

UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN

EARLY CHILDHOOD (Ages 2-6)

Physical

- C Active
- C Large muscles are developing
- C Tire easily

Social

- C Grow and learn through play
- C Like to play alone but are beginning to enjoy some group experiences
- C Need security, love and attention
- C Feel powerless and vulnerable
- C Identify with giants and heroes who do what they cannot do
- C Thinking is magical and fluid; no clear distinctions between reality and fantasy

Mental

- C Learn through the senses
- C Able to create a mental substitute for real things (house, dog, mother)

- C Thrive on the familiar
- C Interested to look at and handle objects
- C Everything must be closely related to children's personal experience
- C Have short attention span
- C Can do only one thing at a time
- C Have limited vocabulary
- C Like repetition

Spiritual

- C Think of God as a real and loving person
- C Can learn to repeat simple repetitive prayers
- C Are aware of own will; wise limits need to be established
- C Experience God's love best through interaction with adults
- C Faith experience becomes foundation upon which all other growth takes place
- C Need images of God's caring presence and loving protection
- C Learn to know the divine through nonverbal communication

PRIMARY (Ages 6-8)

Physical

- C High energy
- C Large developing muscles; need activity
- C Coordination is developing
- C Developing more complex motor skills
- C Can be restless

Social

- C Enjoy playing with others
- C Seek approval from adults
- C Like to have "special friends" and secrets
- C Are selective with playmates
- C Have sympathy for needs close at hand
- C Imitate behavior of parents, teachers and significant adults

Mental

- C Think concretely; require concrete objects, practical firsthand experiences to understand
- C Are inquisitive, curious
- C Visualize objects through pictures
- C Are developing reasoning powers
- C Don't understand someone else's point of view

- C Understanding is confined to personal experiences (meals, bedtime, television hours)
- C Understanding of historical concepts are related primarily to family (grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, siblings, parents)
- C Relate to places from personal experience
- C Have active imaginations

Spiritual

- C Can sense God is great and good
- C Enjoy Bible stories at own level of understanding
- C Are sensitive, affected by attitudes parents and teachers
- C Develop many fears
- C Have questions about our world, the causes of things, and their purposes
- C Enjoy participation in worship, singing being part of the church community, need sense of belonging
- C Need to experience love and trust to have capacity to expand faith later

MIDDLER (Ages 8-11)

Physical

- C Have high energy
- C Have slower body growth
- C Show fatigue under strain, but regain strength quickly
- C Enjoy the out-of-doors

Social

- C Respect authority
- C Worship heroes, actual persons
- C Want “best friends”; like to work with them
- C Are competitive
- C Want praise and recognition
- C Are becoming more responsible for actions

Mental

- C Are not able to reason abstractly
- C Have a more complex understanding of time; can distinguish past, present and future
- C Like to learn facts

- C Have extended understanding of geography (village, town, country, continent)
- C Have increased attention span
- C Are in the “habit forming” stage
- C Like to discover things without help or being told, individually

Spiritual

- C Respond to God in personal ways
- C Enjoy worship if within own comprehension
- C Thrive on participation in church like, being part of a drama, musical or other special programs.
- C Have concrete conception of religion— it must deal with real things
- C Can understand Jesus and His teachings as applicable to life on earth
- C Can begin to understand sin and forgiveness
- C Need affirmation of gifts and acceptance of personhood
- C Grow in faith through unconditional love and acceptance by adults

JUNIORS (Ages 11-12)

Physical

- C Are developing rapidly, may be awkward
- C Notice that there are significant differences in the sexes
- C Are sensitive about physical characteristics

Social

- C Find security in a group; tend to gravitate cliques
- C Peer relationships take on greater importance
- C Begin to act and think independently from parents
- C Have self-confidence
- C Have fragile ego
- C Feel growing independence; resent adult supervision
- C Are establishing ideals concerning sex, moral, pleasure
- C Have strong “haves” and “loves”
- C Have new social interests and problems
- C Are forming an identity apart from family and friends

Mental

- C Have growing awareness of the world around
- C Show emerging ability to develop
- C Use abstract thought, make judgments, form hypotheses
- C Understand the past, plan realistically for the future, look at, and combine reactions in situations to make a decision
- C have increasing interest in social issues
- C Have difficulty accepting self as he or she is

