

# Child Development: 9- to 12-Year-Olds

In late elementary and middle school your child experiences a period of tremendous intellectual, social-emotional, and physical change. School demands increase, friends become as important as family, and puberty begins to reshape her body. This is also a time when individual differences among children become more apparent.

Here are the stages you can expect your child to pass through during early adolescence:

## 9-Year-Olds

### Physical Development

- uses tools, such as a hammer or small garden tools, fairly well
- capable of fine hand and finger movements
- draws with great detail
- may persist with an activity until exhausted
- interested in own strength; boys enjoy wrestling

### Intellectual Development

- memorizes and recites facts, but may not show deep understanding
- reads to learn (rather than learning to read)
- has a strong desire to complete tasks
- keeps train of thought and will continue work even after interruptions
- able to use a dictionary
- very interested in mastering skills
- critical thinking starting to emerge
- beginning to be aware of right and wrong (versus good and bad)

### Social & Emotional Development

- may experience wide mood swings
- may be critical of self and others
- may use physical complaints to avoid unpleasant tasks
- often dislikes the opposite sex intensely
- responsible; can be depended upon and trusted
- puts great importance on fairness, in self and in others
- likes to talk and share ideas

## 10-Year-Olds

### Physical Development

- has both skill and stamina for gross motor activities such as biking, skating, and team sports
- personality traits may be revealed by posture and movement habits

- girls may show signs of approaching puberty:
  - softening and rounding of features
  - subtle signs of breast development

### **Intellectual Development**

- still memorizes and recites without thinking deeply about the subject
- developing a conscience but not yet consistently able to tell right from wrong; relies upon an adult to help
- aware of time, but needs help to plan time in a practical way
- still certain that own beliefs are correct and are universally shared by others

### **Social & Emotional Development**

- disposition is generally happy, sometimes silly
- respectful and affectionate toward both parents
- fears which were previously bothersome are now minimal
- may anger quickly but expression of anger differs according to the situation
- friendships are quite important; friends are of the same sex
- enjoys clubs and group activities
- still not interested in the opposite sex

## **11-Year-Olds**

### **Physical Development**

- very active and energetic; constantly wiggles and moves
- boys show few outward signs of puberty:
  - may tend to carry more fat than previously
  - more muscle development than girls
- girls display more physical changes:
  - development of some soft pubic hair
  - breast growth is still minimal, but of great interest
  - rapid height gains

### **Intellectual Development**

- able to use logic in arguments and apply logic to specific, concrete situations
- combines oral, visual, and written material in school reports
- decision-making skill improves
- starts to realize that others may hold beliefs different from own

### **Social & Emotional Development**

- tends to be egocentric, critical, and uncooperative
- may be tearful, fearful, and full of worries
- relationship with mother is particularly thorny
- displays anger physically--fights, slams doors, kicks
- away from home, behavior is well mannered and quite helpful
- friendships are still important, but with more quarrels than before
- may have one "best friend"
- not actively interested in the opposite sex, but on the verge

## **12-Year-Olds**

### **Physical Development**

- both boys and girls are always hungry
- girls are at the peak of physical change:
  - still growing rapidly in height and weight; growth may taper off toward the end of the year
  - menstruation is likely to start
  - breasts fill out
  - underarm and pubic hair thickens
- boys show a wide range of growth rates:
  - soft pubic hair develops
  - penis and scrotum enlarge
  - erections are frequent, with or without an obvious cause

### **Intellectual Development**

- categorizes information in order to make sense of it
- summarizes information from a book in own words
- proofreads own work for errors of grammar, spelling, and logic
- reads adult newspapers or magazines, particularly those sections about topics of specific interest

### **Social & Emotional Development**

- generally pleasant and good natured
- very enthusiastic about likes and equally passionate about dislikes
- strong need to conform to peers
- friendships are calm, without the turmoil seen at eleven.
- shows interest in the opposite sex (girls more than boys)

### **And Finally ...**

You need only to glance at your child 's classmates to be reminded that when it comes to the physical and emotional changes that accompany puberty, children vary widely. Talk with your child about the changes she is experiencing and those she sees in others. Have conversations about sex and reproduction to correct the myths and misinformation she may get from friends. And, as always, share any concerns about your child 's development or school progress with her pediatrician or teacher.

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### About the Contributors

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### Other Resources

#### Books

Your Ten-to-Fourteen Year Old

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0440506786/schwabfoundation/>  
By Louise Bates Ames and Carol Chase Haber

Your Nine-Year-Old: Thoughtful and Mysterious

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/044050676X/schwabfoundation/>  
By Louise Bates Ames and Carol Chase Haber

#### Websites

State of Washington Department of Social and Health  
Child Development Guide

<http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents/training/chidev/cd06.htm>

Parent Soup

Development Tracker

[www.parentsoup.com/tracker](http://www.parentsoup.com/tracker)