



# Want to raise your parenting IQ?

One way is understanding the needs at each stage of youth development

Raising children is one of the most difficult and ever-changing roles many adults will hold.

Deciding the best course of action and path of development can sometimes be daunting. A basic understanding of the developmental stages young people go through as they grow and mature can help guide many of the decisions we will make. We are really talking about the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development of young people when we talk about developmental stages.

What are youth able to grasp, handle, or do that is conducive to creating a positive learning environment?

Understanding the different characteristics at each stage, and the implications for engaging young people at each stage of development, is important. Current research groups the various age categories into four stages of development: 5 to 8 year olds; 9 to 12 year olds; 13 to 15 year olds; and 16 to 19 year olds.

## 5-8 YEAR OLDS

### Characteristics

- Mastering physical skills – have better control of large muscles than small muscles.
- Learning how to be friends and may have several “best friends.”
- Cooperative games are enjoyable and help build social skills.
- Very concrete – like to see, hear, taste, feel, and smell.
- More interested in process than final product.

### Implications for engaging

- Activities need to allow for movement and action – hands-on learning.
- Don't plan projects requiring fine detail or perfection.
- Focus on smaller projects that are easier to complete.
- Small-group activities are most effective and encourage parental involvement.
- Focus on cooperative games that allow each child to equally participate.

## 9-12 YEAR OLDS

### Characteristics

- Small muscle coordination is increasing.
- Prefer to socialize with same sex groups.
- Prefer working in groups in cooperative activities.
- Individual evaluation by an adult is preferred – want to know how to improve.
- Find comparisons with success of others difficult – hard time differentiating between success or failure in activities with success or failure as a person.
- Have increased attention span but interests change rapidly.
- Begin to think logically and symbolically.

### Implications for engaging

- Activities should include physical movement and involvement.
- Focus on activities that help develop and refine fine motor skills.
- Avoid creating competitive situations – this age group has a hard time differentiating between success or failure in activities with success or failure as a person.
- Give positive feedback for the effort and avoid generic praise – they will see through it.

## 13-15 YEAR OLDS

### Characteristics

- Experience rapid changes in physical appearance.
- Are interested in activities involving the opposite sex.
- Seek acceptance and trust from peers and adults – search for adult role models.
- Compare themselves to others but like to have adults compare them to past performances.
- Strive for independence and seek privacy from adults and parents.
- Move to thinking abstractly – can solve problems that have more than one variable.
- Want to explore world beyond their community or current situation.

### Implications for engaging

- Plan activities that do not depend on physical abilities.
- Provide activities to be with opposite sex in healthy ways – planning groups, parties, etc.
- Provide lots of opportunities to learn new skills.
- Plan activities that are more in-depth and require problem solving.
- Involve them in decision-making roles.

## 16-18 YEAR OLDS

### Characteristics

- Are concerned about body image but more comfortable with maturity.
- Explore relationships and search for intimacy.
- Want to take on adult roles and be recognized as individuals.
- Desire respect, independence, and identity.
- Develop own set of values and beliefs.
- Search for career possibilities.
- Enjoy demonstrating knowledge but can lose patience with meaningless activities.



### Implications for engaging

- Eliminate busy work – involve them in decision-making and carrying out plans.
- Give them opportunities to prove their abilities.
- Encourage individual goal-setting and self-responsibility.
- Offer vocational and career exploration opportunities.

Not all young people grow and develop at the same pace. Youth mature at varying rates, ages, and times but, as a general rule, these characteristics hold true. As we evaluate the need of the various age groups, a basic understanding of development stages can help guide important developmental decisions, such as how much responsibility or freedom to give young people and when it is appropriate to give.

A little flexibility and forethought can really have an impact on adults' decision-making ability and the appropriateness of any learning or social activity in which young people engage.

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## BEYOND THE FOUR-LEAF CLOVER



4-H is an informal, practical, learning-by-doing educational program for youths. 4-H helps youth acquire knowledge, develop life skills, and form attitudes that will enable them to become self-directing, productive members of society.

4-H is the youth education program of the University of Wyoming Extension. 4-H membership is available to all Wyoming youth ages 8-19. Members may choose from 45 different projects or they may develop their own projects with the help of an adult volunteer leader.

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