

# What outcomes parents should expect from early childhood education and care

May 24 2018, by Wendy Boyd

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Parents often have different expectations for their three- to five-year-old children when they attend an early learning centre. Some parents expect their child to engage in academic learning activities or "[real learning](#)". Academic activities are associated with formal school-based learning such as writing, reading and knowing their numbers.

Parents are [reported](#) to feel concerned if they visit their friend's home and see their friend's [child](#) brings home worksheets (for example dot-to-dot of their name, colouring in of Easter eggs, or other adult-directed products) from their early childhood centre. They may worry their child is being left behind because their child is "only playing" and not engaging in real learning.

Other [parents](#) focus on their child [being safe and secure in a stimulating environment](#) where [children](#) make choices about what they will play. [Such learning environments](#) are supported by educators who are responsive to the child, and socially construct the child's play.

The tension lies between teacher-directed activities where children are perceived to be doing "real learning", as opposed to children making choices to play according to their interests.

## So, what should three- to five-year-olds be learning?

Developmental milestones provided by the Australian Children's Early

Childhood Quality Authority ([ACECQA](#)) state: "Children's learning is ongoing and each child will progress towards the outcomes in different and equally meaningful ways."

This [milestones checklist](#) covers five domains of learning, which is linked to the curriculum and the National Quality Standards:

1. physical
2. social
3. emotional
4. cognitive
5. language development.

The checklist indicates what a child should be able to do by a certain age, and this is linked to the [early childhood education curriculum](#).

[Research](#) demonstrates children's learning achievements are greater from play-based programs, which include activities such as block building, compared to early childhood programs that have an academic focus.

The [early childhood education](#) curriculum emphasises the importance of play-based learning and [research](#) demonstrates children's learning achievements are greater from play-based programs compared to early [childhood](#) programs that have an academic focus.

## **When to worry**

According to the [developmental milestones](#), parents should seek advice from a professional if their three- to five-year-old child:

- is not understood by others
- has speech fluency problems or stammering
- is not playing with other children

- is not able to have a conversation
- is not able to go to the toilet or wash him/herself.

## Parent-teacher relationships are important

Educators need to be able to explain their approach to children's learning to parents at the outset of the child/family's admission to the centre and reinforce this as children learn and develop.

The curriculum and the National Quality Standards both focus on educators having "partnerships with families". But if there is disagreement about what and how children should be learning, a partnership between the parents and teachers won't develop and endure.

Parents need to be continuously informed about the learning [program](#) in the centre. There needs to be alignment between parents' expectation of what their child will learn in an [early childhood](#) centre, with the learning program provided, and the play-based approach a good one for the children.

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