



HABITS *for* **HEALTHY KIDS**

Features

Information
for parents
of four-year-olds

Fun colourful pictures
for parents and
children to share

Poster and stickers
for children to
help them learn



Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing



CSIRO

Acknowledgements



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Get Set 4 Life - habits for healthy kids

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The purpose of ‘Get Set 4 Life – Habits for Healthy Kids’ is to provide general non-commercial information to parents of four-year-old children to assist in developing healthy habits. If your four-year-old has particular medical or nutritional conditions the content may not be suitable for their individual circumstances. In this case, you should seek professional medical advice.

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How to use this guide

You can use this guide in a number of ways. It includes

- Advice to parents about a range of topics such as play and learning, healthy eating, sleep, and speech and language.
- Pictures that you can use to teach your child healthy habits in a fun way.
- A poster that shows your child how to make healthy habits a part of every day.
- Stickers to encourage your child along the way.
- Sources of further information and support.

At the start of each topic you will find pictures showing healthy habits. The pictures have simple captions that you could read to your child.

There are also some activity ideas. These bits of the guide are for you and your child to look at and talk about together. This is followed by more detailed information for parents.

Enjoy using this guide with your child.

Introduction

All parents want their children to be happy and healthy and to have the best possible start to life. Being four is a very exciting time for your child. Soon they will be getting ready to take a major step – going to school!

You can help your child get ready for school now by setting up healthy habits such as eating breakfast, getting a good night's sleep and learning how to feel good about themselves. These habits will also help set your child up for a healthy life.

“Get Set 4 Life –Habits for Healthy Kids”

is an easy-to-read guide about how you can help your child set up healthy habits. It doesn't have all the answers but it does provide you with lots of practical tips and advice.

In some areas it is likely to reassure you that you are already on the right track. If you have any concerns after reading this guide, speak with your doctor or community health nurse.

Meet the characters

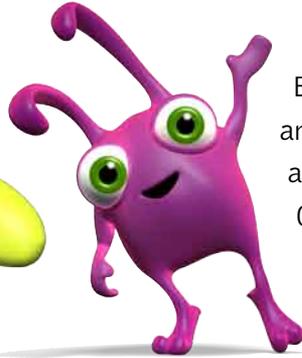
Meet Stretch, Tok, Eko and Biggs.

These characters are used in this guide to show what four-year-olds can do and how different they can be.



Stretch

Is a bit like a parent, relative, teacher or friend, showing the others how to be happy and healthy.



Biggs

Biggs loves to tell stories and asks endless questions about all sorts of things. Occasionally Biggs finds others frustrating because they don't do things the same way.



Tok

Riding bikes with friends is Tok's favourite way to play outdoors. Bedtime is a bit of a challenge but Tok is getting better at following a bedtime routine.



Eko

Eko loves to learn, especially sitting down quietly to draw or read. Trying new foods is sometimes scary. Eko needs lots of encouragement to take the first step.

What is a four-year-old like?

Four-year-olds are learning so much about the world and will often surprise you with the things they know. They love exploring, using their imagination, playing with friends and doing things with you. They are often full of energy and curiosity, but can still find the world overwhelming and scary at times.

Your four-year-old needs lots of opportunities to explore and learn but they still need you to set boundaries to keep them safe and show them what to do.

This information is a guide to what four-year-old children are like. Remember that all children develop at different rates and in different ways.

Behaviour and feelings

- Becoming more cooperative but may sometimes find it hard to follow rules.
- Developing independence in areas such as toileting, dressing and eating.
- Can quickly switch from feeling confident to unsafe or upset.
- Feels good about things they have done well.
- Learning how to express some emotions, but there will still be some tantrums!
- Curious about their bodies.
- Feeling frustrated when they can't do everything they try.



See [Parenting](#) for ideas about managing behaviour and [Emotional Health](#) for more about coping with feelings.

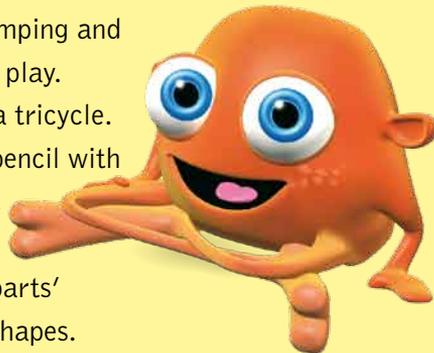
Getting along with others

- Starting to cooperate with other children but still learning to share and take turns.
- Playing games with simple rules and explaining some rules.
- Beginning to understand social “rules” for how people interact with each other.
- Learning to understand other people’s feelings but can be bossy.
- May have imaginary playmates.
- May say sorry if they have done something wrong.
- Can separate from parents more easily.

See *Emotional Health* for more information about social skills

Using their bodies

- Becoming more coordinated in running, climbing, jumping and other ‘*large-muscle*’ play.
- Riding and steering a tricycle.
- Correctly holding a pencil with their preferred hand, drawing a simple person with 3 or 4 ‘parts’ and copying simple shapes.
- Cutting along a line with scissors.



Four-year-olds are gaining confidence in their physical abilities. They might be too bold or a little timid. They need lots of opportunities to practice these skills and encouragement from grown ups (see *Play and Learning* for activity ideas).

Learning and understanding

- Understanding many new ideas such as size, weight, numbers, colours, position and time of day.
- Becoming a more rational thinker and understanding the idea of consequences.
- Counting to 20 and copying their name.
- Recognising some words, letters and numbers.
- Persisting with difficult tasks.
- Generally speaking clearly and using complete sentences.
- Listening attentively, understanding and answering simple questions or following simple instructions.
- Likes telling silly jokes and perhaps saying rude words.

See *Speech and Language* for more about what you can do to encourage your child’s speech.

If your child’s development is very different from other children the same age and you’re concerned, discuss with your doctor.



Parenting a four-year-old

Parenting a preschooler can be rewarding, entertaining, exhausting, and frustrating – all in the same day! Your child may appear full of energy and confidence but they still need boundaries and structure. While there is no one way to parent, there are some things that will make it easier.

Some things to remember:

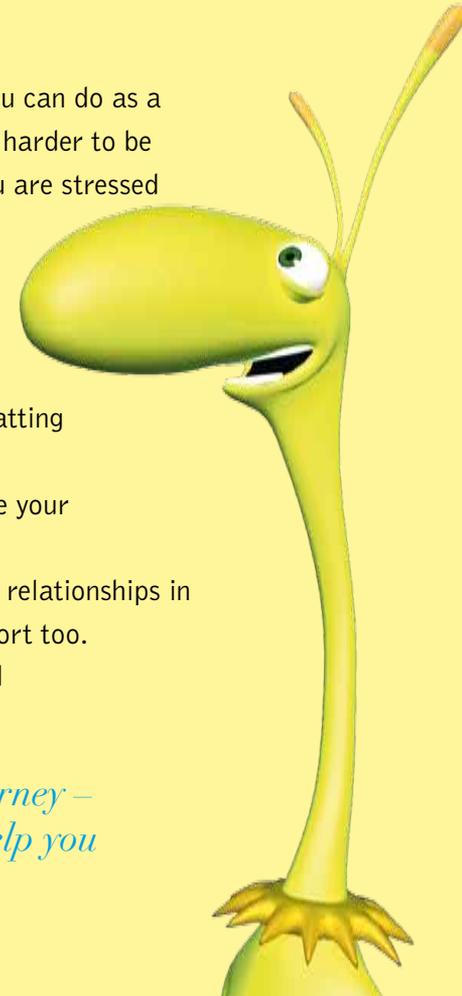
- *ALL parents find it difficult at times.*
- *Successes and mistakes are part of being a parent.*
- *Don't be too hard on yourself. Congratulate yourself on the things that you are doing well.*

Looking after yourself

One of the most important things you can do as a parent is to look after yourself. It is harder to be a positive and effective parent if you are stressed or tired, anxious or depressed.

