

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.