

## Children's Ministry – Ages and Stages

No two children are alike, and development does not follow a rigid timeline. Still, understanding the generalizations below can be helpful for volunteers interacting with children at these age levels.

### Preschool

- Are acquiring new skills in many areas. Fine motor skills are still developing. Curious and eager to learn.
- Energetic and not able to sit still for long periods of time. Physical movement of various kinds is important at this age.
- Still learning about their bodies, this age can be clumsy – collisions and spills are common. They can become frustrated by their desire to do things independently yet not being developmentally able to accomplish certain tasks.
- Beginning to recognize right from wrong. Understand punishment and consequence, but the concept of a conscience is still difficult to understand.
- Can be self-centered and possessive. Does not initiate sharing.
- This age enjoys learning through imaginary play, role-play, artistic expressions, songs, and sensory activities.
- For prayer, this age responds well to repeating phrases after a leader. Some may like to pray out loud by themselves.
- They may not always be able to communicate their emotions with words, expressing their feelings in physical ways instead.
- Can be easily redirected from inappropriate behavior.
- Routines, consistency, and repetition are important at this age.

### Kindergarten & Young Elementary (5–7-year-olds)

- They need to move. Wiggling and other restless behavior is common.
- Becoming more aware of others, and more adept at relationships. Crave approval and being liked. Are beginning to stand up for their personal rights and can sometimes be bossy.
- Enjoy learning through discovery. Loves asking questions and trying out new things.
- Think in literal rather than figurative ways.
- Have a sense of adventure but still need to experience a sense of security.
- Enjoy games but not competition. Not able to handle losing well.
- They can be extremely sensitive at this age. A bit of encouragement may be all they need to get through what is, for them, a difficult situation.
- They work better in pairs than in groups.
- Tend to be self-centered at this stage. Many want to be first. Can behave in ways to gain attention.
- Security and structure are important at this age. Affirmation and encouragement are beneficial.

### **Middle Elementary (8–10-year-olds)**

- Begin to work well in small groups of three or four. Typically, gender identity is becoming more apparent at this stage, and they prefer to work in groups of the same gender.
- Are competitive. Can become argumentative and quarrelsome when they lose.
- Their logic is becoming more developed, and they begin to understand another's point of view, but still think in concrete terms.
- Are developing a growing sense of moral responsibility, associating obedience more with morality than reward or punishment. Fairness is important to them.
- Like to push their physical limits. May tire easily.
- Can still be self-centered at this age, seeking attention. Squabbles can break out when a child feels slighted.
- Children at this age may exhibit worry or anxiousness. Patience and clarity, especially when giving directions or communicating expectations, is helpful.
- They can feel close to God and pray with faith. Good to encourage kids in their faith at this age.
- Can be self-critical. Leaders can acknowledge use of good judgement and making good choices. Encouragement and positive reinforcement are helpful.

### **Preteens (11–12-year-olds)**

- Are very social. Enjoys the social aspects of learning. Can work well in small groups.
- Enjoys group games and group activities.
- Transitioning from concrete to abstract thinking. Have a deepening sense of justice and wrongdoing.
- Peer relationships are important to them.
- May experience moodiness and roller-coaster emotions, especially as they begin puberty.
- Can be clumsy and uncoordinated due to growth spurts and body changes.
- Adult empathy, humor, and sensitivity to help them cope with their changing minds and bodies is beneficial.
- "Hero worship" can be common at this age. Leaders can help kids by teaching them how to distinguish between heroes worthy of admiration and heroes who are not.
- Can mature in faith as they learn to put God first in their decisions regarding priorities and loyalties.
- Enjoy being noticed and rewarded for their efforts.