- Regularly do things that make **you** feel good. Try simple things like playing your favourite music, reading a magazine or chatting with a friend.
- Eat well and be active to improve your energy levels and lift your mood.
- Take care of the other important relationships in your life. You need love and support too.
- Ask for help when you need it and accept help when it is offered.

Parenting is a really long journey – taking care of yourself will help you to make the distance.



Copycats

Children at this age love to copy.

Use this to your advantage.

If you lead a healthy, active lifestyle your child is more likely to take on this lifestyle too.

Leading by example

Four-year-olds watch everything you do and actually want to do what you do. Some things your child learns from you:

- **How you interact with others** – e.g. using manners, the way you talk with your partner and friends.
- **Everyday habits** – e.g. washing your hands before dinner, wearing a hat outside, what to eat for snacks.
- **Your attitudes** – e.g. towards trying new foods or how you feel about your body.
- **Your interests** – e.g. whether you enjoy reading, playing sport, cooking.

Connecting and Communicating

Children need to know that they are loved and cared for by their parents.

- **Be available** – When your child wants to talk to you or show you something, try to give them your undivided attention for a short time.
- **Be warm and affectionate** – Try to give your child some hugs, cuddles, kisses or tickles every day and tell them how much they mean to you.
- **Be a good communicator** – This is all about the way you talk to and listen to your child.
 - Look at your child when they are talking to you.
 - Practice active listening (see box).
 - When asking your child to do something make your instructions **simple** and **clear**.

Active listening

Pay close attention to what your child is saying, and then repeat back what they said and how they are feeling. This can really help preschoolers avoid getting frustrated.

Routine

No matter what your parenting style, having some sort of routine helps children of this age feel *safe* and *secure*. Routines are great for letting your child know what is coming next, what things are important in your family, and they help children learn what is expected of them.

Routines are also a great way of teaching your children healthy habits and helping the habits become automatic.

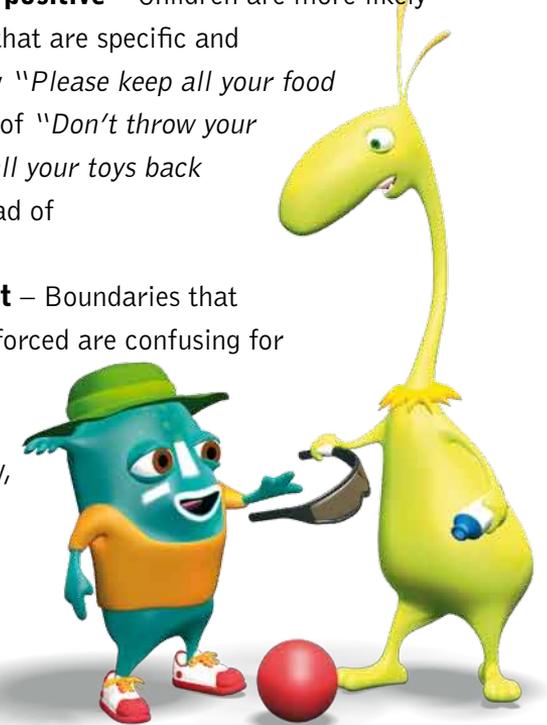
Check out '[Pulling it all together](#)' for more about routines.



Clear and Consistent Boundaries

Boundaries and rules help children learn what is expected of them and help keep your child safe. Some points to consider when setting boundaries:

- **Not too many** – Before you set a boundary ask yourself “*How important is this?*” and “*Am I willing to follow through if my child oversteps the mark?*” Stick to the issues that you really believe are important.
- **Make them clear and positive** – Children are more likely to stick to boundaries that are specific and easy to understand (try “*Please keep all your food on your plate*” instead of “*Don’t throw your food*” or “*Please put all your toys back into the toy box*” instead of “*Tidy your room*”).
- **Make them consistent** – Boundaries that are not consistently enforced are confusing for children. If possible, boundaries should not change from day to day, from setting to setting or from one parent to the other.



Routines can also be good for parents. When things are busy, having a routine can help you feel more in control and nag less! As your child gets more experienced at following a routine, you will need to give fewer instructions because each step of the routine will prompt the next step.

Encouraging desirable behaviour

It is common to focus on children's "bad" behaviours. Focusing more on the "good" will mean you will see more of it! Try these:

- **Show them how it is done** – Model the behaviours you want to see (e.g. eating a variety of foods). Children are more likely to do things they have seen other people doing.
- **Reduce temptation** – Avoid situations that might cause a problem. For example, if having lollies in the pantry causes pestering and tantrums, don't keep lollies in the house.
- **Plan and Prepare** – Identify the times that most often lead to challenging behaviour (e.g. getting dressed in the morning) and prepare for these situations as best you can (e.g. laying the clothes out the night before, or laying out two outfits so that your child can choose).
- **Keep them busy** – Providing children with things to do will mean less of the "bad" behaviour (see '*Play and Learning*' for ideas).
- **Praise** – When you see your child behaving in a way you like, give them some descriptive praise (see box).

Descriptive praise

When you praise your child, describe what it is that you like.

Describing the behaviour, "Sophie I really like how you put your dirty clothes in the laundry basket after your bath", works better than describing your child, "Sophie you are fantastic".

This way your child knows exactly what you are pleased about, making it more likely they will do it again.

Consequences

Consequences help teach children what not to do. If you are consistently modelling and encouraging desirable behaviour, you won't need to use consequences so often. Some tips for effective consequences:

- **Timing** – Give the consequence as soon as possible after the behaviour occurs.
- **Consistency** – By both parents and on all occasions.
- **Don't be mean** – The aim is to teach rather than to punish. Choose consequences that relate to the situation. They don't need to be mean or long to be effective – e.g. it is reasonable to remove a toy that is being fought over for five minutes.

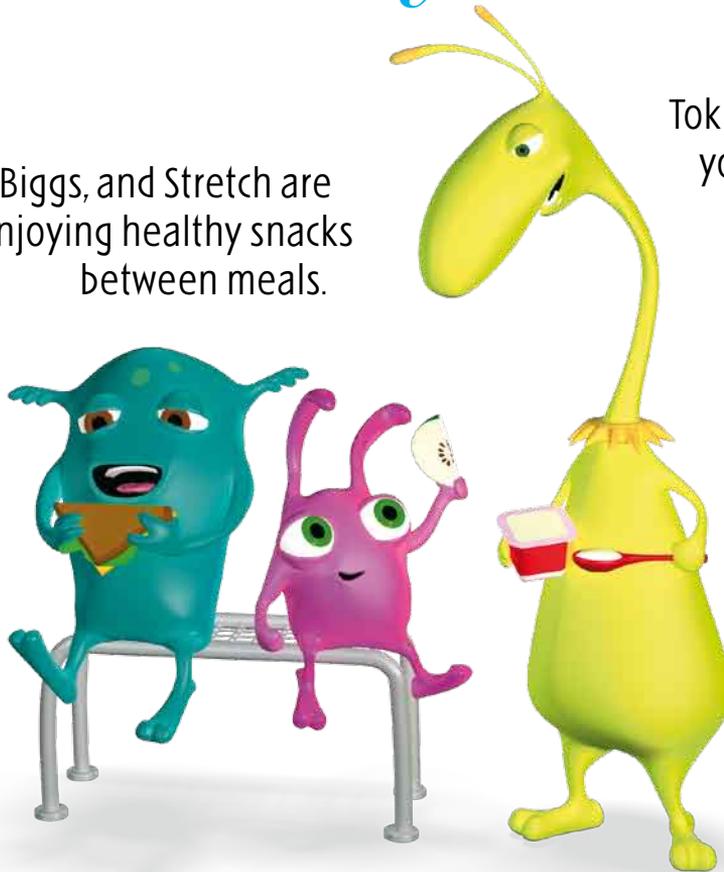
If you feel overwhelmed or like you are not coping, talk to your doctor. For more information about parenting, visit the Raising Children Network www.raisingchildren.net.au

Healthy Eating



Tok knows that breakfast gives you the best start to the day.

