

Preschool Characteristics

An infant . . .

- senses love from the way she is treated.
- needs to be held securely but not tightly.
- learns through hearing.
- needs lots of time and space for exploring.
- needs to be treated as an individual.
- responds to loving care at church.
- is learning to trust.

A 1-year-old . . .

- is constantly active, moving from one interest to another.
- learns to reason and think through physical manipulation.
- imitates the activities of the adults around him.
- explores with his five senses—seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling.
- uses the word no frequently.
- wants everything now. His understanding is limited, and he cannot wait.
- is interested in himself. He has little interest in cooperative play.
- is developing attitudes about church.
- shows interest in simple Bible truths, songs, stories, and pictures.

A 2-year-old . . .

- learns best when all five senses are used.
- likes to feel, pound, pat, and manipulate objects.
- has a short attention span.
- listens to a short story, conversation, or song.
- learns by doing and hearing something over and over.
- enjoys holding the Bible and turning pages.
- is beginning to realize that Jesus is a special person.

A 3-year-old . . .

- has a vivid imagination.
- is imitative.
- asks many questions. The first word in each sentence seems to be why, how, or what.
- has to be told the same thing repeatedly.
- learns through senses.
- is active and seldom still.
- can identify some Bible stories and people.
- understands that God made people, animals, and other things in the world.

A 4-year-old . . .

- is a bundle of energy who needs freedom to move.
- tests her world through explosive behavior.
- needs freedom to experiment yet consistent guidance.
- finds security in the very limits she defies.
- is interested in many areas. Her actions, thoughts, and needs are unpredictable because her interests change often.
- is curious; questions begin with how or what.
- has a strong desire to learn.
- expresses herself well verbally.
- delights in new words, name calling, and silly sentences.
- likes to retell stories in her own words.
- enjoys games that allow her to find verses.

A 5-year-old . . .

- is calm, secure, and eager to please.
- relishes adult approval and attention.
- asks “why” questions and grasps ideas quickly.
- prints his name with pride, but may encounter problems when using scissors.
- enjoys planning projects before attempting them.
- participates in group play, but may sometimes prefer one friend.
- begins to ask questions about God.
- expresses love for God and Jesus.

Children's Characteristics

Physically children are:

- active learners. They utilize their senses and may appear restless.
- becoming more coordinated. They are increasing proficiency in utilizing fine motor skills.
- developing at different rates. They do not all have the same skills and abilities.

Intellectually children are:

- concrete thinkers. They think in terms of real-life experiences.
- naturally curious and becoming independent thinkers. They enjoy a variety of learning activities.
- creative in their ideas and plans. They enjoy group decision-making.

Socially children are:

- aware of the difference between right and wrong. They are sensitive to fairness and honesty.
- becoming more aware of their peers and what others think. They crave genuine affirmation.
- understanding rules and consequences. They desire appropriate guidelines for behavior.

Emotionally children are:

- seeking love and affirmation. They need you to love them for who they are.
- anxious in large groups of unknown people. They express feelings openly and are embarrassed easily.
- growing aware of their strengths and weaknesses.

Spiritually children are:

- modeling the adult examples they see. They model the attitude, prayer, and worship of others.
- acquiring biblical knowledge, skills, and principles. They relate their knowledge to daily life.
- increasingly capable of making commitments. They are learning to trust Christ and talk to God about their feelings.

Application

- Change activities and offer balanced times of play and rest.
- Plan activities that use gross motor skills such as games and fine motor skills such as crafts.
- Be sensitive with your remarks and attitudes.

Application

- Keep activities challenging and relevant to their lives.
- Implement multiple learning styles in your lesson.
- Form groups and let children discuss ideas presented in the Bible study.

Application

- Model appropriate ways to apply these concepts through your actions.
- Be specific in your praise and encouragement.
- Be firm and loving as you address behaviors.

Application

- Recognize individual gifts and talents.
- Value everyone's suggestions and thoughts.
- Allow them to make choices and do tasks independently.

Application

- Model Christian attitudes and actions.
- Allow children to respond and participate actively in Bible study.
- Listen to their questions, encourage them to read the Bible for answers.
- Be a Christian mentor.

Characteristics of Youth

Younger Youth (12-15 years old)

Physical Development

- Look very much like a child at the onset of puberty.
- Experiencing growth spurts and hormonal changes.
- Acne and weight fluctuation are common.

Intellectual Development

- Moving into the early stages of abstract thinking.
- Begin to understand abstract concepts such as social justice and ration, aesthetic, or social ideals.
- Begin to desire “proof” before accepting others’ beliefs.
- Enjoy problem solving, looking for alternatives, and consequences.
- Personal values are beginning to influence their decisions.
- Tend to be clumsy in decision making and often make poor decisions because they think of so many alternatives.

Emotional Development

- Developing their own sense of identity.
- Self-conscious and self-centered, but are gaining self-confidence.
- Full of enthusiasm and love to be independent, while still dependent on their parents.
- Vacillate between being friendly and being moody.

Social Development

- Often cliquish; they have a few close friends.
- Desire to fit in. Most comfortable in same-sex groups.
- Overly critical and have unrealistic expectations of themselves and others.
- Hero worship and crushes are common.
- Test the limits and experiment with different behaviors.

Spiritual Development

- Generally interested in a relationship with Christ.
- Able to make genuine commitments.
- Right and wrong are prominent in their thinking.
- Initially, mirror their parents’ values.
- Have a great ability to respond to the needs of those who are less fortunate than they.

Older Youth (16-18 years old)

Physical Development

- Look very much like adults; puberty comes to an end.
- Girls precede boys in physical and emotional maturity until about the age 16.
- Interested in personal health and may have tendencies toward eating disorders.
- Many are sexually experienced.

Intellectual Development

- Interested in the future and begin to focus a career.
- Recognize that today’s decisions may affect their futures.
- Can process many things at one time.
- Tend to make better and more mature decisions.
- Able to resolve conflicts maturely.
- Think more multidimensionally; not limited to single issues.

Emotional Development

- Fairly confident and secure with their own identity.
- Seek deeper, more meaningful relationships.
- Desire independence and are aware of the need to be responsible for their actions.
- Tend to be friendly toward their families.
- More giving of themselves; less self-centered.

Social Development

- Desire meaningful relationships, especially with members of the opposite sex.
- Personal relationships tend to be more exclusive.
- Have experienced rites of passage such as receiving a driver’s license.
- May work part-time to earn spending money.

Spiritual Development

- Can make and keep a strong commitment to Christ.
- Moral and spiritual values are often challenged at school and in social relationships.
- Very interested in life after death.
- Desire to understand and decide for themselves what they believe and why.
- Grasp and apply deeper spiritual principles to their own lives than younger youth.