

# Characteristics of Beginner Ages 0 – 3



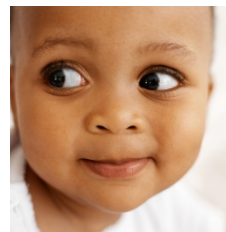
In order to understand beginner children, ages birth to three years, it is helpful to note characteristics of their growth and development.

## Physical

- vary greatly in their physical development
- are growing rapidly
- tire easily
- cannot sit still for long

## Mental

- have an attention span of only one or two minutes
- learn by active involvement and imitation rather than by instruction
- learn best one mini-step at a time
- focus attention on what they see and/or touch



## Emotional

- are extremely egocentric – centred in themselves
- fear separation from parents
- cry easily; one crying child sets other children crying
- express their needs by crying. The crying usually stops when the child's needs are met
- become attached to adults who show love and acceptance of them

## Spiritual

- Senses attitudes of respect, joy, and anticipation in connection with church, the Bible, and Jesus
- Can identify pictures of Jesus and lisp His name
- will fold hands (briefly) for the blessing before meals and kneel (again briefly) for prayer

## Developmental Needs

As they mature, these children need to experience:

- power – to have a chance to manipulate objects, events, people
- freedom – to make choices, to interact in learning situations, to sometimes move about at will
- independence – to do some things unaided
- security – to feel safe

# Characteristics of Young children Ages 4 – 6



## Physical

- start developing large muscle co-ordination
- lack a sure sense of balance
- are extremely active
- tire easily; but soon revive after resting
- lack fine muscle co-ordination
- are curious and like to explore their environment
- learn by exploring

## Mental

- are capable of limited listening and understanding without the help of a visual cue, such as seeing the object being discussed
- have a quick memory
- memorise things they don't understand
- enjoy repetition – provided they don't tire
- are beginning to reason from simple cause to effect
- make some generalisations – often incorrectly
- learn best by active participation
- have a short attention span, 3-6 minutes

## Emotional

- cry easily
- are capable of verbalising emotional responses
- learn to delay gratification of needs
- experience the full spectrum of negative emotions
- learn ways to express negative emotions

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## Social/Relational

- are self-centred – the world revolves around them
- play alone in the presence of their friends, rather than playing with their friends
- like to make friends and be with friends

## **Developmental Needs**

Kindergarten children need:

- freedom – to choose and to explore within limits
- power – to have some autonomy in learning situations
- limits – safe boundaries that are set by parents and teachers
- fun – learning through play; enjoying success
- discipline and training – to provide safety and structure in their lives

## **Spiritual Needs**

Kindergarten children need to know:

- God loves and cares for them
- how to show respect to God
- how to respect themselves; this comes from knowing that God made them, knows them, and values them
- the difference between right and wrong
- how to choose what is right, with God's help



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# Characteristics of The Primary Child Ages 6 – 9



## Physical

- show good muscle coordination and balance
- behave in a boisterous and energetic manner
- learn eye-hand coordination for fine-muscle skills
- willingly practice so as to learn new skills
- are somewhat visually far-sighted until 8-years old
- are good singers

## Mental

- like to demonstrate their newly-acquired reading skills; however, many still need help finding and reading Bible texts
- are literal thinkers; need objects and pictures to help them understand
- are learning to distinguish between fact and fancy
- are curious and observant, asking lots of questions
- learn best from hands-on experience with concrete objects
- are capable of prolonged interest and concentration
- apply simple, logical thought to practical situations
- memorise easily
- show an interest in the faraway and long ago
- have limited understanding of time and historical sequence
- are strongly committed to fairness; want those who break the rules to be punished
- enjoy discussing experiences and new ideas
- are fond of stories
- like using new words

## Emotional

- appreciate variety within a fairly stable routine; a complete change of programme can upset younger primaries
- are learning to control negative emotions, expressing them in socially acceptable ways
- need adults to model self-control
- fear death and divorce
- are motivated by recognition

## Social/Relational

- Enjoy group games, projects, quizzes, and activities
- are naturally boisterous and energetic
- like adults and seek relationships with them; want to please them
- want to make friends, especially best friends, with their peers
- can be "little legalists", wanting to know the rules and to apply them to other people
- want to belong to clubs and groups; family and church are important to them

## Spiritual

- understand some simple religious symbolism
- have an interest in God
- willingly believe what the church teaches
- want to be told what to believe
- understand enough about sin and salvation to choose Jesus as Saviour and best Friend
- want to please God and be baptised
- make prayer a part of daily life if encouraged to do so
- willingly accept their responsibility as stewards if given the opportunity

