

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

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

Fox, Jennifer. 2008. *Your Child's Strengths: Discover Them, Develop Them, Use Them*. New York: Viking.

Nelsen, Jane. Numerous books published about her "Positive Discipline" approach. For full list, descriptions, and other resources, see [www.positivediscipline.com](http://www.positivediscipline.com).

Wolf, Anthony. 2000. *The Secret of Parenting: How to Be in Charge of Today's Kids—from Toddlers to Preteens—Without Threats or Punishment*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Wood, Chip. 2007. *Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom Ages 4–14*. Turners Falls, MA: Center for Responsive Schools, Inc.

### WEBSITES

**Child Development Institute**  
[www.childdevelopmentinfo.com](http://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](http://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](http://www.pta.org)  
Tips and articles on topics related to parenting and school-home collaboration

**PBS Parents**  
[www.pbs.org/parents](http://www.pbs.org/parents)  
Tips and information on a variety of topics, including child development and how to support your child's learning and work in school

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](http://www.responsiveclassroom.org)**.



*Partnering with schools to ensure a high-quality  
education for every child, every day*

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CRS ITEM NO. CCK



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 Center for Responsive Schools, 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

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## 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

### S O C I A L

- Read one word at a time
- Copying from board or chart 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

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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.*

### 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 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

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

## ENJOY YOUR CHILD AT EACH AGE.

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

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### CHILD DEVELOPMENT PAMPHLET SERIES



# First GRADERS

Common developmental  
characteristics of 5, 6,  
and 7 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 Five-Year-Olds

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### S O C I A L

- Early in the year, like to help, follow rules, and be “good”
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- Need consistent rules and enforcement; respond well to clear and simple expectations
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### 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
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- 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

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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.*

### 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

## 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.*

### S O C I A L

- 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”
- Rely on adults for help and reassurance
- Need the security of rules, routines, and physical boundaries

### P H Y S I C A L

- Often keep their eyes focused on a small, close area
- Copying from board 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.

### C O G N I T I V E

- Better at understanding ideas such as time, space, and quantity
- Learn new words and meanings quickly; enjoy writing stories
- Open to learning math
- Good at classifying, such as sorting buttons, pictures, leaves, and shapes
- Listen well and speak precisely
- Enjoy hands-on exploration of how things work
- Bothered by mistakes and try hard to make their work perfect
- Like to work slowly and finish what they start
- Enjoy repeating tasks and reviewing learning

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# Second GRADERS

Common developmental  
characteristics of 6, 7,  
and 8 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  
**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



COMMON CHARACTERISTICS OF  
**Seven-Year-Olds**

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S O C I A L

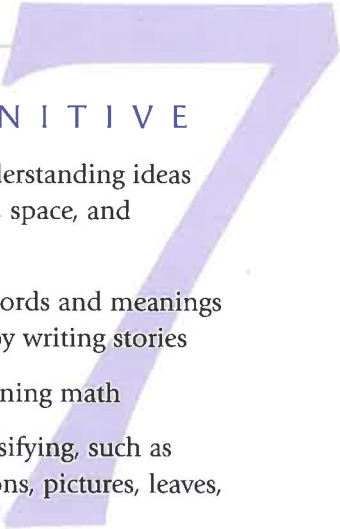
- May be moody, shy, sulky, touchy; sometimes depressed
- Prefer playing and working alone or with one friend
- May change friendships quickly and feel “nobody likes me”
- Rely on adults for help and reassurance
- Need the security of rules, routines, and physical boundaries

P H Y S I C A L

- Often keep their eyes focused on a small, close area
- Copying from board 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.

C O G N I T I V E

- Better at understanding ideas such as time, space, and quantity
- Learn new words and meanings quickly; enjoy writing stories
- Open to learning math
- Good at classifying, such as sorting buttons, pictures, leaves, and shapes
- Listen well and speak precisely
- Enjoy hands-on exploration of how things work
- Bothered by mistakes and try hard to make their work perfect
- Like to work slowly and finish what they start
- Enjoy repeating tasks and reviewing learning



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.*

S O C I A L

- 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

P H Y S I C A L

- 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 cursive writing and copying from board

C O G N I T I V E

- 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, handcrafts, computers, 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

