

# CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

## 8- to 10-Year-Olds

### **General Characteristics**

1. Interested in people: aware of differences, willing to give more to others, but also expect more.
2. Busy, active, full of enthusiasm, may try too much, interested in money and its value.
3. Sensitive to criticism, recognize failure, capacity for self-evaluation.
4. Capable of prolonged interest.
5. Decisive, dependable, reasonable, strong sense of right and wrong.
6. Spend a great deal of time in discussion. Often outspoken and critical of adults although still dependent on adult approval.

### **Physical Characteristics**

1. Very active: need frequent breaks from tasks to do fun and energetic things.
2. Bone growth is not yet complete.
3. Some may mature early, may be insecure about their appearance or size.
4. Often accident-prone.

### **Social Characteristics**

1. Start to develop close ties with friends outside of the family and start to seek independence.
2. Very choosy about friends; acceptance by them is important.
3. Can be competitive.
4. Team games become popular.
5. May try to emulate popular sports heroes and TV and movie stars.

### **Emotional Characteristics**

1. Very sensitive to praise and recognition; feelings are hurt easily.
2. Because friends are so important during this time, there can be conflicts between adults' rules and friends' rules. Mentors can help with honesty and consistency.

### **Mental Characteristics**

1. Fairness is very important to them.
2. Eager to answer questions and look for a positive response to their ideas.
3. Very curious; like to collect things but may jump to other objects of interest after a short time.
4. Want more independence but look for guidance and support.
5. Reading abilities vary widely.

### **Developmental Tasks**

1. Social cooperation.
2. Self-evaluation.
3. Skill learning.
4. Team play.

### **Suggested Volunteer Strategies**

1. Recognize allegiance to friends and heroes.
2. Help them understand responsibilities in a two-way relationship.
3. Acknowledge and praise performance and affirm often.
4. Offer enjoyable learning experiences; share ideas about different cultures and fun facts about geography to broaden their sense of the world around them.
5. Provide frank answers to questions.

Adapted from materials provided by Mentoring Partnership of Long Island, Virginia Mentoring Partnership, and Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, Child Development Seminar, August 1990.

## **Suggested Activities**

1. Introduce new games that will broaden their concepts of different cultures.
2. Video games.
3. Board games.
4. Craft projects and drawing; remember to display their work.
5. Get to know who and what they are interested in and who they are trying to emulate in pop culture.
6. Engage in educational games that allow them to see the fun in learning.

## **11- to 13-Year-Olds**

### **General Characteristics**

1. Testing limits, “know-it-all” attitude.
2. Identify with an admired adult; may reflect examples of that adult.
3. Vulnerable, emotionally insecure, fear of rejection, mood swings.
4. Bodies are going through physical changes that affect personal appearance.

### **Physical Characteristics**

1. Small-muscle coordination is good.
2. Bone growth is not yet complete.
3. Are very concerned with their appearance and very self-conscious about growth.
4. Diet and sleep habits can be bad or inconsistent, which may result in low energy levels.
5. Girls may begin menstruation.

### **Social Characteristics**

1. Acceptance by friends becomes quite important.
2. Cliques start to develop.
3. Team games are popular.
4. Crushes on members of the opposite sex are common.
5. Friends set the general rule of behavior.
6. Feel a real need to conform; may dress and behave alike in order to belong.
7. Very concerned about what others say and think of them.
8. Have a tendency to manipulate others. (“Mary’s mother said she could go. Why can’t I?”)
9. Interested in earning own money.
10. Starting to develop ideas of their future.

### **Emotional Characteristics**

1. Very sensitive to praise and recognition; feelings are hurt easily.
2. Can be hard to balance adults’ rules and friends’ rules.
3. Are caught between being a child and being an adult.
4. Need praise as an individual to distinguish themselves from the group.
5. Loud behavior hides lack of self-confidence.
6. Look at the world more objectively, adults subjectively, critical.

## **Mental Characteristics**

1. Perfectionists. Don't know their own limitations; may try to do too much and may feel frustrated and guilty.
2. Want more independence, but often still need guidance and support, which they might reject.
3. Attention span can be lengthy.
4. Are exploring boundaries and discovering consequences of behavior.
5. May seek guidance and advice from a trusted friend.

## **Developmental Tasks**

1. Social cooperation.
2. Self-evaluation.
3. Skill learning.
4. Team play.

## **Suggested Volunteer Strategies**

1. Offer alternative opinions without being insistent.
2. Be accepting of different physical states and emotional changes.
3. Give frank answers to questions.
4. Share aspects of professional life and rewards of achieving in work.
5. Do not tease about appearance, clothes, boy/girlfriends, or sexuality. Affirm often.

## **Suggested Activities**

1. Trivial Pursuit.
2. Help with homework.
3. Creative writing; this can get them to express their thoughts and ideas in a very beneficial and positive way.
4. Watch educational videos about the changes they might experience in adolescence (peer pressure, physical changes, new responsibility).
5. Have discussions with them, and actually listen, letting them know that how they feel is important.
6. Read plays with them; broaden their horizons while letting them know that learning can be fun.

## **14- to 16-Year-Olds**

### **General Characteristics**

1. Testing limits, "know-it-all" attitude.
2. Facing challenges of developing mentally and physically.
3. Vulnerable, emotionally insecure, fear of rejection, mood swings.
4. Often project competence while lacking full ability.
5. Identify with an admired adult, or often reject adults in exchange for friends.

### **Physical Characteristics**

1. Very concerned and self-conscious with their appearance and growth.
2. Diet and sleep habits can be uneven, which may result in low energy levels.
3. May experience rapid weight gain at beginning of adolescence. Enormous appetite.
4. Important to learn good personal hygiene and grooming.

### **Social Characteristics**

1. Friends set the general rules of behavior.
2. Feel a real need to conform. They dress and behave alike in order to “belong.”
3. Are very concerned about what others say and think of them.
4. Go to extremes; emotional instability with “know-it-all” attitude.
5. Fear of ridicule and of being unpopular.
6. Often facing the duality in adolescence between childhood and adulthood.
7. Girls are usually more interested in boys than vice versa, because of earlier maturing.

### **Emotional Characteristics**

1. Are very sensitive to praise and recognition; feelings are easily hurt.
2. Are caught between being a child and being an adult.
3. Self-confidence is a very important factor in going against peer pressure and concern for success.
4. Loud behavior hides their lack of self-confidence.
5. Look at the world more objectively, but look at adults subjectively, and may be critical.

### **Mental Characteristics**

1. Can better understand moral principles.
2. Thought processes are starting to involve more of their own personal voice.
3. Attention span can be lengthy.
4. Argumentative behavior may be part of “trying out” an opinion.

### **Developmental Tasks**

1. Physical maturation.
2. Abstract thinking.
3. Strong sense of responsibility and consequences.
4. Membership in their peer group.
5. Developing more defined relationships among their peers.

### **Suggested Volunteer Strategies**

1. Give choices and don't be afraid to confront inappropriate behavior.
2. Use humor to diffuse testy situations.
3. Give positive feedback, and let protégée know affection is for them and not for accomplishments.
4. Be available and be yourself with strengths, weaknesses and emotions.
5. Be honest and disclose appropriate personal information to build trust.
6. Apologize when appropriate.

### **Suggested Activities**

1. Shared community service projects such as volunteering to do a canned food drive before the holidays.
2. Help with homework, while stressing the importance of homework as a priority.
3. Creative writing and development of poetry.
4. Discussion: tap into how they view things and let them know that their points of view are important.