

## Confidence Age 3 Summary

---

### Why Confidence?

Three-to-four-year-olds will continue to grow their social and emotional skills primarily through loving interactions with you and your responses to their needs. Your child is now interested in and capable of playing cooperatively with their peers. They realize that new, exciting fantasies await if they can engage others in their play. But, this will require that they take social cues, manage their impulses, and negotiate their way through conflicts.



#### Get Your Child Thinking by Getting Their Input

- Each time there is an opportunity, ask your child, *“How do you feel? How do you think I feel?”*
  - For example, if your child is making a disagreeable facial expression. Say, “Freeze” like a game. Pull out the mirror, ask them to repeat the face, and ask what that facial expression represents. For example, *“Your eyebrows are squished down, and there’s a line in your forehead. Are you feeling mad?”*
  - When reading books, look at the images of children or animals and guess the feelings by asking, *“What do you think this character is feeling? What do you think that character is thinking?”*
- If your child is feeling unsure about how others are feeling -- or buried in their own feelings -- consider asking questions like:
  - *“What do you notice about how they are feeling?”*
  - *“How do you know from their facial expression?”*
  - *“What does their voice sound like?”*
  - *“How are they moving?”*
- Practicing naming feelings will enable your child to identify their own feelings as well as others and seek support when they need it. This can help reduce the length and strength of tantrums or other expressions of upset feelings as your child gains emotional competence.

STEP  
**2**



TEACH

## Teach New Skills

- Read and “pretend play” together.
  - During reading time, select a book with faces to help your child learn to identify the different feelings. Point out how you can tell what each face feels, and practice recreating those cues with your child.
  - After reading a story together, act out the story and use feeling words and expressions to match how the characters are feeling throughout the story. This expands their feelings vocabulary and teaches them how to recognize a wide range of perspectives and feelings they might not encounter in daily interactions with others.
- Share your thoughts and feelings. Talk about how you feel, why you feel that way, and what signs you are giving even when it’s uncomfortable. *“I am frustrated right now because I cannot get the seat belt to work. Can you tell? My face is red and getting hot.”*
- Talk aloud about how you respond to your big feelings: *“I’m going to take a few deep breaths before trying again and see if that helps.”*
- Develop empathetic thinking. In addition to developing these essential skills that lead your children to grow confidence, there are beliefs and attitudes that you can promote to contribute to your child’s thinking. For example, if your child sees their friend crying, you could say:
  - *“It looks like your friend is crying. Do you think they are feeling sad?”*
  - *“What do you think we could do to make them feel better? Do you think we could go over and check on them?”*
- Play act anger. In a calm moment, create a drama in which you feel angry. Describe how you are feeling and why. *“This doll took my toy. I feel so mad. My face feels hot. I feel like I want to growl.”* Then, shift to what could make you feel better. *“How could I help myself feel better?”* you might ask your child. Create ideas and try them out together. *“I could hug a pillow tight. I could draw with crayons or pound on Play-Doh.”* Ensure that the ideas you try are ones you want to teach your child to use when they are truly angry.
- Practice deep breathing. When you are putting your child to bed, give a teddy bear a ride on your tummy as you breathe in and out deeply. Have your child try it.

**Tip:** Use play acting when your child is angry. Gently remind: *“Do you remember how we felt better when we play acted that we were angry?”* If your child can’t recall, show them how you hug a pillow tightly to help yourself feel better. Don’t forget to take deep breaths together.

**STEP  
3**

## Practice to Grow Skills and Develop Habits

- Allow your child the chance to take steps to meet their big challenges, whether they are working on tasting new foods for the first time, exploring the objects in their environment, or attempting to communicate with new words or phrases.
- Be sure to consider how you can create the conditions to support their success like creating a quiet, organized environment with age-appropriate books, toys, or creative supplies.
- Initially, practice may require more teaching, but avoid taking over and doing it for your child.

**STEP  
4**

## Support Your Child's Development and Success

- Use “Show me...” statements with a positive tone and body language to express excitement and curiosity. Ask them to demonstrate how they can work hard toward a goal. When a child learns a new skill, they are eager to show it off! *“Show me that you can tell me what you are feeling.”*
- Don’t move on quickly if your child shows interest in trying something new. Children often need more time to stick with a challenge or pursue a goal. Be sure to wait long enough for your child to show you they are competent. Your waiting could make all the difference in whether they can gain skills over time.
- Recognize effort by using “I notice...” statements like: *“I noticed how you squeezed your pillow as we practiced.”*
- On days with extra challenges, when you can see your child is scared of new people or situations, offer confidence in your child’s ability to face the new. In a gentle, non-public way, whisper in your child’s ear, *“Remember how you enjoyed meeting my friend Susie? Anna is kind, too. You might enjoy meeting her today.”*
- Actively reflect on how your child is feeling when approaching challenges. You can offer reflections like:
  - *“You seem worried about going into this new store. I’ll hold your hand so you feel more confident.”* Offering comfort when facing new situations can help your child gain a sense of security and face them rather than backing away.
  - You can also offer comfort items to help your child face new challenges. *“Would your bear help you feel better?”*
- Take steps to support your child if they experience separation anxiety. Be sure you are placing your child in the care of someone you trust so that you feel safe leaving your child in that person’s care. Give your child something of yours (blanket, scarf) to have while you’re gone. Express your love and explain to them when you’ll return in terms of activities: *“You’ll finish lunch, and then I’ll be back!”* Leave without lingering, but don’t sneak out.

**Tip:** Separation anxiety, though developmentally normal, can be stressful for both parent and child. Take deep breaths and time to calm down after leaving your child in caring hands.



## Recognize Efforts

- Recognize and call out when all is going well. If your child cried when you had to leave the playground yesterday but seems perfectly content today, notice their newfound comfort. *"I notice you are OK as we leave the playground today. That's very helpful!"*
- Recognize small steps along the way. For example, you don't have to wait until your three-year-old can sleep through the night to recognize they are doing better at their sleep routine. Find small ways your child is making an effort and let them know you see them. *"You stayed in your bed. I like seeing that!"*
- Build celebrations into your everyday routines. Promote joy and happiness by laughing, singing, dancing, hugging, and snuggling to appreciate one another.

Recommended Citation: Center for Health and Safety Culture. (2024). *Confidence Age 3 Summary*. Retrieved from <https://www.ToolsforYourChildsSuccess.org>

This content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Tools for Your Child's Success communities, financial supporters, contributors, SAMHSA, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.