Developmental Characteristics of Third Graders

Every child’s development is unique. Although children develop through a generally predictable sequence of milestones, we cannot say exactly when a child will reach each and every stage. Every child has his or her own timetable. The characteristics below are offered only as a reference to give you a better understanding of your child. Feel free to contact your pediatrician and/or your child’s school if you have any questions.

The Eight-Year-Old

Physical Development

- High energy
- Enjoy rough and tumble games, as well as team sports
- May be physically daring
- Fine motor skills showing increased speed and smoothness
- Some write with tiny letters and artwork becomes more detailed
- Large muscles in arms and legs are more developed than small muscles
- Seven to nine-year olds are learning to use their small muscles skills (printing with a pencil; using scissors and small tools) and their large muscle skills (throwing and catching a ball)
- Large differences in size and abilities of children; may affect the way they get along with others, how they feel about themselves, and what physical activities they do
- Enjoy testing muscle strength and skills
- Good sense of balance

Social and Emotional Development

- Begin to define self based on certain attributes or achievements, such as “I wear glasses,” etc
- Can become self-conscious based on how they believe they look in the eyes of others
- Establishing friendships is very important, although they may lack skills to do so
- Emergence of a sense of humor--telling jokes
- Less dependent on adults and more dependent on peers
- Begins to question authority and test limits
- Often overestimate abilities; “they bite off more than can chew”
- Interested in rules and rituals
- Generally girls tend to play more with girls; boys with boys
- May have a best friend
- Strong desire to perform well, do things right
- Find criticism and failure difficult to handle
- View things as right or wrong, wonderful or terrible, with little middle ground
- Need a sense of security in groups, organized play and clubs; friendship groups may be larger
- Generally enjoy caring for and playing with younger children

Intellectual Development

- Concrete Operations Stage of Thinking is solidifying for most children. They can reason logically about actual objects and organize thoughts coherently. They cannot handle abstract reasoning very well unless it relates to real experiences.
- Learn best through active, concrete experiences, but are learning to see books as sources of information; reading may become a major interest
- Developing a longer attention span
- Enjoy collecting, organizing, and classifying objects and information
- Imaginative play in the form of skits, plays, and puppet shows
- Likes groups and group activities
May reverse printed letter (b/d) (until mid-third grade)
Enjoy planning and building
Speaking and listening vocabularies are expanding rapidly; talkative
Increased problem-solving ability
Interested in magic and tricks
Learning to plan ahead and evaluate what they do
When something is suggested, they may say, "That’s dumb" or "I don’t want to do that."
Beginning to see and understand the perspectives of others.
Listen well, but they are so full of ideas that they cannot always recall what has been said
Like to explain ideas—may exaggerate
Engrossed in activity at hand; love to socialize at the same time
Industrious; often work quickly
Basic skills begin to be mastered; begin to feel a sense of competence with skills

The Nine-Year-Old

Physical Development

Girls generally ahead of boys in physical maturity
Improve coordination and reaction time
May have poor posture; lots of physical habitual movements; fingers in hair, slouching, picking at nails
Stomachaches, headaches, leg pains common
High energy, often playing to the point of fatigue
Inconsistent appetite and sleep patterns

Social and Emotional Development

Enjoy being a member of a club
Increased interest in competitive sports
Learning to take responsibility for his/her own actions
Begin to see parents and authority figures as fallible human beings; sees adult inconsistencies and imperfections
Peer conformity in dressing is important
May begin to be interested in the opposite sex
Self-aware
Concerned about being right or wrong, being fair; may complain about fairness issues
Have great need to be in a group, but are also individualistic
Need to be in control of some choices
May become deeply attached to a best friend
Can be sullen and moody

Intellectual Development

Concrete Operations Stage of Thinking is solidified for most children, they can reason logically and organize thoughts coherently. However, most thinking is done about actual physical objects. They cannot handle abstract thinking very well unless abstractions are related to something they have directly experienced. Even if they can make abstractions, they still learn best through active, concrete experiences
Showing signs of being more responsible, inner directed, an independent worker
Appreciate being trusted
Interested in many different types of reading: fictional stories, magazines, how-to project books, and non-fiction informational books
May develop special interest in collections or hobbies
Better able to understand concepts
Are becoming much less egocentric and are able to understand the perspectives of others
Better understanding the concept of “audience” when writing
Less interested in fantasy; more involved in the real world
May have problems with increased homework demands
Age of negatives: ”I can’t,” ”boring”
Maybe less imaginative than at earlier grades