



Adapted by Cat Gander from
Helping Children Thrive

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You & Your Pre-schooler



Pre-schoolers, or children aged 3 to 5, are becoming individuals and learning many important things, such as how to express emotions appropriately, how to play cooperatively with friends, and are getting ready to start school. At the same time, they still think the world revolves around them. What they see is more real than what they are told.

Normal behaviours for children aged 3–5 years old

Which things do you see in your child so far?

- Learning many, many more new words (maybe hundreds!) and using longer sentences
- Becoming aware of the differences between females and males and children and adults
- Understanding “yesterday” and “tomorrow” and knowing time is divided into present, past and future
- Showing curiosity about how things work, often asking “why, why, why?”
- Having a short attention span and being easily distracted
- Being proud of doing things by themselves (e.g. getting dressed)
- Learning to play with other children, perhaps making mistakes once in a while, like hitting others
- Telling other people, even strangers, about things in your family you may prefer to keep private
- Having fewer temper tantrums but more aggression directed at others such as same-age friends

How to help your pre-schooler

Children should not live with violence and getting away from abuse is the best thing you can do as a mother. Here are some other ideas:

- Re-establish (or establish) familiar routines as this will be comforting
- Tell them you love them and give them lots of hugs and attention
- Help them believe that nothing which happened between adults was their fault
- Take responsibility for the decision to leave (if you and partner have separated)
- Read a book with them designed for their age level
- Teach “hands are not for hitting, hands are for...” tickling, drawing, making shadow puppets, etc.
- Have clear rules and consequences so they know what you expect
- Try to build into the routine some time for you to relax
- Don’t rely on them for emotional support: seek out friends, family or professionals for that
- Consider finding a quality child care program, to give you a break and help them prepare for school

Effects of violence at home

When pre-schoolers see violence at home, they may...

- worry about their own safety and about being hurt themselves
- have nightmares about being harmed
- worry about being arrested or taken away, if Daddy/partner was arrested
- worry that Mum will be taken away by the police if Daddy/partner has been arrested
- feel responsible because they think that everything in the world is related to them
- try to make it stop by, for example, yelling at the abuser
- hope that a TV character or super hero can come and save them
- 'tune out' the noise by concentrating hard on something else

What your pre-schooler may be feeling

Confusion:

- Confused why people are saying bad things about Daddy/partner
- Confused about why Daddy/partner can't live with us anymore

What your pre-schooler may be feeling (continued)

Distress:

- Distress over seeing Mum upset
- Distress about unfamiliar surroundings in a refuge/new residence
- Distress over the loss of familiar routines and belongings left behind at home
- Distress over floods of emotions and not knowing how to control them
- Distress over backsliding on things she or he has already learned (e.g. using the potty)

Guilt:

- Guilt because they blames themselves

Grief

- Grief over missing Daddy/partner, or other relatives on Daddy's/partner's side of the family
- Grief over missing home, friends, toys, pets and other possessions left behind

Fear

- Fear of abandonment, e.g. "if Daddy/partner left me, will Mum leave me too?"
- Fear for personal safety: "if it happens again, will I get hurt?"
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All these feelings and beliefs are all normal reactions of teenagers to the situation