

DEVELOPMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENT

The following information is adapted from the work of Dr. Arnold Gesell, as described in *Child Behavior from Birth to Ten* by Drs. Frances L. Ilg and Louise B. Ames as well as from *About the Elementary School Years – Educational Opportunities in Virginia* (1985).

Age Five – Five year olds are generally happy, secure, cooperative, and friendly. They sometimes prefer staying close to their parents in familiar surroundings and rarely attempt tasks they cannot accomplish successfully. Typically, mom is their favorite person, and they enjoy pleasing her. As the five-year-old matures, they begin a transition period during which their behavior changes. They sometimes are less happy with themselves and others, and are no longer calm, secure delightful children. They see things concretely and have short attention spans.

Age Six – Six year olds are very unpredictable and changeable with moods and behaviors which shift from one extreme to the other. At this age children can be loving and cooperative one moment, and angry and defiant the next. They also have lots of energy and are willing to undertake just about anything. They tend to be self-centered, like to win or be first in everything they do. They often blame others when things go wrong and do not like to be criticized. Mom is no longer the most important person and sometimes they even hold her responsible when things go wrong, or direct their anger at her.

Age Seven – Children at age seven are calmer, more cooperative, and less active than they were. They can sit quietly and listen for longer periods and are inclined to spend much time thinking things over and analyzing them. Sometimes seven year olds see life as unfair and complain that others are “picking on them, don’t like them, or leave them out.” Some seven year olds are highly sensitive to real or imagined situations and have a tendency to worry. Another typical characteristic is their need to be a part of a group and not be singled out for either praise or criticism.

Age Eight – This age brings a new stage in which children become more outgoing and ready for new experiences and new friends. They have lots of energy, excitement, enthusiasm, and curiosity. Their interests are short-term and they sometimes become impatient to move ahead to new challenges. Eight year olds often overestimate their own abilities and are highly critical of themselves when they don’t succeed. They are concerned about having good relationships with others and care about what others think and do. Friends are becoming more important.

Age Nine – At this age children become more serious and sure of themselves and develop a greater sense of truth. They are becoming more independent and self-sufficient. Activities outside the home are increasing importance to them, and they tend to be concerned about the opinions of friends rather than those of family members. Many children like team sports and games and will work hard to perfect their skills and abilities. Nine year olds can sometimes resist authority, direct commands, and bossing. This is generally shown by withdrawal or

complaining while they do what is asked of them. They become upset by matters which didn't previously bother them and may even develop ailments such as headaches and stomachaches. These ailments, which are real to them, are their way of coping with unpleasant tasks or situations.

Age Ten – Ten year olds are generally happy with themselves and their world. They want to cooperate and please parents and teachers. Children of this age are getting better at getting along with others. They are affectionate, reliable, and adaptable. This is nature's way of providing some rest for parents prior to the demanding and erratic behavior of the adolescent period.

Age Eleven – Eleven year olds are entering the beginning stage of adolescence. They sometimes can be obnoxious towards adults and resent being told what to do. These pre-adolescents like games, competition and being included in clubs/groups. They can be moody and often exaggerate their problems or situations. Anger is a common emotion in eleven year olds. Intellectually, they are becoming more abstract thinkers.