



Middle Childhood: 9-11 Years

As children get closer to the teen years, they become more independent. It's important that parents allow them to make some choices and take part in family decision making. Older children are able to choose their clothing. They can choose to become involved in certain sports, activities and hobbies. And they are able to help decide the chores they'll be responsible for completing. By allowing children to make these decisions, parents support their children's growing need for more freedom.

Friendships become important to older school age children. Friends may use secret codes, made-up languages, and passwords to feel closer to each other. Having friends provides children the security they need to begin separating from their parents and families.



Children's thinking also changes at this time. Children can think about and understand why certain things happen. This ability helps them predict what might happen in similar situations in the future. Their new way of thinking also affects their behavior. For example, older school age children are capable of playing more complex games. They are better able to understand the relation of rules to games.

As children continue to improve their motor skills, they may be more willing to try new activities. Playing ice hockey, skiing, roller blading, riding bikes, and playing baseball, basketball, and soccer, may become favorite activities. Still, when children reach a certain age, it doesn't mean they're ready to perform a task well. Becoming skilled in adult activities can't be rushed or forced.

School age children also need to feel they're valued members of the family. Studies show that children whose parents take the time to talk and play with them are generally happy and have high self-esteem. Children also feel good when parents believe in their children's abilities.

Parents can show their beliefs, for example, by saying "I'm proud of you" or "You did a good job on that project." Children who think they can do well in school are often as successful as children who are naturally very intelligent.

Children with positive self-esteem often are those involved in sports or other school or community activities, like drama. Parents can encourage their children to try out for some type of activity that meets their interests. Another area that affects children's feelings about themselves is physical appearance. Children between nine and 11 years of age often become very sensitive about how they look. Many pre-teens want to look just like the models in magazines or their favorite television and movie stars. Parents can try to identify for their children

other role models whose successes aren't based on appearance. With some encouragement from their parents, pre-teens may try to take on the characteristics of outstanding people in music, education, politics, science, business, medicine, or sports.



Ideas for parents

Provide your child with:

- time for play and relaxation.
- space and time to be alone - to read, daydream, or do school work.
- problem solving activities.
- your undivided attention and time to talk with you. Asking questions and talking with your child will help your child succeed in school.
- complex games, such as checkers, chess, or Monopoly. Match your child's interests and develop mental level to the game.
- real-life tasks and responsibilities. For example, your school age child can help with many family tasks. Some chores may be setting the table, preparing lunch, or cleaning a room. Expect your child to be responsible, but balance family responsibility with time for friends and play.
- phone privileges to call a friend or classmate.
- time to participate in an organized club or youth group. Many groups encourage skill and leadership development.
- plenty of food. As they begin puberty, older children often have large appetites.

A parent is a child's most important teacher. Parents help children gain skills, develop interests, and adopt values. Learning about development will help you know what behavior to expect of your child. Still, it's important to remember that your child is unique. Children grow at their own pace. The information given here is only a guide. If you have questions about your child's development, contact your pediatrician or health care professional.

Physical development

Girls:

- are generally as much as two years ahead of boys in physical maturity.
- may begin to menstruate.

Boys and girls:

- have increased body strength and hand dexterity.
- show improved coordination and reaction time.
- may begin to grow rapidly at the end of this age period.
- require less sleep.
- may enjoy team sports.
- may need to be reminded to comb hair, brush teeth, and change underwear.
- have an increase in energy and appetite.



Mental development

Children:

- like to read fictional stories, magazines, and how-to project books.
- may enjoy having a collection or special hobby.
- daydream about the future.

- enjoy planning and organizing tasks.
- have great ideas and intentions, but have difficulty following through.
- enjoy games with more complex rules.
- compare themselves to others.
- can solve some problems on their own.
- begin to understand social injustices and take up cases.
- love trivia.
- like organization and schedules.
- may criticize or confront adults to get attention.

Social and emotional development

Children:

- begin to see that parents and other adults make mistakes.
- seek acceptance and recognition by peers.
- like rituals, rules, secret codes, and made-up languages.
- enjoy being a member of a club.
- enjoy competitive sports.
- are able to control anger better.
- may not always follow adult rules.
- show concern for others.
- show interest in the opposite sex by teasing, joking, showing off.
- may spend more time with friends than with parents.
- sometimes may be cruel to classmates with verbal “put downs.”
- tend to see things as right or wrong, with no room for difference of opinion.
- may have strong feelings that change quickly and dramatically.
- have a strong desire to show others their independence.
- may appear to be experts on things they know little about.
- become interested in clothes.
- enjoy planning and going on outings and trips.

Toys and hobbies

- Arts and crafts materials
- Musical instruments
- Sports equipment
- Camping equipment
- Construction sets
- Electric trains
- Bicycles (use helmets, 26-inch wheels for kids 10 and older)
- Models
- Board games
- Skates (helmets, pads)



Books

For parents:

Parent’s Guide for the Best Books for Children, Eden Ross Lipson

How to Talk So Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk, Adele Faber and Elizabeth Mazlish

Caring for Your School-age Child, American Academy of Pediatrics

For Children:

- Are You There God? It's Me, Margaret, Judy Blume
- Chocolate Fever, Robert Kimmel Smith
- How It Feels To Be Adopted, Thomas Rockwell
- The Indian in the Cupboard, Lynn Banks
- Nothing's Fair in the Fifth Grade, Barthe DeClements
- The Oxford Book of Poetry for Children, compiled by Edward Blishen
- Tales of a Fouth Grade Nothing, Judy Blume
- What if you Couldn't...? A Book About Special Needs, Figne Hanson

Sources:

- Ages and Stages, Iowa University Cooperative Extension
- University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension. Family Focus: Parenting the School Age Child.
- The Brown University Child and Adolescent Behavior Newsletter, 1996, vol. 12, no. 6 and vol. 12, no. 4.

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