

# Handout: Ages and Stages

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## AGES AND STAGES OF YOUTH

Not all children are the same; all are unique in their development. However, there are some characteristics that children share at certain stages of life. The term *developmental characteristics* is used to describe how children think and act at a certain age. These characteristics are described in four areas:

- Physical— physical development has to do with the growth and maturity of their bodies.
- Social—Social development is how children interact with others and how they respond in social settings.
- Emotional—Emotional development is how they deal with their feelings and how they express them to others.
- Intellectual—Intellectual development is about how children think and learn.

School-aged children are grouped into four developmental age groups:

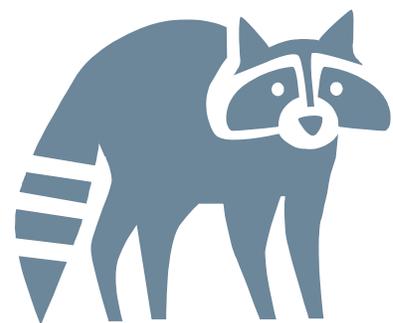
- Early childhood (5-8) (Cloverbuds)
- Middle childhood (9-11) (4-H Juniors)
- Early Adolescents (12-14) (4-H Intermediates)
- Adolescents (15-18) (4-H Seniors)

By knowing the characteristics of each age group, it is easier to plan and teach in a way that will work best for the age group that your students are in.

## Principles of Development

Even though patterns do occur, it is important to remember that each child is unique.

- Development is orderly, not random. It happens in sequence.
- Development is a continuous and gradual process. From the time a child is born he or she continues to change and develop all the way through adulthood.
- Development is most rapid during the early stages of infancy and the adolescent years. As we look at the four age groups, we are able to see this rapid growth.
- Not all children develop at the same pace.
- Not all children possess the same temperament.



## Ages and Stages of Youth (continued)

### Early Childhood, Ages 5 to 8 (4-H Cloverbuds)

PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	EMOTIONAL	INTELLECTUAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning to master physical skills using large muscle groups like running</li> <li>• Beginning to develop their small motor skills like tying their shoes</li> <li>• As we work with this age group in relation to their physical development, we should focus on activities that encourage the use of large motor skills more than small motor skills.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They are developing skills in how to be a friend and may have several best friends. They do fight with each other, but can get over those fights pretty quickly.</li> <li>• To help facilitate the social development of 6 to 8 year olds, consider these ideas:</li> <li>• Break them into small groups to encourage them to interact with children with whom they do not usually play.</li> <li>• Incorporate some role playing into your programming</li> <li>• Include activities that mix up the genders instead of allowing them to divide up into boy or girl groups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotionally, children 6 to 8 years old are very focused on themselves. They have a hard time understanding things from someone else's point of view.</li> <li>• Some things we can do to help 6 to 8 year olds with their emotional development include:</li> <li>• Keep a positive attitude when around them.</li> <li>• Be supportive and encouraging, especially when you see they are frustrated.</li> <li>• Plan activities that promote success and focus more on cooperative activities rather than competition.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The intellectual development of 6 to 8 year olds is characterized by concrete thinking. They base their thinking in reality, not in the abstract.</li> <li>• They only work well on one task at a time. They are more interested in the process of doing rather than the end result.</li> <li>• We can help this age group with their intellectual development by planning activities with a shorter time frame.</li> <li>• Allow them to explore and answer questions if they have them. That is how they learn.</li> </ul>

### Middle Childhood, Ages 9 to 11 (4-H Juniors)

PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	EMOTIONAL	INTELLECTUAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This age group is very active and cannot sit still easily. They will experience a growth spurt during this time as they move toward adolescence.</li> <li>• The girls will begin to mature before the boys.</li> <li>• As we work with this age group, some things we can do to help their development include providing active learning experiences.</li> <li>• Kids at this age are also beginning to be more competitive between boys and girls. Try to avoid competition between the gender groups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social development for the 9 to 11 year olds is all about same sex groups—boys want to be with other boys; girls with other girls.</li> <li>• This age group still has difficulty seeing the views of others, but they also like to make others happy and will adapt to some extent, even though they may not fully understand.</li> <li>• As we work with this age group it is important to allow them to be in same sex groups so they are more comfortable.</li> <li>• We can encourage their social development by involving older youth as mentors. They look up to older kids and will model their behavior.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At ages 9 to 11, children want everything to be fair or equal. They often judge things in absolutes, with very little middle ground—either an idea is wonderful or it is disgusting.</li> <li>• It is important for us to remember not to compare youth to each other, but recognize each child for his or her strengths. We can also place emphasis on the individual progress they make as they complete a task or work on their project.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This group is easily motivated and eager to try new things; however, they may lose interest quickly. Favorite subjects will begin to emerge as they discover their interests; often they will explore hobbies and collections related to these interests.</li> <li>• As we work with this age group, we can help them develop intellectually by providing simple, short directions and by keeping learning experiences brief.</li> <li>• We can also provide a variety of different activities that will ensure success for each child. This may take a little more time to plan, but the results will be worth it.</li> </ul>

