

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 five may still show a lot of four-year-old behaviors, and a child who's five-and-a-half may already be showing a lot of six-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

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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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CHILD DEVELOPMENT PAMPHLET SERIES:

Kindergartners

Common developmental characteristics of 4, 5, and 6 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 Four-Year-Olds

Four-year-olds tend to be active, curious, and adventurous, with lots of physical and mental energy. They are ready for everything and soak up information with incredible speed.

S O C I A L

- Friendly, talkative, “bubbly”
- Love being with friends, though still often play near, not with, a friend
- Learn from modeling and practice of appropriate behavior
- Can make decisions based on their interests, but need adult advice
- Need adult help finding words to express needs
- Love “jobs”—counting attendance, putting out snack, etc.

P H Y S I C A L

- Vision tends to focus on faraway objects
- Often clumsy; collisions and spills are common
- Awkward with writing, handcrafts, and other small movements
- Need lots of physical activity
- Able to sit still only for short periods

C O G N I T I V E

- Need to move frequently from one activity and classroom area to another
- Learn best by playing and exploring, such as through dress-up and drama
- Can do paper and pencil tasks for only very short periods
- Learn well through use of large muscles—for example, easel painting, math manipulatives, large blocks, tumbling, and dancing
- Love being read to
- Enjoy language, delighting in big words, long explanations, bathroom language, and swear words

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF Five-Year-Olds

Five, overall, is a time of great happiness. Life is “good,” says the five-year-old. Five is also a time of great change. During this one year, children may go from being cautious and compliant to uncertain and oppositional.

S O C I A L

- Early in the year, like to help, follow rules, and be “good”
- Later, may test or oppose adult authority or show uncertainty (not sure whether to be “good” or “naughty”)
- Need consistent rules and enforcement; respond well to clear and simple expectations
- Need empathetic discipline as they test limits and make mistakes

P H Y S I C A L

- Better control of running, jumping, and other large movements
- Need lots of physical activity, including free play
- Still awkward with writing, handcrafts, and other small movements
- Early in the year, pace themselves well; later, tire quickly
- Pencil grip changes from three-fingered to other grips
- Able to see close objects best; not yet able to sweep focus smoothly from left to right

- Read one word at a time

- Copying from blackboard is hard

C O G N I T I V E

- See only one way to do things; rarely see other viewpoints
- Imaginative and believe toys and other objects are alive
- Think very literally (“raining cats and dogs” means cats and dogs are falling from the sky)
- Often reverse letters and numbers
- Early in the year, like to copy and repeat activities; later, like to try more new activities
- Often think out loud before acting (“I’m going to move the truck”)
- Learn best by exploring materials such as blocks, clay, finger paints, rocks, and shells

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF Six-Year-Olds

The bodies, minds, and social behavior of six-year-olds are changing dramatically. Sixes have lots of energy. Eagerness, curiosity, imagination, drive, openness, and enthusiasm—all are at their peak in the typical six-year-old.

S O C I A L

- Competitive; not always good sports; sometimes bossy or critical
- Either rush to be first or dawdle to be last
- Want to have friends; may have best friends
- Enjoy dressing up, putting on plays, etc., with other children
- Talkative and noisy
- Easily upset when criticized or discouraged
- Love encouragement, surprises, and treats
- Might test authority with tantrums, complaining, or tattling

P H Y S I C A L

- Eyes are maturing, so reading is easier, but blackboard copying is still hard
- Often chew pencils, hair, or fingernails (may be due to the discomfort of new teeth growing in)
- Bodies growing rapidly
- Like lots of physical activity
- Tire easily and get sick often

C O G N I T I V E

- Beginning to understand past and present, and how and why things happen
- More able to see other viewpoints and understand reasons for rules
- Love new ideas and asking questions
- Learn well through games, poems, riddles, and songs
- Very ambitious, often choosing projects that are too hard
- Learn well from field trips and hands-on projects
- Like doing lots of work; not that concerned with the quality of the work

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