

Ages and Stages

How children behave, especially in a group setting, is heavily influenced by age. You will be more effective as a teacher if you understand developmental characteristics common to children at different ages and then “match” activities to their ages.

Characteristics common to 6-8 year olds:

- Can't sit still very long or stay engaged in activities longer than 15-20 minutes
- Learns best if physically active
- Sensitive to criticism; do not accept failure well
- Strong desire for affection and attention
- Easily motivated and anxious to try new activities
- Do not understand complex direction with multiple parts
- Eager for clear rules and definitions; difficult time differentiating between major and minor infractions

Tips for working with 6-8 year olds:

- Vary activities – offer short (15 -20 minute) activities that are mostly active
- Expect them to be messy but help them learn to clean up
- Focus on cooperative, not competitive, games and activities
- Find ways to lift up successes
- Catch them being “good” and praise.
- Offer specific praise, e.g. “I like how you waited for your turn”, as opposed to general less meaningful praise such as “good job”.

Characteristics common to 9 – 11 year-olds:

- Like group activities
- Admire and imitate older youth
- Like to be with members of their own sex
- Very active with boundless energy
- Interests change rapidly; may jump from one activity to another
- Are easily motivated and eager to try new activities
- Usually work best when work is laid out in pieces
- Interested in riddles, jokes, word games, collections, rituals and codes

Tips for working with 9-11 year-olds:

- Always model good behavior and respect
- Let them occasionally work in same-sex groups
- Foster personal interests by giving them activity choices
- Include some physical activities
- Provide corrections quietly – one on one
- Help them resolve conflicts respectfully
- Never play favorites

In summary, it is important to understand developmental characteristics and to use this knowledge when planning activities and working with the children.