

Understanding developmental stages can help you support your child's learning at home and in school.

All children go through developmental stages as they grow up ■ Just as children's height, weight, and physical abilities change, so do things such as their desire to play alone or with a group, how they learn best, or how talkative they are.

These stages of development are fairly predictable in children within any given culture* ■ With each stage come certain predictable changes in how children relate to others and approach the world.

Children go through these stages at different rates ■ Although there are general characteristics at each developmental stage in any given culture, how quickly a child goes through these stages depends on many things, including the child's personality and environment. It's common and normal for some children to arrive at a developmental stage a bit later or earlier—sometimes a year later or earlier—than their peers. Also, a child might mature quickly in one area, such as physical development, but more slowly in another, such as social development.

Children don't change suddenly on their birthday ■ For example, a child who just turned thirteen may still show a lot of twelve-year-old behaviors, and a child who's thirteen-and-a-half may already be showing a lot of fourteen-year-old behaviors.

ENJOY YOUR CHILD
AT EACH AGE.

Each age is unique. Each is a wonder.

*The characteristics in this pamphlet are based on research on children in European and U.S. schools. Children growing up in other cultures may show different developmental patterns.

Additional resources about child development and children's success in school

BOOKS

Comer, James P., and Alvin F. Poussaint. 1992. *Raising Black Children*. New York: Plume Books.

Faber, Adele, and Elaine Mazlish. 1995. *How to Talk So Kids Can Learn*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Konner, Melvin. 1991. *Childhood: A Multicultural View*. Boston: Little, Brown & Co.

Nelsen, Jane. 1996. *Positive Discipline*. New York: Random House.

Rogoff, Barbara. 2003. *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*. Reprint Edition. New York: Oxford University Press.

Wood, Chip. 1997. *Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom Ages 4–14*. Turners Falls, Mass.: Northeast Foundation for Children.

WEBSITES

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning
www.casel.org

Includes a section on how parents can support their children's social and emotional learning at home

National PTA® www.pta.org

Tips and articles on topics related to parenting and school-home collaboration

School Success Info.org
www.schoolsuccessinfo.org

Tips on how to support children's school learning at home

Origins www.originsonline.org

Includes a section on *Responsive Designs for Middle School*, strategies for meeting the unique developmental needs of young adolescents

For more detail about the common characteristics of children at each age and implications for classroom curriculum, see *Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom Ages 4–14*, published by Northeast Foundation for Children.

Child Development Pamphlets are available for grades K through 8. To order pamphlets, *Yardsticks*, or other resources, call

800-360-6332, ext. 125 or visit www.responsiveclassroom.org.

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Eighth

GRADERS

Common developmental characteristics of 12, 13, and 14 year-olds

ADAPTED FROM
YARDSTICKS

Children in the Classroom Ages 4–14

by Chip Wood ■ Published by Northeast Foundation for Children, Inc.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF Twelve-Year-Olds

Twelves are often unpredictable and hard to read as they swing between childhood and adulthood. Their greatest need is to be with peers as they sort through their physical, social, and emotional challenges and the all-important identity question, "Who am I?"

S O C I A L

- Peer opinions matter more than those of teachers and parents
- Question and argue with adults about rules; need adults to listen to their ideas
- More willing to accept guidance from adults other than teachers and parents
- Need ceremonies and rituals to mark turning points on their way to adulthood
- Capable of self-awareness, insight, and empathy
- Can take on major responsibilities such as running a school store or raising money
- Careless with "unimportant" things such as cleaning their room and keeping track of assignments
- Like both group and individual work

P H Y S I C A L

- Very energetic; need lots of sleep, exercise, and food (including in-school snack)
- Enjoy physical education and sports
- Boys and girls both have growth spurts
- Girls show signs of puberty; most are menstruating
- May begin to excel at a subject (such as science) or skill (such as drawing)
- Understand and enjoy sarcasm, double meanings, and more sophisticated jokes
- Enthusiastic about school work they see as purposeful, such as research projects, science experiments, and drama productions
- Can set goals and concentrate well
- Very interested in civics, history, current events, environmental issues, and social justice

C O G N I T I V E

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF Thirteen-Year-Olds

Thirteen is typically an age of rapid growth in mind and body, an age of contrasts and confusion. Thirteen-year-olds are both pushing away from adults and seeking them. They're excited about new teenage opportunities but hesitate to take risks. Adding to the confusion, physical and emotional development is happening much faster in girls than in boys.

S O C I A L

- Moody and sensitive; anger can flare up suddenly
- Feelings are easily hurt; can easily hurt others' feelings
- Very concerned about personal appearance
- Like to be left alone when home
- Prefer working alone or with one partner
- Spend hours on the phone or computer, and with video games and TV
- Decorate their bedrooms to show personality and independence
- A lot of peer pressure in what to wear, how to talk, what music to listen to
- Girls tend to focus on close friendships; boys tend to travel in small groups or gangs
- Challenge the ideas and authority of parents and teachers
- Answer parents with a single word or loud, extreme language
- Often mean (may stem from being insecure or scared)

P H Y S I C A L

- Lots of physical energy
- Skin problems are common; hygiene becomes more important
- Most girls are menstruating and have almost reached full physical development
- Most boys are showing first signs of puberty (will reach full development at age fourteen or fifteen) and are physically awkward
- Changing bodies make gym, health, and sex education embarrassing
- Tentative, worried, unwilling to take risks on tough intellectual tasks
- Interested in fairness, justice, discrimination, etc.
- Often write better than they speak, so better at written work than oral explanations
- Need short, predictable homework assignments to build good study habits
- Starting to enjoy thinking about the many sides of an issue

C O G N I T I V E

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF Fourteen-Year-Olds

First on the agenda for fourteens is distancing themselves from adults. They need to do this to allow their own adult personalities to emerge. Fourteen-year-olds often have many challenging behaviors, but they can also have great creativity, a keen interest in solving problems in the larger world, more willingness to admit errors and try again, and a striking sense of humor.

S O C I A L

- Need adult connection even while fighting for their own identity
- Need adults to listen and negotiate rules and requirements
- Fiercely criticize parents' dress, ideas, friends, etc.
- Mimic adult behavior but resent adult lectures
- "Know it all"; can be extremely oppositional
- May be troublesome at home while excelling at school
- Work hard at creating teen subculture
- Typically loud and rambunctious
- Can rise up to leadership challenges in student council, peer tutoring, etc.
- Without safe rites of passage, may drift toward alcohol and drugs
- Work well in small groups
- Both boys and girls are more interested in sex; some are sexually active

P H Y S I C A L

- Very energetic, generally healthy; most would rather go to school than stay home when sick in order to be with peers
- Need lots of exercise, snacks, sleep
- Girls almost fully developed
- Boys may continue growth spurts and show signs of puberty

C O G N I T I V E

- Better at thinking abstractly—for example, understanding ideas such as "freedom"
- Enjoy individual skills (music, art, etc.)
- Like technology and learning how things work
- Respond well to variety and challenge; enjoy research
- Complain about homework, but often enjoy the challenge
- Like having a chance to revise and improve work
- Often say "I'm bored" to mean "I don't understand"
- May see academic success as "nerdy" and "uncool"