

Stage of Competence - 4-7 years old

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The Stage of Competence sees the child eager to develop new skills and discover more about themselves and what they are capable of. They begin to compare themselves to others, recognizing similarities and differences: Dad is stronger, a friend is taller, another friend runs faster, etc. They are ready to see what impact they can have on the world. They are able to begin to take risks and recover from loss or failure although the primary goal is winning. They have a strong sense of ownership—my toy, my dad, etc. This is the age of preschool and kindergarten when they are ready for “real learning.”

From birth through age seven, the development stages lay the foundation for a healthy life:

- Attachment www.coachmyrna.org/blog/stage-of-attachment-birth-to-18-months
- Exploration www.coachmyrna.org/blog/stage-of-exploration-18-months-to-3-years
- Identity www.coachmyrna.org/blog/stage-of-identity-3-4-years

- Competence

The security that the child develops through strong connections with family and the confidence to explore helps them get ready to meet the world. It is preparing them to try new tasks, take risks, face the unknown, handle possible failures, deal with crises and learn to ask for help. Integration of these four stages gives the foundation for future success in relationships and school, work and social environments.

What 4 to 7 year olds need from parents:

- They need consistent availability, warmth and support from the parents.
- They need to be rewarded/acknowledged for the child's engagement in the process, not a successful outcome. Encourage the sense that failure to master a task at first gives opportunity to try again. Support, encourage and praise the process of learning how to learn.
- They continue to need physical and emotional safety.
- Time and space to explore is essential; allow an area of the home where it is ok to make a mess.
- Focus on what the child does, not their character, motivation, or result. Focus on their behavior, not who they are as a person. Say, "I see that you are upset or frustrated", not "Why are you so lazy, mean or giving up so easily?" Ask "Would you like some help or show you how to do that...?"
- They need to question authority; have conversations about why we do things a certain way or have specific rules and values.

A tool that supports your child during this stage of development is **Share the Thinking**. Give your child the opportunity to have to think about how to solve a problem. Ask guiding questions and give them practice at making choices, solving problems and learning from mistakes. As a parent, watch your tendency to step in too quickly to fix something. Asking guiding questions instead of telling a child what to do empowers the child, creates cooperation instead of resistance and develops self-efficacy and ownership. See the example below of how a mom uses this tool with her four year old son Alex.

Mom: "Alex, honey. You still have your slippers on and we have to go to school. The car leaves in 5 minutes."

Alex: "I like my Mickey Mouse slippers, Mama. I want to wear them to school."

Mom: "I know you like them, Sweetie." "How do you think your slippers will work in the classroom."

Alex: "Great."

Mom: "How do you think they'll work when you go outside for recess?"

Alex: (He thinks for a bit and his mom is quiet, not saying a word, giving Alex time to think.) "I gotta change into my tennis shoes, Mama. But can I pack my slippers in my backpack?"

Mom: "Sure honey. The car leaves in four minutes."



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If you would like to know more about what I offer as a coach, please visit my website: www.coachmyrna.org/ Find out more about Safe Conversations www.coachmyrna.org/safe-conversations.html.

