



## School-Aged Children Development Stage

**Understanding your child starts with knowing which behaviors are typical for his or her age.**

**Please note:** Every child is different and may not follow exactly these milestones. This information is just a guide for “average development.” If you have any concerns about your child’s development, please talk to your doctor.

### Physical Development

- Children love physical activity, such as climbing, jumping, and running.
- Around ages 6-7, baby teeth begin to fall out, and adult teeth replace them.
- Kids often enjoy hobbies that improve their fine motor skills (such as sewing, building models, or creating art) and gross motor skills (balancing, riding a bike on two wheels).
- Children grow more slowly compared with earlier years (but later school-age years may include the beginning of puberty, which brings many changes).

### Emotional/Social

- School-age children typically develop skills for coping with strong emotions, but need help and comfort from parents or other caretakers when feeling very sad or upset.
- Kids start to play further away from parents (in a different room or at a friend’s house). Other kids become more important, but parents are still extremely important.
- In the school setting, children may start to face issues of teasing, bullying and even rejection by other kids. Parents can help their children learn social skills by supporting them in responding to these issues in an appropriate manner.
- Playtime is the backbone of childhood development, as kids learn social norms, develop self-esteem, and begin to understand the world around them. School-age children often enjoy competition (with adults and kids) in games and sports.
- During the school years, children tend to play with friends of the same gender. When they become teenagers, opposite-sex friendships become more common and important.

### Cognitive (Mental Ability)

- School-age children’s understanding of the world becomes much more complex than before and they start to define a unique sense of “self” that is different from that of other kids.
- The attention span of young school-age kids is about 15 to 20 minutes. This grows as they approach adolescence, to being able to pay attention for about one hour per activity.
- Math and reading skills develop a great deal during school, and children improve their abilities to describe their thoughts and feelings through writing and speaking.



- As children grow, they shift from simply following the rules to thinking matters through with logic. You will notice that they may ask you challenging questions (such as “Why?” and “Why not?”). Be reassured that they are not always trying to challenge you, but are exploring and practicing their abstract thinking.
- Most school-age children can remember and follow three-part directions (such as “Come downstairs, wash your hands, and come to the dinner table.”) The complexity of directions can increase (slowly) as kids grow. Children who are slower to develop or who have attention difficulties may need shorter directions given to them step-by-step.

**A note about boys and girls:** Although every child is unique, in general boys and girls develop at different rates. You may notice differences between your children, and understanding these gender differences can be useful. For example:

Girls tend to show signs of puberty before boys. Be prepared to answer your child’s questions related to body differences, development, and sexuality during elementary school. It’s important for you to be open to talking about these issues throughout your child’s development, and to take your child’s questions seriously. Open communication now will lay the groundwork for continued discussions as your child grows and matures.

Citation: Sherman, M.D., Bowling, U., & Anderson, J., & Wyche, K. (2011). Veteran Parenting Toolkit. South Central Mental Illness Research, Education and Clinical Center (MIRECC) and Oklahoma City VA Medical Center. Oklahoma City, OK. [www.ouhsc.edu/VetParenting](http://www.ouhsc.edu/VetParenting)