

SCHOOL-AGE DEVELOPMENT:

Who Are School-Age Kids and What Do They Need from Me?¹

A Look at Characteristic Traits of School-Age Children and Youth

School-age children and youth are growing and changing in many different ways as they move through the years between ages 5 and 13. To be successful working with kids in out-of-school programs, it's important to keep their typical needs, interests, and characteristics in mind. One way to do this is to think about some of the main developmental tasks they are working on during these years. Here is a brief overview of some important tasks of school-agers, along with examples of how children might work on them in your school-age program.

They are growing physically. They need many opportunities for physical activity as well as time to rest, relax, and unwind. They want to challenge their bodies to learn new skills through sports, active games, and activities which allow them to use small muscles and develop fine motor skills. They need lots of fuel for their growing bodies and are often VERY HUNGRY! Newly emerging physical capabilities and characteristics may lead them to test out what they can do with their growing bodies. This often leads them to experiment and take risks. When physical needs aren't met, children sometimes exhibit behavior problems.

Seven-year olds Simone and Keisha do clapping games while they chant favorite rhymes. They work on learning new moves and try to go faster and faster.

Eight-year-olds Casey and David want to go outside or to the gym when they arrive after school; they like to run and play active games with their friends before starting their homework.

Eleven-year-olds Samantha, Karin, and Hannah are working on their rope-jumping skills. They keep track of their progress from day to day. When they get tired, they like to go to the art area where they are teaching themselves how to do calligraphy.

They are developing new thinking abilities and skills. They can use reasoning skills to solve problems. They like to categorize, investigate, experiment, and test out their ideas. They can plan, organize and make decisions about their own activities. Their increasing attention spans lead them to pursue activities which last for hours and continue the next day. They use their imaginations to think about people, places, and events beyond the immediate present. They can use thinking skills to explore questions about *right and wrong* and other moral issues.

Eight-year-old Ellen wants to be an airline pilot like her uncle. She likes to design model airplanes, fly kites, and read books about things that fly. She's amazed that migrating birds travel thousands of miles every year. She wonders what it would be like if people had wings.

¹ Excerpted with permission from Newman, Roberta. *Training New After-School Staff*. Cape Charles, VA: Newroads Media, a Division of Cape Charles Development Co. Pages 13 – 16. © Roberta Newman 2002.

Twelve-year-olds Sarah, Jeremy, and Cara are sitting in the quiet corner looking at a book about protecting the environment. They think it would be a good idea to organize a recycling center in the program and make a list of different things they could collect. They decide to start with aluminum cans because lots of people throw them on the ground in the neighborhood. They make a plan for getting other kids involved.

They are developing social skills. They can use emerging communication skills to help them get along with others. Increasing language skills help them express opinions, ideas, and feelings in conversations with peers and adults. They like to work on projects and mutual interests together. Small and large group activities and sports and games provide opportunities for them to use and practice social skills such as listening, cooperating, problem solving, negotiating, compromising, and exercising self-control.

Six-year-olds Kevin, Jamal, and Jason are setting up a grocery store in the dramatic play area. They talk about how much to charge for each item and go to the art area where they work together to make signs to advertise the store. While making the signs, they talk about how to operate the store and what job each will do. All three boys want to be the check-out clerk and use the cash register. They decide to take turns. To decide who gets to be the check out clerk first, they write their names on a piece of paper and ask a staff member to pick out one of the papers.

Ten-year-olds Marie, Alishia, and Nicole love to dance. They think it would be great fun to have a dance club. they recruit other friends who like to dance and set up a meeting to plan their club.

They are expanding their world beyond home and family. As their physical, social, and thinking skills increase, they want to use these skills to connect with the "real world." They are learning about the traditions and history of people from different backgrounds and cultures. They are working to make sense of the world as they experience interactions with peers and adults outside their own families. They are increasingly aware of community concerns and of happenings and events in the news. They want to make a difference in the world.

Nine-year-olds Monica and Rene heard about a family in their community whose house burned down over the weekend. The family is living in a homeless shelter temporarily. Their three school-age children lost all of their clothing and toys in the fire. Monica and Rene ask the school-age program staff if they could organize a drive to collect clothing and toys to help the children.

Eleven-year-olds Gunnar and Daniel have been learning about the disappearing rainforests in school. They are concerned about endangered species which may become extinct if the rainforests are destroyed. They want to write to the International Children's Rainforest program to find out what they could do to help save the rainforests.

They are moving toward competence. They are using their emerging physical, social, and thinking abilities to *get good at doing things*. They want to learn and practice new physical skills through sports, games, athletic skill clinics, fitness clubs, or individual activities like learning and performing yo-yo tricks. They like to learn new arts and crafts skills and techniques, such as weaving, calligraphy, gimp, or origami. Complex games like chess help them increase their thinking skills. They like the challenge of developing teamwork through competitive and cooperative games. They feel a sense of accomplishment when they put on a talent show, raise money for a community project, harvest a garden or complete another big project successfully.

Five-year-olds Aaron, Wanika, and Rachel are working with a staff member to harvest herbs they have been growing in a window garden over the past few months. They will use some of them to season a soup they are making together. They will dry some of the herbs to use in other cooking projects.

Twelve-year-old Mason has perfected 10 magic tricks. He's performing them tonight at a parent meeting.

They are experiencing many new thoughts and feelings. Many new thoughts and feelings emerge as school-age children and youth experience physical, social, and intellectual development. They need many opportunities to explore, sort out, and express these thoughts and feelings as a sense of self is developing. They seek out opportunities for creative expression through activities such as music, dance, writing, and art. Activities related to science and sports can also serve as vehicles for expression of new ideas, thoughts, and feelings.

Nine-year-old Astrid is enjoying learning about her family's Swedish traditions and folklore. She hopes to visit Sweden someday. She has seen pictures of the farm her grandmother lived on in Sweden and thinks about what it would be like to grow up in Sweden. She likes to make pictures of Swedish farmhouses and writes poems about mystical elves that live in Swedish barns.

Ten-year-olds Jerrel and Damon are feeling proud of their new basketball skills. They have designed a routine of the things they can do and plan to give a demonstration for other kids in the program.

They are moving toward independence. As their new capabilities increase, they want to use them to become more independent. They seek out opportunities to do things for themselves, to direct their own interests, to choose their favorite activities, and to be reliable and assume responsibilities. They enjoy being resourceful and like to take on leadership roles.

Five-year-olds Kaitlyn and Joey volunteer to be snack helpers. Every day, they help set up the snack area with cups, napkins, and utensils. They also help decorate the tables and pick out background music to create a pleasant atmosphere during snack.

Seven-year-olds Jerome and Ben love to play board games. They get upset when they can't find all the pieces to their favorite games. They decide to make a poster for the game area reminding their friends to put games away when they're finished playing with them.

The important thing to remember about the characteristic needs and tasks of school-agers is that children are *works in progress.*" They are just beginning to grow in some areas and may be quite advanced in others. And each child experiences the developmental tasks in a unique way. Whatever task they are working on, school-age children thrive when staff tune in to their needs and provide them with appropriate support, help, and guidance.

What You Can Do. Look back at the examples of developmental tasks provided in the box after each area. Select *one example* and think about what you could do to provide support, help, guidance, or encouragement to children in the example. Link your ideas to the task they are working on. Write your ideas below; share them with your supervisor.

Child(ren) in the example: _____

Developmental Task: _____

Ideas I have for providing support, help, guidance, or encouragement to these children: