

Two to three years

Concentration and listening

They will be able to concentrate well on something – but only if they have chosen it. At other times they might flit from one thing to another.

If you talk to them when they are concentrating it can seem as though they aren't listening - they can't do two things at once.

Sometimes this can be difficult as it feels as though they don't want to play with you or your choice of activity – if this happens, try following their lead and joining in their play

Understanding words and sentences

By now they should understand a range of different object and action words eg "trousers" "jump" (around 300 words)

They can respond to instructions with 2 parts eg "Get your socks and put them in the basket". They might still need gestures to help them understand longer instructions and they still benefit from you keeping your sentences short when you talk to them but generally they should be able to follow most simple everyday instructions.

Using words and sounds

The number of words they say should have made a huge jump (around 200).

Having so many words means they should be using sentences with 2 words together on a regular basis.

They might even be starting to put 3 words together to make longer sentences eg "*Where doggie gone?*"

By now they should be able to have a simple but "proper" conversation.

Speech Sounds

Between two and three years you should be able to understand what your child says 50 – 75% of the time

You should be able to hear sounds such as p/b / t / d / m

Big muscles and movement skills (gross motor skills)

By the age of two and a half, most children enjoy rough and tumble play and should be able to run, kick, climb and jump.

By three, most children should be able to climb walk up and down stairs with alternating feet (one foot per stair). They can climb well, ride a tricycle, throw a ball overhand and bend over easily without falling.

Hand and finger skills (these can be referred to as Fine motor skills)

By the age of 2 and a half, most children should be able to manipulate small objects with their hands more easily. They will scribble on paper. Build a tower of up to 6 blocks, eat easily with a spoon and help to get themselves dressed.



By 3, most children should be able to make up and down, side to side and circular lines with a crayon or pencil. They can turn the pages of a book one at a time, screw and unscrew jar lids, nuts and bolts and turn the pages of a book one at a time. They should also be able to turn rotating handles, for example on a musical toy.

Making sense of what you're looking at (visual perception)

By the age of 2 and a half most children should be able to match an object held in their hand or seen in a room to a picture in a book.

By three most children should be able to make mechanical toys work and complete a puzzle with three or four pieces. They can also sort objects by shape and colour.

Social and Emotional Developmental

Between 2 and 3 years of age, confidence grows and children can be separated from their parents and carers more easily, but will still need reassurance. At this age they can find it difficult to wait for adult attention as they live for the moment.

Children begin to put words to their emotions in a very simple way and are able to use language to comment on and explain their feelings. They can be very affectionate as they start to realise that those around them have feelings too. Moods can change very rapidly and dramatically. Children can often be laughing one minute and crying the next, often for no apparent reason.

By the age of 3, children are still self-centred. They are magical in thinking and believe that wishes can come true.

They often have imaginary friends who can be blamed if things go wrong. They get less angry when stopped from what they are doing and don't get so frustrated.

Behaviour Management

Between 2 and 3 it is usual for children to show extreme behaviour. They can swing between being very dependent to independent, very aggressive to calm and helpful to stubborn.

At this age adults can help them by putting their feelings into words and helping them understand what is happening. Distraction still works, as may bargaining, but reasoning does not work at this age.

Managing your child's behaviour can be difficult, but evidence shows that harsh parenting and smacking get in the way of your child's emotional development.

Concerns? Check out the following advice:

Carry out activities on the Dressing Skills sheet if your toddler:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cannot pull their pants up and down by the time they are three
Carry out activities on the Developing Cutlery Skills sheet if your toddler:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cannot feed themselves using a spoon without your help at two and a half
Carry out activities on Developing Hand Skills if your toddler:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has more difficulty using their hands than his/her peers
Carry out activities on the First Words sheet if your toddler:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is not yet communicating their needs or wants by sound, gesture or words• Is not yet showing that they understand words in very familiar situations or when used on their own• Is not using sounds regularly when they are playing• Is not using any consistent sounds, e.g. animal noises
Ask your Health Visitor to complete the Let's Talk More Screen as well as carrying out the activities on the First Words sheet if your toddler:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Finds it difficult to concentrate on an activity they have chosen to do• Is not understanding instructions with two information words, e.g. give the book to Grandma at two and a half• Is not understanding instructions with 3 information carrying words at three, e.g. give the big cup to Daddy• Is not understanding the names of everyday actions and objects• Often looks puzzled and/or does not do what you have asked
Ask your Health Visitor to complete the Let's Talk More screen as well as carrying out the activities on the Sentence Building sheet if your child:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is using single words and not showing signs of linking two words together in a sentence at two and a half• Is not linking three words together in a sentence at three years
Ask your Health Visitor to complete the Let's Talk More screen as well as carrying out the activities on the Speech Sound sheet if your child:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is difficult for familiar family members to understand
Carry out the activities on the Stammering Sheet if your child:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is showing signs of stammering,
Refer to ICS if, at 2 and a half, your child:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is unable to squat and stand up again• Is unable to jump from a low step with feet together• Is showing signs of stammering which are causing him/her distress