Eko, Biggs, and Stretch are enjoying healthy snacks between meals.



Biggs knows that tap water is the best drink when you are thirsty.

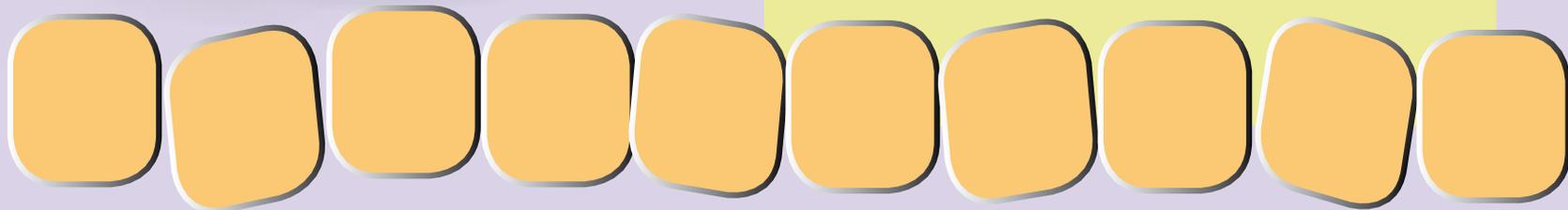


Eko knows
to stop eating
when your
tummy is full.

Eko is
being brave
and trying
something new.



Learning to eat a new food takes time. Choose a food your child is not so keen on at the moment. Let them put a mark (e.g., sticker, stamp or tick) on the chart every time they have a little taste (for some tips read '*Learning to like new foods*' on page 13).



Tasting New Foods Chart

Healthy Eating

"She picks out anything green" "He simply refuses to try new foods"

Sound familiar? Food is a common frustration for parents of four-year-olds. At this age, children are still learning about food, tastes, textures, using cutlery, table manners and eating routines. Food is one way they express their new found independence. You can help your child through this phase by making healthy foods available at regular meal and snack times, setting an example and keeping meals relaxed.

Phrases like 'Good girl for eating everything' are not helpful because they teach your child to clean their plate or continue to eat when full. Many adults find it hard to break this habit, partly because they were told as a child to finish everything on their plate.

Appetite

It is common for healthy children to be very hungry some days and not eat much on other days. It is normal that a child's appetite varies from meal to meal and day to day. When children are offered nutritious food they are actually very good at knowing how much they need to eat.

Try to share mealtime decisions with your child.

- You decide **what** healthy meals and snacks are offered and **when**.
- Your child decides **if** they eat, **what** parts of the meal they eat and **when they've had enough**.
- Remove leftovers without a fuss.
- Avoid offering alternative foods if your child doesn't eat much.
- Provide an end to the meal such as leaving the table. This will help your child learn that eating has finished until the next meal or snack.

Learning to like new foods

Children naturally like sweet and salty foods.

They need to learn to like many tastes and flavours – particularly vegetables. Here are some things you can do to help your child enjoy a variety of foods:

- Aim to provide your four-year-old the same meal as the family.
- Show them that you enjoy eating the meal. They need to see other people (especially you) eating a food before trying it themselves.
- Try serving a new food with something familiar, e.g. sweet potato (new) with potato (familiar).
- Praise your child when they try a new food, even if only a mouthful *“It’s great that you tried the zucchini”*.
- Involve your child in food preparation, for example washing vegetables or collecting ingredients from the cupboard. Being familiar with food increases the chance they will taste it.

Children may need to be served a food many times before they will taste it. **THEN** they may need to taste it 10 times or more before they actually like it. So be patient and keep offering – it only needs to be a small amount.

Encourage your child to taste a food without making a big deal. *“Let’s have a small taste together”* if your child refuses try saying *“OK, maybe next time”*.

The problem with food bribes

“Finish your pumpkin, then you can have dessert.” Many parents say things like this not realising that it may make children further dislike pumpkin and like dessert even more. While it’s tempting to use bribes in the short-term, praise and patience can be better in the long run.

Mealtime frustrations

Many parents find dinner time stressful.

To lighten the mood:

- Aim to serve the same meal for the whole family.
- Eat together at the table as often as possible. Children’s bedtimes may mean serving dinner early.
- Remove distractions like TVs and toys.
- Avoid talking about what and how much your child is eating. Try these topics instead:
 - Everyone tell something about their day.
 - Share something funny you saw today.



Nutritious foods

Your child needs nutritious foods for growing and learning

Use foods from these groups to create a variety of tasty, healthy meals and snacks.

	How much a day?	Tip
Fruit and Vegetables	1-2 medium pieces of fruit. 2-4 different vegetables each about the size of their fist.	Fresh, canned and frozen are all good options.
Breads, cereals, rice, pasta, noodles	3-4 serves. For example: Breakfast: wholegrain cereal. Lunch: wholemeal sandwich. Dinner: noodles (1 cup). Snack: wholemeal crumpet.	Introduce wholegrain and wholemeal choices. They provide more fibre, vitamins and minerals.
Meat and protein foods	One serve the size of your child's palm.	Choose lean meat, skinless chicken, eggs, fish and legumes (like baked beans or lentils).
Dairy	2-3 serves of dairy foods. 1 serve = 1 cup milk (250ml), 200g yoghurt or custard, 2 slices cheese or 1 cup calcium fortified soy drink.	Choose reduced-fat milk and dairy products. If you choose soy milk make sure it is calcium enriched.
Healthy fats	Choose margarine instead of butter as a spread and vegetable oil for cooking. Avocado and fish also contain healthy fats.	Limit cakes, biscuits, pastries and fried foods. They are 'sometimes' foods and not for everyday.

Why reduced-fat dairy? Low or reduced-fat dairy foods provide as much calcium, vitamins and protein as full-fat choices.

Switch to reduced-fat dairy foods for children over the age of two years.

Water

Water is the best drink to quench thirst.

Encourage your child to drink tap water:

- Keep tap water in the fridge, use ice cubes, straws or a slice of orange to add interest.
- Serve tap water with meals and snacks.
- Take a bottle of tap water when you go out.
- Limit fruit juice to 1/2 cup a day (125ml) and avoid sugary and fizzy drinks.

Too much juice, cordial or soft drinks leads to tooth decay. 'Diet' soft drinks can also damage tooth enamel.

'Sometimes' foods

Some processed foods like potato chips, lollies, soft drinks and some take-aways should be limited to no more than once or twice a week.

Keep serves small and avoid offering a 'sometimes' food "just so he eats something!"

See next column for healthy snack ideas.

To manage children nagging for 'sometimes' foods have clear rules about when they can be eaten.

Getting into a routine

A regular meal pattern will help your child form healthy eating habits. Try to serve meals and snacks around the same time each day. A break between eating gives the body a chance to feel hungry. It is also good for teeth.

Breakfast - Mornings can be busy, but breakfast is essential. Toast and cereal are quick and easy to prepare.

Lunch - Sandwiches are popular, inexpensive and easy. Frequently offering the same thing for lunch is fine if it's healthy, like a wholemeal sandwich with margarine, reduced-fat cheese and grated carrot.

Dinner - Simple meals can be nutritious. Aim for a plate that is about half vegetables, one quarter meat/protein and one quarter rice, noodles or other grain food. Sliced fruit, reduced-fat yoghurt or custard are healthy choices if you serve dessert.

Snacks - One scheduled nutritious snack between each meal is better than grazing. Stick to two or three small snacks over the day. Fruit, reduced-fat yoghurt or cheese, vegetable sticks and wholemeal toast or crackers are good options.

If you are concerned about your child's eating, speak with your doctor. The Dietitians Association of Australia website (www.daa.asn.au) contains information and fact sheets and will help you locate an Accredited Practising Dietitian for expert advice.

