

The Five-Year-Old is Fabulous!¹

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Overview

The typical five-year-old child is wonderful to parent. This child is more emotionally stable than the four-year-old. He or she is eager to learn, enjoys being with family, and wants the approval of parents. Additionally, five-year-old children start to show empathy, and play better with friends and siblings. However, the age of five is when many children begin to attend school, and that can be a stressful experience for some children.



Physical Development

At the age of five, children generally have a body mass index, or BMI, between 14 and 18, and need around 1200-2000 calories per day (depending on gender and activity level). Although they are growing, they are only gaining around 4-5 pounds per year. This is the age when body temperature stabilizes and children's body shapes start to look more like adult body shapes. Children's vision

improves, and they should reach 20/20 vision at this age. One big change for many children is the first loss of "baby" teeth. Parents should be prepared for this milestone.

Children's sense of balance is improving rapidly at this age. At the age of five, children may be able to walk up and down stairs by alternating feet, learn to do a somersault, and learn how to hop, skip, and walk on a balance beam. In addition to better coordination of physical movement and balance, five-year-old children are better at using their hands.



They are better able to manage pencils and crayons, and should be able to cut shapes using safety scissors. By the

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age of five it is usually clear whether a child is left- or right-handed.

Five-year-old children are beginning to learn to take care of themselves and their bodies. They can learn to bathe themselves, wash their face and hands, and brush their teeth, although they will likely need prompting and supervision. They can also learn to dress themselves, but might not get everything right. (For instance, they might put on shirts inside out or backwards, or have difficulty with tying shoes.) They may also be able to perform some food-related tasks, such as pouring cereal, getting milk out of the refrigerator, and spreading butter onto bread. It is important to remember that these are developing skills, so there may be some errors along the way. Children will probably still need to be watched and reminded to make sure that they brush their teeth and go to bed on time.



Five-year-old children usually require about 10–11 hours of sleep per night. Some children may still need to nap during the day, but many no longer need a nap at this age. Children will probably report having both dreams and nightmares. This is considered normal.

Social Development

At the age of five, children play better with their peers and siblings. They also tend to play best with one child at a time, but should be able to participate in group play. Friends become important, and they may have a “best” friend, or a couple of children they like to play with more than others. Most will cooperate with others and share well, although there may be times when they are not in the mood to share or cooperate.

Many five-year-olds show an increase in dramatic play, such as puppet shows, dress-up, and performances for others. Children may start to show a sense of humor, enjoy telling simple jokes, and making others laugh. Although children

of this age may lie or take others’ things, this is done out of immaturity, rather than malice. In fact, lying is a sign of development, because it shows that children are now able to understand that other people can believe—or can be convinced to believe—that something is true that is not. They are still learning about the meaning of lying, the boundaries of property and ownership, and the morals and values their parents teach them.



Emotional Development

One of the hallmarks of the five-year-old is a calmer manner. There are fewer emotional outbursts, and emotions are much more under control at this age than at the age of four. However, five-year-olds can be very rigid in their thinking, especially in their ideas about what is right and wrong. They may not yet have a sense of “gray areas,” or of things changing across time or situation. They may not completely understand the difference between real and pretend.

Five-year-olds might have difficulty separating to go to school or stay at a friend’s home because they may be afraid that they will never see their parents again when they go away. The five-year-old tends to show affection and concern for siblings, and begins to get along better with them. At the same time, if younger siblings require too much attention or become bothersome, the five-year-old may get angry or frustrated.

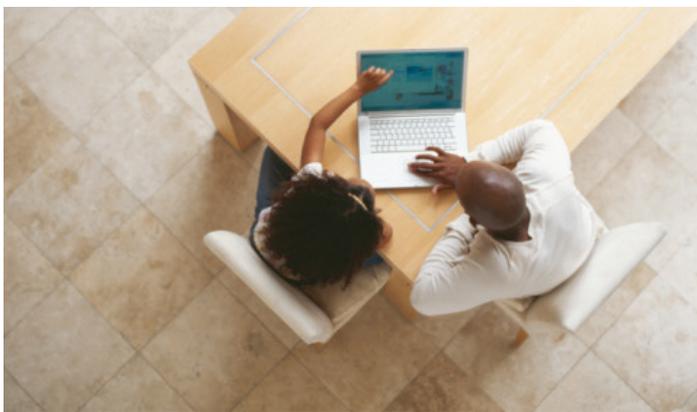
Many children begin formal schooling at the age of five, which is often a big change. It may be necessary to develop rituals for being dropped off at school and coming home from school in order to ease the transition. Some children may have difficulty separating from their parents, so it may be good to prepare them for going to the classroom. Let them know the day’s schedule and when they will be picked up. It may also be helpful to bring them to the classroom and get them involved in something before leaving, so that

their parent's departure is less stressful. Finally, the end of the school day can be challenging for some children. Children may arrive at home tired, overstimulated, hungry, or overly energetic. Parents should be sensitive to the needs of their children at this time. If they need a nap, snack, time alone, or time to play when they get home, allow them to do so in order to avoid crankiness.



Intellectual Development

At the age of five, children's sense of time becomes more developed. Children begin to understand what a calendar is for, and may be able to understand that things happen at particular times (e.g., 5 o'clock is when we eat dinner). Some children are even able to tell time on the hour (e.g., 5 o'clock vs. 6 o'clock). Children begin to understand differences and sameness, and can put things into categories. They can also understand concepts such as less and more, bigger and smaller, and right and left.



Children are very curious at this age, and may ask about how things work or why they happen. Some questions can be hard for parents to answer. You may not know the answer or how to explain the answer, or it may be an uncomfortable subject. If you don't know an answer, it is okay to say so. Show your child how to search for answers.

Looking things up together can be a great way for parents and children to bond with one another. You will provide a great example to your child of what to do when you don't know something.

Discipline

At this age children tend to want to please parents, and are very likely to listen to direction. However, if they do not respond to parental requests or are in a bad mood, it is important to consider why this might be. Sometimes children do not listen to parents because they are not paying attention. Sometimes they are grumpy because they are hungry, tired, or overwhelmed. And sometimes disobeying is a way of getting attention, testing their parents' limits, or playing around.

If children are not paying attention it may be necessary to physically go to them and look them in the eye, rather than calling out to them. If children are hungry, tired or overwhelmed, make sure to attend to their needs. It is a good plan to think about their limits, and try not to push them beyond what they can handle. For example, if an all-day activity is planned, bring snacks and take frequent breaks to make things easier. Make sure there is enough to keep a child entertained if there are long periods of adult activity. When children are looking for attention, they may misbehave. Make sure that you are giving your children attention for the good things that they do. That way, they won't need to resort to inappropriate behavior in order to get your attention.

Remaining consistent with the use of rules will help children learn that you mean what you say, and they will be less likely to keep testing your limits (although it is normal for children to test limits). It is important to remember that behavior such as lying or taking things that belong to others is common at this age, and is related to level of development. Patiently explain the rules and why they are important, but understand that it may take some time before children really understand these concepts. There are multiple EDIS publications that cover parenting issues and discipline that may serve as resources. However, if your child is particularly difficult or your attempts at discipline are not effective, you may want to find a professional (a guidance counselor, therapist, or a parenting program) to work with you on creating a discipline plan that will work for your child and family.

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