

Characteristics of the Primary Child

It is always risky to describe the “typical child” of any age. Actually, there is no typical child. Differences within an age group are at least as great as the variation of one age group from another. It is important to remember that such variability is found within every area of development. With this caution we shall attempt to outline what might be expected in children seven to eight years old.

Physical

- ◆ growth rate slows down but is steady
- ◆ needs to wiggle and move around but tires easily
- ◆ developing small muscle skills but variation among children in small muscle control
- ◆ still very active but can be more purposeful in activities
- ◆ his body language will be a clue to his self-concept

Mental

- ◆ is curious, likes to see what is happening
- ◆ can see differences
- ◆ likes to compare
- ◆ learns by appreciation; going from the known to the unknown
- ◆ thinks concretely
- ◆ memorizes mechanically, not logically
- ◆ has strong imagination
- ◆ memorizes words more easily than thoughts

Social

- ◆ can be a paradox for he may be friendly one minute and antagonistic the next
- ◆ some rivalry for they are beginning to like to be best, first, the winner; also may be self-conscience and unwilling to speak or read in front of others
- ◆ ownership becomes important
- ◆ eights like to have a best friend and have more of a “gang” spirit
- ◆ growing in awareness of the world and his relationship to it
- ◆ likes children own age, likes pets

Emotional

- ◆ may be insecure and fearful and worried
- ◆ sevens are sometimes called the “eraser age”; strive for perfection so they continually make corrections
- ◆ enthusiastic
- ◆ attitudes may be expressed by bodily movement

Spiritual

- ◆ seeks love, security, and assurance
- ◆ forgiveness is important and needed
- ◆ curious and eager to learn more; will ask questions; will believe exactly what they are told
- ◆ is God-inclined
- ◆ thinks of God as a friend and companion in physical form
- ◆ needs to hear truths repeated and explained, which means patience on the part of parents and teachers
- ◆ can begin to realize he is personally responsible for actions
- ◆ conscience is awakening to discern difference between right and wrong and between precept and practice
- ◆ The book Childhood Education in the Church (edited by Roy B. Zuck and Robert E. Clark, © 1975, by The Moody Bible Institute), is an excellent resource book with a complete section on teaching theological concepts to children. The charts on the theological concepts which can be taught at each learning level are divided into what a child can learn 1) about God, 2) about Jesus, 3) about the Bible, 4) about home and parents, 5) about others, and 6) about angels and last things.

Effective Methods of Teaching

- ◆ Tell the story using concrete language; explain new words, don't avoid new, theological, faith-related words but be sure to define them in terms the child can understand
 - visualize the story – pictures, flannelgraph, filmstrips
 - if you need to read the story, it is a good idea to practice it beforehand
- ◆ This age child learns by doing and being interested in the lesson and activities; likes to work with his/her hands
- ◆ Teacher should vary the pace of activities
- ◆ Encourage children to express their ideas and tell what they are thinking
- ◆ Give directions carefully, patiently; give encouragement, praise and appreciation
- ◆ Plan a drama together (act out a story)
- ◆ Have children draw pictures relating to the story or discussion questions; use these to start discussion
- ◆ Do not underestimate the child's ability to reason, but:
 - set reasonable standards for behavior, memory work, etc.
 - tell only the truth; there is no place for mixing fairy stories with the Bible
- ◆ Make worship service meaningful by explaining the altar, pulpit and order of service
- ◆ Music should be a vital part of the teaching program
 - very effective suggestion: use the theme hymn as a teaching tool by incorporating it into the lesson; maybe have it on tape
- ◆ Repetition and review are a must; make them meaningful and enjoyable
- ◆ When using charts and awards, be sure to involve all students
- ◆ Plan class time allowing children to move, participate, act, choose, etc.
 - provide and use a variety of activities and teaching techniques to meet the individual needs of the student; perhaps have students teach each other
- ◆ Learning Center ideas: (change "center" activities from time to time)
 - match verses with their references (addresses)

- memory verse puzzle
- make a poster of/for a commandment
- additional reading: devotionals, Christian magazines and books specifically for youth

◆ Bulletin board ideas: (change periodically)

- correspond with commandment being taught
- seasonal; fall, winter, spring
- correspond with the church calendar events
- have students design and put up the board; have them work in small groups, or if you have a small class, work with students individually to design a board; they will appreciate the personal attention and you will have a good opportunity to share Jesus one on one with your students.