It's great to play
in different ways

Eko and Biggs
enjoy being active
EVERY DAY.



Play and Learning



*Some questions
you can ask your child*

How do you like to be active?

What is something fun to play outside?

What is your favourite game?

If you could play dress-ups, what would you be?



Play and Learning

Play is how your child learns.

The best thing you can do to help your child learn is to spend time with them and encourage them to play in lots of different ways. Play is most valuable when your child gets to 'make it up'. Let their imagination go!

Your four-year-old needs to do some active play every day. Head outside at every opportunity to encourage your child to be active.

Active Play

Why?

Body coordination, balance, posture and flexibility.

Healthy heart and lungs.

Fun and relaxation.

Confidence in physical abilities.

Increased self esteem.

Learning to play with others and make friends.

Getting started

Provide lots of opportunities for your child to be active everyday.

Focus on activities that are fun.

Provide a safe, encouraging, non-competitive environment.

Be active yourself!

Limit time in front of the TV.

Try these ideas

Inside

- Dancing to music.
- Simon says.
- Balloon games.
- Helping around the house.

Outside

- Riding a bike.
- Ball and bat play.
- Playing at the park.
- Obstacle courses.
- Games that include rolling, skipping, hopping or chasing.
- Walk or ride to get to and from places.

What about TV? TV and electronic games are the biggest barriers to your child being active. Sitting still for a long time can mean they're not getting the active play they need. These habits can form at an early age, so limit your child's TV and computer use.

Making Play

Why?

Fine motor coordination.

Creativity.

Artistic techniques.

Getting started

A 'useful' box filled with bits and pieces from around the house like old wrapping paper, magazines, cereal boxes, string, buttons, feathers, ribbon, paper plates, crayons, pencils, chalk, stamps.

Places to display their creations.

Try these ideas

- Make a birthday card or decorate a place-card for the dinner table.
- Cut out pictures from the newspaper and count how many 'red things' you can find?
- Make an alphabet book - cut out letters of the alphabet and pictures that start with each letter.
- Go for a walk and pick up items that you find. Sort these into groups and put in a box.



Words and Music Play

Why?

Language skills.

Rhythm and coordination.

Getting started

Story books.

Books with songs, rhymes.

Musical instruments (rice in a bottle).

Try these ideas

- Child "reads" a story to her toys or dolls (it's okay to make up the story).
- Act out songs and nursery rhymes.
- Dancing.
- Musical games.
- Collect objects to make sounds (sticks, pebbles, leaves).

Messy Play

Why?

Concepts like texture, volume, and size.

Making sense of their surroundings.

How to relax and express their feelings.

Getting started

Rice, water and sand.

Paint.

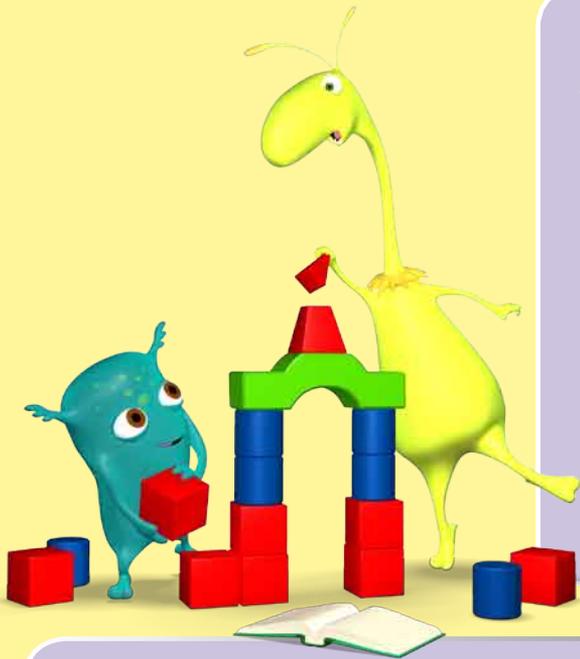
Bubbles (a little detergent and water, bubble wand).

Play dough.

Some "messy play" clothes.

Try these ideas

- Put rice in a tray and practice writing letters, numbers and drawing shapes.
- Finger painting.
- Smelling games using spices or things from the garden.
- Make shapes with play-dough.
- Play in puddles (rug up with some warm clothes!).



Thinking Play

Why?

Letters, words and numbers.

Problem solving.

How to cooperate, wait your turn, and follow rules.

Getting started

Cards games.

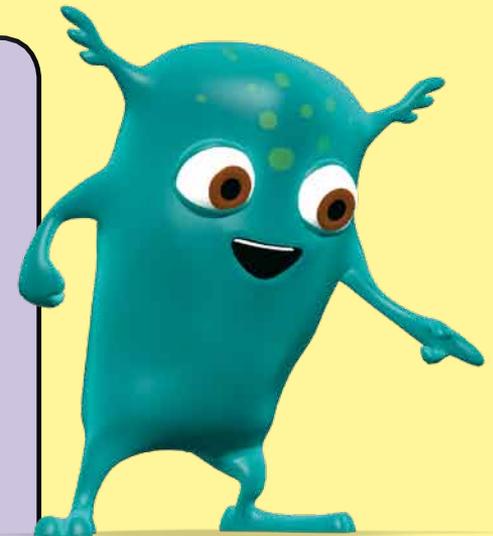
Board games.

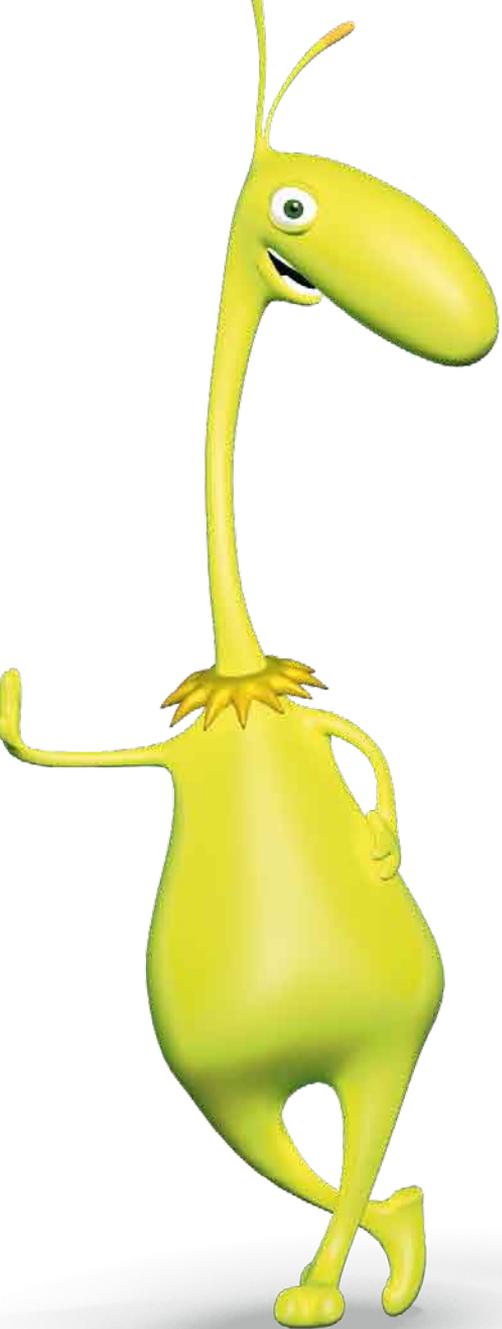
Puzzles.

Blocks and parts that connect together.

Try these ideas

- Sort objects into categories (putting books onto bookshelf, cars into the shoe box, and soft toys in the basket).
- What's missing? Choose some objects. Cover them up and take one away. Child has to guess what's missing?
- Borrow puzzles and games from your local library.
- Let your child make up a game and their own rules.





Pretend Play

Why?

Imagination.

Learning about how people act in different situations.

