Typical development of preadolescents

Late childhood or preadolescence is loosely defined as the years when children are about 9 to 12 years old. As in other stages of development, school-agers develop along a continuum as skills emerge, refine, and then are used broadly in a child’s life. While a child may show maturity in one domain, development in another domain may not be as advanced. This is typical of most children.

Often school-day staff focus on the academic or cognitive aspects of a child’s development. It is important for the out-of-school-time professional to think about the whole child and to pay attention to and support development in all domains. The OST setting is a particularly appropriate place to practice and improve social skills, creativity, and physical development. *What to expect regarding late childhood development:*

### Physical
- Gain about five pounds and grow about two and a half inches taller each year
- Increase in physical strength and coordination
- May experience injury at growth plate areas
- Permanent teeth come in
- Girls may enter puberty
- With onset of puberty for boys and girls, skin becomes oily, body odor changes
- Fine motor skills mature – more precise dexterity, can accomplish delicate tasks
- Need ten to eleven hours of sleep each night
- Rough and tumble play is common and developmentally appropriate
- View physical skills as important in determining status and self-concept

### Social
- Friends and peer groups have high importance
- Some children need support to positively interact with peers
- Join clubs or teams with peers who have similar interests/goals; gangs and “secret societies” create intrigue
- Begin to take on the values of their peers rather than the adults in their lives
- Are overly concerned about conforming to peer rules
- Conflicts are common; conflict resolution skills are refined
- Connect self to others, comparing characteristics and roles in a group or within the larger community
- Able to show empathy through words and actions
- Able to process hypothetical situations and feelings associated with other scenarios
- May need encouragement to cooperate with peers
- May take on more adult roles like caring for a younger sibling or making own meals
- Aware of who is friends with whom and are aware when anything happens to disrupt a particular alliance

### Self
- Interested in showing competence by completing meaningful projects
- Describe their own skills and qualities in positive terms, based on past experiences and future aspirations
- Like being “workers” and feeling competent—they often find side jobs to earn money
- Enjoy competition and to keep track of results, but social impact needs to be managed carefully
- Experience a tension between wanting to be independent and conform
- Express personal opinions and develop their own ideas
- Becoming opinionated, but want to blend in with peers and NOT stick out in a crowd
- Often self-conscious, self-centered, and sensitive to criticism

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• Develop an awareness of others; may take actions that show an appreciation for similarities and differences among people in the community; may promote social justice stances regarding current issues
• May experiment with masturbation and have fantasies about others and sexual intimacy
• May exhibit evidence of rebellion against authority (backtalk, disobedience)
• Bursts of emotion and impatience
• Accept failures and mistakes more realistically
• Still need teacher approval and attention
• Need personal space
• Start to describe their future roles

Moral
• Interested in justice and fairness
• Like organized play with definite rules
• Argue about rules and point out people who break the rules
• Control impulses independently
• Begin to control behavior based on what is best for the group or even the greater community
• Turn to media for advice

Cognitive*
• Can think abstractly
• Attention span increases
• Learn to plan and organize
• Begin to make independent decisions
• Can plan ahead several weeks
• Demonstrate higher level problem-solving
• Enjoy challenging, strategic games
• Begin to think about future careers
• Sense of humor continues to mature
• Enjoy doing polls and surveys and presenting the results in mathematical ways
• Enjoy calculating sports statistics for their favorite teams, clip box scores or look up stats on line and track them

Language
• Eager readers; they read chapter books and enjoy book series
• Can maintain journals
• Can memorize portions of literature or lyrics
• Can do oral presentations
• Use language in a wide variety of ways, spend time in discussion, often resort to slang and profanity

Creativity
• May start taking lessons in art, music, dance, or photography
• Karaoke can be a fun experience for older school-agers

References:
California Department of Education. 2009. “Desired Results Developmental Profile - School Age©.”

* In Pennsylvania, academic standards from grade three on are set by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Standards for birth to grade two are set by the Office of Child Development and Early Learning (OCDEL). For specific information on subject matter standards, go to http://pdesas.org/Standard

Chapter 6: The Early Adolescent

extension.psu.edu/youth/betterkidcare

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