Spiritual

- C Are forming life philosophy
- C May be troubled with questioning; need to feel welcomed and accepted with that questioning
- C Are troubled by personal, social, and global fears (war and disease)
- C Can grasp principles of Christian living to own problems
- C Are able to develop more personal relationships with God
- C Faith styles are conforming; are influenced by peers and adults
- C Have image of God as friend, guide, counselor
- C Still need to feel loved and accepted and valued

Understand your Beginner child–Ages 2-3

How they behave	Why they behave	How to handle them	How to Teach them
continually active	C arm, leg, & other large muscles growing fast	T Give plenty of opportunity for activities requiring some control–walking, carrying, handling large objects T Tire easily when “being quiet”	g Plan physical activities g Select actions of Bible characters for tots to imitate: walking to God’s house, sharing activities, etc.
unable to coordinate finer muscles	C larger muscles growing rapidly, acquiring skill in using them C finer motor control comes later	T Don’t expect them to handle small materials efficiently or be interested in fine detail	g Teach them to use small items gradually g Provide large crayons for coloring; encourage them to make large strokes g Avoid activities requiring much skill in fingers
tires easily	C “works” hard at play C expends much energy C average attention span is about 2 ½ minutes at 2 years and 4 ½ minutes at 3 years	T Change activities frequently	g Vary activities; alternate action with quiet or listening activities
eager for new sensations	C learns primarily through senses at this stage C senses give meaning & understanding to ideas/words	T Allow them to hear, feel, taste, smell, and see! T Keep breakables out of reach T Don’t expect them to keep “hands off,” but teach them to handle items CAREFULLY.	g Provide opportunities for learning through the senses: see pictures, hear stories & songs, touch flowers, etc. g Have a variety of materials for child to handle–tied in with lesson theme
needs some responsibility	C must learn to cooperate and share with others	T Provide opportunities to help and to share. However, do not force them to share.	g Plan helping and sharing activities, related to lesson theme g Give them responsibility in caring for materials, sharing them with others
uninhibited	C reacts spontaneously C hasn’t yet learned artifice, doesn’t pretend interest when bored	T Provide “positive” environment T They enjoy familiar materials and situations T Allow them freedom to choose activities	g Use familiar materials to attract attention g Follow the child’s interest of the moment–relate it to himself and the Lord g Don’t try to force their attention–they’ll rebel
sensitive	C has been alone and slept a great deal as a baby C too many people—even children—and unaccustomed noises make her tense and restless C gets bewildered C reacts quickly to moods of others–cries with another child, becomes frightened easily, etc.	T Keep atmosphere reasonably calm and avoid placing him in a big group T Allow the child to choose her own pace T Let him watch others until he is sure of himself T Don’t insist that she join activities; lead her into them gradually, as she is ready T Give personal attention	g Keep calm in every situation; speak quietly, be a friend g Avoid hurry; plan story and activities to fit the child’s pace g Don’t expect children to change activities abruptly before they are ready g Provide adequate materials to avoid quarreling among children
maturing rapidly	C learning daily C knowledge increases most rapidly in first three years C learns to walk, talk, understand ideas, build vocabulary, handle materials, use muscles, etc.	T Watch individual child closely. T Note changes in attitudes & interests because of increased understanding/abilities	g Adjust teaching program to changing interests/abilities g Build program around individuals and individual activities rather than the group
can’t express feelings or ideas adequately	C vocabulary is limited; sentences often only one word C average sentence length for 2-yr-old is about 2 words C 3-yr-olds begin to use simple sentences	T Use short, simple words when speaking to them T Help him express himself by your repetition of words, sentences. T Use words referring to very simple concepts. T Avoid words referring to time, space, distance (such as hour, week, mile)	g Guide her in expressing feelings by suggesting ideas she can agree with. For example, lead the child to feel glad for God’s creation–trees, flowers, etc. Then pray simply: “Jesus, we thank you for the flowers.” She may repeat the prayer with you.
has a short memory	C ability to take in impressions and retain them increases with age C memory span of a 2-yr-old varies from a few moments to several days, depending on complexity of subject	T Be patient with them–expect them to forget easily T Repeat stories, songs, Bible words, etc. several times during the lesson. Use the same words each time. T Repeat teaching material for several weeks. You may tire of repetition, but they do not.	g Give clear impressions. g Repeat stories in exact words. g Use varied visual aids and physical activities to make a deeper impression on his mind. g Talk to her individually about the Bible story.
fearful	C new situations are frightening C if unaccustomed to separation from parent, child may fear that the parent will not return C may also fear the dark, sudden or prolonged noises, being alone, imaginary creatures, strange persons, feeling of height	T Avoid, when possible, situations which may disturb T Walk with him to take Mother to her class, so he knows where she is. Tell him she will come for him later. Ask her to be prompt. T Give them a sense of security by your own calmness. T Show them that you love them.	g Speak of Jesus as a friend. g Help the child to feel confident of His love. g Make clear the truth that Jesus loves him and is taking care of him.

Understand your Kindergarten child—Ages 4-5

How they behave	Why they behave	How to handle them	How to Teach them
usually active	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C growing fast C needs exercise to stretch muscles C can concentrate on only one thing at a time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Give opportunity for movement T Lead in finger plays, motion songs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Plan varied learning activities: looking at and handling pictures/objects, making handcraft items, listening to Bible story, watching visual aid, etc. g Give them 4 or 5 changes during the Sabbath School hour
gaining some muscular control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C large muscles are still growing rapidly C child is awkward and clumsy, but likes to try things C tend to be far-sighted C like to make own designs with crayons C enjoy building, quite skillful in construction C greatly enjoy dramatic play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Needs plenty of space. Cramped space and inadequate materials bring conflicts with other children. T Provide large materials; don't expect him to do fine work. T Allow some freedom for individuality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Teach through dramatic play, as well as by story & visual aids g Let her act out the Bible story. She learns by doing g Exercise "rests" him!
Likes to help and take care of self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C works off excess energy this way C likes useful activities within own capabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Make the child responsible for own coat, hat, etc.; he can also help others T Give assignments to help keep the room in order, put materials away. This requires patience, but let the child to the job. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Teach Bible truths of sharing, helping. g Show how he can please Jesus by his actions
has a short interest span	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C expends a great deal of energy because he puts his whole self into each activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Change activities often enough to maintain interest and keep them from tiring. T Average attention span is 7-20 minutes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Vary types of activity g Alternate action with quiet or listening activities
learns a great deal through senses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C needs to feel or touch things to "see" or understand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Provide teaching aids that the children can handle: flowers, nature objects; large, clear pictures, non-fragile materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Provide some lesson-related visual aid with each lesson. Vary these.
developing a sense of rhythm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C can learn to keep time to music, beat tempo with hand C can also walk and skip to music C rather fast tempo appears to be easiest for him to follow; however, he sings best at a slower tempo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Provide rhythm instruments and teach them to play in tempo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Teach children to express joy and praise to God through music
talks in simple sentences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C some children are more advanced than others C vocabulary average is about 1500 words for 4-yr-old to about 2000 for 5-yr-old C generally uses "I," "me," "mine" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Speak in simple sentences T Keep vocabulary and concepts within the child's understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Hold children's attention with action verbs (walk, talk, see, hear, get, make, help, etc.) g Give them actions to imitate g Relate Bible truths to him personally, and to his daily activities
asks many questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C WHAT and WHERE are common questions C asks for information, to confirm own opinion, or for sheer sociability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Answer questions adequately to satisfy the child when she wants information T Remember that his memory is short. He learns greatly through questioning, however 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Direct their thinking to the lesson subject. Don't let them go too far from the subject unless the question is earnest and important g Be enthusiastic and give enough details in the story to avoid some questions
can think through problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C is developing the ability to think through problems and reason out solutions for herself 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Don't do all the work—even though it's easier for you. Make some demands of the child. T Make her think and solve problems within her capabilities. T Guide him in his reasoning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Real learning takes place when they can use information to solve problems. g Encourage children to think—not merely repeat what you tell them. g Give occasions to think: Present problem; let them solve it on their level of understanding. g Give time to reason out answers. g Don't tack a moral on your story. g Help them see what they should do about the Bible truths you have discussed.

