



Everyday Miracles

4 1/2 - 6
years

a parent's story

Ready for school

Caleb Medvedic had only just started preschool when his mother Valerie was struck with the thought: "One day he's not going to need me at all."

Given Caleb's reaction to seeing his family every day when they pick him up, that day is still years away.

"He really likes to see us again and he gives his little sister a big hug every time," says Valerie of her nearly 5-year-old son.

Caleb's first days and weeks in "school" have been a time of excitement, adjustment and, of course, learning. "Starting school was good for Caleb, because he wasn't happy just being with me and his sister. He wanted to be around other children," says Valerie.

In a few short weeks, Caleb has learned to clean up more after himself, sing new songs and has shown more interest in writing and reading. "Caleb was not that interested in learning to write his alphabet," his mom says, "but now he will proudly show off any letters that he draws – including his name."

Indeed, Caleb seems to have entered a giant learning and developmental curve in recent months: connecting symbols with words; refining his



eye/hand coordination; dressing and undressing himself; and using the toilet and washing his hands by himself.

"Starting school felt like a very big step, as I had to let go of some of my influence," says Valerie.

While she has accepted that change, Valerie has held fast to her consistency, especially when it comes to setting boundaries for Caleb.

"Caleb has always been a good kid," says his mom, but acknowledges that he still has his testy days and times when he gets frustrated and angry. "We used to have head-on fights and I've learned not to try and have 'a big talk' with him in the middle of them." She's also learned that if she gets upset, it doesn't help the situation.

Instead, she's learned to diffuse such struggles with good routines and structure – along with the realization that her expectations for Caleb, her first child, might be unrealistically high at times.

"As a parent, it is important for me to re-evaluate my 'style of parenting' to ensure that I am helping my child become the best he can be, instead of using methods that just frustrate us both."

"Children are amazing gifts – if we pay attention, we can learn just as much from them as they can learn from us."

what's your child doing?

Active and interested in life

Around 4 1/2 to 5 years of age your child:

- uses complete sentences and can be understood by most people
- listens to others; can follow 3 step directions, such as: "Please put your books on the shelf, get your sweater on and bring me your shoes."
- knows own name and age; can learn your address
- knows how to share, but doesn't always want to
- is able to:
 - count to 10
 - focus on an activity for 20 to 30 minutes
 - be in someone else's care for short periods
 - walk downstairs on her own with one foot on each step
 - hop and stand on 1 foot
 - use scissors and pencil correctly, draws simple shapes (circle, square) and people with head, body and legs
- likes to help with chores
- has learned to use the toilet, but may still have occasional "accidents"

- plays "make-believe" games
- asks "Why?" a lot

From 5 to 6 years, your child:

- shows signs of being ready for school
- swings, jumps, climbs, skips
- dresses and feeds self
- is very interested in how the body works and the differences between boys and girls
- loves to talk and tell stories
- is not always able to tell the difference between imaginary and real
- is able to play cooperatively with other children most of the time
- is able to think of solutions to simple problems

Your child's speech should now be understandable by neighbours and people outside your family. Children this age may still have trouble with the "r" and "th" sounds. If you are concerned about your preschool child's speech development, call our Speech and Language Preschool Program at 943-9830.

sound advice

Ask a

Public Health Nurse

Q I've heard a lot about obesity in the news — how can I help my child grow up healthy?

A Your child is learning eating and lifestyle habits now that can affect her throughout her life. At this age, you have an important influence, so help your child learn to make healthy choices.

Your child is unique and will grow at her own rate. Provide nutritious food and encourage fun physical activity. She'll feel good about herself if she grows up in a home where people are accepted for who they are. Focus on a healthy lifestyle and healthy growth will follow.

Q My child always seems to be catching a cold. What can I do?

A As your child plays with more children and visits more places, she is exposed to more germs. The most important thing you can do to prevent illness is to teach your child to wash her hands with soap and warm, running water before eating, after using the toilet and when she returns home. Hand washing is one of the most effective ways to stop the spread of germs.

If your child is sick, she needs to be at home. Make sure she gets lots of rest, fluids and good nutritious food.

Q My son gets very frustrated when he's learning everyday things like tying his shoes. How can I help him?

