



Developmental Characteristics Eleven-to-Thirteen Year Olds (Grades 6-8)

A child's development is an individual and continual process. The following outlines the typical developmental characteristics of a middle school student. Keep in mind that some of the youth in our program may be "behind" or "advanced" in any of these areas.

- **General Characteristics**
 - Testing limits; a "know-it-all" attitude
 - Vulnerable; emotionally insecure; fear of rejection; mood swings
 - Identification with admired adults
 - Bodies going through physical changes that affect personal appearance

- **Physical Characteristics**
 - Mature at varying rates of speed. Girls tend to be taller than boys for the first two years of early adolescence and are ordinarily more physically developed than boys
 - Good coordination of small muscles; interest in art, crafts, models and music
 - Early maturing youth may be upset about their size (as their adult supporter, you can help by listening and explaining)
 - Very concerned about their appearance; very self conscious about their physical changes
 - Face responsibility for sexual behavior before full emotional and social maturity has occurred
 - Experience biological development five years sooner than adolescents of the last century, the average age of menarche has dropped from seventeen to twelve years of age
 - May have bad diet and sleep habits and, as a result, low energy levels

- **Social Characteristics**
 - Acceptance by friends becomes very important
 - Cliques start to develop
 - Team games become popular
 - Often have "crushes" on other people
 - Friends set the general rules of behavior
 - Feel a strong need to conform; dress and behave like their peers in order to "belong"
 - Very concerned with what others say and think about them
 - Have a tendency to try to manipulate others to get what they want
 - Interested in earning their own money

- **Emotional Characteristics**

- Very sensitive to praise and recognition; feelings are easily hurt
- Because friends are very important, can be conflicts between adults' rules and friends' rules
- Caught between being a child and being an adult
- Loud behavior may hide their lack of self confidence
- Are moody, restless; often feel self-conscious and alienated; lack self esteem
- Challenge authority figures; test limits of acceptable behavior
- Want to know and feel that significant adults, including parents and teachers, love and accept them; need frequent affirmation
- Are impacted by high level of mobility in society; may become anxious and disoriented when peer group ties are broken because of family relocation to other communities
- Look at the world more objectively; look at adults more subjectively and are critical of them

- **Mental Characteristics**

- Tend to be perfectionists; if they attempt too much, may feel frustrated
- Are searching to form a conscious sense of individual uniqueness "who am I"
- Want more independence but know they need guidance and support
- Consider academic goals as a secondary level of priority; personal social concerns dominate thoughts and activities
- Confront hard moral and ethical questions for which they are unprepared to cope
- Are reflective, analytical, and introspective about their thoughts and feelings
- May have lengthy attention span