Practice at dressing themselves, doing zips, buttons and laces.

Expressing ideas, thoughts and feelings.

Getting started

A 'dress-up' box filled with old clothes and accessories.

Blankets and sheets.

Dolls and soft toys.

Aprons, wooden spoons
plastic tongs, plastic bowls.

Plastic containers, egg cartons
and cereal boxes.

Try these ideas

- Role playing.
- Build a cubby house out of sheets.
- Act out a story using sock puppets.
- Put on a performance.

Learning without even realising:

■ **Sorting socks** – finding pairs.

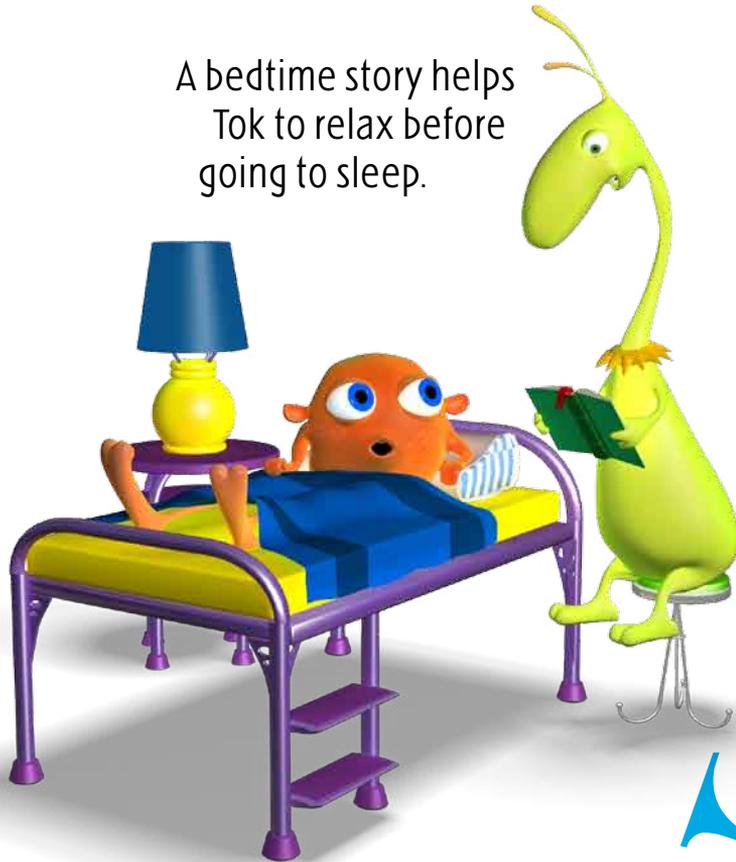
■ **Driving or walking games** – what colour cars can you see, what sounds can you hear, I-spy.

■ **Putting the groceries away** – what items need to be kept cold?

■ **How many different walks can you do?**
E.g. backwards, giant steps, like an elephant.

If you are concerned about aspects of your child's play (e.g. overly repetitive play or lack of pretend play) discuss your concerns with your doctor.

A bedtime story helps
Tok to relax before
going to sleep.



A consistent bedtime routine
can help children to get to sleep.
You can use the poster to teach
your child to follow a routine.

Sleep



Sleep

Sleep is extremely important for children's health, growth and development. The best tip for establishing good sleeping habits in your child is to follow the same routine every night. This will make it easier for your child to relax, fall asleep and sleep through the night.

Give a warning to let your child know that bedtime is coming e.g. *"One more puzzle and then it is time to get ready for bed"* and make sure you follow through.

- Have a regular bedtime.
- Check out your child's sleeping environment. It should be quiet, reasonably dark, a comfortable temperature and without a TV.
- Have a 'wind down' time before bed. Reading or telling stories about your day are good relaxing activities before going to sleep.
- Avoid exciting or stimulating activities before bed. Wrestling, watching TV and computer games will make it harder for your child to relax and go to sleep.

Tip: *do your 'wind down' activities in the room where your child is going to sleep. This way your child learns to associate the positive experiences of being read to or sharing daily experiences with going to sleep.*

While children will vary in the amount of sleep they need, most four-year-olds need around 10-12 hours of sleep each night.

To work out an appropriate bedtime for your child - you might need to work out what time your child needs to wake up in the morning in order to get to kindergarten or childcare on time and then count back between 10 and 12 hours.

Did you know? *Children who get enough sleep at night will function better during the day; they may be happier and may display fewer behaviour problems.*

“I don’t want to go to bed”...

“Just one more story?”...

“I just have to tell you something.”...

Bedwetting is still very common at this age.

Bedwetting is nobody’s fault and is something that most children will grow out of.

Bedtime battles

It is common for children of this age to resist going to bed. Your child may go through a stage of getting up after you have said goodnight or calling out for you from bed. Waking during the night is also common. Some tips:

- Have a consistent, calming bedtime routine.
- After your ‘wind down’ time, tuck your child into their bed, making sure they have all that they need (have been to the toilet, had a drink, are warm and comfortable, have had kisses and cuddles).
- If your child gets out of bed, calmly return them. The key is to make it brief and low-key. If they are worried or upset, remind them that they are safe and that you are nearby. Repeat this calmly until they don’t get up again.

- Night awakenings can be handled similarly. If they call out, you could go to your child and reassure them that everything is alright and say something like **“back to sleep now”**. If your child comes into your room you can lead them back to their bed and resettle them there.

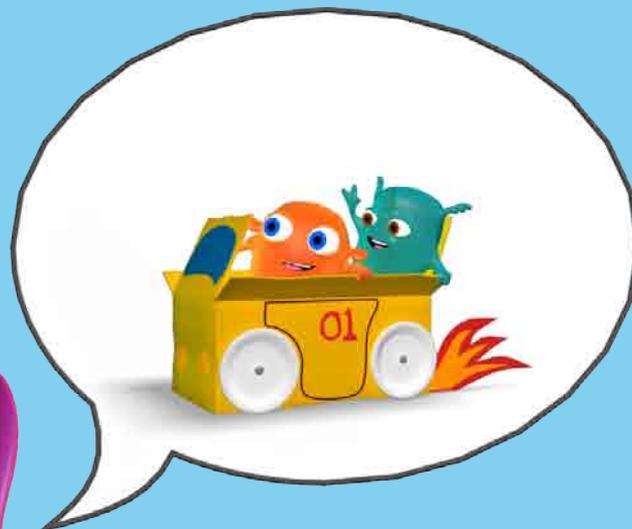
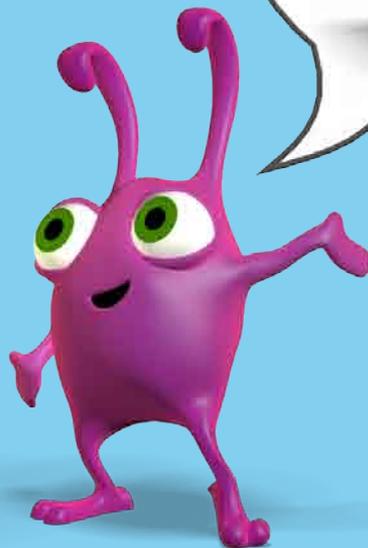
With perseverance and a consistent and calm approach, your child will eventually learn to sleep independently.

If you have concerns about your child’s sleep (especially if they appear to have difficulty breathing while sleeping), speak with your doctor.



Speech & Language

Talking is great for encouraging your child's language. Ask your child to tell a story about this picture. Prompt by asking questions about what Tok and Eko are doing and where they might be going.



Biggs loves
telling Stretch
stories.

Speech and Language

Did you know?
*The more words your child hears,
the more words they learn.*

You might feel that your four-year-old talks non-stop! While this can be tiring, this is your child's way of practising their communication skills.