A While it can be frustrating to wait while your child ties his own shoes, he needs to try things on his own so that he can feel capable. First, take time for teaching. A quick tip: break learning into four stages:

1. You do it, he watches.
2. You do it, he helps.
3. He does it, you help.
4. He does it, you watch.

Give your child the chance to try, plan for the extra time it will take and be there to help him if he needs you. Encourage the effort – time and practice will bring success.

Q My child loves to be outdoors. What can I do to protect him from the sun?

A The Alberta Cancer Board says that sun safety is as easy as 1,2,3!

1. **Cover Up** - wear a wide-brimmed hat and cover bare arms and legs
2. **Use Sunscreen** – SPF 15 or higher, applied to any exposed skin 20 minutes before going outside. Reapply every two hours.
3. **Seek Shade** – under a tree or umbrella. Avoid being in the sun when the rays are strongest – between 11a.m. and 4p.m.



Help is here when you need it:

Calgary Health Link 943-LINK (5465) Calgary and area
1-866-408-LINK (5465) toll-free

211 – for community services and programs

Parenting Programs for Everyone: See the *Parenting Pages* in *Calgary's Child* or get a copy from your Community Health Centre.

Growing Miracles – ask your public health nurse for your free copy



calgary health region

Learning to eat – eating to learn

Continue to follow Canada's Food Guide for regular meals and snacks. Food is crucial to growing children – hungry children cannot learn. A healthy, well balanced breakfast gives the best start to your child's day.

Morning and afternoon snacks will help give your child energy for learning and playing throughout the day. Teach her to choose nutritious foods and drinks for snacks and meals. Frequent sweet, sticky snacks and sugary drinks can cause cavities.

Continue to supervise your child when he brushes his teeth at least twice a day and after sweet treats. Dental sealants can help protect molars from cavities by filling in the pits and grooves. Ask your dentist for more information.

It's normal for your child's appetite to vary from day to day. Children will eat when they are hungry. As long as you provide nutritious food, that is what they'll eat. Coaxing and forcing children to eat can do more harm than good. It becomes less about food and more about behaviour. Keep mealtimes pleasant and avoid power struggles over food.

If you give your child juice, read the label to make sure it is 100% unsweetened fruit juice (not punch, beverage or powdered mix). Limit fruit juice to 1/2 to 1 cup (4 to 8 oz) a day and give it only at a meal or planned snack. Offer your child water between meals and snacks if she is thirsty.

In these growing years, the goals of the 'healthy feeding relationship' remain the same. As a parent, it is your job to decide **what** foods to offer, as well as **when** and **where** to offer them. It's your child's job to decide **whether** to eat and **how much**. Allowing your child to do their job will help avoid eating problems later in life.

Children this age are often very interested in where food comes from. Encourage them to be capable by letting them help you at mealtimes – assisting with sandwich making, washing and tearing up lettuce, carrying dishes to or from the table. When you let children help, they are more interested in what they are eating. Always supervise your child in the kitchen. Teach him to wash his hands before he helps in the kitchen and before he eats. Do not let your young child touch raw meat, poultry or seafood.

For more information about healthy food for preschoolers, ask your public health nurse or contact Calgary Health Link. For great menu ideas, check out www.dietitians.ca/healthystart

Dealing with disruptions

A good night's sleep is critical to your child's healthy development and ability to learn. At this age, children need 10 to 11 hours of sleep a night and some may still nap in the afternoon. When your child starts play school or kindergarten, she may be very tired for the first few months. Schools are busy, noisy places and your child may need some quiet or down time when he gets home before he feels like being with people again.

Bedtime challenges are often fewer at this age, although a change in family routine such as starting school or a new baby's arrival can disrupt your child's sleep patterns. A few helpful tips:

- If your child constantly falls asleep in front of the TV or in the car, he needs more sleep. Try backing up bedtime by 15 minutes.
- If your child resists going to bed at night, try making a bedtime chart with him using photos, magazine pictures or drawings to illustrate the steps of your bedtime routine. At bedtime, he can follow the chart and tell you what comes next. When your child helps set a routine, he's is much more likely to follow it.
- Nightmares may be a problem. Four to 6 year olds have great imaginations and their dreams can seem very real to them. When your child wakes up from a nightmare, he needs comforting and reassurance. A night light may help.

