

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 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.