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 seven may still show a lot of six-year-old behaviors, and a child who’s seven-and-a-half may already be showing a lot of eight-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


WEBSITES

Child Development Institute www.childdevelopmentinfo.com

Offers information on child development, parenting, and other topics of interest

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

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

National PTA www.pta.org

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

PBS Parents www.pbs.org/parents

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

PBS Kids www.pbs.org/kids

Tips and articles on topics related to child development

Common developmental characteristics of 6-, 7-, and 8-year-olds

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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.

SOCIAL
- 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 talking

PHYSICAL
- Eyes are maturing, so reading is easier, but copying from board or chart 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

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF
Seven-Year-Olds

In contrast to brash, noisy sixes, seven-year-olds are generally quiet, sensitive, and serious. Their intense moods often change quickly. Sevens tend to work hard at everything they do and need private time to manage their new thoughts and feelings.

SOCIAL
- May be moody, shy, sulky, touchy; sometimes depressed
- Prefer playing and working alone or with one friend
- May change friendships quickly and feel "nobody likes me"
- Relies on adults for help and reassurance
- Needs security of rules, routines, and physical boundaries

PHYSICAL
- Often keep their eyes focused on a small, close area
- Copying from board or chart is very hard
- With head on arm or desk, grasp pencil point tightly and write very small
- Can do quiet work for longer periods
- Can get sick from worrying about tests, assignments, etc.

COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF
Eight-Year-Olds

Enthusiastic and imaginative, eights often love big challenges but lack the work skills and patience to complete their plans. Children this age need adult help to know their limits and work through the steps to their goal.

SOCIAL
- Love group activities and cooperative work
- Prefer playing with peers of the same gender
- Like to talk and explain ideas
- Good sense of humor
- Adjust well to change; bounce back quickly from mistakes or disappointments

PHYSICAL
- Full of energy; play hard, work quickly, and tire easily—do better with several short play breaks than one long one
- Eyes able to focus well on objects near and far
- May have growth spurt
- Limited attention span, short exercise breaks help concentration
- Better control of eyes and hands allows copying from board or chart

Cognitive
- Industrious, impatient, and full of ideas; often take on more than they can handle
- Listen well but may not always remember what they’ve heard
- Getting good at handwriting, handicrafts, and drawing
- Excited but also nervous about exploring the broader world
- May give up when things are hard but soon want to try again
- Interested in rules, logic, and fairness

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