

Developmental Characteristics Overview

Ages 5 – 8

Easily motivated—eager to try new thing
Experimental—like to explore
Learn best if physically active
Short attention span—
 deal with here and now
All new learning involves use of language
Sensitive to criticism—
 do not accept failure well
Strong desire for affection and
 attention of adults

Ages 9 – 11

Very active with boundless energy
Easily motivated—eager to try new things
Extremely curious—constantly ask “why?”
Enjoy hands-on activities
Use concrete thinking
Learn to locate resources
Like to explore ideas
Like group activity
Learn about self through relationships
Like to be with members of own sex
Admire and imitate older boys and girls
Has rapidly changing interests
Usually do best when work is laid out in
 small pieces
Guidance from parents and other adults
important if learners are to stay on task and
 achieve optimum performance
Do not like keeping records—do not see value
in them
Find difficulty in delaying immediate pleasure
for future goals
Like symbols and regalia
Need recognition and praise for doing
 good work

Ages 12 – 14

Ready for in-depth, longer learning
 experiences
Concerned about physical development—
 sometimes practice excessive grooming
 behaviors
Self-conscious—many need help
 overcoming inferiority complexes
Want to be liked by friends
Interested in activities involving boys and
 girls together
Interested in sports and active games
Like fan clubs—many have adult idols
Getting over the age of fantasy—beginning to
 think of what they will do when they
 grow up
Often unclear of needs and values
Desire independence—but want and need
 their parents’ help
Want to explore outside of their own
 community

Ages 15 – 19

Social needs and desires are high
Interested in co-educational activities
Want and need a strong voice in planning
 programs
Want adult leadership roles
Have interest areas that are more
 consistent with earlier ones
Patterns of interest are emerging
Often need guidance in selecting careers
Beginning to think about leaving home for
 college, employment, marriage, or other
 relationships
Developing community consciousness

This resource was compiled, edited, and written by
Steve Wagoner, Extension Educator, Youth
Development, University of Illinois Extension,
January 2004.