

## AGE GROUP CHARACTERISTICS

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*by Eva Lee Henderson*

### **Ages 8 - 9**

**Physical:** Eight and nine year olds grow steadily, rather than in spurts. They are active and energetic and are becoming more coordinated than they were in the past. Their attention span can be long if they are involved in an interesting project.

**Emotional:** In these two years much emotional growth takes place. Children begin to assert independence and make choices on their own. They begin to control their emotions more than in early childhood. They fear failure and want adult approval.

**Social:** It's important to belong to the group. The peer group takes on more importance as dependence on adults lessens. Best friends, usually of the same sex, pair off, although the 'best friends' may change allegiance often. Fair play, according to a set of rules, is important. This is an age to develop self-respect as well as respect and consideration for others. They can participate in cooperative activities successfully by the end of the two years.

**Intellectual:** Children want to use their reading skills (but beware of vast differences in ability). Games, creative art and drama activities are excellent learning tools, as children enjoy them - their creativity is at a peak right now. They still accept the adult as authority, and curiosity fills them with questions. They think concretely, not abstractly.

**Spiritual:** Choices and decisions are based on what is right and wrong. Some are ready and capable of making a salvation decision, but shouldn't be pressured to do so. They have a simple, trusting, honest faith. Because concept formation depends on experiences, they need adult models for love, forgiveness, etc.

### **Ages 10 - 11**

**Physical:** Ten and eleven year olds are active, curious and able to use physical skills purposefully - playing soccer rather than just running and kicking a ball, for example. Physical changes can cause eleven year old girls to tire easily. Eleven year old boys are often restless and wiggly. This characteristic is shown in the rough and tumble games they enjoy so much.

**Emotional:** The ten year old has reached an emotional balance and is cooperative, agreeable, and friendly. The eleven year old may be unsteady, and shift from one mood to another unpredictably. This age doesn't rely on adults' approval or attention but still needs loving, accepting relationships.

**Social:** The ten year old still enjoys family and values parents. The eleven year old follows the peer group behavior code, may be critical of adults, and may be unwilling to communicate openly. Cliques, gangs, and clubs form naturally at this time.

**Intellectual:** Learning activities still need to involve action, creativity, and practical daily application. Ten year olds want to know the reasons for right and wrong. Abstract thinking is difficult for some of them, but the eleven year olds are getting a better grasp on it. Because independence is important, give

a minimum of specific direction to encourage them to think on their own. Hero worship is strong. They also begin thinking about the future.

**Spiritual:** Independence comes through here, too. Ten and eleven year olds benefit from involvement in planning and choosing their own learning projects. Scripture memory is easier than ever before. Ten year olds may feel a deep love for God and have a developing sense of responsibility to their church. Eleven year olds respond to God by seeking His guidance in decisions. Eleven year olds also are learning to think about concepts, relating to facts or grouping them. Because of their hero worship it is important for Christian adults to model in life what they teach in Bible Exploration.

#### **Ages 12 - 14**

**Physical:** Junior highers grow very fast and in spurts. They are caught up in the details of puberty - girls maturing earlier than boys. Uneven growth may result in tiredness, clumsiness, and preoccupation with 'looks'. Many of their sensitivities, teasing of others and self-image ideas are based on physical factors.

**Emotional:** Junior highers' emotions can be yo-yo like. The turmoil in every other area is reflected in emotions, too. Up and down, ecstatic or depressed, but usually unpredictable. Thus junior highers' emotions can easily lead to unexpected embarrassments, hot tempers, self-criticisms, or discipline problems. Respond with patience, few demands, and time.

**Social:** Cliques are inevitable for this age-group, so work around them rather than against them. Being part of a peer group helps a junior higher develop meaningful relationships, handle rejection or loneliness, and try new social skills. Though belonging to a peer group helps an individual feel safe from criticism, it may not keep him or her from being cruel and critical of others. Learn to respond with patience and humor.

**Intellectual:** As junior highers begin to think abstractly they also gain the ability to think more logically. They want facts and proof for things they previously accepted on trust. While they are sharper intellectually, they may be indifferent or negative toward things such as memory work. They want to think like a grown-up and be treated as one. But they often lack the all-around development needed to say the right things at the right times, to be self-disciplined, or to be consistent in their decisions.

**Spiritual:** Junior highers are apt to voice doubts and even disbelief in God. This may be part of their desire for independence from home and authority, or it might be because they can't 'prove' Christianity. They tend to associate commitment to Christ with proper Christian behavior, but give up because they can't cope with their own failure. A keen sense of right and wrong makes them eager to work on projects for the less fortunate. And their idealism can be nurtured by showing them how God can use them now - they are special to Him. During these years, adults communicate spiritually by being the right kind of models as much as by talking about the right behavior.

#### **Ages 15 - 18**

**Physical:** High schoolers always seem hungry. Their adult bodies are becoming well-developed.

**Emotional:** High schoolers covet, and yet shirk, responsibility. Respect for authority is built on respect for the person who is in authority.

**Social:** Gaining independence, they spend much time with friends. Peer influence is very strong. High schoolers are looking for identity - they want to experience real life, not just a humdrum existence. In many respects they are very grown up, yet underneath they are still girls and boys. Boys are beginning to catch up with girls in maturity.

**Intellectual:** Personal convictions are being formed. High schoolers have a strong desire to discuss and explore. They are imaginative, adventurous, demanding, and may also be wrapped up in their personal fears, frustrations, and confusion.

**Spiritual:** Religion is recognized as part of their search for meaning in life. They are ready and able to grasp the intellectual content of faith. High schoolers are at a readiness to give and serve.