

School-Age Youth Developmental Characteristics

The following list covers general characteristics attributed to children and youth ages 5 – 18 years old. Children and youth develop at varying rates and there will be individual differences. These characteristics should be used as a guide for each age group while keeping individual variability in mind. This knowledge supports program staff in planning age-appropriate activities.

	Cognitive	Social-Emotional	Physical	Ethical	Language
5-7 Year Olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrates natural curiosity • Thinking is emotional • Displays egocentric thinking, use logic & reasoning sparingly • Present oriented 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows strong ties between physical and emotional states of being • Have energy highs and lows • Begin to play cooperatively • Have a strong attachment to adults • Have an emerging sense of humor • Have limited control of expression • Want to be part of older children's activities • Need assistance with transitions and changes in routine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gross motor skills predominate (Fine motor activities may dysregulate) • Are developing fine motor skills • Like to practice their motor skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believe rules are sacred but do not always play by them • Think it is unfair to do what is forbidden • Believe in obeying authority figures so they do not get punished 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning to use language to resolve problems with peers • Asks the meaning of words • Uses language in cooperative play

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8-10 Year Olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Displays natural curiosity • Thinking is more concrete but is becoming more reflective • Begins to understand abstract concepts like time, future, past, & present 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begins comparing themselves to others • Have high energy • Are able to learn from each other • Develop relatively stable groups of friends • May have extreme reactions to minor things • Exhibit growing independence • Are able to work in groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin exhibiting physical differences and increased fine motor skill development • Develop physically at a smooth and uneventful rate • Compare their physical skills with those of their peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play by the rules • Believe in social, conventional rules • Believe in fair treatment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opens and closes conversations • Uses language to persuade, inform and entertain • Better able to give and follow multi-step directions
11-13 Year Olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are interested in the adult world • Thinking begins to become more abstract & reflective • Lack long-range planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater awareness of self • Experience mood and energy swings • Have a need for privacy & more independent interactions • Starting to develop stronger attachment towards peers than adults • Need to develop self-esteem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show greater hormonal changes and physical growth • Begin a period of rapid physical growth • Often experience a period of greater adjustment to physiological changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin to make ethical decisions by themselves • Think social injustice is unfair • Are willing to revise outdated rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses metaphors • Uses slang and text-speak • Has discussion, debates, and arguments • Begins paying more attention to body language, tone of voice, and other nonverbal cues • Starts using writing to

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11-13 Year Olds		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience relationship traumas • Exhibit growing independence • May work well with younger children, as mentors (supervised) 			describe personal experiences
14 Year Olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a greater ability for complex thoughts • Have a stronger sense of right and wrong • Can focus on the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows more interest in peer groups • Influenced by peers • Shows less affection toward parents; may even be rude or short-tempered • Wants to be liked • Displays interest in romantic relationships • Shows more concern about body image, looks and clothes • Focuses more on themselves, alternating between high 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May experience concerns if they develop physically slower than their peers • Most girls have started their menstrual periods • Begin experiencing significant hormone and body changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Starts to set personal goals • May challenge the solutions and assumptions presented by adults • Is embarrassed by parents • Recognizes own strengths and weaknesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can better express feelings through talking

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14 Year Olds		<p>expectations and lack of confidence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experiences more moodiness • Experiences stress from more challenging schoolwork 			
15 Year Olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows more concern about their future • Exhibits more defined work habits • Can explain the reasoning behind their choices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefers to communicate through text messages and social media • May struggle with peer pressure • Has a strong interest in romantic relationships • Many girls are insecure about their appearance • Have greater emotional regulation skills • Have a deeper capacity for caring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boys may continue growing, but most girls have reached their full height • Boy's voices become deeper and they may begin growing facial hair • Boys may gain muscle rapidly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has specific hobbies or interests • Shows a greater respect for the rules when their privileges depend on their behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can communicate in an adult-like fashion • Can hold appropriate conversations • Can tell more involved stories • Uses slang when speaking with their friends
16 Year Olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have preferred methods for studying • Planning for future school or work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is part of a team or clique (or wants to be) • Shows more signs of sexual interest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the visual-spatial coordination needed to judge distance and speed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is more emphatic when expressing opinions • Shows signs of confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is more abrasive and sometimes rude when talking • May be less communicative

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16 Year Olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can better reason out a course of action and explain their decision • Memorizes information more easily 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Becomes aware of sexual orientation • Enters into deeper platonic or romantic relationships • Has increasing resistance to peer pressure • Begins relating to family better • Regularly sulks • Develops a better sense of compassion for others • May be concerned about the way they look 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> and react quickly when driving • Boys may still be developing, with more height growth and further development of facial hair • Experiences a redistribution of fat patterns • Sleeps and eats more to keep up with growth • Is more agile and coordinated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begins making decisions with their independence in mind • Begins developing a worldview and a basic set of values 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seems to love arguing • Changes their language and behaviors between school and home
17 Year Olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has more defined work habits • Is better about giving reasons for their choices, including what they believe to be right or wrong • Understands that their decisions have longterm effects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has more interest in romantic relationships • Has fewer conflicts with parents • Develops more intimate relationships • Spends less time with parents and more time with friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Girls have completed puberty, while boys may still be maturing physically • Metabolism has slowed to more adult ranges • Acne can become common • May experience body image issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows more independence from parents • Shows excitement and/or concern about future school and work plans • Wants adult leadership roles • Can make and keep commitments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can communicate like adults • Commonly uses slang • May still struggle to understand double negatives • Can lose track of long, complex questions

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17 Year Olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May still do things without thinking first • Organizational skills improve 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Searches for intimacy • Has a deeper capacity for caring and sharing • May feel a lot of sadness or depression • Can cope with new problems and different situations better than in the past 			
18 Year Olds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will move into adult roles and responsibilities (e.g., learning a trade, working, or moving on to higher education) • Fully understands abstract concepts and is aware of consequences and personal limitations • Builds and tests decision-making skills • Often philosophical and idealistic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moves into adult relationships with their parents • Sees their peer group as a less important determinant of behavior • Has greater intimacy skills • Enters into intimate sexual and emotional relationships • Has an increasing capacity for using insight and empathy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All genders have reached their full height • Establishes their body image • Less preoccupied with body changes • Takes care of their own personal hygiene and grooming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifies career goals and prepares to achieve them • Is secure in their autonomy • Develops new hobbies, skills, and adult interests • Carries some feelings of invincibility • Can make their own schedule and plans • Can evaluate their own opinions instead of following those of others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can communicate like other adults, although may say the first thing that comes to their mind without thinking it through • May seem less communicative

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18 Year Olds		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shifts their emphasis from self to others • Can manage emotions in a socially acceptable manner 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sets limits and compromises when appropriate • Is more comfortable seeking adult advice 	
Adapted from: Berger, Kathleen S, <i>The Developing Person Through the Life Span</i> and Coral Care, <i>Developmental Milestones for Teenagers</i>					