

## Ages & Stages of Youth Development 9-12 Year Old Fact Sheet

### **Physical Growth**

Physical growth at this stage is still rather slow for most children, but they are anything but still and quiet. Puberty may be starting in some girls who mature very early. Activities for middle-school-age children should encourage physical involvement. These children like the movement in ball games and swimming. Hands-on involvement with objects can be very helpful. These children like field trips to science museums or parks, but only if they are not expected to stay confined to one area or to do one thing for a long time. They also need opportunities to share their thoughts and reactions. Children at this stage are still fairly concrete thinkers. Speakers and demonstrators get more attention if they bring things that can be seen and handled. Projects that involve making or doing something are of interest to middle-school-age children.

### **Growth in Thinking**

Children at this stage are beginning to think logically and symbolically. They still think in terms of concrete objects and can better handle ideas if related to something they can do or experience with their senses. They are moving toward abstract thinking. As they begin to deal with ideas, they think of things as black or white. Something is either right or wrong, fabulous or disgusting, fun or boring. There is very little middle ground. These children still look to adults for approval. They follow rules primarily out of respect for an adult. Individual evaluation by an adult is preferable to group competition where only one can be the best. Middle-school-age children want to know how much they have improved and what they should do to be better next time. Children at this age often are surprised at what they can accomplish, especially with encouragement from an adult.

### **Social Growth**

Joining a club is popular with this age group. In fact, the period from 6 to 12 years has been called "the gang age." Children are beginning to identify with peers, although they still look to an adult for guidance. They like to be in an organized group with others like themselves. Although 9- to 12-year-olds still have difficulty understanding another person's thinking, they are beginning to discover the benefits of making other people happy. Primarily, they are developing an "I'll scratch your back if you scratch mine" philosophy. By the end of this age range, they begin to realize additional benefits of pleasing others apart from immediate self-reward. During most of this period, however, the satisfaction of completing a project comes more from pleasing a leader or parents than from the value or importance of the activity itself. Toward the end of this age range, children are ready to move ahead with the task of taking responsibility for their own actions. Although the teaching of responsibility is a long process that should begin in infancy, some very concrete steps may be taken at this point. Club meetings offer the opportunity for members to have a voice in determining their own

activities. Decision-making skills are developed as the adult leader moves away from dictating directions to giving reassurance and support. For many activities, children of this age divide themselves into sex-segregated groups. Project interests may separate into traditional male-female areas. This distinction is not as prevalent as it was at younger ages, however. At the same time these children are thinking in black and white terms about male-female issues, they also are developing an increased independence of thought and action that may allow them to try new things.

### **Emotional Growth**

Middle-school-age children have a strong need to feel accepted and worthwhile. School becomes increasingly difficult and demanding for these children. Other pressures are added, too. Successes, even small ones, should continue to be emphasized. Failures should be minimized. (Individuals learn better and try harder if they believe in themselves and think they can succeed!) Comparison with others is difficult for children at this age. It tends to shake self-confidence. In addition, it can cause problems in dealing with peers at a time when they are trying to understand and build friendships. Instead of comparing children with each other, build positive self-concepts by comparing present to past performance for the individual. Project-judgings that allow each article to be rated on its own merit, rather than in competition with others, are preferable. If all successful projects can earn blue ribbons, the children are more encouraged than if projects must compete for only a few available placings.