While all children develop at different rates, your four-year-old is probably:

- Speaking clearly enough to be able to be understood by most people but some sounds may still be unclear.
- Speaking in complex sentences, such as sentences that include 'because' or 'but'.
- Telling you some real and some made up stories.
- Asking endless questions *"Why is the sky blue?"* *"Why am I a boy?"*
- Able to have a simple two-way conversation.

What you can do to help your child's speech and language development:

TALK to your child:

- Tell them things about what you are doing.
- Encourage your child to talk to you by asking open ended questions *"How come....?"* *"Why do you think"*
- If you speak more than one language, use the one you speak best with your child.

LISTEN with interest when your child is talking:

- Allow time for your child to get out what they are trying to say. Don't interrupt or finish what your child is trying to say.
- Try not to correct your child's speech while they are talking, but when you repeat back what you heard, say it correctly. For instance, your child says *"I ran down the hill and I falled down"* you could say *"Oh, you fell down, did you hurt anything?"*

READ to your child

- Let your child lead the story time by picking the book, even if they want to read the same book or certain bits over.
- Engage your child by asking questions as you read *"What do you think Jack is doing in this picture?"* or encouraging them to join in familiar parts of the story.



TIPS about books:

- Your local library will have a great range of children's books.
- Books make great presents and rewards.
- Garage sales and markets have cheap children's books.

Why reading is so important?

Reading is an essential tool for language development. It helps children learn about the world, develop imagination and see how others deal with problems or fears.

Answering questions

Although four-year-olds' curiosity and "Why" questions can be tiring, try your best to answer questions simply. You can sometimes prevent your child always asking "Why?" by giving them an explanation when speaking: "I would like you to put on your jacket before we go to the park because it is cold today".

Other activities to help speech and language development:

- Singing songs – borrow a CD from your local library or make up your own!
- Rhyming games and riddles – "*What rhymes with sky?*"
- Make up a story together – you could start telling a story and then ask your child to finish it.

Hearing is essential for children to develop their communication skills. Problems with hearing can interfere with a child's speech and can also affect their ability to learn.

Seek further help if you are concerned about any of the following:

- Your child's hearing.
- Your child speaks only in short sentences.
- Other adults and children have difficulty understanding your child's speech.
- Your child is stuttering.
- Your child does not seem to understand or respond to simple instructions.

If you have any concerns about your child's hearing, speech or language, speak with your doctor or health professional. Speech Pathology Australia www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au can help you find speech pathology services in your area.

Sometimes I feel...



Happy



Sad

Emotional

Being able to name and show feelings will help your child to deal with them. Get your child to point to the character who is feeling happy, sad, cross, and scared. Ask your child to tell you times they have felt happy, sad, cross and scared.

Cross



Scared



Health

Emotional Health

Above all, your child needs to feel loved, safe and secure in their environment.

Your four-year-old is still learning a lot about themselves, especially how to cope with their feelings, and how to approach problems. These are the building blocks for positive self-esteem and resilience.

Building Self-esteem

When children feel good about themselves they are more likely to approach tasks in a positive way and learn to accept disappointments.

To help build positive self-esteem:

- Show an interest in what your child is doing and learning. Provide encouragement and praise for things they have done well and also for trying new things.
- Avoid jumping in to do things for them and introduce simple tasks they can do to help you.
- Have special family rituals or routines (e.g. reading to your child before bed).

Make sure the positive things that you say to your child far outnumber the negative things you say. Try thinking about the things you like about your child. What special qualities does your child have?

Too much choice can be overwhelming for children at this age.

Only give your child a choice if you are happy with the options. For example, “What would you like to eat?” is too much choice for a four-year-old and is probably going to result in answers you are not happy with. A better option might be “Would you like some grapes or some yoghurt?”



Learning about and coping with feelings

Learning how to cope with frustration, anger or sadness is an important life-long skill. To help build good coping skills:

- Help your child to name their feelings (“*I can see you frowning, you must be feeling cross right now*”).
- Provide comfort and reassurance when your child is feeling overwhelmed.
- When things don’t quite work out, help your child to talk about how this makes them feel and to think of some possible solutions.
- Show them appropriate ways to express their emotions (“*You’re feeling cross that the TV was turned off, let’s go outside and play with your ball*”).



How can I teach my child about feelings?

Toys, puppets, and picture books are a great way to talk about feelings and how people cope in different situations.

Some feeling words to use with your child are happy, sad, cross, and scared.

Developing Social Skills

Making friends involves learning many new skills (e.g. how to join a group, to listen and be understood, to share / take turns / follow rules, and to be kind and helpful). Your child needs to see what these skills look like and have chances to practise them.

- Encourage them to test out the skills they are learning at home and at family outings.
- Praise the positive behaviours that you see (e.g. “*Wow, that was great to let Lily have a turn*”).
- Make sure they have plenty of opportunities to play with children their age.

If your child has difficulty getting along with others (e.g. is overly withdrawn or boisterous), separating from you or appears particularly anxious, speak with your doctor.

Children's *Growth*



Tok, Eko and Biggs know
that eating healthy foods and
being active EVERY DAY
helps them grow!





Four-year-olds are learning a lot about their body. Ask your child to show you some things that they can do. They could try:

- Making a funny face
- Balancing on one leg
- Somersaults
- Walking along a pretend tightrope
- Making animal shapes with their body (e.g. cat, giraffe, snake)

Our bodies are very clever. Look what we can do!

Children's growth

Growth is a good indicator of your child's health and wellbeing. Growth describes children's increase in body size including height and weight as they get older.

For the next few years your four-year-old will grow more slowly compared to when they were a baby.

Being aware of how your child is growing is important. Being underweight or overweight can put your child's health at risk, so keep both possibilities in mind.

It can be hard to recognize your child is overweight because we are surrounded by big adults and big children. Comparing your child to their friends may not be helpful (see *Keeping Track*).

Being aware of how your child is growing is important. Being underweight or overweight can put your child's health at risk.

Keeping Track

Growth charts are the best way to keep track of your child's growth. Healthy children come in all different shapes and sizes.

Regardless of their size, growth should follow a predictable path. You can check this by recording their height and weight over time using growth charts. A shift up or down from the line your child has been following is reason to take a closer look.

*(see *Taking a closer look*).*

Your doctor can help you keep track of your child's growth. Ask your doctor to check your child's growth when you see them. Do this a few times a year. If you are unsure of how to use growth charts speak to your doctor.

Taking a closer look

Support your child's growth by providing healthy foods and plenty of opportunities for active play.

Children's growth and weight are mainly influenced by:

- The food and drinks they eat and drink.
- The amount of activity they do.

Helping your child to set up healthy eating (see *Healthy Eating*) and activity habits (see *Play and Learning*) are important for normal growth and a healthy weight. The habits they develop now may influence their future health.



Talking about weight

Weight is a sensitive issue for parents and children, even as young as four years old. Focus on the things that influence weight, not weight itself.

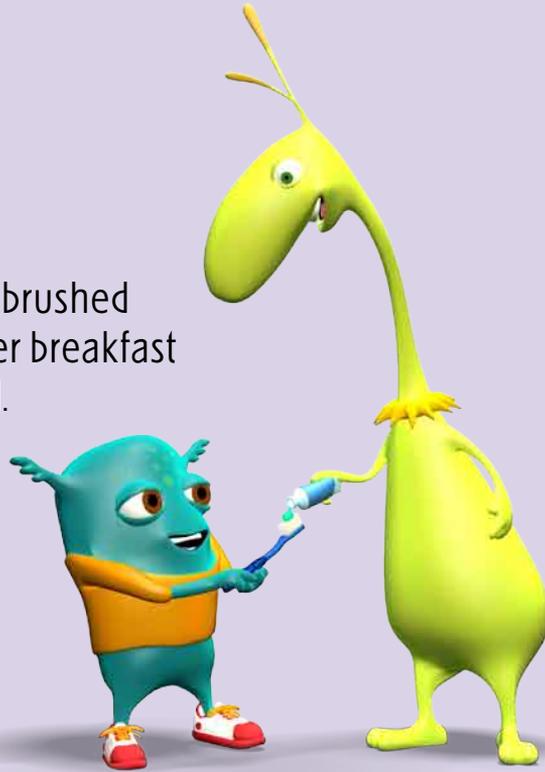
- Be a role model for a healthy lifestyle.
- Encourage your four-year-old to eat well and be active.
- Promote a positive body image by encouraging and praising what your child's body can do, for example learning to ride a bike or doing a somersault.
- Avoid commenting on body weight (even your weight) in front of your child.
- **NEVER** call your child fat or tell them to lose weight.
- **NEVER** promote dieting to your child.

