

Preschool programs for 3 year olds

Two Years are Better Than One

Effective and high quality preschool programs for 3 year olds are developmentally appropriate and designed around the way 3 year olds learn best.

Three year old children learn through exploration and inquiry, free and guided play, rich engagement and conversation with educators, opportunities to practice and master new skills, and positive relationships with peers and educators.

The kinds of learning that matter for 3 year olds are:

- Making friends, getting on with peers, learning to collaborate and play with others
- Exploring new ideas, asking questions, growing independence in problem-solving, becoming confident and curious learners
- Talking about and managing their emotions, developing their memory, learning to focus on activities
- Becoming confident communicators, developing early numeracy

A preschool program for 3 year olds should not be a 'pushed down' curriculum or 'sped up' learning experience, and should not simply replicate the 4 year old preschool program.

Consistent with Australia's Early Year Learning Framework, some of the ways a preschool program can be developmentally appropriate for 3 year olds include:

- Support for learning that gives children the opportunity for new and emerging skills to be practiced and mastered with the support and encouragement of educators

- Shared activities in smaller groups, that help children learn to work together and don't place unfair demands on 3 year olds' listening skills
- Recognising that 3 year olds' are still developing ability to wait, be patient and share with others
- Learning experiences designed around the attention span of 3 year olds, including planning activities that will capture children's interest, sustain their attention, and build their ability to focus over time
- Supporting 3 year olds' flourishing language and building their confidence as communicators through responsive conversation
- Exploring basic numeracy concepts such as counting, sorting, classifying, comparing and patterns
- Play-based exploration of basic science concepts, asking questions, learning
- Supported by questioning, hypothesising and scaffolding children's everyday experiences
- Outdoor play that helps 3 year olds to progressively develop new skills, build their strength, confidence and coordination

“The best way to learn how to become a competent 4-year-old learner is to embrace the joys and wonders of being a 3 year old. We shouldn't be tempted to rush children through any parts of their childhood as it will not improve outcomes”

Dr Anne Kennedy