<b>Characteristics:</b>	<b>Teaching Tips:</b>
Learn best when physically active.	Allow youth to participate in activities where they can use physical energy.
Have a special attachment to older youth.	Allow youth to choose an older youth to be their helper and role model.
Are easily motivated.	Use encouragement to keep them motivated.
Reading becomes an individual experience.	Allow time for youth to read on their own and think of activities before working with others.
Attention span is about 45 minutes.	Use varied activities to keep them interested.
Acceptance by peer group is important.	Use the peer group to recognize good works, e.g., applauding completed activities and avoiding putdowns.
Interests expand from home, to neighborhood, to community.	Talk to youth about friends and neighbors, and what goes on in their community. Involve them in community service.
Enjoy both cooperation and competition. Group and club membership is important.	Plan activities so that sometimes youth work together, sometimes compete with each other.
Show independence by seeking individual attention and sometimes disrupting the group.	Involve youth in selecting activities they would like. Give individual attention.
Feelings of competence enhance self-concept.	Provide activities that will let youth feel good about themselves and succeed. Recognize them for their accomplishments.
Show loyalty to members of their own sex and antagonism toward those of the opposite sex.	Involve youth in choosing partners.
Have interests which often change rapidly, jumping from one thing to another. Usually do best when work is presented in small pieces.	Encourage many brief learning experiences. Need simple and short directions.
Like symbols, ceremonies, and songs.	Hold initiation and installation ceremonies for new members and officers.
Show independence by disobedience, back-talk, and rebelliousness.	When you notice these characteristics, allow youth to show independence. Ask them in which activities they would like to participate, and give individual attention.
Are fairly concrete thinkers, tend to be more attentive if they are seeing and doing, rather than just listening.	Designing opportunities for hands-on learning.
May have rapid spurts of growth. Girls mature faster than boys. Some may be uncomfortable with their changing body images. Begin a roller coaster ride of hormones and emotions as puberty approaches.	Being sensitive to their feelings, accepting and willing to listen and talk about their feelings. Accepting these changes and providing positive reinforcement.

## Tips

- Use detailed outlines of sequential learning experiences
- Allow groups to develop parts of a larger plan
- Use hands-on learn-by-doing activities
- Use activities where learners need to locate resources
- Build in activities where learners exchange resources for personal or group goals
- Plan activities that allow learners to move about and use their bodies—but vary activities for many interests (not just sports)
- Incorporate many brief learning experiences
- Emphasize group learning experiences
- Encourage learning experiences be done with learners of the same sex—if to be done with the opposite sex, avoid competitions between girls and boys (mix groups for these activities)
- Use activities where learners achieve and produce a product
- Keep written work simple—review forms and worksheets with the group step-by-step
- Give clear instructions with set deadlines
- Clarify and enforce reasonable limits for this group—provide the safety net of an adult who will maintain boundaries
- Do NOT play favorites—treat ALL learners fairly
- Involve older teens in helping learners in this group plan and carry out activities together
- Encourage group free time
- Be present for this group—visible and accessible but in the background
- Make recognition available to those who earn it—let learners know they will receive rewards for completing activities, and present recognition in front of peers and parents
- Have learners share what interests, talents, abilities, and skills they developed in the activities
- Ask learners to share personal or group adjustments made during the activities
- Ask learners how teamwork, cooperation, friendship, and sportsmanship played out in activities completed
- Ask learners to verbalize or demonstrate opposing points of view they observed in the activities
- Plan group time to talk about beliefs and values as related to activities completed
- Ask learners to share opinions about activities completed—personal and group member performance, results of group work, etc.
- Ask group members to share options considered in the activities
- Ask learners to identify stressors and dangerous situations encountered in the activities completed

- Ask learners to demonstrate sequenced steps completed in the activities
- If tools were used in the activities, ask learners how they shared the use of them in their groups
- Ask learners what questions they still have about the activities just completed—encourage them to find some of the answers on their own, or encourage a few learners to find the answers and report back to the group
- Have learners explain rationale for choosing some options over other ones in the completed activities
- Help learners identify successes achieved in the activities—give positive feedback to the efforts and successes you see (and look for them!)
- Provide correction quietly—one on one—in a caring and consistent manner
- Avoid generalized praise—this group sees through it and feels manipulated
- Have learners generate alternative solutions to problems solved in the activities—or speculate other problems that could be solved in similar ways
- Ask learners what general categories were formed or needed to complete the necessary activities
- Ask learners to describe how the relationships that were formed or strengthened in the activities could be used in the future
- Provide active experiences that generally relate to or reinforce activity content presented such as nature walks, ropes courses, trips to significant sites, etc.
- Based on the content of activities completed, help learners form groups or clubs with common “collecting” interests or hobbies—ball cards, stamps, bugs, rocks, buttons, etc.
- Give related assignments for learners to manage and complete
- Encourage apprenticing with teen volunteers in related activities
- Provide opportunities for parental involvement such as homework or “things to do” lists—solicit the help of parents to assist learners with written work
- Build in ways parents, teachers, and other adults can help learners complete follow-up additional activities
- Provide opportunities to set two or three goals for a six-month period
- Encourage learners to incorporate technology into follow-up related activities
- Work with learners to identify and study related careers
- Build in community service roles to reinforce content taught—help this group work on environmental issues in their community