



Typical Age-Level Characteristics

Infant & Toddler (0–3 Years)

Faith Development

- ▲ Beginning to trust
- ▲ Senses love of parents and those in the church community

Physical Development

- ★ Fast physical growth and changes
- ★ Hand-eye coordination improving

Mental and Intellectual Development

- ▲ Actions first based on reflexes
- ▲ Searches, imitates, learns from concrete activities and objects

Values and Ethics

- ▲ Does what adults say is right and wrong
- ▲ Size determines importance, not intention

Interpersonal Relationships

- ▲ Relationships with adults primary
- ▲ Dependent on parenting persons
- ▲ Self-centered
- ▲ Often shy with strangers
- ▲ Parallel play
- ▲ Develops relational skills through group experience

Hints for Leaders

- ▲ Use free downloadable lessons at cokeburyvbs.com to find age-appropriate lessons for the youngest in this age group.
- ▲ Consult the *Preschool/Kindergarten Leader* book for lesson plans for the oldest in this age group.
- ▲ Many students will not be ready for toilet learning until after age three; treat accidents calmly and matter of factly.
- ▲ With three-year-olds, use simple rhythm instruments and a variety of body movements with music.

Young Child (4–7 Years)

Faith Development

- ▲ Imitates religious behavior of adults
- ▲ Begins to ask religious questions
- ▲ Expresses wonder, joy, thanksgiving, and praise
- ▲ Begins to use faith language

Physical Development

- ▲ Talks more clearly
- ▲ Most can run, skip, jump, throw, catch, and climb

Mental and Intellectual Development

- ▲ Episodic thinking
- ▲ Begins to differentiate reality from imagination
- ▲ Learns best from concrete activities
- ▲ Recalls, invents, begins to converse

Values and Ethics

- ▲ Obeys to avoid punishment
- ▲ Understands the significance of intention
- ▲ Begins to see consequences of actions

Interpersonal Relationships

- ▲ Relationships with adults primary
- ▲ Parallel play moves to relational play
- ▲ Develops relational skills through group experience
- ▲ Increasing empathy
- ▲ Sees “big” people as good

Hints for Leaders

- ▲ Use the *Preschool/Kindergarten Leader* book for lesson plans for four- and five-year-olds.
- ▲ Use the Young Elementary material for six- and seven-year-olds.
- ▲ Provide opportunities for active play.
- ▲ Take students’s fears seriously.
- ▲ Encourage students to create and use their imaginations.



Older Child (8-12 Years)

Faith Development

- ▲ Begins to identify with “my” church
- ▲ Learns stories of the faith
- ▲ Understands God in concrete terms
- ▲ Begins to engage in acts of service and discipleship

Physical Development

- ▲ Physical growth slow
- ▲ Finer coordination and muscular growth, but wide differences

Mental and Intellectual Development

- ▲ Concrete thinkers
- ▲ Stories have meaning and coherence to life
- ▲ Developing the ability to memorize
- ▲ Learns through projects, games, songs, and stories

Values and Ethics

- ▲ Reciprocal sense of justice
- ▲ Strong belief in “the rules”
- ▲ Sees consequences of actions and understands the significance of intent

Interpersonal Relationships

- ▲ Increasing empathy
- ▲ Cliques of same gender
- ▲ Begins to develop loyalty
- ▲ Peers become important but still wants to please significant adults
- ▲ Belonging to the group is important

Hints for Leaders

- ▲ Provide opportunities for the older students to help out with projects.
- ▲ Maintain proper adult supervision even though the group may think it doesn't need it.
- ▲ Continue to give each one personal attention. When they are left to care for themselves they are lonely, unhappy, and sometimes frightened.
- ▲ This age group may be asked to help with younger students. Don't overdo, as older students should not be burdened with adult responsibilities.

Early Teen (13-14 Years)

Faith Development

- ▲ Moving toward a more abstract concept of God
- ▲ Asking deeper questions about God, faith, and the church
- ▲ May see God as distant

Physical Development

- ▲ Physical growth more rapid
- ▲ Maturity levels different between boys and girls
- ▲ More self-conscious

Mental and Intellectual Development

- ▲ Beginning to think abstractly
- ▲ Can ask complex questions beyond ability to understand
- ▲ Short attention span

Values and Ethics

- ▲ Desire to save the world and great empathy for those who suffer
- ▲ Trouble distinguishing between group values and personal values

Interpersonal Relationships

- ▲ Seeks peer relationships and is influenced by peer perceptions
- ▲ Needs to know significant adults

Hints for Leaders

- ▲ Provide opportunities for the older students to help the younger students.
- ▲ Provide opportunities for the group to experience many of the same activities as the younger students. They will engage in the activity at their level.
- ▲ Continue to give each one personal attention.