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CHILDREN — HOW THEY GROW

Elementary School Children Ages — 9 to 12

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Children in the age group 9 to 12 years (middle school-aged) are becoming “preadolescents.” In addition to the changes going on physically, mentally and socially they are also beginning to develop serious ideas about their plans for careers.

If children are confident and feel positive about themselves toward the end of this period, they are better prepared to move on to take more risks and gain a better understanding of themselves in adolescence.

Physical development

- ◆ Growth in weight and height continues at a steady rate. Some children experience a growth spurt and enter early adolescence.

- ◆ Children begin to experience body changes (hips widen, breasts bud, pubic hair appears and testes develop) that indicate approaching puberty.

- ◆ The range of height and weight widens. Boys weigh from about 60 pounds to 100 pounds; girls weigh 55 pounds to 100 pounds. Height for boys and girls varies from 50 inches to 60 inches.

- ◆ Small muscles develop rapidly during this period. This development makes activities that require the use of those muscles, such as hammering or playing musical instruments, more enjoyable.

- ◆ Children in this age group are as coordinated as adults, although lapses of awkwardness are common.

- ◆ Eyes reach maturity in both size and function. The added strain of school work (smaller print, computers, intense writing) often creates eye-tension, and leads some children to eye examinations. Regular eye check-ups are an important part of annual physicals.

- ◆ Energy abounds and children this age may become over-stimulated when participating in competitive, physical activities. (Children this age need 10 hours to 11 hours of sleep.)

- ◆ Regular dental check-ups are important during these years as permanent teeth shift position.

Mental development

- ◆ Children in middle childhood can enjoy reading alone, can think abstractly and can plan ahead for several weeks.

- ◆ They can evaluate behavior with insight.

- ◆ Their attention span and ability to concentrate increases to several hours.

- ◆ This age group needs to feel independent and free to express themselves.

- ◆ These children have a need to know and understand “why.”

- ◆ They develop a sense of morals based on what they have learned from adults.

Social development

- ◆ Importance of the peer group increases. Children this age become interested in joining gangs, clubs or secret societies.

- ◆ Beginning to try on various identities to discover who they want to associate with.

- ◆ Independence from adults becomes important.

- ◆ “World view” expands from home to neighborhood and local community.

- ◆ Sibling rivalry is common.

- ◆ Children in this age group want to discuss sex — often to correct information from peers.

- ◆ They develop a concept of “fair” or “unfair” related to actions of others.

- ◆ They enjoy both cooperation and limited competition. Cooperation is more difficult to learn.

Emotional development

- ◆ Signs of growing independence and testy disobedience — perhaps even backtalk and rebellious behavior — are typical.

- ◆ Children who seem withdrawn, depressed or cruel may be having a problem with their emotional development.

- ◆ Common fears include the unknown, failure, death, family problems and non-acceptance.

◆ Their concept of right and wrong continues to develop.

◆ Their sense of humor further develops during this period.

◆ Every time children succeed at something, their view of themselves improves.

◆ When adults set up inappropriate competitions, children in this age group can suffer serious emotional disturbances.

◆ These children are ready to face consequences if their mistakes are not too serious.

◆ They have a strong attachment to their own sex and show antagonism toward the opposite sex.

Vocational development

◆ Occupational preferences are based on personal abilities and capacities as well as interests and exposure to various settings.

◆ Children this age think about possible occupations when selecting junior high courses.

◆ Self-image as “worker” begins to emerge.

◆ Many children want to begin a part-time job or find a way to earn money as an allowance.

Reflection on your 9- to 12-year-old

Listed below are typical behaviors of children 9 through 12 years old. The list is by no means complete, and it is likely that many children will exhibit characteristics of several ages.

For instance, Mike may be chronologically age 10, but he might behave younger than 10 in some ways and older than 10 in some ways.

Study the list of characteristics shown for your child's age, and check off behaviors now displayed.

Look forward and backward to see what characteristics of older and younger children your child exhibits. Do you see your whole child better?

The nine-year-old

- Gaining self-confidence
- Less quarreling
- Perfecting motor skills
- Becoming more inner-directed
- Likes organized play with definite rules
- Bursts of emotion and impatience
- Accepts failures and mistakes more realistically
- Tries to give impression of being calm and steadfast
- Becomes selective in activities and spends more time focused on an activity
- Girls may start puberty spurt of growth
- Loves to form clubs and be an officer
- Sense of humor is well defined
- May begin to show signs of neglecting personal hygiene while interest in clothing styles and fads begins to be important

The ten-year-old

- Likes and enjoys friends
- Beginning to agree logically
- Individual interest more long-lasting
- Motor skills fairly well developed
- Enjoys ability to “fit in” at home, school and play
- Relation with parents, siblings, teachers and friends at all-time high
- Enjoys organized activities and has secret groups, codes, etc.
- Can show concern and is sensitive to others

From a guide originally written by Mary McPhail Gray and Terrie Foltz



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