

ПЕДАГОГИКА / PEDAGOGY

УДК

Can the Three-Year Crisis be Prevented?

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Abstract

The crisis at three years old is a significant stage in a child's psychosocial development. To maintain and support a child's psychological well-being, adults need to create favorable conditions for meaningful interaction and communication. This involves engaging in different activities with the child and fostering a warm, positive emotional connection between parents and the child. It is important to consider the child's age-related and individual characteristics while guiding and monitoring their behavior both at home, in public settings, and in other situations.

Keywords: third-year crisis, prevent crisis, psychological problems, parenting

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Introduction

The problem of productive mental development of a young child (1-3 years old) remains relevant at the current stage of development of age psychology in Russia. This is due to high labor employment of parents (mothers) who return to work soon after giving birth to fully financially provision their families; to the unstable situation with the content and methods of parenting at preschool institutions because of the transformations of the modern education; to the large flow of information (stimuli, technical tumors, etc.), which stimulates the child, but which the parents do not have time to filter, and many more. All of the above more often adversely affects the psychological health of the child, as it does not build trust and positive emotional communication with the parents and teachers; there is a dissonance between the needs of children and of adults in today's information technology environment, the process of the child's self-expression is limited. And the critical periods of development of children indicate the quality of parenting in the family and the level of psychological health (Ruskina, E.N., 2011, Yashkova, A.N., 2012).

1. What is the Three-Year Crisis?



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The “three-year crisis” refers to a developmental phase in young children, typically occurring around the age of three, characterized by significant emotional, cognitive, and behavioral changes. It is often seen as a transition period from early childhood to more independent behaviors and is part of normal psychological development. The term originates from developmental psychology, particularly the work of Lev Vygotsky and his followers.

1.1. Key Characteristics of the Crisis at Three

Vygotsky identifies several behaviors that emerge during this stage. These behaviors are not merely problematic; they are signs of significant internal changes in the child's development:

1. **Negativism:** The child refuses adult instructions not because they disagree with the content but as a way to assert their autonomy.
2. **Stubbornness:** The child insists on something they previously desired, even if it is no longer important, to emphasize their own will.
3. **Self-will (Obstinacy):** The child demands independence, attempting to perform tasks themselves, often beyond their ability.
4. **Protest and Rebellion:** Increased resistance to authority figures as the child tests limits and establishes their individuality.
5. **Depreciation:** The child devalues cherished items or relationships, reflecting a cognitive restructuring of their environment.
6. **Despotism:** The child may try to control others in the household, often seen in families with an only child.
7. **Jealousy:** In multi-sibling families, children may display possessiveness over parents or items, highlighting their need for recognition.

Vygotsky uses these "seven stars" to describe the symptoms of this crisis, which are common across cultures, suggesting that this phase is a universal developmental phenomenon. (*L.S. Vygotsky's Pedological Works. Volume 2. (pp.201-227)*)

1.2. Developmental Stages at this Age

Around age three, children experience significant developmental changes, often referred to as the "three-year crisis." Key milestones include:

1. **Physical Development:** Improvement in **motor skills** (running, jumping, using utensils), better **coordination** (riding a bike, aiming a ball), and mastering basic **self-care** (dressing, using the toilet).
2. **Cognitive Development:** Expanding **vocabulary** and **sentence formation**, developing **cause-and-effect** thinking, engaging in **role play**, and improving **attention span**.
3. **Emotional Development:** Recognizing themselves as individuals, expressing a desire for independence ("I want to do it myself"), and experiencing a wider range of emotions (joy, anger). Early signs of **empathy** appear.
4. **Social Development:** Increased interest in peers and beginning **cooperative play**. Understanding basic **social rules** and testing limits, while continuing to rely on **parents** as role models.
5. **Moral Development:** Beginning to understand **right and wrong**, though still influenced by personal desires. **Resistance to authority** and testing boundaries is common.

6. **Play:** Engaging in **symbolic play** (e.g., pretending with everyday objects) and using play as a way to explore the world and develop skills.
7. **Language Development:** Improved ability to **participate in conversations** and express desires, though complex emotions may still be hard to articulate.

These milestones lay the foundation for further growth in later preschool years, though the timing may vary for each child.

2. Causes of the Crisis

2.1. *Psychological and Developmental Changes*

So why does the development crisis happen at the age of three? What are the causes of the "strange" behavior of a three-year-old child? This, of course, has been studied by the domestic psychology; and here is what they found out. The third-year crisis is one of the most difficult moments in the life of a child. It is based on the breakdown of the close relationship that has existed between the child and the adult (the parents) until the age of three (Vygotsky, V.S., 1997).

