



## Dear Baby TALK Parents,

Congratulations! Your child is three, the age many refer to as "the golden age of childhood." With the negativism of the last eighteen months mostly behind him, your child is probably calmer, happier and easier to manage. He is more confident than ever before and mostly thinks his parents are wonderful, desiring to please them above all else. He feels good about his accomplishments and wants everyone to share in his enthusiasm. In his book *Touchpoints*, Dr. T. Berry Brazelton writes, "The one thing I'd like for all children to feel about themselves at this age is, I'm important! Everyone likes me!" Your child wants to know that you think he is the greatest three-year-old ever. With the absence of major developmental hurdles just now, this is an important opportunity to strengthen your child's sense of self-esteem.

### LET'S PLAY!

Physical play with your three-year-old is deliciously fun. He is more competent at running, jumping and climbing. He knows how to play on a slide and a swing. He enjoys throwing, catching and kicking a ball. His small motor skills have improved to the point that he is able to "write" with a pencil or crayon. He will enjoy experimenting with scissors. He may be able to draw a few simple shapes. Sand, clay and water play provide real enjoyment now, as does working with modeling clay or playdough.



**Pretending** is a new ability at this age. You may notice your child playing with blocks imaginatively

along with other toys, such as building bridges for his trucks to drive over or building a house for his dolls to live in. Doll play increases in complexity as he role plays real people he knows, acting out all sorts of situations.

Another positive development for threes is their social ability. Playmates become more and more important to your child. Although threes still enjoy individual play, play between children is far more cooperative now. Threes like having "friends." They show many emotions in play, making each other cry, laugh and get angry. They hug each other, learn from each other and look forward to seeing each other again. They are becoming aware that other people have feelings, too. And, much to the relief of their parents, three-year-olds are finally able to share. Sharing their possessions becomes somewhat less painful as they come to value people above objects. Threes are finally able to take the love and warmth they have received from you since birth and share it with others. They are ready to begin to nurture other people as they have been nurtured.






### LITTLE MINDS AT WORK

One of the great advances seen in the three-year-old child is her understanding of the **passage of time**. Words designating time ("yesterday," "soon," "next week") may be showing up in your child's vocabulary, even if she uses them inappropriately ("*I went to the store tomorrow.*") She will enjoy looking at a calendar as you explain upcoming events in her life, and marking off her days as they pass.

In the same way, her cognitive growth enables her to have a better sense of **space** as she comes to understand and use words like "under" and "behind." She may also begin to have a sense of **number** as she may accurately count two or more objects.

## FEARS

One difficult aspect of all this mental growth is the appearance of **fears**. Your little one may begin to worry about sirens, barking dogs and monsters in the closet. She may become reluctant to go to strange places or try new adventures. These fears may be triggered by real events, they may be a part of your child's growing imagination or they may be a way to work out aggressive feelings. What can you do about these fears?

-  Try to understand the cause of the fear. Has it been caused by a real event, or a change in your child's life? You may not always find a cause. Remember: Fears are a normal part of growing up.
-  Talk to your child about her feelings. Prepare her for the surge of fear she'll have when she hears a barking dog or enters a dark room.
-  Remember that reassurance will not always wipe away the fear. Try to help her find some control. Ask her what will help her be less afraid, and try it if possible.
-  Limit your child's TV watching. She is especially susceptible to scary images just now. Watch TV with her and follow-up by talking with her. This discussion will assure her and give you a chance to share your values.
-  Realize that bedtime is a common source of fears: both going to bed and waking in the night. A bedtime routine will help your child handle the fears. A "**lovey**" (blanket or stuffed animal) and a **night-light** will go a long way with a three-year-old.

## LANGUAGE

Just as two-year-olds acquire language, threes begin to really use it. Their improved language ability makes parenting easier, as they can sometimes even be talked into doing something they don't want to do if you can give them a compelling reason. When your three-year-old misbehaves, a discussion will be an important part of your approach to discipline.

