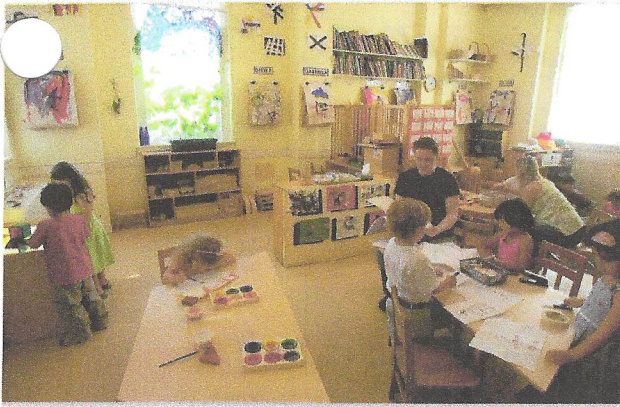




In a Reggio Emilia classroom, young children explore topics that interest them.

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considered essential, and cooperation is a major theme in the schools. Many experts on early childhood education believe that the Reggio Emilia approach provides a supportive, stimulating context in which children are motivated to explore their world in a competent and confident manner (Follari, 2019; Morrison, 2017, 2018; Vatalaro, Szente, & Levin, 2015).

Parents and educators who understand how young children develop can play active roles in creating programs that foster children's natural interest in learning, rather than stifling it. In this chapter, the first of two chapters on early childhood (ages 3 to 5), we explore the physical, cognitive, and language changes that typically occur as the toddler develops into the preschooler, and then we look at early childhood education. ■

Physical Changes

Earlier, we described a child's growth in infancy as rapid and following cephalocaudal and proximodistal patterns. Fortunately, the growth rate slows in early childhood; otherwise, we would be a species of giants.

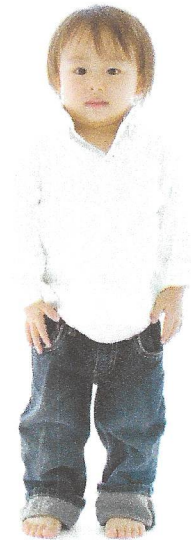
Body Growth and Change

Despite the slowing of growth in height and weight that characterizes early childhood, growth is still the most obvious physical change during this period of development. Yet unseen changes in the brain and nervous system are no less significant in preparing children for advances in cognition and language.

The average child grows $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in height and gains between 5 and 7 pounds a year during early childhood. As the preschool child grows older, the percentage of increase in height and weight decreases with each additional year (Hockenberry, Wilson, & Rodgers, 2017). Girls are only slightly smaller and lighter than boys during these years, a difference that continues until puberty. In addition, girls have more fatty tissue than boys, and boys have more muscle tissue than girls.

During the preschool years, both boys and girls slim down as the trunk of the body lengthens (Kliegman & others, 2016). Although the head is still somewhat large for the body, by the end of the preschool years most children have lost the top-heavy look they had as toddlers. Body fat also shows a slow, steady decline during the preschool years. The chubby baby often looks much leaner by the end of early childhood.

Growth patterns vary from one individual to another (Grimberg & Allen, 2017). Think back to your preschool years. That was probably the first time you noticed that some children were taller than you, some shorter; some were fatter, some thinner; some were stronger, some weaker. Much of the variation was due to heredity, but environmental experiences were also involved (Hay & others, 2017). A review of the height and weight of children around the world concluded that the two most important contributors to height differences are ethnic origin and nutrition (Meredith, 1978). Urban, middle-socioeconomic status, and firstborn children were taller than rural, lower-socioeconomic status, and later-born children. In the United States, African American children are taller than White children.



The bodies of 5-year-olds and 2-year-olds are different. Notice that the 5-year-old not only is taller and weighs more, but also has a longer trunk and legs than the 2-year-old. *Can you think of some other physical differences between 2- and 5-year-olds?*
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