By age three, children begin to seek **autonomy**, wanting to do things on their own (e.g., dressing, pouring water). This marks a **separation** from parents, who often resist seeing their child act independently due to safety concerns or the child's slower, less-skilled attempts. This creates a **conflict** between what the child wants to do ("I want") and what they are allowed to do ("I may"), triggering the emotional and behavioral **crisis** associated with this developmental stage.

According to Vygotsky, L.S, 1997 and Elkonin, D.B., 1997, the internal contradictions are the driving force of mental development, qualitative changes which occur during the crisis periods of age, indicating the transition to the next stage of development.

2.2. *Improper Nutrition of the Child*

Currently, the importance of proper nutrition is being emphasized everywhere. It is widely known how excessive carbohydrates, sugar, and unhealthy foods negatively affect human health and mental well-being. Improper nutrition is particularly harmful to young children, as it adversely impacts their health and slows their intellectual development. According to some studies, consuming unhealthy food before the age of 3 can weaken a child's immune system, cause negative psychological effects, and lead to irritability and nervous system disorders.

Moreover, poor dietary habits during early childhood have been linked to long-term consequences, including obesity, chronic diseases such as diabetes, and behavioral issues. Nutrient deficiencies, such as a lack of essential vitamins and minerals like iron, omega-3 fatty acids, and calcium, can impair cognitive development, attention span, and overall physical growth. Therefore, ensuring a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and healthy proteins is crucial for the proper physical and mental development of children.

2.3. *The Impact of Gadgets*

In today's world, electronic devices have taken over children's time, often at the expense of other activities. Many parents, despite the negative effects, continue to give in to their children's gadget demands. The consequences include:

1. **Mood swings:** Children become upset when screen time ends, but happy when they are allowed to use gadgets.
2. **Emotional manipulation:** Children cry, beg, or negotiate to get screen time.
3. **Difficulty transitioning:** After using gadgets, children struggle to engage in other activities.
4. **Aggression:** Children may become angry and aggressive after screen time.
5. **Psychological impact:** The idealized world in gadgets can lead to frustration when children can't find the same perfection in reality.
6. **Health issues:** Excessive gadget use causes eye strain, headaches, and disrupted sleep patterns.
7. **Cognitive decline:** Long screen time reduces children's ability to process information, observe their surroundings, and behave appropriately, impairing their learning and self-regulation.

2.4. Environmental and Parenting Factors

2.4.1. Parenting Factors

1. **Breakdown of Close Relationships:** The third-year crisis is triggered by the breakdown of the close and dependent relationship that existed between the child and the parents. By this age, children develop a strong desire for independence ("I can do it myself"), which parents often struggle to accept. They may not be prepared to see their child as autonomous and may resist allowing them to perform tasks independently, like dressing themselves or using household items.
2. **Parental Control vs. Autonomy:** Parents often impose strict limits on the child's actions due to concerns about safety, quality, and efficiency. This creates a **psychological contradiction** for the child between "I want" and "I may," leading to conflict and negative behaviors such as stubbornness and negativism.
3. **Inconsistent Parenting Styles:** A lack of consistency in rules and boundaries confuses the child, contributing to opposition and rebellion. Parents who alternate between strictness and permissiveness often exacerbate the symptoms of the crisis.
4. **Suppression of Initiative:** When parents suppress a child's natural initiative and autonomy instead of supporting it, this increases the child's frustration. Suppressing attempts to "do it themselves" leads to tantrums, stubbornness, and emotional breakdowns.
5. **Parental Expectations:** Unrealistic expectations of "good behavior" and an inability to handle emotional outbursts create tension. For example, discouraging children from expressing anger or frustration ("Good children don't get angry") can intensify emotional stress

2.4.2. Environmental Factors

1. **Lack of Emotional Support:** A child's psychological health is negatively affected when parents are busy with work, distracted, or unable to build a positive emotional connection with the child.
2. **External Environment Overload:** Modern life exposes children to overwhelming stimuli (technology, information flow), which they cannot process. This mismatch between the

child's developmental needs and external demands can limit opportunities for healthy self-expression.

3. **Conflict with Social Norms:** As the child becomes more aware of social norms, they may protest against established household traditions or rules that limit their sense of self. This leads to oppositional behaviors such as obstinacy and rebellion.
4. **Family Dynamics:** Children in families with a single child may exhibit despotism (attempting to dominate family members), while children with siblings may experience jealousy and competition, both of which intensify the crisis symptoms.
5. **Social Isolation:** Limited interaction with peers and adults outside the family restricts the child's ability to adapt to social norms, further exacerbating the emotional and behavioral difficulties of the crisis

These causes highlight the interaction between **parenting styles** and the **social environment**, emphasizing the need for parents to adapt their approach to the child's growing independence while fostering a supportive and consistent environment.

