- **Parent Line**
parentline.org.au (NSW) or
free call 1300 1300 52

Don't let frustrations escalate – reach out for help when you need it.