

Characteristics of Kindergarten Children

Children move through stages of development as they mature. The rate of development varies from one child to another. Development is influenced by the experiences children have, as well as by hereditary factors. Children may grow rapidly in one area and more slowly in another. The direction of development is from general to specific, from dependence toward independence and interdependence, and from gross motor control toward fine motor control.

Kindergarten children, no matter what their cultural and experiential background, have characteristics in common with other children of their age and characteristics that are particularly their own.

Socio-emotional Development

Children develop socially and emotionally during the Kindergarten year. At the beginning of the year some children may be shy and appear to lack initiative. However, as they come to know the situation, the teachers and peers, they usually gain confidence and begin to establish friendships and become an active part of the class. Other children may be too assertive prior to learning from experience more appropriate ways of relating to peers. It is a time of testing and exploring social relationships.

Kindergarten children are eager to be trusted with responsibility. They appreciate going on errands, using proper tools, participating with grown-ups in such activities as cooking, bringing things from home, and suggesting solutions to practical problems. Although there are some senses in which Kindergarten students are still egocentric (that is, tied to their own view of things) they are also able, in a suitable group environment, to be of help to each other.

They can show considerable empathy toward people and animals when their own needs do not conflict with the needs of others. When helpfulness is noticed, modeled and encouraged by the teacher, helpful behavior is likely to become more common in the classroom. Kindergarten children are developing a sense of independence but are also learning to work cooperatively with others.

Kindergarten children are more stable socio-emotionally than they were as preschoolers. They are developing a good sense of humor, which they express by delighting in nonsense and playing with language. They may develop specific fears, such as the fear of death, and mistakenly assume that they have caused such events as their parents separating.

Kindergarten students take criticism, name calling and teasing very seriously because they still think that what is said exists in reality--at its face value.

Physical Development

Physical activity is one common characteristic of Kindergarten children, although children vary a great deal in the development of physical skills and abilities. Some children are slow and cautious about trying new things; others seem to accept any challenge that is presented. Most Kindergarten children are full of energy, ready to run, swing, climb and jump, and are eager to try their strength by moving big blocks or boxes. They are developing a sense of rhythm, and enjoy such activities as marching, jumping or clapping to music. These group activities need to be short and allow for more participation than standing. Required stillness is more exhausting and stressful for most Kindergarten students than movement.

Sensory development is uneven. The coordination of the eyes and other senses are still developing. Physical growth has slowed down. It is a time of consolidating gains and developing fine motor control. However, over-emphasis on fine motor activities such as writing, cutting and making very discrete visual discriminations may result in tension and frustration.

Intellectual Development

Kindergarten children love to talk. Their intellectual development is reflected in the rapid growth of vocabulary and the power to express ideas. They are developing visual and auditory memory and the ability to listen to others. Their ears are keen but they still need help in distinguishing sounds, although they can pick up another language and accurately imitate other people's intonations and inflections. They are especially keen to acquire new words (the names of dinosaurs, for example) and to use such words as "infinity" and "trillion". Kindergarten children welcome opportunities to be inventive with language, to play with rhyming, to joke, to explain things to each other and even to argue.

Opportunities to talk about what they are doing, what they see and what they hear help children construct meaning and learn from their experiences. The language and ideas shared by others enable children to gradually organize and attach meaning to their daily observations and activities.

Kindergarten children have a powerful urge to find out about things, to figure things out. They ask many questions, often deep unanswerable questions and they love to play guessing games or solve riddles. Their curiosity leads them to figure out concepts and relationships, and become interested in symbols. They enjoy listening to stories, but they do not learn very much from passive attention to the teacher or mere listening to information. **The intellectual growth of Kindergarten students comes from exploration, testing and investigating rather than only from listening.**

The children are still figuring out the properties of objects and are not yet able to reverse operations, that is, to understand that 250 ml of water in a tall narrow glass and 250 ml of water in a large, flat pan are equal in volume. Their reasoning, from an adult perspective, is still illogical. Happenings that occur together are thought to have a causal relationship to each other, for example, *"Because I wore my new shoes, it rained."*

Individual Differences

Descriptions of general characteristics are helpful in understanding children. However, such normative statements do not provide the information teachers need about particular children. The teacher's systematic observations of children provide the information needed for appropriate planning.

During the Kindergarten year, the behavior of many children changes from the relatively rambunctious behavior of a four- year-old to the relatively mature and responsive behavior of a five-year-old.

Social: Early 5

- Likes to help out
- Follow rules

Later 5s

- May test or oppose adult authority or show uncertainty
- Need consistent rules and enforcement
- Responds well to clear and simple expectations
- Need empathetic discipline as they test limits and make mistakes

Physical

- Better control of running, jumping and other large movements
- Need lots of physical activity, including free play
- Pencil grip changes from three finger to other grips
- Able to see close objects best - not yet able to sweep focus smoothly from left to right
- Reads one word at a time
- Copying from a blackboard is difficult

Cognitive

- See only one way to do things; rarely see other points of view
- Imaginative and believe toys and other objects are alive
- Think very literally (raining cats and dogs means cats and dogs are falling from the sky)
- Often reverses letters and numbers
- Early in the year likes to copy and repeat activities; later likes to try more new activities
- Often thinks out loud before acting (I am going to move the truck)
- Learns best by exploring materials such as blocks, clay , finger paints, rocks and shells

Common Characteristics of a 6 year old

Social:

- Competitive; not always good at sports; sometimes bossy or critical
- Either rush to be first or dawdle to be last
- Want to have friends; may have best friends
- Enjoy dressing up, putting on plays, etc. with other children
- Talkative and noisy
- Easily upset when criticized or discouraged
- Love encouragement (who doesn't), surprises and treats
- Might test authority with tantrums, complaining or tattling

Physical

- Eyes are maturing so reading is easier, but blackboard copying is still hard
- Often chew pencils, hair or fingernails (may be due to the discomfort of new teeth growing in)
- Bodies growing rapidly
- Like lots of physical activity
- Tire easily and get sick often

Cognitive

- Beginning to understand past and present and how and why things happen
- More able to see other viewpoints and understand reasons for rules
- Love new ideas and asking questions
- Learn well through games, poems, riddles and songs
- Very ambitious, often choosing projects that are too hard
- Learn well from field trips and hands-on projects
- Like doing lots of work; not that concerned with the quality of the work