

THE THREE YEAR OLD

Sociability and Cooperation

The three-year-old begins to understand the rights of others and how to cooperate, take turns and share. He begins to play with others and have special friends. He likes older children but may pester them. He likes his parents' company, too. If there is no father in the home, arrange for the child to be with other male relatives or family friends now and then. The three-year-old should be expected to do small chores at home and pick up after himself. Always praise his help, do not criticize if his work is not perfect.

Imagination and Fears

The three-year-old may have imaginary playmates or pets, or make believe he is an animal. Teach him what "pretend" means, and let him know it is all right to pretend. The three year old may develop fears he didn't have when he was two (fear of animals, the dark, loud noises.) Family quarrels, or accidents, or things he sees on TV may frighten him. Never make fun of his fears. Calm and comfort him.

Play and Learning

The play of three-year-olds still needs adult supervision. Quarrels are frequent. Don't try to place blame. Get them interested in something else. The three-year-old enjoys painting, crayon work and clay modeling. He likes music, rhythm play, guessing games and simple puzzles. He has favorite books and likes his favorite stories read many times. He should be helped to recognize letters and numbers and to learn short songs. He loves to talk and be talked to. Take time to listen to him. TV watching should be very limited. Avoid programs that include violence or that seem to disturb or overexcite the child.

Discipline and Guidance

The three-year-old can begin to learn right from wrong. Take time to teach him reasons for what you expect of him. Remember that the goal of discipline is for your child to become a happy, lovable, creative, stable, responsible and self-respecting person who enjoys life and gets along well with others. Be consistent in your expectations. Set a good example, be generous with praise, and try to avoid punishment. When

his problems are too much for him, a three-year-old may yell, scream, kick and bang his head, feet and hands on the floor and wall. Avoid spanking. Walk away from him, let him get it out of his system and then try to get him busy at something he enjoys.

Bathing, Toileting and Dressing

Three-year-olds should learn to wash themselves. Never leave them alone in the tub. They should go to the bathroom alone. Don't give more help than needed. Most three-year-olds have learned bowel control but some still wet themselves. Don't scold or shame the child, he will learn control as soon as he can. Except for special occasions, a three-year-old should dress himself. Keep his everyday clothes simple and sturdy.

Sleep and Rest

Three-year-olds still need 10 or 12 hours of sleep at night and most of them need a nap after lunch. Even if they aren't sleepy, give them books or quiet toys to keep them occupied. The three-year-old enjoys bedtime stories. They may be fussy when they wake up. A bad dream may cause him to wake up crying at night. Never make fun of him. Try to stay with him until he goes back to sleep. A night light may help. He may want to come into his parents' bed, but this isn't a good idea.

Eating

The three-year-old should feed himself and should eat with the family as much as possible. He should learn to use a fork as well as a spoon. Provide the child with a balanced diet of plain nourishing foods and serve small portions of new foods. Try to let the child choose what he will eat now and then, but not all the time. Three-year-olds learn fast by example. Avoid showing him your own food dislikes, but don't force him to eat food he doesn't like or want. Don't make meal time a battle. If your child is not hungry at meal time or refuses to eat, limit snacks throughout the day.

For additional information contact: Diana Converse, Family Life Educator, University of Florida Extension Service, 5339 South County Road 579, Seffner, FL 33584. Phone: 744-5519. Fax: 744-5776.