3. Managing the Crisis

1. *Set Clear Boundaries and Rules*

- Establish clear, reasonable rules and stick to them consistently.
- Explain rules calmly and use simple language your child can understand.
- Avoid overly strict punishments; instead, provide structure and clear expectations.
- Example: Instead of forbidding noise, specify where and when being loud is acceptable.

2. *Encourage Independence*

- Allow children to perform tasks they are capable of completing, like dressing themselves, cleaning toys, or simple meal preparation.
- Offer choices to satisfy their need for autonomy (e.g., "Do you want the red or blue shirt?").
- Praise efforts rather than results to build confidence and patience.

3. *Stay Calm and Patient*

- Respond to tantrums and protests calmly without raising your voice.
- Acknowledge the child's emotions ("I understand you're upset") while setting boundaries for unacceptable behavior.
- Take a break if needed to regain composure before re-engaging.

4. *Use Positive Reinforcement*

- Praise and reward desirable behaviors through words, hugs, or small incentives (e.g., stickers or privileges).
- Avoid over-relying on material rewards to prevent dependency.
- Gradually reduce rewards as good behavior becomes habitual.

5. *Teach Emotional Regulation*

- Help children identify and name their emotions using words, books, or games.

- Introduce simple techniques like deep breathing, counting, or visualization to calm strong emotions.
- Model self-regulation by managing your own emotions calmly.

6. Prepare for Transitions and Changes

- Use visual schedules or timers to prepare children for changes in routines or activities.
- Provide warnings about transitions (e.g., “In five minutes, it’s time to stop playing and eat lunch”).
- Give options to involve them in decisions, reducing resistance.

7. Redirect and Distract

- When a child becomes fixated on an idea or behavior, gently redirect their focus to a new task or game.
- Distraction can help prevent tantrums before they escalate.

8. Meet Attachment Needs

- Spend quality, focused time with your child daily to strengthen their sense of security.
- Use hugs, kisses, and verbal affirmations to demonstrate love and support.
- Create routines and traditions to provide consistency and predictability.

9. Ignore Minor Negative Behaviors

- Avoid reinforcing small misbehaviors with excessive attention.
- Intervene only when behavior is harmful, dangerous, or disruptive.

10. Work as a Team

- Ensure all caregivers follow the same rules and approaches to avoid confusion.
- Discuss and agree on parenting strategies with partners or family members.

11. Seek Professional Support When Needed

- If behavior becomes unmanageable or concerning, consult pediatricians or child psychologists.
- Parent support groups can offer additional advice and reassurance.

By applying these strategies with patience, consistency, and understanding, parents can navigate the **three-year-old crisis** effectively and support their child’s healthy emotional and social development. (Aksana Nikolaevna Yashkova. 2015)

4. Prevention – Is It Possible?

The **three-year crisis** is a natural and inevitable phase in a child’s development. It arises from critical psychological and emotional transformations as the child begins to form independence, assert autonomy, and navigate their relationship with the world. While the crisis itself cannot be entirely prevented, its intensity and impact can be significantly reduced through **proactive parenting** and a supportive environment that aligns with the child’s developmental needs.

4.1. Understanding the Root Causes of the Crisis

The crisis emerges as a response to two interconnected processes:

1. The Development of Autonomy:

- a. Children at this age start seeing themselves as individuals with their own will, desires, and ideas. This realization creates tension as they strive for independence but still depend on adults for guidance and support.

2. Cognitive and Emotional Growth:

- a. Rapid development of speech, emotions, and cognitive abilities allows children to express themselves better, but they lack full control over their emotions and impulses.
- b. Miscommunication or unmet needs can result in tantrums, stubbornness, and negativity.

Proactive approaches to reduce crisis intensity:

1. Support Early Emotional Development:

- a. Teach emotional literacy to help children identify and express feelings.
- b. Normalize emotions like anger and frustration, teaching constructive ways to process them.

2. Build Independence Early:

- a. Gradually give children opportunities for autonomy, like feeding themselves or choosing outfits.
- b. This reduces friction when they seek independence later.

3. Foster a Collaborative Parent-Child Relationship:

- a. Combine warmth with structure, involving children in small decisions and balancing authority with respect.
- b. This helps children feel valued, secure, and cooperative.

