Child Development Division

This newsletter provides important information about your baby through infancy and early childhood. You will receive 10 issues of this newsletter before your child reaches age 5. Other publications for parents include *Path to Parenthood* and *Growing Up Healthy.* If you have any questions about the content of this newsletter or are interested in a home visit or other assistance, please call one of the Vermont Department Health district offices listed below:

Barre	802-479-4200 888-253-8786	Newport	802-334-6707 800-952-2945
Bennington	802-447-3531 800-637-7347	Rutland	802-786-5811 888-253-8802
Brattleboro	802-257-2880 888-253-8805	St. Albans	802-524-7970 888-253-8801
Burlington	802-863-7323 888-253-8803	St. Johnsbury	802-748-5151 800-952-2936
Middlebury	802-388-4644 888-253-8804	Springfield	802-885-5778 888-296-8151
Morrisville	802-888-7447 888-253-8798	White River Junction	802-295-8820 888-253-8799

Your health insurance benefits include many preventive services at no charge to you: regular health check-ups and dental visits; immunizations (shots); vision and hearing checks; and child safety and developmental guidance.

Information in these newsletters was adapted from the following sources: *Touchpoints*, T. Berry Brazelton, MD; *Babytalk*; *Link Letters*, Healthy Steps; *Baby Your Baby*, Utah Department of Health; *Cradle Crier*, University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension; *Caring for Your Baby and Young Child*, American Academy of Pediatrics; and *Path To Parenthood*, Vermont Department for Children and Families.

VERMONT
DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES
Child Development Division
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growing up healthy

A newsletter from Healthy Babies, Kids & Families

3 YEARS

Your child is now 3 years old, officially a preschooler.

She's focused on figuring out her place in the larger world, and exploring as much of it as she can. Now that she's no longer a toddler, she's probably less self-centered and more outgoing. She'll enjoy playing with her friends and creating elaborate games of make believe. She'll follow rules more easily, and may share with others more. And, although she's still dealing with issues of separation from you, your 3-year-old will probably be leaving the intense struggles of her toddler years behind her.

General Development

Your child probably weighs 25 to 44 lbs. and is between 34 and 43-inches tall. She's developing a taller, thinner, more adult-like appearance.

She may be able to use the toilet by herself, although some children still aren't ready for this until they are 3½, or older. She can dress herself with some help and can pedal a tricycle.

Her speech will become much more understandable and she will talk in complete sentences of three to five words. Your child will also understand "now," "soon," and "later" and ask lots of who, what, where and why questions.

At age 3 your child will be much less selfish than she was at 2. She will be less dependent on you—a sign that her own sense of identity is stronger and more secure. She'll begin to play with other children instead of just playing side by side.

She will accept suggestions and follow simple directions. She also enjoys being silly and making others laugh, hearing stories about herself, imagining and playing "house."

Television

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children either watch no television, or no more than one to two hours per day. Children who watch lots of TV tend not to get enough physical exercise, eat more junk food and are at risk of being overweight. TV can also expose young children to inappropriate subject matter, like violence and sexual behavior, well before they can understand these issues.

Choose programs that are made for kids, like "Sesame Street," and watch them with your child. As your child gets older, you may need to enforce strict rules about what she watches. Remember that she should spend her day playing actively or learning new things by using her imagination. And be careful about the amount of television you watch in their presence.

Challenging Behavior

Although your child's vocabulary is rapidly expanding, when she gets frustrated or angry, she may kick, bite or hit people instead of using words.

Biting—a common behavior—can result from teething, frustration, anger, excitement or because your child doesn't have the language or skills to express her feelings. If your child bites another person, tell her that biting is not okay and that people don't like to be bitten. Then, ask her what she could have done instead of biting, and help her to find words to express herself.

SCHEDULE WELL CHILD VISITS AT 3 AND 4 YEARS OF AGE

Your child hits, kicks or scratches when she doesn't know another way to stop someone from doing something she doesn't like. If your child does any of these things, stop her from hurting the other person by removing her from the situation. Tell her that it's okay to be mad, but not okay to hurt someone. Again, talk with her to find words for her feelings. Use the same approach for spitting and other similar behavoirs.

If your child uses foul language, calmly tell her that it is not okay to use those words. And make sure she doesn't hear you using them.

If your child is acting out, try to understand why. Keep in mind normal behaviors for your child's age and temperament. In addition, any added stresses—like a move to a new home, a new baby, divorce, or even too many scheduled activities—can bring about these negative behaviors.

Children learn best by watching their parents. When dealing with challenging behavior, you need to remain in control. Use words to express your feelings, not physical punishment.

(Adapted from Growing Up is Hard to Do: Challenging Behavior fact sheet, Child Care Resource.)

Healthy Eating

Your preschooler should now be more positive about eating. At mealtimes let her help by carrying the placemats or silverware to the table and assisting you in making simple foods.

Offer planned meals and snacks. Let your preschooler decide how much she eats and whether she eats. Avoid forcing her to eat or using food as a reward. She may still be a picky eater, but continue to offer her a selection of healthy foods.

