

# Common Developmental Traits by Age

(Adapted from *Yardsticks: Child and Adolescent Development Ages 4–14*,  
4th edition, by Chip Wood, 2018, Center for Responsive Schools)

Age	Physical	Language/Cognitive	Social/Emotional
4	<p>Energetic and active, but often clumsy</p> <p>Learning to switch between near and far focus for visual activities</p> <p>Fine motor skills are not yet well developed</p>	<p>Short attention spans</p> <p>Learn best through hands-on exploration</p> <p>Love imaginative play and take delight in words (including bathroom talk!)</p>	<p>Friendly and talkative, but sometimes fearful or worried</p> <p>Love being with friends and learning to work together</p> <p>Need adult help finding words to express needs instead of reacting physically</p>
5	<p>Still awkward with tasks requiring small movements</p> <p>Visual focus is on objects close at hand</p> <p>Need lots of physical activity</p>	<p>See one way to do things</p> <p>Imagination can be vivid, which can lead to believing toys are actually alive</p> <p>Interpret words in their literal sense— “We’re late, we’ve got to fly” means “We’ve got to fly like birds.”</p> <p>Express themselves in few words</p> <p>Think out loud before acting</p>	<p>Younger fives want adult approval; like to be “good”</p> <p>Older fives may challenge adult authority and seem oppositional at times</p> <p>Need consistent routines, rules, and discipline</p>
6	<p>Love to be active</p> <p>Noisy, sloppy, and in a hurry</p> <p>Tire easily</p>	<p>Very curious; love new ideas and asking questions</p> <p>Ambitious; may choose projects that are too hard</p> <p>Better understanding of past and present; can begin to understand real history markers</p>	<p>Enthusiastic, eager, competitive</p> <p>Rush to be first or dawdle to be last</p> <p>Care a great deal about friends</p> <p>Extremely sensitive; severe criticism can truly be traumatic</p> <p>Challenge boundaries and authority</p> <p>Enjoy working in groups</p>
7	<p>Often keep eyes focused on small, close area</p> <p>Writing is very small</p> <p>Improved coordination for both gross and fine motor skills</p> <p>Can be sensitive to physical and psychosomatic hurts</p>	<p>Need support for sustained, quiet work periods</p> <p>Like to collect, sort, and classify</p> <p>Rapidly develop their vocabularies</p> <p>Listen well and speak precisely</p> <p>Bothered by mistakes and try hard to make their work perfect</p> <p>Enjoy hands-on exploration</p>	<p>Need security, structure, and stability</p> <p>Sometimes moody or pouty</p> <p>Often have a best friend, although their best friend might change frequently</p> <p>Rely on adults for help and reassurance</p> <p>Prefer working and playing alone or with one friend</p> <p>Dislike taking risks or making mistakes</p>

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8	<p>Increase in small motor coordination</p> <p>Restless; play hard and tire quickly</p> <p>Eyes focus well on objects near and far</p> <p>Growth spurts lead to some awkwardness</p>	<p>Industrious, impatient, full of ideas; like to talk and explain ideas</p> <p>Often take on more than they can handle</p> <p>Generally able to pay attention, but don't always remember what they've heard or are supposed to do</p> <p>Can handle increasingly complex tasks but tire easily</p>	<p>Love to share humor</p> <p>Adjust well to change; bounce back from disappointments</p> <p>Love group activities</p> <p>May prefer working and playing with some classmates more than others</p> <p>Growing awareness of fairness issues</p>
9	<p>Improved coordination</p> <p>Like to push physical limits, but tire easily</p> <p>Restless; can't sit still for long</p> <p>Often report aches and pains</p>	<p>Industrious and curious; beginning to be aware of a bigger world of ideas</p> <p>Worry about global issues</p> <p>Take pride in attention to detail and finished work, but may jump quickly between interests</p> <p>Look hard for explanations of facts, how things work, why things happen as they do</p> <p>Difficulty with abstractions such as large numbers</p> <p>Love descriptive language and word play</p>	<p>Competitive; may form cliques</p> <p>Critical of self and others; need adult lightheartedness and humor</p> <p>Like to work with a partner of their choice; can work in groups but with lots of arguing</p> <p>Often feel worried or anxious</p> <p>Can be sullen, moody, aloof one minute and goofy and fun-loving the next</p>
10	<p>Large muscles needed for big movements are developing quickly</p> <p>Need lots of outdoor play and physical challenges</p> <p>Enjoy precision tasks</p> <p>Benefit from frequent snack and rest periods</p>	<p>Listen well and enjoy talking and explaining; can appreciate others' perspectives</p> <p>Hardworking; take pride in schoolwork</p> <p>Increasingly able to think abstractly</p> <p>Enjoy categorizing and classifying; like rules and logic</p> <p>Good at memorizing</p> <p>Can concentrate on reading and thinking for long periods</p> <p>Enjoy choral reading, poetry, plays, singing</p>	<p>Eager to reach out to others</p> <p>Quick to anger and to forgive</p> <p>Open to learning mediation or problem-solving skills</p> <p>Developing more mature sense of right and wrong</p> <p>Appreciate having their efforts noticed</p> <p>Cooperative and flexible; do well with group activities and cooperative learning</p>
11	<p>Restless and very energetic</p> <p>Need lots of food, physical activity, and sleep</p> <p>Have growth spurts</p>	<p>Like "adult" tasks, such as conducting Internet research Enjoy brain teasers and puzzles</p> <p>Would rather learn new skills than refine old ones</p> <p>Challenge assumptions—their own and those of adults</p> <p>More adept at abstract thinking</p>	<p>Common age for cliques</p> <p>Need reasonable amount of time to talk with peers</p> <p>Moody; self-absorbed</p> <p>Sensitive about changing bodies</p> <p>Like to challenge rules, argue, and test limits</p>

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12	<p>Very energetic</p> <p>Need lots of food, physical activity, and sleep</p> <p>Have growth spurts</p> <p>Stay up late and want to sleep late</p>	<p>May begin to excel at a subject or skill</p> <p>More able to think abstractly about complex issues</p> <p>Increasingly able to plan, organize thoughts and work, and set short-term goals</p> <p>Able to see both sides of an issue but like to argue one point of view</p>	<p>Care more about peers' opinions than those of adults</p> <p>Enjoy conversation with adults</p> <p>Capable of self-awareness, insight, and empathy</p> <p>Enthusiastic and spontaneous</p> <p>May reach out to classmates they have not been friends with</p>
13	<p>Lots of physical energy</p> <p>Most boys showing first signs of puberty; most girls are menstruating and have reached almost full physical development</p> <p>Skin problems are common; hygiene becomes more important</p> <p>Health and sex education classes can embarrass them and lead to silly or rude behavior</p>	<p>Often tentative, worried, and unwilling to take risks</p> <p>Abstract reasoning skills continue to grow</p> <p>May have strong opinions about likes and dislikes</p> <p>Often highly judgmental of the adults in their lives</p> <p>Often complain about fairness and tend to argue when working in groups</p>	<p>May experience a bumpy transition to increasing independence</p> <p>Can be moody and sensitive, may isolate themselves</p> <p>Acts of meanness may come from insecurity</p> <p>Increasingly sarcastic</p> <p>Feel and exert a lot of peer pressure</p> <p>May use social media extensively</p> <p>Personal appearance is a top concern, but neatness of their room is not</p>
14	<p>Energetic, loud, rambunctious</p> <p>Need lots of snacks, sleep, and exercise</p> <p>Girls are almost fully developed; boys have growth spurts and upper body strength begins to develop More interested in sex at this age</p>	<p>Respond well to academic challenges</p> <p>Like learning how things work</p> <p>Small cooperative learning groups are appealing to them</p> <p>Take pleasure in developing individual skills</p> <p>May say "I'm bored" when they mean "I don't understand" to save face</p>	<p>Tend to feel that they "know it all"</p> <p>Dislike and respond poorly to adult lectures</p> <p>May express contempt with facial expressions or body language as they try to distance themselves from adults</p> <p>Still depend on adults for empathy and boundaries</p> <p>More willing to make mistakes and learn from them</p> <p>Enjoy tackling big ideas</p>