

Developmental Characteristics

The following provide general parameters for the developmental characteristics of children and teens. Although this information is helpful in understanding youth and the behaviors which they exhibit at various ages, these guidelines should not be viewed as hard and fast expectations.

Ages 6-8 years (1st - 3rd Grade)

Six, seven, and eight-year-olds build on the important developments of the first 6 years of life and seem to settle down to a steadier pace of growing and learning. Young school-age children are interested in real life tasks and activities, and pretend and fantasy lessen considerably. School-agers want to make "real" jewelry, take "real" photographs, and create "real" collections.

School-age children have longer attention spans. They are more likely to stick with things until the project is finished, the problem solved, or the argument resolved. Doing things together with friends, teamwork, and following rules become very important. This age group is fascinated by rules and can develop games with extensive rules and rituals.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

- skilled at using scissors and small tools
- development of permanent teeth
- enjoys testing muscle strength and skills
- good sense of balance
- can catch small balls
- can tie shoelaces
- enjoys copying designs and shapes, letters and numbers
- can print name
- long arms and legs may give gawky awkward appearance

INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

- may reverse printed letters (b/d)
- enjoys planning and building
- doubles speaking and listening vocabularies
- reading may become a major interest
- increased problem-solving ability
- interested in magic and tricks
- longer attention span
- enjoys creating elaborate collections
- able to learn difference between left and right
- can begin to understand time and the days of the week

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- being with friends becomes increasingly important
- interested in rules and rituals
- girls want to play more with girls; boys with boys
- may have a best friend and an enemy
- strong desire to perform well, do things right
- begins to see things from another child's point of view, but still very self-centered
- finds criticism or failure difficult to handle
- views things as black and white, right or wrong, wonderful or terrible, with very little middle ground
- seeks a sense of security in groups, organized play, and clubs
- generally enjoys caring for and playing with younger children
- may become upset when behavior or school-work is ignored

Ages 9 to 11 years (4th – 6th Grade)

Children of this age develop a sense of self and find it important to gain social acceptance and experience achievement. Friends become increasingly important. Secret codes, shared word meanings and made up languages, passwords and elaborate rituals are important ways to strengthen the bonds of friendship. Close friends are almost always of the same sex, although children in this age group are usually increasingly interested in peers of the opposite sex.

Be prepared to use all your "patience" skills if caring for children this age, as they tend to think that they do not need any adult care or supervision. Yet, when they are left to care for themselves, they are lonely, unhappy, and sometimes frightened.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

- girls are generally as much as 2 years ahead of boys in physical maturity
- girls may begin to menstruate
- increases body strength and hand dexterity
- improves coordination and reaction time

INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

- interested in reading fictional stories, magazines, and how-to project books
- may develop special interest in collections or hobbies
- may be very interested in discussing a future career
- fantasizes and daydreams about the future
- capable of understanding concepts without having direct hands-on experience

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- begins to see parents and authority figures as fallible human beings
- rituals, rules, secret codes, and made-up languages are common
- enjoys being a member of a club
- increased interest in competitive sports
- outbursts of anger are less frequent
- may belittle or defy adult authority

Ages 12 to 14 years (7th to 9th Grade)

Movement Towards Independence

- Struggle with sense of identity
- Moodiness
- Improved abilities to use speech to express oneself
- More likely to express feelings by action than by words
- Close friendships gain importance
- Less attention shown to parents, with occasional rudeness
- Realization that parents are not perfect; identification of their faults
- Search for new people to love in addition to parents
- Tendency to return to childish behavior, fought off by excessive activity
- Peer group influence interests and clothing styles

Career Interests

- Mostly interested in present and near future
- Greater ability to work

Sexuality

- Girls ahead of boys
- Same-sex friends and group activities
- Shyness, blushing and modesty
- Show-off qualities
- Greater interest in privacy
- Experimentation with body (masturbation)
- Worries about being normal

Ethics and Self-Direction

- Rule and limit testing
- Occasional experimentation with cigarettes, marijuana, and alcohol
- Capacity for abstract thought

Ages 15 to 17 years (10th to 12th Grade)

Movement Towards Independence

- Self-involvement, alternating between unrealistically high expectations and poor self-concept
- Complaints that parents interfere with independence
- Extremely concerned with appearance and with one's own body
- Feelings of strangeness about one's self and body
- Lowered opinion of parents, withdrawal of emotions from them
- Effort to make new friends
- Strong emphasis on the new peer group with the group identity of selectivity, superiority and competitiveness
- Periods of sadness as the psychological loss of the parents takes place
- Examination of inner experiences, which may include writing a diary

Career Interests

- Intellectual interests gain importance
- Some sexual and aggressive energies directed into creative and career interests

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- Sexuality

- Concerns about sexual attractiveness
- Frequently changing relationships
- Movement towards heterosexuality with fears of homosexuality
- Tenderness and fears shown towards opposite sex
- Feelings of love and passion

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Ethics and Self-Description

- Development of ideals and selection of role models
- More consistent evidence of conscience
- Greater capacity for setting goals
- Interest in moral reasoning

Ages 17 to 19 years (Late Adolescence)

Movement Towards Independence

- Firmer identity
- Ability to delay gratification
- Ability to think ideas through
- Ability to express ideas in words
- More developed sense of humor
- Stable interests
- Greater emotional stability
- Ability to make independent decisions
- Ability to compromise
- Pride in one's work
- Self-reliance
- More developed sense of humor
- Stable interests
- Greater emotional stability
- Ability to make independent decisions
- Ability to compromise
- Pride in one's work
- Self-reliance
- Greater concern for others

Career Interests

- More defined work habits
- Higher level of concern for the future
- Thoughts about one's role in life

Sexuality

- Concerned with serious relationships
- Clear sexual identity
- Capacities for tender and sensual love

Ethics and Self-Direction

- Capable of useful insight
- Stress on personal dignity and self-esteem
- Ability to set goals and follow through
- Acceptance of social institutions and cultural traditions
- Self-regulation of self esteem

Teenagers will naturally vary slightly from the descriptions in the charts above, but the feelings and behaviors listed for each area are, in general, considered normal for each of the three stages. The mental and emotional problems that can interfere with these normal developmental stages are treatable.

Sources

National Network for Child Care – NNCC (www.nncc.org)
www.canadianparents.org