



ABC's of the preschooler

- Airway/Breathing respiratory rates: **20–40/minute (generally closer to 20)**.
 - Essential to note any respiratory changes before color changes.
 - Note retractions, nasal flaring as signs of respiratory distress.
- Circulation: Heart rate: **80–120/minute** (closer to 100). (May be higher if toddler is crying or febrile.) Blood pressure: **76–105/39–69** (BP will be elevated in heightened metabolic states.)

Physical characteristics

- Feeding: Feed selves, weight gain generally slows.
- Avoid foods and drinks with high sugar content.
- Fine motor skills developing rapidly. Preschoolers enjoy drawing, building, and using their hands.

Safety

- Preschoolers are curious and able to get into dangerous situations quickly.
- May continue to put small items in the mouth or nose. Do not leave anything small, sharp, or toxic within reach.

Social

- Encourage play with simulated hospital equipment to understand hospitalization and procedures, as well as to work out frustration.
- Use of imagination increases in their self-expression.
- Often feel guilty. Preschoolers may think they caused their illnesses. You should check in often to minimize fears.
- Young preschoolers like to show off, engage in parallel play (play *next to*, but not *with*). Around age four, this gives way to more interactive social experiences with other children.

Communication

- Vocabulary is expanding at a rapid rate, but remains literal. Statements such as, “Draw labs at 1700” could be misinterpreted.
- Action helps with communication. Show and allow them to manipulate the medical equipment if/when safe.

Hospital considerations/family-centered care

- Hospitalization is the most stressful for this age group. Expect regression (thumb-sucking, return to diapers) and remind parents that it is normal.
- Collaborate with the family to learn comfort measures and routines that work well at home.
 - Create an age appropriate coping plan (level 8) with the patient and family.
 - Distraction continues to be a good tool during procedures.
 - Advocate for adequate emotional and physical preparation before procedures.
 - Encourage parents to use comfort holds on preschoolers during procedures.
- Utilize treatment rooms in order to maintain safe havens (for example, the patient's room and playrooms) whenever possible.