

What to Expect

General Characteristics by Grade Level

Pre Kindergarten

- Three and four year olds focus on what they experience through the senses, especially what they can feel and move with their hands. “Hands on” work, with concrete objects, is very important.
- Order is essential for these young children. They thrive when there is routine and stability.
- Children learn language very easily at this time in their lives.
- Young children have a deep sense of wonder and awe. They are naturally curious and seek to “know” things with all their senses. They are open to and drawn by both “physical” and “spiritual” wonders, the natural and supernatural.

Kindergarten

- The self-image of a child at this age is delicate, easily altered by people and situations that are near. A healthy self-concept is encouraged by positive reinforcement including the fact that God made each person and loves each person.
- The kindergartner is egocentric, self - absorbed and sometimes fails to realize that others may not share the same perceptions.
- A five year old needs a strong sense of security and a feeling of belonging and love. Improved socialization skills are a goal for the kindergarten year. Kindergarteners involve their body and spirit as well as their mind in learning.
- This child relates to the concrete, to experiences of everyday life, has a short attention span and needs a variety of activities and approaches to learning. The kindergarten year provides a time for the child to acquire a sense of initiative, to experience opportunities to affect the world.

First Grade

- Children of this age are growing away from egocentric social behavior toward an awareness of other people. They are entering into peer-group activities with zest. Now they need guidance in learning to handle playtime conflicts and to exercise the social skills needed to establish and maintain friendships. These skills include learning to give and take and to share responsibility with peers, learning boundaries, learning to read and to write, and other related intellectual skills.
- First graders are capable of understanding a story and can retell it from beginning to end. Some are even capable at this stage of finding hidden meaning or discovering the moral in a story.
- A child’s sense of self-worth is quite fragile at this stage and it is imperative to be sensitive to this fragility. When disciplining a child, it is important to focus on the behavior that needs to be corrected. This correction should be handled in such a way that the child’s emerging self-image is not damaged or hurt.

Second Grade

- Second-graders are beginning to develop socially. They enjoy increasing involvement in group activities such as team projects, singing and joint recitation. Seven-year-olds need to learn to respect others as created and loved by God, and to treat others as they would want to be treated, with love and respect.
- Second-grade children are more cognizant of right and wrong and of their power to choose. They begin to develop a set of action patterns based on those they observe in adults they admire.
- Seven year olds have a short attention span (about ten to twenty minutes) and tire easily if too many requests are presented at once.
- They can memorize simple prayers, verses from the Psalms and Scripture, as well as other prayer forms such as the response in a litany.
- Their ability to think in the abstract is very limited. They still learn best through concrete experiences. They grasp concepts like “unity” and “belonging” from doing things such as sharing, listening, eating together, giving, thanking and celebrating.
- They show interest in how things are made, especially living creatures. This interest readily transfers to prayers of praise, awe, and thanksgiving.

Third Grade

- Children at this level seek group identification – they have a special group of friends, usually all boy or all girl friends. They define their roles and duties from the community in which they live. This is the “good boy” or “nice girl” period during which it is important to follow accepted expectations.
- Eight year old children begin to take responsibilities seriously, but are very sensitive, at times moody, and easily disturbed by criticism from adults. They are developing a positive, though quite fragile, self-image. Strong adult support is still very much needed – even if the child appears to prefer independence.
- These children, because of their growing group consciousness, enjoy events in which they have a role in planning, like family activities, traditions, and prayer.

Fourth Grade

- Enthusiasm, self-confidence and activity characterize this year. This is a period of steady growth in both physical and mental ability. Athletic skill is very important in the development of nine year olds for it affects their concept of success in winning and maintaining a coveted place among peers. Intellectually, nine year olds are sharpening study skills and becoming capable of a longer attention span. They continue to be interested in living creatures and how they are made.
- Fourth-graders are more concerned about right and wrongdoing at this stage. They want to live by rules, and they want others to live by them too. They want to be accepted and to be part of a community. They experience conflict and need to know how to deal with or resolve it.

- Nine-year olds want to please their parents, teachers and other adults. They want their efforts and achievements to be noticed and complimented. Parents will want to recognize the underlying virtue that leads to good behavior and achievements in academic, musical, and athletic activities.

Fifth Grade

- Fifth graders, though no longer little children, are not yet adolescents. They are at a period in life commonly called pre-adolescence. During this stage physical changes often drain their energy. Great spurts of activity are frequently followed by periods of “laziness” which may have a physical basis in fatigue.
- They have a greater desire to know more, especially the world around them. They are open to experimentation and investigation. Pre-adolescents tend to have a wide range of interests; they talk, look, read, listen more than they want to work. They are amenable, cooperative, sincere, poised, and easy-going; they enjoy life. They want to please their parents, teachers and other adults. They want their efforts and achievements to be noticed and complimented. Parents will want to recognize the underlying virtue that leads to good behavior and achievements in academic, musical, and athletic activities.
- Socially, ten year olds are open to close family companionship. They like to help in forming family plans, to be “in on things.” They may make friends easily and cooperate in group activities to which they are increasingly able to make worthwhile contributions. Peer acceptance becomes stronger at this age.
- Fifth graders enjoy being of service to others, whether helping younger children, sharing in the ministry of the Church, or taking the initiative in noticing the needs of others.

