Children’s Growth and Guidance

Kenneth E. Barber, Ph.D.
Extension Family Life Specialist

A child’s age makes a large difference in how he or she needs to be guided and disciplined. Guide according to the child’s age, behavior, and ability to understand words. A child’s language skills develop slowly at first, then increase rapidly with age, i.e., the ability to make sounds, form sounds into words, words into sentences, and put words together in ways that communicate thoughts, feelings, and needs, and to understand what words mean and how to use them.

Understanding the way children grow and develop will help parents guide their children.

Children grow in these ways:

- Physically
  - The child’s bones and muscles grow larger and stronger; their coordination in walking, running, and climbing improves.

- Mentally
  - The child’s brain develops rapidly allowing him or her to think and reason more clearly. They are able to ask meaningful questions, make better decisions, perform complex tasks, and become more responsible.

- Socially
  - The child develops skills and attitudes towards playing and working with others. Children become interested in same-sex groups, and later on, boy-girl associations.

- Emotionally
  - The child gradually develops the ability to control feelings and emotions.

Over time, guiding children in appropriate ways tells children that their parents love them, want them to be happy, responsible, and caring persons. Children learn by watching others, by what makes them feel good, accepted, what gets them attention, and from the love they receive from parents and others.

When children are misguided and poorly disciplined/punished, they feel unloved, bad, stupid, or incapable, and they may give up trying to learn.
CHILDREN’S GROWTH PATTERNS

- **One-year-olds** learn fast. They are curious, explore, and get into dangerous situations. They make messes.

- **Two-year-olds** learn how to get what they want. They don’t want to share their things, they want to do things the same way over and over, and they say “No.”

- **Three-year-olds** try to please. They mind fairly well, can accept suggestions, and follow instructions.

- **Four-year-olds** tend to be bossy and think they are important. They brag and stretch the truth. They can follow rules.

- **Five-year-olds** are dependable. They like praise, want to please, and can cooperate with adults and other children.

- **Six-year-olds** are capable and independent. They like to help out with routines. They have lots of energy and like physical things. They need praise and encouragement.

- **Seven-year-olds** are less stubborn, play easily with others, and are active and boisterous. They sift and sort information to make sense out of it and begin to reason. They are becoming more aware of themselves and others.

- **Eight-year-olds** are outgoing, curious, and self-confident. They talk a lot and gossip. They are more self-aware and self-judging. They recognize ways they differ from others, and are less apt to withdraw. They can work independently, but need direction. Friends of the same sex are important. They like action and play.

- **Nine-year-olds** have a new level of maturity, self-confidence, and independence. They have more self-control and can spend more time alone. They like to please, they like organized games and activities, and they like to be chosen. Friendships are more solid.

- **Ten-year-olds** tend to fit in at home, at school, and at play. They feel good about who they are and what they can do, and they love praise. Friends are important and may change quickly. They like organized games and belonging to clubs and groups. Girls are slightly more advanced physically and sexually than boys. Moodiness is short-lived and infrequent.

- **Eleven-year-olds** may grow rapidly. Activity, appetite, and energy levels increase. They can be loud, rude, boorish. They like to take chances and defy rules. They like to argue with adults, yet they can be cooperative and friendly. Friends are important, and opposite sex interests emerge. They tend to avoid complicated tasks.

- **Twelve-year-olds** start to mature sexually, with changes in growth, activities, and behavior. Those not entering puberty will remain much as they are. Rapid growth may cause tiredness, moodiness, bickering, and over-anxiousness. Friends and groups are more important, while personal habits and manners take on less importance.

---

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- Child Guidance Techniques, PNW0064
- Communicating With Young Children, EB1348
- Young Children and Safety, PNW0483
- Young Children and Stories, PNW0484
- Young Children’s Play and Toys, PNW0485
- Teaching Young Children Right from Wrong: Learning to be Honest (video—6/98)
- Understanding Babies and Toddlers, PNW0279
- Understanding 3- to 6-Year-Olds, PNW0280
- Disciplining Preschoolers, PNW0281

**Order From:**

Bulletins Office, WSU, Department C, P.O. Box 645912, Pullman, WA 99164-5912
1-800-723-1763, Fax: 509-335-3006
Online: http://pubs.wsu.edu

**Web sites:**

- National Network on Child Care (NNCC): http://www.nncc.org