Understand your Primary child—Ages 6-8

How they behave	Why they behave	How to handle them	How to Teach them
delight in strenuous activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C growth is slower during this age C interested in anything active—seldom walk if there's space to run C work and play hard C energy and vitality fluctuate; frequently overdo and become exhausted—then they're apt to become irritable C like to do work which can be made into play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Be patient when they run instead of walking T Give opportunities for physical activity T Plan pre-session activities which involve action: acting out Bible story, sand table projects, etc. T Let them help arrange chairs, distribute materials T Plan some activity during the regular Sabbath School time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Show how they can use their energy for the Lord g Teach them to do things for others g Plan simple projects for them to carry out, such as inviting friends or neighbors to Sabbath School, sending cards to someone who is sick, etc.
enjoy making things	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C like to put things together or make useful objects C muscular coordination is developing; need practice in using smaller muscles C like to draw to get across an idea or feeling or tell a story C usually impatient with details 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T It is a strain for them to use small muscles for a prolonged period. Plan projects which are easy to do and which can be completed quickly. T Don't require fine detail T They like to work with modeling clay and paper projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Handwork should be purposeful—have some practical use, such as making an object he wants to keep or give to someone. It should have some connection with the lesson itself.
have an active imagination and increasing ability to memorize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C sensory perception is increasing—more alert to details C can easily picture objects not present C can easily imagine what might happen what might happen in a given situation C find it easy to memorize 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Give enough story details to stimulate the imagination and help them recall sights or sounds, such as the "swish" of Peter's fishing nets, the kind of slingshot David used, the style and colors of Bible-time clothing. T Assign memory selections—books of the Bible, Scripture verses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Present the lesson so that she can put herself in the place of a character. g Make him think what he would do in such a situation, what he should do. g "Useful" imagination helps them work out answers to such problems. g Don't over-emphasize memory work—they can memorize words easier than thinking through ideas and telling them in their own words
attention span varies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C attention shifts rapidly from one thing to another C common attention span is 1-2 minutes C when interested, may pursue an activity for 10-60 minutes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T They need at least three changes in activity in the class period: Bible stories, discussion, worship, physical activities, suggested action on truth just learned. T Can't give prolonged concentration on non-action work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Provide variety in your lesson presentation: tell the story, use visual aids, ask questions g Use action verbs in telling the story g Plan activities which also teach g Let them change position by standing to answer questions, etc.
like stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C stories with good plots appeal to them C boys especially enjoy animal stories C girls tend to enjoy stories about children and family experiences C girls are especially interested in conversation and repetition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Keep action of the story moving T Don't give non-essential details T Include conversation T Make people and situation seem real 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Through a story, make abstract ideas & truths clear g Make Bible characters "come alive" and help them desire to imitate right actions g Make applications of truth to her personally by relating it to her everyday life. g She accepts ideas, but fails to relate them to his own life and actions.
easily disciplined	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C some psychologists say this is probably the best age for them to cooperate with adults—if conditions are right C like some freedom of choice C rebel when basic needs are not met C cannot understand inconsistency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Give them opportunities to choose an activity T Show that you like him and respect his ideas. T Give her some personal attention. T Offer interesting and "important" jobs T Awards for good behavior are more effective than punishment for wrongdoing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Help him feel secure in God's love g Explain the "why" of rules—those for classroom behavior, handling of materials, and those which God gives in His Word.
crave a satisfying experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C tend to get annoyed when they cannot carry out a natural tendency—such as a need for physical activity when tired of sitting C failure in any project irritates them C desperately want approval from those they respect C resent interference when engaged in an interesting activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Let her do something that she is eager to do T Consider his physical needs T Give approval for actions, answers, or work T Make your demands simple so that they can succeed in carrying them out T Give opportunity to win special privilege for good work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Help them to learn to love God and desire to please Him in all phases of life

Understand your Junior child—Ages 9-11

How they behave	Why they behave	How to handle them	How to Teach them
enjoy physical activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C this is a healthy period of slow growth C they are gaining weight, strength, and control of finer muscles C practice for skill, control, speed in activities C nothing seems too hard if challenged C have abundant energy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Give them opportunities to do things T Plan active assignments: help arrange room, distribute materials, participate in opening and class sessions, pre-session activities, missionary projects, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g They admire strength and power. Show them how God enabled men and women in the Bible to be strong to do His will. g Challenge them to be strong in daily Christian living. g Show what they can do to serve and please God.
seek friends among own age and sex; desire to achieve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C both sexes are active, but boys tend to think themselves stronger, braver C girls tend to be larger than boys—this gives natural antagonism between the sexes C proud of new skills, impatient with younger children who can't keep up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Appeal to their desire to achieve T Give practice in learning the use of the Bible T Stimulate their desire to do lesson assignments, memorize Scripture T Give opportunity to show skills through participation—music, reports, art projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Challenge them to live for God g Give concrete examples of what they can do for God—ways to help others, witness to them; real-life everyday situations in which they can obey God's commandments, etc.
begin to enjoy teamwork; make contest out of nearly everything	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C interested in ball games and other activities which carry over into adult life C enjoy competition; find thrills in trying to outwit the "enemy" C enjoy belonging to "gang," but move to another group if new activity looks more interesting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Plan group projects to give them experience in working with others T Let them compete for honors in Bible memorization, lesson preparation, attendance, etc. T Make projects difficult enough to challenge, but not too hard. They get discouraged easily, and find defeat hard to take. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Show their need of belonging to God's army g Tell of spiritual warfare between the forces of good and evil g Show them how they can be victorious through Christ
do everything wholeheartedly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C have strong likes/dislikes C developing desire for independence; want freedom from restrictions C activities take them out of their homes C tend to ignore adults and pursue own interests C respect authority and have ambition for leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Present plans enthusiastically T Show what they'll get out of projects or lessons T Let them help plan, set rules, etc. with guidance T Give opportunities to develop leadership ability, but keep good discipline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Teach them to serve God wholeheartedly g Show from the Bible—the Christian's guide Book—what God expects of us g Challenge them to become leaders in school and play situations, to stand for right
alert, eager to learn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C anything new is interesting—interests are world-wide C eager to know more about people, geography, history, current events, nature, science, mechanics; want to know what makes things tick 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Capitalize on their interests T Give details on people, events in lesson T Know material thoroughly. Check factual information. T Use visuals to show customs, dress, buildings, etc. of Bible times. T Let them ask questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Stimulate desire to know God and His plan of Salvation—and to find God's plan for their lives
avid readers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C because they're eager to learn, they like to read—and they're likely to read anything handy which they can understand C friends, home, and school have a big influence on what they read C don't like to write because forming letters is difficult and they don't understand all the rules of grammar, punctuation, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Help them be selective in reading material T Challenge them to read and complete their student guide activities T Provide good reading material through the library T Encourage reading of Christian fiction, biography, Bible story books, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Challenge them to read the Bible daily, to go to it for answers to problems g Present the Bible as the true, unchanging Word of God, the most important Book and source of all knowledge
have an intense interest in collecting things	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C collect because they want to keep things for future use—or because of interest in the material itself C even facts are collected C collection serves a useful purpose—shortcut to knowledge, trains eye, gives practice in judgment, forms systematic habits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Make use of their collections—show foreign stamps on 13th Sabbath T Ask them to collect pictures or other items for use in class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Show ways for them to use their time and talents in serving the Lord
beginning to note relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C because of wide interests, geography and history lessons in school, they are coming to understand how things and events fit together, why and how things happen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Excite their curiosity about Bible geography and history T Present facts within a chronological framework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Challenge them to consider the "why" of people's actions and God's dealings with them g Help them see what their relationship is (and should be) to Christ
extremely realistic—yet enjoy imagination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> C imaginative play decreases; no longer interested in "made-up" stories C want true stories of bold action, accurately told C project themselves into the role of the hero of these true stories—they're imitators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> T Illustrate the points of the lesson with true stories of figures from history, sports, etc. Select those they admire. T Also use stories about spiritual victories from lives of leaders, missionaries, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> g Present godly heroes for them to admire and imitate g Show what makes people great—faith in and obedience to God g Above all, set an example in your own life