



PART 2: CHILDREN'S AGES & STAGES

WHAT CAN THEY UNDERSTAND?

WHAT CAN THEY DO?

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Part 1 of this article covered milestones and appropriate activities for two- and three-year-olds and was published in the Nov/Dec 2008 issue of Technique magazine.

No matter what the activity, children want to have fun. This is especially true for gymnastics classes. If a teacher understands child development and incorporates age-appropriate activities in class, that can go a long way in helping the "Fun Factor!" When you understand the interest and abilities of children at various ages, you can create stations and appropriate challenges to allow them to be successful and have fun.

Listed below are developmental milestones and activity suggestions for four- and five-year-olds.

Age 4

Physical Development Milestones

Skips on one foot, draws "Man," cuts with scissors (not well), can wash and dry face, dresses self except cannot tie laces, can do standing broad jump, throws ball overhand, high motor drive.

Age appropriate activities to include in your gymnastics class:

- Hopping on one foot, then the other.
- Skipping on one side, then both.
- Hurdle step. Hopscotch one foot, two feet, etc.
- Toss and catch a bean bag. Toss, clap and catch.
- Basic rolls forward and backward with a spot.
- Inverted readiness activities to create upper body strength.
- Balance on different body parts.

Emotional Development Milestones

Seems sure of himself, out-of-bounds behavior, often negative, may be defiant, and seems to be testing himself, needs controlled freedom.

Age appropriate activities to include in your gymnastics class:

- Sometimes have negative thoughts like "I can't." When children make those statements, help them to reword the statement to say, "I'll try, but I may need help."
- They will usually want to help and be the leader, find ways to make everyone feel special during class. Once they know that everyone will get a turn being first, they will relax and take whatever turn they get.
- They enjoy role playing. Make stations where they are different animals or creatures.

Social Development Milestones

Cooperative play, enjoys the company of other children, highly social, may play loosely organized group games such as tag or duck-duck-goose, talkative, versatile.

Age appropriate activities to include in your gymnastics class:

- Cooperative games are great, partner games work well.



- Class relays (where everyone ends up the winner)
- They like to help pick up. Use the clean up game to re-arrange the equipment before you move to another place.
- They like to use humor and tell jokes. Give everyone a chance to be the center of attention.
- They can use an organized line to move from place to place.

Intellectual Development Milestones

Uses complete sentences, 1540 word vocabulary, asks endless questions, learning to generalize, highly imaginative, dramatic, can draw recognizable simple objects.

Age appropriate activities to include in your gymnastics class:

- Can understand four stations presented at once.
- Play the Memory Game. Create a series of skills and see if they can remember what comes next.
- They should be able to follow patterns easily. Try to teach them to stay at a station with a partner and keep working until it's time to rotate to another station. See if they know where to go next.
- Give tasks involving counting or ask them to do four cartwheels.
- Can perform 3-4 element sequences.



Age 5

Physical Development Milestones

Hops and skips, dresses without help, good balance and smoother muscle action, skates, rides wagon and scooter, prints simple letters, handedness established, ties shoes, girls small muscle development about 1 year ahead of boys.

Age appropriate activities to include in your gymnastics class:

- Balances on one foot on beam. Scale, lunge, knee scale, jumps across beam.
- Jump rope, hoola hoop games.
- Running and jumping with vaulting activities is more coordinated.
- Basic tumbling and strength activities are appropriate. Bridges are introduced.
- Include basic skills, gallop, skip, run and jump with a rhythm.

Emotional Development Milestones

Self-assured, stable, well-adjusted, home-centered, likes to associate with mother, capable of some self-criticism, enjoys responsibility, likes to follow the rules.

Age appropriate activities to include in your gymnastics class:

- Usually has no problem coming in to class and joining a group even if it's a new experience.
- Likes to be watched, give them a turn to show off.
- Can understand a correction. Only give one at a time.
- Can understand safety rules and repeat them.

Social Development Milestones

Highly cooperative play, has special "friends," highly organized, enjoys simple table games requiring turns and observing rules, "school," feels pride and

accomplishment, eager to carry out some responsibility.

Age appropriate activities to include in your gymnastics class:

- Partner games – toss a pit cube back and forth.
- Do a casting game on bars, one child holds a speed bump (or noodle) behind the other who is doing a front support. The casting child tries to kick the noodle with her legs as she casts. They trade places.
- Do partner warm up games such as "Row Your Boat" or "Leap Frog."
- Group relays work well. Keep it cooperative so everyone wins! They enjoy the "Team" atmosphere of a class.

Intellectual Development Milestones

2,072 word vocabulary, tells long tales, carries out direction well, reads own name, counts to 10, asks meaning of words, knows colors, beginning to know difference between fact and fiction-lying, interested in environment, city, stores, etc.

Age appropriate activities to include in your gymnastics class:

- Can understand 4-5 stations presented at once.
- Create letters of their name with a jump rope. Do jump rope games.
- Use pit cubes with numbers on each side to roll like a dice and see how many cartwheels they have to do.
- Sit on a low beam and press up in a tuck and sing the ABC song, or spell your name, or count how old you are.
- Can start to tell the difference if their legs are straight or bent in a cartwheel.

>> By understanding child development you will be able to plan activities that are more appropriate for each age level. The more tasks that a child can complete, the better their self-esteem will become. Take time to understand child development. It will help you produce children that are happy, safe and willing to stay involved with gymnastics for years to come! For more information on child development, age appropriate activities and suggestions for preschool gymnastics class take the Preschool Fundamentals: Theory course. Find information on the course at www.usa-gymnastics.org/education. ✕



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