Your toddler has probably developed a wonderful sense of humor and enjoys listening to silly rhymes, perhaps even making up some of his own. He enjoys songs and fingerplays and wants them to be part of his day. Threes love mystery words and the emphasis they give:

- "This day is *special*."
- "Do you want to know a *secret*?"
- "When we get home there will be a *surprise*."

You may even be able to change the course of a whiny conversation with a mystery word and some quick thinking!

Your undivided attention in conversations with your child will enable him to share with you his accomplishments and discoveries. He will appreciate your listening ears and attentive eyes as he shares his questions and "stories." Threes become great conversationalists, almost as interested in what others are saying as in what they say themselves. Language, at last, becomes reciprocal!

Observing these wonderful new language skills, you may be tempted to push your child in reading and writing. Resist the temptation to push him too early. At this time, **play** is his way of learning. A child learns best who learns for himself. Although young children can learn to read (they will do anything to please their parents!) it tends to cost them something later. Watch for your child's own desire to learn numbers and letters, and be sure the desire is coming from him and not in order to please you!

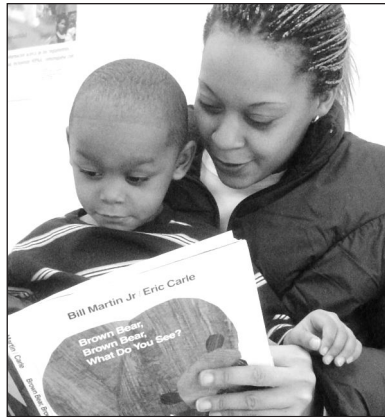
In the meantime, reading to him, talking to him, listening to him and giving him unlimited opportunities for play and exploration will prepare him well for the complex process of learning to read.

## STUTTERING

Your three-year-old may experience episodes of stuttering as he is able to think faster than he can form the words to express himself. Stuttering provides him with a little time to pull his words together and is only rarely a cause for concern at this age. Give him your full attention when he speaks and resist the urge to tell him to "slow down" or finish his sentence for him. As in so much of parenting, patience seems to be the key!

## LET'S READ!

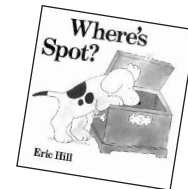
Threes love books more and more, and their taste for books is expanding. They are able to appreciate busier, more complicated illustrations. They enjoy guessing and riddle books, and alphabet and number books begin to be of interest to them. Most three-year-olds have a few much-loved books they want to read again and again. We know one little fellow who chose the same book each time he went to the library, even though he had his own copy on a shelf at home!



## PARTICIPATION BOOKS

Your competent, confident three-year-old loves to do things for herself. For that reason, she will love books that invite her to lift the flap, answer a question, pull a tab, poke, squeeze, sniff or otherwise participate actively in the reading session. Books have become very real to her, and she wants to participate in reading just as she has learned to participate in life! Here are some participation books your child may enjoy:

- Each Peach Pear Plum
- Janet & Allan Ahlbert,
- Viking 1999
- Old MacDonald Had a Farm:
- A Pop-Up Book
- Frances Cony, Orchard 1999
- Maisy Goes to Bed
- Lucy Cousins, Little 1990
- Dear Zoo
- Rod Campbell, Four Winds 1999
- Mr. Little's Noisy Car
- Richard Fowler,
- Grosssett & Dunlap 1985
- Where's Spot?
- Eric Hill, Putnam 2000



Reading aloud is an effective way for parents to say to their children, "You are so special to me that I want to spend this time with you." It's the surest method for teaching a child to learn to love books. And once you've taught her that, she'll spend the rest of her life teaching herself.

**AND A VALUABLE BOOK FOR PARENTS. . .**  
Touchpoints Three to Six by T. Berry Brazelton and Joshua Sparrow, Perseus 2002.

**BEST WISHES FROM YOUR FRIENDS AT BABY TALK**

 **Baby TALK**

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