

Embracing the Joy & Fostering Resilience, One Milestone at a Time

2-5 Years

Age	Joyful Milestone	What ALSO to expect	One Connection Activity	One Self-Care Strategy for Parent	One Age-Appropriate Self-Care Strategy for Child
2 Years	May be able to speak in short two- or three-word sentences!	Uses language to yell "NO MOMMY!"	Making time to play with your child one on one can help prevent meltdowns!	When your child yells back, pause for a moment to take 5 deep breaths before responding.	Validating your child's frustration can help them through these big emotions. Don't ask them to use their words, these are still coming, just model breathing and invite them to join you.
	Your child may have figured out about on/off switches and how to open doors.	You turn around and suddenly your child has opened the door to the outside!	If your child is bored, they may do things to get your attention. Notice this and try engaging them in a song to help ease the transition to a more appropriate activity.	In addition to child-proofing the door knobs and switch panels, notice your own fears and try drinking a glass of ice water.	Have a child who is a little older than yours come over to play so you can see what needs to be childproofed next!
	Your child's motor skills are improving and they can run and maybe even kick a ball!	Don't be surprised if your child suddenly decides to bolt and run away from you!	Be curious about what drove the behavior, whether they wanted to play, get your attention, or something else. Try to replace this with other playful activities before you leave the house and as your day unfolds.	Try walking meditation as you go after our child so you won't over-react when you reach them (breathe in 2,3,4 then breathe out, 2,3,4 with the pace of your steps).	Singing helps to ease stressful situations, allowing you to create that space for any big emotions that arise.
3 Years	Your child may love having conversations with you.	Can get frustrated easily when unable to do what they want.	As your child learns to use language, they want to have conversations! Give them your undivided attention for a few minutes and repeat back what you heard them say, asking them to tell you more.	You may feel stressed, like you do not have time to have a conversation with a 3-year-old! Take a minute to really notice your child, how they look, smell, the sound of their voice. Use your child's voice to ground your senses.	Your child may get upset when you have to get back to the dishes or go to work. Tell them you love talking with them and you can't wait for more stories. For now, would they like to draw a picture of what they were telling you about so they can show it to you later?
	The end of diapers is coming!	Your child refuses to poop on the potty.	Try reading your child a book while they sit on the potty. This will help them relax and may ease the process.	Children often master peeing on the potty before pooping. Notice your feelings around this process and use SUNBEAM.	Make sitting on the potty fun. Have a rolling table with a special, easy to sanitize toy that they enjoy and can only use when on the potty.
	Can start to get dressed on their own!	May refuse help even when things are challenging.	Refusing to cooperate can be a sign that your child wants to connect more. If this is happening regularly, try spending one on one time with your child before (even if it is the night before).	Notice frustration if you are in a rush. Notice your own and your child's frustration. Then, do five big deep breaths.	Children at this age often want a sense of some control. Allow the child to choose their outfit from a set of acceptable possibilities.
4 Years	Know that sadness at daycare drop off will end within 10-15 minutes after you go!	May become very upset at drop off and escalate to a point that leaves you tearful.	Talk about what you look forward to doing together when you see your child next, maybe a tea party or kicking a soccer ball.	Breathe deeply in through your nose and exhale slowly out through your mouth. Know this is temporary and a sign you're doing a good job!	Plan ahead with your child for the big feelings that come up at drop off. Validate your child's feelings and share how you take care of yourself when you feel that way. Invite your child to do the breathing with you.
	May be ready for a half or even full day of preschool!	Restraint collapse is what happens after your child has been holding in their big emotions all day and then they melt down when they see you at pick up.	Offer a hug for your child. If they don't want a hug, create a calm, restful space and stay with them through their big emotional release.	Anticipate the emotional release space your child may need, plan to listen to soothing music and remind yourself it's not because you are doing anything wrong.	Validating your child's feelings can help them begin to understand what's happening which supports accessing healthy coping skills and leads them towards healthy emotional regulation strategies. If possible, try to spend some time outside in nature with your child during this time.
	Likes to "help" with chores.	May make a mess, and undo what you just did.	Pick a specific chore that you will do together and make it playful. Choosing the part your child can do easily will help avoid more mess. Ex: have them take the clothes out of the dryer and put them in piles before you fold them.	It's normal to feel frustrated when your child is learning something and makes a mess. But messes are okay! This is part of learning. Try using your senses if you feel frustrated and do 5-4-3-2-1.	Children often get frustrated when they want to be independent in an activity but end up needing help. Normalize asking for help and if your child gets frustrated, you can have them do 5-4-3-2-1 with you! If that's too much to manage, ask them to count the blue things in the room.
5 Years	Your child's developing independence, meaning they enjoy trying to pour themselves milk or serve themselves food.	Eager to "do it myself" may lead to milk all over the floor and tears that follow.	Let them try again with a similar, perhaps easier, task. Say something like "Ooof, it's hard to pour milk into these tiny cups! Let's take a minute and I'll clean up and you can pour this water into the dog's dish."	Notice frustration if you are in a rush. Notice your own and your child's frustration. Then, do five big deep breaths.	Help your child normalize taking a break. This might sound like "I get how you're sad that the milk spilled. It's normal to feel frustrated when you're learning how to do something. Why don't you try a few big deep breaths and then you can decide if you want to try again."
	Your child is old enough to clean their room!	They may refuse to actually do it.	Making cleaning fun and playful can help. Instead of expecting them to know how to do it, go into your child's room with them and give the toys and items characters and personalities. EX: "Where does Mr. Shoe belong?"	Laugh. Being silly with your child will help you feel more relaxed about the chore and the connection with your child is soothing for both of your nervous systems.	Talk to your child about how they can always ask for help if the task feels like "too much" or they don't know where to start.
	Understands that certain things might be dangerous (like jumping from high places).	Your child may suddenly seem afraid of things they used to do without hesitation.	Talk about what it is that has become scary for your child. Validate the fear and say "I'm going to be right here with you."	Talk to other parents of similar aged kids or your support people. If you are feeling isolated, journal about your parenting journey.	Have your child try box breathing and tell them this is what the Navy SEALs do when they feel afraid on a mission.
5 Years	Your child's ability to draw is expanding. They may love drawing with crayons.	You may find your child's "art" on the living room wall.	Spend time drawing together. You can draw a picture with your child, each contributing different parts.	See if you can find something funny about the situation and don't take it too seriously! Laughter lowers stress.	Ask your child how they were feeling when they drew on the wall. Ran out of paper? Grew bored? Come up with a plan for next time they feel like that, like asking for help or taking a break.
	Your child is increasingly able to engage in pretend play, increasing how long they can play independently for.	Suddenly your child pretends they are a dog and refuses to use language and will only "bark."	Engage in your child's imaginative play as much as you can. Pretend you understand what the barking means and respond with conversational sentences.	Keep things light, telling them to stop might make them keep going for longer. Give yourself permission to hand this activity off to your partner or the child's older sibling.	Children will often do this kind of behavior when they are anxious or need reassurance. When they are back to using words, ask your child how they feel when that happens. See if they might be interested in doing a special activity with you when they feel this way, like a dance party.