She will like to eat the foods she sees you and others eating. It may take time for her to accept new foods, so offer them with familiar foods. Even if she refuses to eat something, don't become discouraged. It may take several attempts before she becomes familiar with a food and is willing to try it. If you have concerns about whether or not your child is eating a balanced diet, consult you health care provider.

Skills Checklist

Kindergarten is the start of your child's formal schooling, and it isn't too far off. Gently, and without pressure, begin working with your child to develop certain skills for starting kindergarten. Below are some examples of skills that most educators agree are helpful:

- Knowing her name, address and phone number.
- Knowing her parents' full names.
- Going to the bathroom without help.
- Washing her own hands and face.
- Putting on and taking off jackets, sweaters and coats.
- Saying what she wants rather than pointing or crying.
- Playing without constant fighting, crying, or bullying.
- Sitting quietly and listening to a story.
- Knowing her right hand from her left.
- Recognizing her printed name.
- Buckling, tying, or fastening her shoes.
- Knowing the names of the basic colors.
- Knowing a circle, square, or triangle.
- Understanding quantity: some, all, one, two, a lot.
- Understanding what it means for something to be up, down, in, out, on, under.

Go slowly and only spend a few minutes on each skill at a time. Most importantly, give plenty of praise as your child learns these new skills.

(Adapted from *Healthy Stages*, Healthy Families Partnership, Hampton, VA)

Sleeping

Your child's bedtime may be one of the most challenging parts of your day. She may resist going to sleep and may try to find ways to delay her bedtime. Regardless, she needs at least 10 to 12 hours of sleep every night.

Avoid active play before bed. A calming, nurturing routine before bedtime works best. You may want to read her a book and provide a favorite toy or blanket as part of a self-comforting routine. Your child needs to learn to get herself to sleep after you tuck her in and when she wakes at night, but this might take a while.

Environmental Spotlight: Mercury

Mercury is a natural substance found in the environment, and is harmful to both humans and wildlife. At room temperature, metallic mercury is a shiny, silver liquid that can evaporate into a colorless, odorless vapor. If a "fever" thermometer or fluorescent bulb breaks, mercury can be released. The small amount of mercury in these items is unlikely to cause health problems if the spill is promptly, safely, and properly cleaned up.

Can I clean up a small spill in my own home?

You can probably clean up a small spill by yourself if the following is true:

- The spill is a small amount, less than or equal to one household thermometer,
- The spill is limited to a small area and mercury has not been spread around,
- The spill is on a hard surface like tile, linoleum or wood that is in good condition, or
- The spill is on a small porous item like an area rug, a blanket or clothing that can be safely and appropriately disposed of as indicated below for mercury debris.

If the spill involves a large area, has been spread around, is in cracks and crevices or other difficult places to clean, or is on a non-disposable porous item such as wall to wall carpeting or upholstery, follow the first four steps below then contact the emergency spill program at 1-800-641-5005.

How can I clean up a small spill in my home?

1. Open windows to ventilate the area. If possible, clear the air from the room using a window fan(s) pointing to the outside.
2. Close off the room from other rooms in your house. Shut doors and close any air pathways (like floor or ceiling grates, air conditioning or heating vents) which may allow mercury vapors to enter other areas of the house.
3. Keep pets, children (especially infants and young children) and pregnant women out of the room.
4. Do not walk on the mercury or track it into other areas of the house.
5. NEVER sweep or vacuum the mercury. Wear disposable gloves if possible.
6. Use stiff cardboard (such as playing cards or index cards) to push mercury droplets together and scoop up beads of mercury; a flashlight will make shiny mercury beads easier to see.
7. Use the sticky side of duct or masking tape to pick up any remaining mercury beads.
8. Place the mercury, contaminated clean up materials (cardboard, gloves, tape, etc.) into double plastic bags or a rigid container with a tight lid for containment.
9. Contact your local town, solid waste district for proper disposal or call 1-800-974-9559 or (802) 241-3472. In the meantime, store the bag in a secure place, if possible, outside the house.
10. For health questions, contact 1-800-439-8550 or (802) 863-7220 and dial zero.
11. Weather permitting, leave windows in the contaminated room open long enough to air it out completely.

Replace any mercury thermometers in your home with a non-mercury alternative, available at area stores. Non-mercury thermometers are just as effective as mercury ones and can be used to take oral, rectal or auxillary (armpit) temperatures.

Mercury is also found in lakes and rivers and affects fish. Fish caught in Vermont waters and bought in the grocery store contain varying amounts of mercury. Mercury can cause developmental damage in a fetus; however, fish is a good source of protein and low in fat. To find out about guidelines for eating fish during pregnancy call 1-800-439-8550 or visit www.mercvt.org.

Make An Artbox

Three-year-olds are really creative. They love to paint, color, cut, and build. Transform an old box into an "art box" for your child. Put in scrap paper, paper plates, non-toxic glue and paints, brushes, buttons, safety scissors, yarn, and anything else you can think of. She can even decorate the box.