Sixth Grade

- Sixth graders may feel they do not belong for they are too old for elementary school and too young for junior high. Along with increased physical growth, eleven year olds are developing new emotional patterns and are subject to variable moods from one extreme to another. They may be fidgety, disagreeable, resentful, argumentative, insolent, and sulky at one time and at other times exuberant, outgoing, candid, communicative, sincere, and friendly.
- Pre-adolescents are interested in bodily development. Sexual curiosity intensifies, and some begin to take care of their personal appearance. Most eleven year olds exhibit a growing interest in clothes, although this does not mean they know how to choose or how to care for their clothing.
- By now most are comfortable with abstract ideas and reasoning, though they still need concrete objects and examples in order to grasp general principles. They become curious about details of the past, about “what really happened.” They are aware of social problems, and of the need for group action to meet human needs.
- At this age, parents, teachers and adults will need to hold firm to the standards and expectations that are aligned with the Ten Commandments. They need to be ready to “correct behavior” while maintaining a love for the child.

Seventh Grade

- One characteristic of the twelve year old is rapid growth: physical, mental, and emotional. As these changes occur pre-teens may feel awkward, uncertain, and self-conscious. Their interior turmoil and self-doubt are often expressed in symptoms associated with adolescence: boredom, frustration, sharp changes in mood, withdrawal, and apathy toward many things.
- Twelve year olds may experience sudden, unexpected, sharp and short-lived pains in various parts of the body, localized most often in the head or in the abdomen; these probably indicate puberty. While children develop at their own rate, girls generally advance more rapidly than boys do.
- Middle school students begin to experiment, question all authority, and sometimes are rebellious, antagonistic, and negative toward adults. Parents, teachers and adults will need to hold firm to the standards and expectations that are aligned with the Ten Commandments. They need to be ready to “correct behavior” while maintaining a love for the child.
- At this age girls and boys desire peer approval more important than adult approval. They are curious as to how their peers think and feel about them. Because such thinking can greatly influences their behavior, parents, adults and teachers need to establish intentional communication with the emerging adult.

Eighth Grade

- The thirteenth year of life is usually one of complex transition involving body, mind, and personality. Changes in body build and body chemistry affect posture, coordination, appearance, voice, facial expression as well as attitudes and tension. Body changes intensify awareness of growing up. Moods change quite regularly. Thirteen-year-olds are not always open and communicative. At home they may lapse into spells of silence and introspection. At school they may be apathetic and uninterested in any class that does not challenge and stir their emerging conceptual power. The young person is beset by interpersonal demands from family, peers, and teachers, which often conflict and can cause confusion. Yet in the midst of these pressures, adolescents are trying to figure out who they are and achieve a measure of independence.
- Young people long for and need security, understanding, and supportive love from adults and peers in spite of their inability to respond openly and consistently. Through prayer and encouragement from parents and other respected adults, young people learn to accept themselves, their good characteristics together with their weaknesses. They need to learn to deal positively with mistakes and failures in their lives, realizing and appreciating God’s unfailing love for them while asking for forgiveness from Him and those offended.
- Eighth graders seek to be themselves and to make their own decisions. Parents need to revisit their standards and expectations, considering the input of the young adult. Parental connectedness is often the determining factor in the young person’s decision to experiment with drugs, alcohol, cussing, and pre-marital sexual relations. It is primarily the task of the parents along with all adults to assist them in proper conscience formation and the process of making decisions through prayer and the

sacraments. It is essential that parents involve the youth in home, parish, and community activities. In addition, parents should continue consistent and intentional communication with the emerging adult.

High School

- Most high school youth can do consequential thinking. They can figure out "if – then" situations. The time is right to have them practice hypothesizing about cause and effect relationships, and considering likely consequences of alternatives in problem situations.
- High school youth can further these abilities when they are presented opportunities to determine relationships between abstract concepts. They can become skilled at analyzing events that have multiple causes and effects. Some high schools students, though, are not consistently able to operate at this level.
- At this age, young adults are looking for meaning in life. They truly want to know that they are making a valuable contribution to the world. This desire plays out in their requests to take on leadership roles and to be considered equals to the adults in their lives. Parents are advised to continue connecting with their young adult through discussions, monitoring of activities and continued expectations of right and good behavior. This is not the time for parents to “cut the apron strings” because, while they desire independence, they still struggle with social pressures and peer approval.
- Parents of high school students should plan to hold frequent conversations with their youth regarding topics related to relationships, chastity and marriage. Youth encounter numerous situations during high school that can tempt them to seek love in ungodly ways. Therefore, parents need to share the Church’s teachings on love and life, including information on why certain behaviors (masturbation, fornication, contraception, pornography, homosexual activity) are considered sins.
- Faith development in the high school years requires additional support from parents. Young adults are in constant search for answers to questions, like “Who am I?”, “Why am I here?” and “Where am I going?” Finding the answers to these questions requires both private as well as public study of the faith. One of the most important tasks parents can do is maintain expectations of weekly reception of the Eucharist, frequent Reconciliation, and daily prayer. Of course, parents who role model these expectations provide the best example.