Children never outgrow safety

Falls

At the playground, three key points will help keep your child safe:

- Choose playgrounds with a deep soft surface like pea gravel, sand, wood chips or a rubber surface. Grass, dirt and asphalt surfaces are not safe.
- Check raised surfaces on equipment for secure handrails, barriers, and railings that prevent falls.
- Children under the age of 5 need constant supervision when on the playground. Stay within an arm's reach. Falls of less than 1 metre (3 feet) can cause serious injuries.

Choose age-appropriate equipment. If your child needs to be lifted to use the equipment, he is too young to play on it.

Booster seats

Once a child outgrows a forward-facing car seat, a booster seat is needed because adult seat belts do not properly fit.

Children over 18 kg (40 lbs.) are safest in a booster seat until 8 years old or 36 kg (80 lbs.) Take the 'Booster Seat YES TEST' (available from your public health nurse or Calgary Health Link) to make sure it's right.

Pedestrian safety

Children under the age of 9 lack the skills needed to safely cross a street. Teach your child the skills to safely cross a street, but always supervise her until she's older.

Bike safety

In Alberta, it's the law that every child under 18 must wear a helmet when riding a bicycle or tricycle. When you wear a helmet too, your child is more likely to wear his and make it a life-long habit.

Home alone

Children this age are too young to be left home alone, even for just a few minutes.

Accepting your child's growing independence

Your child's world is expanding and he's now meeting new friends, playing with other children and learning more about his world. It's an exciting time for him, but it can mean mixed emotions for you. Your baby is growing up. If you feel stressed or anxious about your child's newfound independence, these tips may help:

- Choose quality child care in a centre or home that is loving, safe, and clean.

Be as involved as you can. Volunteer your skills, whatever they might be.

- Prepare yourself and your child for school. Take a school tour, read stories about starting school, get to know his new teacher.
- Get to know the parents of your child's new friends.

- Make sure your child knows you expect him to follow your rules (buckle up, wear his helmet, wash hands, be polite, etc) at home and away.

If your child is not ready for kindergarten (see *Ready for School* in *Growing Miracles*), you may want to consider other options such as day camps, play groups or preschool. Starting formal school too early can cause struggles for your child in later years.

Build on the skills you have already learned in parenting your young child. Ask your public health nurse for your free copy of *The Parenting Pages* – a list of parenting programs in Calgary. Parenting programs are for everyone and there are programs for parents with children of all ages. Call Calgary Health Link or 211 for more information.

Play is a big part of a child's day

Preschoolers and new schoolers need 60 minutes of structured or directed activity a day. This is activity you or another adult directs or does with your child such as playing tag, building a snow fort, swimming, skating, etc.

As well, your child needs at least 60 minutes (and up to several hours) of play every day just for fun, both indoors and out, alone and with other children. Physical skills to build on at this age are dancing, kicking, throwing, tumbling, hopping, running and climbing.

Children need a balance of active and quiet play. Reading, puzzles and crafts are creative quiet play activities. Pretend play is important to your preschooler and new schooler. It helps him learn about his world and develops his creativity.

The Canadian Pediatric Society advises parents to limit screen time (TV, videos and computers) to one hour or less each day for preschool children and two hours each day or less for early school aged children. See www.caringforkids.cps.ca for more information.

10 reasons to be active with your child:

1. Healthy growth and development
2. A good night's sleep
3. Maintains a healthy weight throughout life
4. Reduces stress
5. Builds strong muscles and bones
6. Keeps your heart and lungs healthy
7. More brain power – better learning and thinking skills
8. Discover new places and meet new friends
9. Feel good about yourself
10. It's fun!

For more information, visit www.dietitians.ca/healthystart.



calgary health region

You know your child best. If you are concerned or need more information, we can help.

If your child:

- cannot be understood by people outside your family when he talks
- is aggressive with frequent, violent temper tantrums
- has many or unusual fears
- shows frequent, repetitive behaviours (such as rocking or head banging)
- has a very short attention span or seems to be much more active than other children
- is not growing or developing as you think she should be

Talk to your doctor, public health nurse, or call Calgary Health Link for advice.

Calgary Health Link

943-LINK (5465) Calgary and area
1-866-408-LINK (5465) toll-free

health advice and information 24 hours a day