

AGE-GROUP CHARACTERISTICS

– INFANTS THRU KINDERGARTEN –

Babies and Toddlers

Active

- Learn and explore through senses

Curious

- Feel, pound, pat, manipulate objects
- Reason and think through physical manipulation
- Imitate the activities of the adults around them

Self-focused

- Say 'no' to express desires
- Want everything now and cannot wait
- Have little interest in cooperative play

Have short attention spans

- Can focus for simple Bible truths, songs, stories, and pictures
- Learn by doing and hearing something repeatedly

Need security

- Set simple but clear limits
- Like being held securely but not tightly
- Respond to loving care and sense love from the way they are treated
- Consistent rhythms, routines, faces, and even smells during their day provide felt safety

Sensitive

- Sense fairness and are developing attitudes about church
- Learning to trust. Treat them with respect.
- Often sense changes and may internalize and be upset by them



3s - K

Active

- Most always up and moving
- Can focus their energy into a learning experience
- Need varied methods of teaching, even during group time

Literal

- Use and understand simple, concrete language (Phrases such as “give your heart to Jesus,” “open your ears,” or “zip your lips” are confusing.)
- Pictures to boost understanding

Curious

- Learn from hands-on experiences and discovering answers on their own
- Ask lots of questions, but accept “I don’t know”

Self-focused

- Need help to focus on strengths and overcome failures or limits
- Develop social skills through play and interaction with peers

Short Attention Spans

- Learn best with multiple short activities encompassing different learning styles
- Teachers should be flexible and keep instructions short and simple.

Creative

- Have vivid imagination and enjoy free-play activities
- Discover through self-expression and making choices

Need Limits

- Simple, clear limits provide security
- Respond best to positive instructions (Instead of saying, “Don’t run,” say, “Walk.”)
- Redirection of negative behavior is more effective than consequences (when possible)

Sensitive

- Heightened awareness of “fairness” - don’t compare one child to another.
- Feel respect or disrespect, notice attitudes and interpret facial expressions

HOW TO SUPPORT ELEMENTARY STUDENTS



1st-4th

Physical

- Change activities and offer balanced times of play and rest.
- Plan activities that utilize children's senses.
- Remember children develop at different rates. They do not all have the same skills and abilities.
- Plan activities that use gross motor skills, such as games, and fine motor skills, such as crafts.

Intellectual

- Keep activities challenging and relevant to their lives. Children are concrete thinkers.
- Implement multiple learning styles in your session. Children are naturally curious and becoming independent thinkers. They enjoy a variety of learning activities.
- Form groups and let children discuss ideas presented in the Bible study. Children enjoy group decision-making.

Social

- Model appropriate ways to apply the concepts of right and wrong through your actions. Children are sensitive to fairness and honesty.
- Be specific in your praise and encouragement. Children are becoming more aware of their peers and what others think. They crave genuine affirmation.
- Be firm and loving as you address behaviors. Children understand rules and consequences. They desire appropriate guidelines for behavior.

Emotional

- Children seek love and affirmation. They need you to love them for who they are.
- Keep in mind children are anxious in large groups of unknown people. They express feelings openly and are embarrassed easily.
- Allow children to make choices and do tasks independently as they are growing aware of their strengths and weaknesses.

Spiritual

- Model Christian attitudes and actions. Children model the worship, prayers, and attitudes of others.
- Allow children to respond and participate actively in Bible study. They are acquiring biblical knowledge, skills, and principles and are relating this knowledge to their daily lives.
- Listen to their questions and encourage them to read the Bible for answers.
- Be a Christian mentor. Children are increasingly capable of making commitments. They are learning to trust Christ and talk to God about their feelings.

Age-Group Characteristics

— Middle School —

7th-8th

Physical

- Bodies are changing with muscle development, overall growth, voice changes, and appearance of adult physical features, hormones are increasing
- Boys begin these developments later than girls and may be smaller
- May still look like kids or may look much older
- Awkward and clumsy

Social/Emotional

- Self-image is BIG—insecure, self-conscious
- Can be moody and unpredictable
- Relationships with the opposite gender take on a different nature
- Need attention but don't want to stick out
- Can have child-like emotions
- Spend more time with other teens and less time with family
- Push to find firm limits with adults and test for resolve
- Mixed feelings about independence from parents

Mental

- Concrete thinkers—no hypotheticals
- Think in terms of the present moment
- See themselves as the center of their world
- Risk-takers—believe bad things will not happen to them, primarily with regard to physical harm or illness
- Impressionable
- Not a child, but not yet a teen
- Short attention span

Spiritual

- Beginning to question things personally
- Still have child-like faith
- Excited in youth group—everything is new!



AGE-GROUP CHARACTERISTICS

— HIGH SCHOOL —



9th-10th

Physical

- Growing rapidly—spurts of 3–4 inches
- Girls have usually reached full physical development while boys are close
- Boys' voices lower, facial hair appears, weight and muscle gain continue

Social/Emotional

- More self-assured and able to solve problems
- Girls are more divisive and judgmental and often see small things as more important than they actually are
- Can be apathetic toward opinions and life, and socially are either 'on' or 'off'
- May have urges to use substances, become sexually active, or develop problems like eating disorders

Mental

- Can think about the future, and understand long-term effects of their decisions
- Often self-centered and/or can appreciate opinions of others
- Organizational skills—better able to juggle school, church, family, work
- Frequently challenge parental and school rules

Spiritual

- Many know the "church" answer but do not apply it to life
- May not have grasped concept of personal relationship with Christ
- May have difficulty prioritizing relationship with Jesus when life is going smoothly

11th-12th

Physical

- Physically developed for the most part (still growing but past major changes)

Social/Emotional

- Romantic relationships become very important (either developing, maintaining, or overcoming hurt)
- Starting to see the world outside hometown
- Guys internalize; girls externalize
- Not totally confident but more aware of who they are
- More guarded—don't show emotions easily

Mental

- Abstract thinkers
- Plan for graduation
- Seeing the "bigger picture"
- Reaching independence

Spiritual

- Maturity in this area can vary dramatically
- Still questions to be answered
- Putting pieces together of their faith
- Starting to understand what they believe and why