4. Create Predictable Routines:

- a. Consistent daily routines (meals, play, sleep) help children feel secure.
- b. Gradual transitions build adaptability and reduce frustration.

5. Establish Healthy Communication:

- a. Encourage open communication, validating children's feelings and helping them express emotions.
- b. Early communication skills help children navigate conflicts and frustrations.

6. Minimize External Stressors:

- a. Ensure a calm, supportive environment with adequate rest, nutrition, and unstructured play.
- b. Avoid overwhelming the child with too many demands or overstimulation.

7. Strengthen Attachment and Security:

- a. Spend quality one-on-one time with the child, using affection and routines to nurture emotional bonds.
- b. A strong attachment helps children cope with challenges and reduces anxiety.

4.2. *Why Prevention Is Not Absolute?*

While proactive strategies can help ease the transition into this stage, the three-year crisis itself is a **necessary developmental milestone**. It reflects healthy psychological growth, including the formation of:

- Self-identity
- Autonomy
- Social and emotional understanding

Instead of attempting to prevent the crisis entirely, parents should view it as an opportunity to guide their child toward emotional maturity, independence, and stronger relationships. By preparing for this stage in advance, parents can create a smoother, more positive experience for both themselves and their child.

Chapter 5

This chapter will be about my research work. I carried out a survey among parents whose children have gone through or are currently going through the “three-year-old crisis.”

The survey was conducted online, and the questions were created using Google Drive. I shared the survey link with all my contacts via WhatsApp and Instagram, asking them to forward it to their own networks as well. As a result, responses came not only from residents of Bishkek but also from people living in other cities across Kyrgyzstan. In just three days, I received responses from 102 individuals, but I rounded it to 100 participants for analysis.

The questions were made up to determine whether all children go through this phase, what changes occur in children at this age, what might cause it, whether it can be managed, if the crisis can be prevented, and how parents support their children during this challenging period.

The questions were as follows:

1. You?
2. Have you heard of the three-year-old crisis?
3. How do you understand this developmental stage?

Manifestations of crisis in a child

4. What changes in your child's behavior have you noticed at this age?
5. How often does your child have tantrums?

Parents' reaction

6. How do you react to your child's tantrums or stubbornness?
7. What methods do you use to calm your child down?
8. Do you think your approach helps?

The role of the environment

9. Do you have a clear daily routine at home?
10. Does following a routine help reduce the manifestations of the crisis?
11. Does your child eat properly?

12. How many times a week does your child watch cartoons?
 13. Do you discuss your child's behavior with other family members?

Interaction with the child

14. Do you give your child the opportunity to make choices (e.g., toys, clothes, food)?
 15. Do you allow your child to make mistakes so they can learn from them?
 16. How much time do you spend playing with your child every day?
 17. Have you sought advice or help regarding the three-year-old crisis?
 18. What kind of help would be useful to you?

Personal experience and conclusions

19. Do you think the three-year-old crisis can be prevented?
 20. What actions have helped you cope with the difficulties of this period?
 21. What would you advise other parents?

Table 1. Results

Which of the guardians?	f	f
<i>Mother</i>	83	83%
<i>Father</i>	15	15%
<i>Grandmother</i>	1	1%
<i>Sister</i>	1	1%

2. It turned out that only 73.8% of respondents are aware of or have heard about the “three-year-crisis.”

3.

- The period when a child becomes stubborn. (21.2%)
 The stage when a child learns to be independent. (60.6%)
 The stage when a child learns to express emotions. (61.6%)
 A challenging period. (10.1%)

4.

- Stubbornness and protests. (42.4%)
 Mood swings. (30.3%)
 The desire to do everything independently. (66.7%)
 Frequent tantrums. (40.4%)
 Refusal to follow rules. (29.3%)

5.

- Everyday. (34%)
 Several times a week. (33%)
 Rarely. (32%)
 Never (1%)

6.

I ignore. (12.1%)
 I calmly explain why it is wrong. (66.7%)
 I punish (9.1%)
 I give in (4.1%)
 And other answers

7.

I hug and comfort (57.6%)
 I distract with toys/activities (27.3%)
 I leave the child alone until they calm down (13.1%)

8.

For question 8, many respondents who answered that they hug and comfort their child said this method helps. Those who said they distract their child also mentioned that this method is effective. However, there was one response suggesting that it is better to let the child express their emotions and then calmly explain the situation afterward. This respondent argued that distracting or immediately comforting the child might cause them to suppress their emotions, which is not good. I agree with this response

9.

Yes (51.5%)
 No (48.5%)

10.