What to do if you're concerned about your child's growth or weight?

Seek advice from a qualified health professional. Speak with your doctor first. They will help you understand your child's growth and may refer you to a paediatrician or Accredited Practising Dietitian.



Eko's teeth are brushed every day after breakfast and before bed.



Stretch helps to finish off the tricky bits.



Daily Care

*Some questions
you can ask your child*

When do we brush our teeth?
When do we wash our hands?
Can you spot the 5 ways Eko
is being sunsmart?

Eko remembers to be
sunsmart when
outside.



Tok knows that
washing hands
keeps the
germs away.



Daily Care

Although they are not always much fun, there are some things that we have to do every day in order to stay clean, safe and healthy. Although it might seem like a lot of effort, you will be teaching your child habits that will eventually become automatic.

Healthy Teeth

Looking after your child's "baby" teeth is really important to give their "adult" teeth the best possible start when they come through.

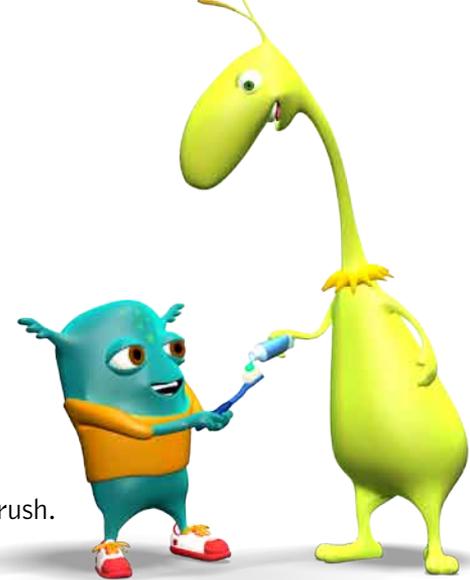
Food and drinks

- Tap water and milk are the best drinks for healthy teeth.
- Sugary foods and drinks can cause tooth decay. Avoid snacking or grazing on sugary foods and drinks between meals.
- Encourage your child to drink from a cup rather than a bottle, especially before bed.



Brushing teeth

- Teeth should be brushed twice a day – after breakfast and before going to bed.
- Use a small, soft bristle toothbrush.
- Use a pea-sized amount of low fluoride (children's) toothpaste.
- Your child should be brushing their own teeth, but you still need to supervise and finish off the bits they miss.



Checking for tooth decay

- Regularly lift your child's top lip to check for early signs of tooth decay. White lines on the teeth along the gum line can be the beginning of tooth decay.

Remember to take your child to see your dental professional for regular check ups and if you notice any changes in your child's teeth e.g. signs of decay, or if they become loosened, chipped or dislodged.

Being SunSmart

Australia has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world. Australians are more likely to develop skin cancer than any other cancer. Fortunately, most skin cancer can be prevented by being SunSmart.

Protect your child against sun damage and skin cancer by using these five steps:

1 Slip on sun protective clothing

Cover up as much of the skin as possible.

2 Slop on SPF 30+ sunscreen

Make sure it is broad spectrum and water-resistant.

3 Slap on a hat

Wear a brimmed hat that covers your face, head, neck and ears.

4 Seek shade

Make use of trees or built shade structures – or bring your own.

5 Slide on some sunglasses

Close fitting wrap-around styles that meet Australian Standards offer the best protection.

Remember!

*Take extra care between 10 am and 3 pm
when UV radiation is most intense.*

Keeping Clean

Good hygiene habits are an essential part of daily care and are important for protecting your child against illnesses.

Teach your child **WHEN** to wash their hands:

- Before preparing food and eating.
- After they go to the toilet.
- After playing with animals.
- After being around sick people.

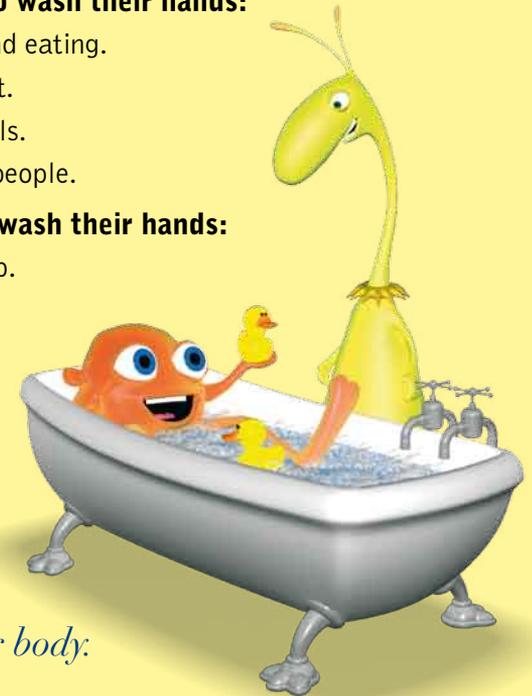
Teach your child **HOW** to wash their hands:

- Use clean water and soap.
- Lather up.
- Rinse off the bubbles.
- Dry hands using something clean.

Whether your child prefers a bath or a shower, teach them to wash all parts of their body.

Safety in the bath

- Always supervise your child in the bath.
- Always turn the cold water tap on first and off last.
- Ensure the temperature is OK before letting your child get in the bath.
- Always empty the bath after use.



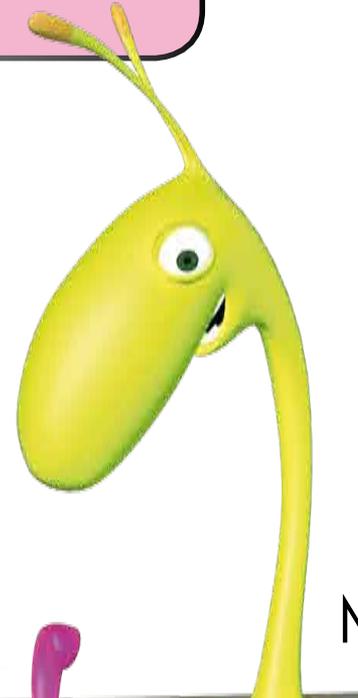
Stretch always supervises...

Safety



Around dogs

Use these pictures to talk to your child about the different ways you keep them safe. Teach your child their full name and address, and get them to practice it. Talk to your child about when to call 000.



At the playground

Near water



Safety

The best way to keep your child safe is to always supervise.

Four-year-olds are adventurous but don't always understand danger. Try not to be overprotective, but make sure their play areas are safe and they are supervised. It's also a good idea to teach your child some basic rules about staying safe.

Always Supervise

- **Water** – bath, paddling pool, beach and rivers.
- **Traffic** – crossing the road, in car parks, in the driveway.
- **Dogs** – especially when the dog is eating.
- **Kitchen** – hot oven, kettle, knives and poisons.

What you can teach your four-year-old:

- Safe outdoor play boundaries (e.g. from back fence to the side gate).
- Simple rules (e.g. No helmet, no bike! Holding hands around cars. No kids alone in the kitchen).
- 'Asking permission' to do certain things (e.g. going near water, getting something from the kitchen drawer or touching a strange dog).
- Road safety skills (Stop, Look, Listen and Think!).
- When to call 000 (e.g. you are hurt and can't call for help).
- Their full name, address and phone number.
- Not to go with unfamiliar adults.
- Different parts of the body and which are their private parts. These should not be touched by other adults, even by someone your child knows very well.