## Ages and Stages of Youth (continued)

### Early Adolescence, Ages 12–14 (4-H Intermediates)

PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	EMOTIONAL	INTELLECTUAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children between ages 12 to 14 are experiencing many physical changes. They are entering puberty where boys' voices are changing. Boys are experiencing a growing spurt in which they overtake the girls in stature.</li> <li>• Both boys and girls may be concerned about their body image.</li> <li>• As we work with this age group, we need to be sensitive to their feelings and avoid comments that criticize or compare youth physically. We can also watch for youth who are making fun of others and put a stop to it so we can avoid hurt feelings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Socially, children at this age prefer activities that include both boys and girls. They are more interested in what their peers say than their parent's advice. They are becoming more opinionated and independent and tend to reject solutions from adults because they feel their solution is better.</li> <li>• It is also important to select activities they can do with their peers. They are also ready to begin working on individual goals they would like to achieve instead of just focusing on group goals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children at this age still tend to compare themselves to others. We also characterize them as the drama king or queen.</li> <li>• Their emotions are all over the place—one minute happy and having a great time, the next, the world is against them.</li> <li>• We need to be careful not to embarrass or criticize these children. We can also help them explore their identity, values and beliefs by providing activities that challenge their thinking in these areas.</li> <li>• Let these early teens assume responsibility for planning events and activities and set expectations that they follow through with their duties.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The intellectual development of 12 to 14 year olds is expanding to include more abstract thinking. They are beginning to understand cause and effect and are ready for more in-depth and long-term experiences.</li> <li>• As we work with this age group on their intellectual development, we can begin to give them real-life problems to solve. We also need to let them make decisions and evaluate the results so that they can learn from mistakes and celebrate achievements.</li> <li>• This age group will thrive with service learning projects where</li> <li>• They can identify an area of need and put a total plan together to address that need.</li> </ul>

### Adolescence/Teens, Ages 15–18 (4-H Seniors)

PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	EMOTIONAL	INTELLECTUAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Typically, teenagers are approaching maturity with their physical development and are concerned frequently about their body image. Acne, weight, physical activity, and other issues are concerns to them. They are impressionable where physical appearance is concerned and can be easily misguided by advertising and the emphasis our society places on physical appearance.</li> <li>• While working with teens it is important to avoid comments criticizing their appearance, or implying that their physical appearance is related to who they are inside or their success and happiness.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In their social development, 15 to 18 year olds desire status among their peer group. Although they want to be part of a group, they also want to be recognized as individuals. They are interested in co-educational activities and dating.</li> <li>• They are learning how to make commitments and follow through.</li> <li>• We can encourage their social development by involving them in planning their own programs and holding them accountable for the success or failure of their plans. We can also emphasize personal development and leadership skills with teens.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotional characteristics of 15 to 18 year olds center around respect, developing confidence and developing independence.</li> <li>• They are looking for ways to express their uniqueness but still want approval from their peers.</li> <li>• They are also developing their own set of values and beliefs. As teens mature, we can encourage their emotional development by letting them assume more responsibility.</li> <li>• Continue to challenge their thinking on identity, values, and beliefs. Encourage them to work in youth/adult partnerships to achieve common goals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some intellectual characteristics of the 15 to 18 year old age group include mastery of abstract thinking and their ability to imagine how their behavior can impact the future. They like to show others what they have learned. This age group does not do well with meaningless activities or things that just take up time.</li> <li>• If we want to keep teens engaged intellectually, we have to provide real life problems for them to solve.</li> <li>• Career exploration is important as this is when they are thinking about whether they will go to college, what career they will pursue, and other important decisions for their future.</li> </ul>