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# Age-Level Characteristics

*Note: Applies to typically developing students ONLY; special needs and other students may develop at a different pace!*

## **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 [cokesburyvbs.com](http://cokesburyvbs.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* (where available) 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.

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## **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.