### **Developmental Needs**

In addition to their basic needs, primary children have a need to:

- develop a sense of responsibility
- develop a sense of accomplishment
- grow in self-esteem
- learn social and academic skills
- balance personal freedom with parental limits



### **Spiritual Needs**

Primary children need:

- to know God loves and cares for them
- to develop a personal relationship with Jesus, and see Him as their Friend
- ready access to God through prayer
- to experience forgiveness and mercy
- assurance of God's acceptance – without it, they experience fear and guilt
- to have their decision for baptism affirmed
- to know the law of God; they will apply it as a standard of living
- help to offer mercy and forgiveness to those who wrong them

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# Characteristics of The Junior Student Ages 10 – 11



## Physical

- Mature at different rates; some girls may experience the growth spurt that signals adolescence
- are energetic, loud, talkative, and imaginative

## Mental

- are on the brink of doing abstract thinking
- like to figure cause and effect
- have a rapidly-increasing attention span
- discover ways to answer their own questions
- need to have abstract words and concepts explained to them
- begin to question authority
- are capable of thinking and reasoning

## Emotional

- lack self-esteem
- are subject to mood swings
- get bored unless they see the purpose in what they are doing
- crave success and affirmation
- are acquiring values
- take themselves seriously

## Social/Relational

- care about pleasing their peers
- are hero-worshippers
- are action-oriented
- start to develop gender roles

## Spiritual

- want Bible teaching to be practical, related to their life
- are ready to continue making salvation decisions, eg baptism
- are developing their consciences
- feel responsibility for their sins
- are rule-oriented
- are looking for adult models

## Developmental Needs

Juniors have the basic needs of childhood plus the need to:

- be responsible
- achieve competence
- grow in self-esteem

- master social, academic, and physical skills
- earn from parents a greater measure of personal freedom

### **Spiritual Needs**

Juniors need:

- to know God loves and understand them
- a Saviour who can give them victory over sin
- confirmation that God answers prayer and encouragement to trust Him
- to know what God has done for others and what they personally can expect from Him
- to know how God affects their daily lives
- to experience forgiveness and freedom from guilt
- to rehear the importance of communion & baptism



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# Characteristics of The Earliteen Student Ages 12 – 14



## Physical

- mature at widely different rates; girls generally experiencing a growth spurt before boys of the same chronological age
- (most of them) reach puberty during the earliteen years
- want action and want it now
- can be quite awkward as they cope with growth spurts
- often look more grown up than they act

## Mental

- think in the abstract quite well, but still need examples, synonyms, or word pictures to illustrate new concepts
- understand symbolism once it has been explained
- capable of engaging in discussion and debate
- have long attention span – provided they are interested in the topic
- test the boundaries of convention and knowledge
- interested in making money (boys more so than girls)
- beginning to question everything look for authoritative answers
- reject illogical reasoning or rules

## Emotional

- lack self-confidence and self-esteem
- experience wild mood swings
- get bored easily
- be always testing the values they grew up with
- take themselves seriously
- appreciate adults who are low-keyed and who joke with them

## Social/Relational

- cave in to peer pressure; often afraid to take a stand
- be somewhat clumsy in relating to each other
- avoid doing anything in isolation from the group
- fear being singled out as different
- seek close friendships within a tight group

## Spiritual

- question spiritual truths that they previously had accepted
- challenge religious beliefs but need help to clarify them
- need to make an active recommitment to God
- need constant reminders of God's love and grace
- need to hear adults talk about their personal faith
- want a practical religion to live by, eg involved in a mission project

## Developmental Needs

Earliteens have the basic needs of childhood, plus the need to:

- collect and sift through information
- make more of their own decisions
- express their individuality in various ways (usually with varying degrees of success)
- crave affirmation
- need increased freedoms from parental control and corresponding increases in their responsibilities
- need more time with peers



- need increased emotional distance from parents
- need authoritative standards by which to judge right from wrong

### **The Developmental Task for Earliteens**

Earliteens are beginning to struggle with the task of discovering their inner, personal identity and making decisions based on their own identity instead of their group's identity. They will continue to struggle with their identity through the high school years.

### **Spiritual Needs**

Earliteens need:

- to know that there is a God and how to share their faith
- to be told again and again that there is nothing they can do to make God love them more or anything they can do to make Him love them less
- a Saviour who can give them victory over sin
- to learn how to forgive and to accept forgiveness
- to experience forgiveness and freedom from guilt
- to be told what is in it for them if they commit to living God's way
- to keep on hearing what God has done for others and will do for them
- to admit that they need a Saviour



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