Playing safely – how to encourage kids to explore and keep safe

Kids love to run around outside, climb over and under obstacles and try to do things that are just above their ability. This will cause some tumbles, bruises and scratches as they test their skills and judgement. It's important to let them explore, but provide a safe place for them:

- Have a safe area outside for kids to play. Ideally it should be fenced off from the road or driveway. If this is not possible, teach children where it's safe to play and where is out of bounds.
- Encourage safety gear – wear a helmet every time they use their bike or scooter.
- Supervise them when they use play equipment and stay close by if you think they are testing their limits.

Allow your child to practice using their body in a safe environment so that they develop confidence in their own skills e.g. bike riding, climbing and swimming.



For more information about safety visit
www.kidsafe.com.au

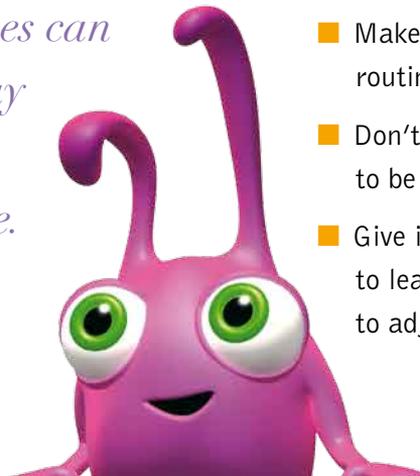
Routine “pulling it all together”

Routines are a great way to pull together the healthy habits covered in this guide. Routines are useful when you need to get lots done and time is short (e.g. getting ready in the morning, eating meals and winding down at bedtime). Setting up a new routine or changing existing routines can be tricky because you may have to change how things are currently done.

Check out the poster in the back of this guide which shows a common morning and evening routine. Children can use the pictures to work out what to do next, either with your help or on their own as they become more independent. Display this poster somewhere that your child can see it and use it as a prompt “*What does Tok do after having a bath?*” “*That’s right, it’s time to clean your teeth!*”

If this poster doesn’t represent your family’s morning and evening routines you could make your own. You can also develop routines for other habits (e.g. being active every day). Here are some tips:

- Make sure every family member is clear about the new routine and what their roles are.
- Don’t be too rigid. There will be times that you will need to be flexible (e.g. special occasions and illness).
- Give it time to work. It takes time for children (and adults) to learn new ways of behaving. Everybody will need time to adjust to a new way of working.



Healthy Routines for Kids

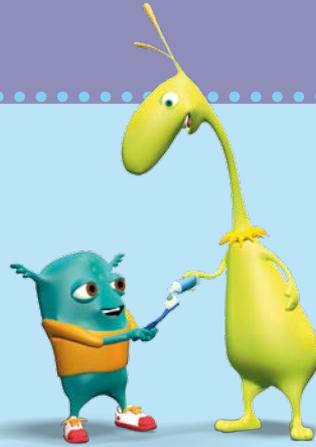
Morning



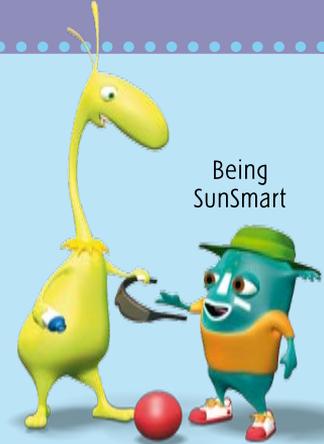
Getting dressed



Eating breakfast

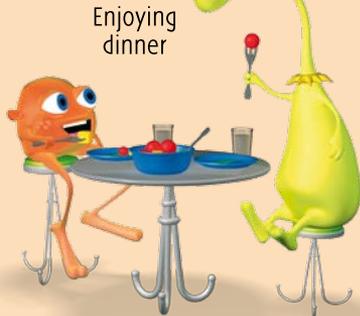


Brushing teeth

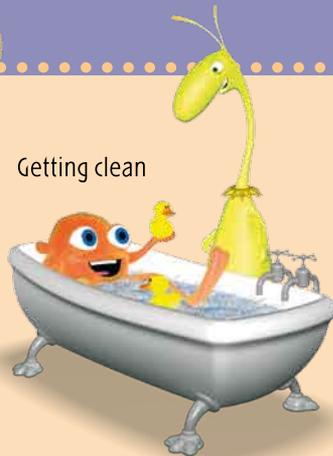


Being SunSmart

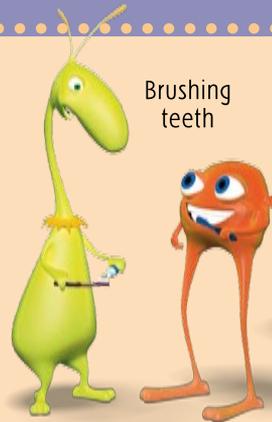
Evening



Enjoying dinner



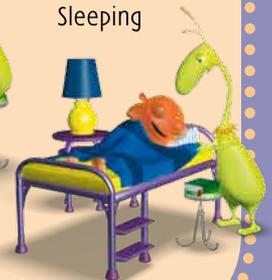
Getting clean



Brushing teeth



Winding down



Sleeping

Further Information

Immunise Australia

www.immunise.health.gov.au

Provides information about immunisation to assist parents to make informed decisions.

HealthInsite

www.healthinsite.gov.au

Provides easy access to quality information about health including some information on child development.

Raising Children Network

www.raisingchildren.net.au

Provides reliable, scientifically validated information and resources to support parents in the day-to-day work of raising children, and looking after their own needs.

Heart Foundation

www.heartfoundation.org.au

Phone: 1300 36 27 87

Provides information about healthy eating, physical activity and healthy weight for children.

The Cancer Council Australia

www.cancer.org.au

Provides information about being sunsmart, quitting smoking, healthy eating and physical activity.

Lifeline 13 11 14

www.lifeline.org.au

Lifeline offers a counselling service and provides information about other support services available in Australia.

Australian Guide to Healthy Eating

www.health.gov.au

Search for "Australian Guide to Healthy Eating"

Maternal and Child Health Services and Parent Helplines

Maternal and child health services are listed for each State and Territory. Parent helplines are also listed and provide information, counselling, and support for parents and carers of children.

South Australia

Child and Youth Health

www.cyh.com

Parenting SA

www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Parent Helpline

1300 364 100 or
08 8303 1555
from mobile phones

Victoria

Maternal and Child Health

www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/maternal-child-health/home

Maternal and Child Health line

13 22 29

ParentLine

13 22 89

www.parentline.vic.gov.au

Australian Capital Territory

Maternal and Child Health

www.health.act.gov.au/c/health

Parentline

(02) 6287 3833

Healthdirect Australia (HealthFirst)

1800 022 222 or
(02) 6207 7777.

www.healthfirst.net.au

To speak with a registered nurse 24 hours a day, seven days a week

Tasmania

Child Health Centres

www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/services

Search for Child Health Centres and Parenting Centres

Child and Family Services

Helpline 1800 001 219

The Parenting Line

1300 808 178

New South Wales

NSW Department of Community Services

www.community.nsw.gov.au

Healthy Kids

www.healthykids.nsw.gov.au

Parentline 13 20 55

Queensland

Community Child Health Service

www.health.qld.gov.au/cchs

13HEALTH

(13 43 25 84)

www.health.qld.gov.au

ParentLine

1300 30 1300

www.parentline.com.au

Northern Territory

Maternal Child and Youth Health

www.nt.gov.au/health/healthdev/mych

NT Families

Website
www.families.nt.gov.au

ParentLine

1300 30 1300

www.parentline.com.au

Western Australia

Child Health Centres

www.health.wa.gov.au/health_index/c/child_health.cfm

Parenting Line

(08) 6279 1200 or
1800 654 432

www.community.wa.gov.au/DFC/Resources/Parenting