Yes (77.1%)
 No (22.9%)

11.

Yes (66.7%)
 No (33.3%)

12.

Only one time (8%)
 Several time a week (33.3%)
 Everyday (57.3%)

13.

Yes (86.7%)
 No (13.3%)

14.

Always (30.3%)
 Sometimes (69.7%)

15.

Yes (98%)
 No (2%)

16.

Less than 30 minutes. (40.4%)

30–60 minutes. (37.4%)

More than 1 hour. (22.2%)

17.

From friends or relatives. (14.4%)

From specialists (psychologists, pediatricians). (14.4%)

In books, articles, on the Internet. (38.1%)

Did not search. (32%)

18.

Specialist consultation. (21.7%)

Support groups for parents. (22.8%)

Practical advice or training. (42.4%)

Articles or films about parenting.

Books.

General information.

Internet.

19.

To this question 80% of parents responded that it is possible

Other 20% responded that it is impossible because it is a natural phase that the child must go through, but it can be made easier.

20.

The responses to this question were as follows:

A friendly attitude. Hugging and loving the child despite their bad behavior. Establishing a daily routine, switching to a healthier diet, limiting screen time, spending more time outdoors, dedicating more attention, playing together with the child, negotiating, ensuring a proper sleep schedule, and so on.

21.

The advice was as follows:

Love, hug, kiss often, put yourself in the child's place, don't yell, don't hit, spend more time together, don't spoil them too much, but when necessary, show the child that you dislike certain behaviors and that you are upset. Be more patient, learn a lot, discipline yourself first, teach the child to express their emotions with words, talk a lot, and try not to get overly nervous.

Conclusion

The survey results showed that today, there are many conscious parents who strive to provide proper upbringing for their children. Almost 99% of parents are interested in whether the “three-year-

old crisis” can be prevented, as this challenging period significantly affects the quality of life for both children and parents, who often have other responsibilities besides caring for a three-year-old.

The survey revealed that 95% of children who experience daily tantrums, despite being hugged, loved, and having things explained to them, do not follow a clear daily routine, have insufficient sleep, poor nutrition, watch cartoons every day, and spend very little time playing with their parents. On the other hand, children who rarely or occasionally have tantrums generally adhere to these practices.

Of course, it is essential to consider that every child is an individual with a unique personality and character. And it is also important to consider how the mother’s pregnancy went.

Based on the information provided above and the results of the survey, we concluded that preventing the three-year crisis entirely is not possible because it represents a natural stage of development. However, understanding its causes and taking proactive steps—such as fostering independence, supporting emotional development, creating routines, and strengthening communication—can significantly reduce its intensity. By embracing this period with patience, empathy, and preparation, parents can help their child navigate this important phase with confidence and success.

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ПЕДАГОГИКА / PEDAGOGY

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Үч жаштагы кризистин алдын алууга болобу?

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Аннотация

Үч жаштагы кризис — бул баланын психосоциалдык өнүгүүсүндөгү маанилүү этап болуп саналат. Баланын психологиялык бакубаттуулугун сактоо жана колдоо үчүн чоңдор мазмундуу өз ара аракеттенүү жана баарлашуу үчүн жагымдуу шарттарды түзүшү керек. Бул баланы ар кандай иш-аракеттерге тартууну жана ата-эне менен баланын ортосунда жылуу, позитивдүү эмоционалдык байланышты калыптандырууну камтыйт. Баланын жүрүм-турумун үйдө, коомдук жайларда жана башка кырдаалдарда багыттоодо жана көзөмөлдөөдө анын курактык жана жеке өзгөчөлүктөрүн эске алуу абдан маанилүү.

Ачык сөздөр: үч жаштагы кризис, кризистин алдын алуу, психологиялык көйгөйлөр, баланы тарбиялоо

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ПЕДАГОГИКА / PEDAGOGY

УДК

Можно ли предотвратить кризис трех лет?

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Аннотация

Кризис трех лет является важнейшим этапом в психосоциальном развитии ребенка. Для сохранения и поддержания психологического благополучия ребенка взрослым необходимо создавать благоприятные условия для содержательного взаимодействия и общения. Это предполагает включение ребенка в различные виды деятельности, а также формирование теплой, позитивной эмоциональной связи между родителями и детьми. В процессе руководства и контроля поведения ребенка как дома, так и в общественных местах, а также в иных жизненных ситуациях крайне важно учитывать его возрастные и индивидуальные особенности.

Ключевые слова: кризис трех лет, предотвращение кризиса, психологические проблемы, воспитание детей