

## Ages and Stages: 4 to 8 Year Olds

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### Working with the Young Child: Ages 4 - 8

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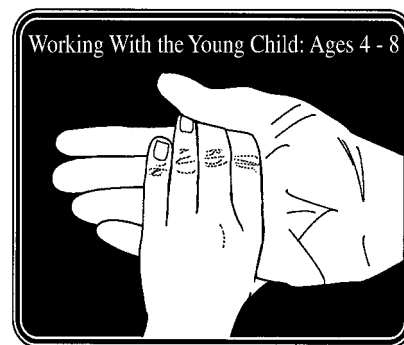
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“To understand children, their development, needs and uniqueness is vital for parents. Each child is different, not only in abilities, but also on the extraordinary way that he or she sees the world. Understanding children can result in less conflict in relationships with them. Understanding is also an important part of helping children become secure and healthy people.” (National Extension Parent Education Model, Manhattan Kansas: Kansas Cooperative Extension Service, 1994.)

The 4- to 8- year old changes in four ways — physically, mentally, socially, and emotionally.

However, as you read about these changes, keep in mind, that each child grows at his or her own rate. It is

important not to compare children. Your child may be going through the stages at a slower or faster rate than your neighbor's child. This doesn't mean your child is less intelligent, has less potential or will not catch up. The ages and stages are listed for a range in years, since the abilities and changes occur over a time span of several years.



Mental Development	4 Year Olds	5 Year Olds	6-8 Year Olds
<b>Word Use</b>	Vocabulary expands to about 2,000 words. Children are able to label things and start putting them into groups.	Vocabulary and language skills are developing quickly. Children use complete sentences with 5 to 6 words.	Beginning to read and write at 6 years of age. Quite self-assured by the end of 8 years of age. Basic understanding of numbers.
<b>Learning Style</b>	Learn through imitating adults and friends. Very imaginative. Imaginary friends and playmates often appear. Lifeless objects are thought to be alive. "What," "Why," and "How," are common questions. Their questions are often direct and personal.	Longer attention span than 4 year old. Better at telling the difference between fantasy and reality. Thinking skills are at a higher level, however illogical at times. Questions are fewer and more meaningful.	Understands value and uses of money. Attention span is about 20 minutes. Able to think through actions and situations to understand causes of events. Wants to make everything very well, often called "eraser stage." Learns best if physically active.

<b>Emotional Development</b>	<b>4 Year Olds</b>	<b>5 Year Olds</b>	<b>6-8 Year Olds</b>
<b>Feeling</b>	<p>Increased feelings of security when adults are not present.</p> <p>Intense frustration may lead youth to turn back to infant behaviors, i.e., thumb sucking.</p> <p>Beginning to be able to say how they feel - happy, sad, proud and excited.</p>	<p>Is independent and very secure in this independence.</p> <p>Has wide range of emotions and feelings which are easily expressed.</p> <p>Sometime during the year the child may become emotionally intense.</p> <p>Is starting to interpret the feelings of others.</p>	<p>More realistic fears replace common fears of ghosts, creatures in dark places.</p> <p>New fears revolve around school, friendships and family income.</p> <p>Ability to feel for others.</p> <p>Release tension through physical activity.</p> <p>Strong desire for affection and attention of parents.</p> <p>A lot of "reporting" of the child's activities to the family.</p>
<b>Self Image</b>	<p>Sense of self or self-concept continues to develop and needs strengthening.</p>	<p>Self-concept continues to need strengthening.</p>	<p>Good and bad is what's approved by the family.</p> <p>Positive self esteem grows through successful experiences.</p> <p>Sensitive to criticism and does not know how to accept failure.</p> <p>May try out new behavior or imitate a friend to see how it feels and who they are.</p>

<b>Social Development</b>	<b>4 Year Olds</b>	<b>5 Year Olds</b>	<b>6-8 Year Olds</b>
<b>Play</b>	<p>Plays well with other children.</p> <p>Boys and girls have similar interests, so will often play together and share same toys such as dolls or trucks.</p> <p>Beginning to learn that others have "rights" as games are played.</p>	<p>Seems to play best with children of the same age, and plays better outdoors than indoors.</p> <p>Physical aggression, like hitting another child, decreases, however, verbal aggression, like name calling may increase.</p>	<p>Girls don't want boys playing in their games and vice versa.</p> <p>Children tend to be competitive, bossy and unhappy if they lose in a competition.</p> <p>Like to win or be first in competition.</p>
<b>Friends</b>	<p>Friendships with peers are constantly being worked out.</p> <p>Friendships change often - one minute s/he is a friend, next minute a fighting enemy.</p>	<p>"Best friends" can still change quickly.</p> <p>School provides the perfect opportunity for getting together with friends and meeting new people.</p>	<p>Most children have a "best friend" and often an "enemy."</p> <p>Friends are likely to be of the same sex.</p> <p>Friend influence is growing.</p> <p>Concerned about being liked by their friends.</p>
<b>Adult Influence</b>	<p>Involved in jealousy and rivalry to gain parents' approval.</p>	<p>Being good and "big" is very important.</p>	<p>Tattling is one common way to attract adult attention.</p> <p>Becoming attached to another adult besides parent, i.e., teacher, caregiver, club leader.</p>

Physical Development	4 Year Olds	5 Year Olds	6-8 Year Olds
<b>Body Growth</b>	Physical growth is rapid, but less than during infancy. Grow about 3 inches in height. Gain 4 to 5 pounds per year.	Growth rate is steadier. Grow about 2.5 inches in height. Gain about 6 pounds per year.	Growth rate is slow and steady. Begin to lose baby teeth and acquire permanent teeth. Sexual organs grow at slower rate. Childhood diseases are most likely to occur (measles, chicken pox). Boys weigh from 45 to 65 pounds. Girls weigh 40 to 60 pounds. Normal rate increase is 3 to 6 lbs/year.
<b>Motor Skills</b>	Large muscles develop which allows youth to be more skilled at walking and running. Few broken bones because bones are not calcified.	Rapid muscle growth, so jumping, skipping, walking on tiptoes is more controlled and poised.	Greater control over large muscles - arms and legs, though muscular coordination is uneven and incomplete.
<b>Sleep Requirements</b>	12 hours of sleep is commonly required because of their physical activity (4 year olds need a high rate of sleep and rest).	Approximately 11 hours of sleep commonly required. They may need a nap after a hard day at school.	Need 10 to 12 hours of sleep per night. Intense activity may bring on temporary exhaustion.
<b>Hand-Eye Coordination</b>	Fine-motor skills allow youth to write, draw, make things, play musical instruments, etc., but at low skill level.	Fine-motor skills are more developed. They can fasten buttons faster, cut, paste and draw.	Use of fingers and hand-eye coordination continues to develop.

## References

Cherry, Florence J., *Ages and Stages of the Middle-Years Child, Part 1, Six to Eight Year Olds*, Cornell University, 1988.

Gary, Mary and Foltz, Terrie, *Children--How They Grow: Elementary School Children Ages 6 to 8*, University of Missouri-Columbia, 1991.

*Growth-Development booklet, Youth Ages 0-18*, adapted from "Growth and Development of Youth," Wisconsin Passport to Leadership Series, Cooperative Extension, University of Wisconsin, No Date.

Heins, Marilyn, and Seiden, Anne, *Child Care Parent Care*, Doubleday & Co., New York, 1987

*"Working with the Young Child: Ages 4-8"* is a series of six bulletins authored by Arizona Cooperative Extension Family Task Force members. The bulletins cover the same major topics found in "Understanding Youth: Working with the Early Adolescent" curriculum, but address younger children.

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