

STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT IN YOUTHS

grade/age	emotional development	social development	mental (cognitive) development	spiritual development
preschool (3-4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · generally happy · influenced by the reactions of other youths · sensitive to the moods and reactions of adults 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · generally play with same sex · prefer short group experiences · use language in dramatic play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · can recall some facts and events · can memorize stories, songs, or finger plays · ask lots of questions · have an attention span of no longer than 10 minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · hear and enjoy Bible stories · recognize own church: develop sense of belonging at church · understand that prayer is talking to God; pray simple, spontaneous prayers
preschool (4-6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · proud of their accomplishments · have their feelings hurt easily · beginning to gain self-confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · learning to share and cooperate · can understand and follow rules · enjoy extensive dramatic play · eager to please teachers and parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · can listen to and create stories · can distinguish between real and pretend · need simple directions — understand one step at a time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · understand that God made them · trust that God loves them · beginning to develop sense of conscience
first and second graders (6-8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · express feelings with physical action · crave individual attention and affirmation · are self-centered; each wants to be first · feeling capable is directly related to self-esteem · want everything to be fair; black-and-white sense of justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · usually prefer to stick to same-sex friendships · thrive on organized games and group activities · want to please teachers but are beginning to recognize their role in relation to their peers · want to win and always be first; have a strong sense of competition with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · interested in concrete learning experiences such as dramatizations and rhythms · have a limited concept of time and space; interested in the present but not past and future · yearn for competence in developing skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · understand God's love and God's world through personal experience · don't comprehend the spiritual nature of God; think of God as a giant/magician/invisible man · don't comprehend the Bible's chronology except that the Old Testament comes before the New · have a literal and concrete understanding of Bible stories and biblical truths; don't comprehend abstract ideas
third and fourth graders (8-10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · feelings may be hurt easily · sensitive to praise and criticism from adults · developing ability to empathize with others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · want to be a part of a group · enjoy extended group projects · able to accept limited constructive criticism · naturally avoid interaction with the opposite sex 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · most can read well · like to be challenged but don't like to fail · need to feel independent; don't always want help from teachers · understand cause and effect; like to arrange and organize information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · able to accept that there are some things about God we don't understand · ready to relate individual Bible events to the scope of Bible history · recognize the difference between right and wrong; able to make deliberate choices about actions

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fifth and sixth graders (10-12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · get mixed messages about being mature and accepting responsibility for choices/ actions · possible strong fears about losing parent, abandonment, rejection by friends, being a victim of violence, or becoming ill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · spend a lot of time with one best friend · usually prefer to stick to same-sex friendships · thrive on organized games and group activities · strongly influenced by heroes and role models 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · well-developed critical-thinking and problem-solving skills · beginning to question authority figures; prefer to reason things through for themselves · interested in how past and present world events affect their lives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · want everything to be fair · want to test what they have been taught about God against their own experiences · able to make choices about finding God's will and following it
junior high (12-14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · major time of changeability/ transition · great sensitivity/variability due to hormonal shifts at onset of puberty · initial stages of identity formation with emphasis on role-playing/identity experimentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · major increase in social awareness/need for acceptance · self-centered — embarrass easily · growing influence of peer group · increased emphasis on meaningful friendships · growing interest in opposite sex with preoccupation with physical and sexual concerns · often extreme idealism · continued emphasis on the present · new emphasis on the importance of role models 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · more open to new ideas · a fact-finding/decision-making period · growing ability to reason sequentially and logically · want to make own decisions (need for autonomy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · beginning to view religion as a belief system rather than an activity system · the beginning of a period of questioning of previously unquestioned beliefs · a growing need to understand the concepts behind beliefs in order to reaffirm those beliefs · a spiritual fact-finding period · continued emphasis on interpersonal relationships in faith formation and new emphasis on the affective (feeling) aspects of faith
senior high (14-18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · nearing completion of identity formation (commitment to an identity) sometimes leading to rigidity of identity · growing stability of personality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · continued self-centeredness but a growing awareness of the self in relation to others · growing stability of social relationships but continued struggle with sexuality · relationships become deeper and more important 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · development of adult-like cognitive abilities (formal operational thinking) · growing ability to understand theoretical issues · growing ability to deal with ambiguity and relativity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · increased ability to consider ethical/moral issues in abstract ways · questioning of beliefs as those beliefs are either rejected or internalized · adoption of and commitment to a set of ethics/values

Analysis of ages 3-12 adapted from Group Publishing, Inc; "Hands-On Bible Curriculum, Teachers Guide, Fall 1994. Group Publishing, Inc., Box 481, Loveland , CO 80539. Permission granted for reference only. Analysis of ages 12-18 taken from "Junior High Ministry" by Wayne Rice (Youth Specialties, 1987).