# Common Developmental Traits by Age

(Adapted from *Yardsticks: Child and Adolescent Development Ages 4–14*, 4th edition, by Chip Wood, 2018, Center for Responsive Schools)

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| 4   | Energetic and active, but often clumsy  
Learning to switch between near and far focus for visual activities  
Fine motor skills are not yet well developed | Short attention spans  
Learn best through hands-on exploration  
Love imaginative play and take delight in words (including bathroom talk!) | Friendly and talkative, but sometimes fearful or worried  
Love being with friends and learning to work together  
Need adult help finding words to express needs instead of reacting physically |
| 5   | Still awkward with tasks requiring small movements  
Visual focus is on objects close at hand  
Need lots of physical activity | See one way to do things  
Imagination can be vivid, which can lead to believing toys are actually alive  
Interpret words in their literal sense—“We’re late, we’ve got to fly” means “We’ve got to fly like birds.”  
Express themselves in few words  
Think out loud before acting | Younger fives want adult approval; like to be “good”  
Older fives may challenge adult authority and seem oppositional at times  
Need consistent routines, rules, and discipline |
| 6   | Love to be active  
Noisy, sloppy, and in a hurry  
Tire easily | Very curious; love new ideas and asking questions  
Ambitious; may choose projects that are too hard  
Better understanding of past and present; can begin to understand real history markers | Enthusiastic, eager, competitive  
Rush to be first or dawdle to be last  
Care a great deal about friends  
Extremely sensitive; severe criticism can truly be traumatic  
Challenge boundaries and authority  
Enjoy working in groups |
| 7   | Often keep eyes focused on small, close area  
Writing is very small  
Improved coordination for both gross and fine motor skills  
Can be sensitive to physical and psychosomatic hurts | Need support for sustained, quiet work periods  
Like to collect, sort, and classify  
Rapidly develop their vocabularies  
Listen well and speak precisely  
Bothered by mistakes and try hard to make their work perfect  
Enjoy hands-on exploration | Need security, structure, and stability  
Sometimes moody or pouty  
Often have a best friend, although their best friend might change frequently  
Rely on adults for help and reassurance  
Prefer working and playing alone or with one friend  
Dislike taking risks or making mistakes |
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| 8   | Increase in small motor coordination  
      Restless; play hard and tire quickly  
      Eyes focus well on objects near and far  
      Growth spurts lead to some awkwardness | Industrious, impatient, full of ideas; like to talk and explain ideas  
      Often take on more than they can handle  
      Generally able to pay attention, but don’t always remember what they’ve heard or are supposed to do  
      Can handle increasingly complex tasks but tire easily | Love to share humor  
      Adjust well to change; bounce back from disappointments  
      Love group activities  
      May prefer working and playing with some classmates more than others  
      Growing awareness of fairness issues |
| 9   | Improved coordination  
      Like to push physical limits, but tire easily  
      Restless; can’t sit still for long  
      Often report aches and pains | Industrious and curious; beginning to be aware of a bigger world of ideas  
      Worry about global issues  
      Take pride in attention to detail and finished work, but may jump quickly between interests  
      Look hard for explanations of facts, how things work, why things happen as they do  
      Difficulty with abstractions such as large numbers  
      Love descriptive language and word play | Competitive; may form cliques  
      Critical of self and others; need adult lightheartedness and humor  
      Like to work with a partner of their choice; can work in groups but with lots of arguing  
      Often feel worried or anxious  
      Can be sullen, moody, aloof one minute and goofy and fun-loving the next |
| 10  | Large muscles needed for big movements are developing quickly  
      Need lots of outdoor play and physical challenges  
      Enjoy precision tasks  
      Benefit from frequent snack and rest periods | Listen well and enjoy talking and explaining; can appreciate others’ perspectives  
      Hardworking; take pride in schoolwork  
      Increasingly able to think abstractly  
      Enjoy categorizing and classifying; like rules and logic  
      Good at memorizing  
      Can concentrate on reading and thinking for long periods  
      Enjoy choral reading, poetry, plays, singing | Eager to reach out to others  
      Quick to anger and to forgive  
      Open to learning mediation or problem-solving skills  
      Developing more mature sense of right and wrong  
      Appreciate having their efforts noticed  
      Cooperative and flexible; do well with group activities and cooperative learning |
| 11  | Restless and very energetic  
      Need lots of food, physical activity, and sleep  
      Have growth spurts | Like “adult” tasks, such as conducting Internet research  
      Enjoy brain teasers and puzzles  
      Would rather learn new skills than refine old ones  
      Challenge assumptions—their own and those of adults  
      More adept at abstract thinking | Common age for cliques  
      Need reasonable amount of time to talk with peers  
      Moody; self-absorbed  
      Sensitive about changing bodies  
      Like to challenge rules, argue, and test limits |
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| 12  | Very energetic  
Need lots of food, physical activity, and sleep  
Have growth spurts  
Stay up late and want to sleep late | May begin to excel at a subject or skill  
More able to think abstractly about complex issues  
Increasingly able to plan, organize thoughts and work, and set short-term goals  
Able to see both sides of an issue but like to argue one point of view | Care more about peers’ opinions than those of adults  
Enjoy conversation with adults  
Capable of self-awareness, insight, and empathy  
Enthusiastic and spontaneous  
May reach out to classmates they have not been friends with |
| 13  | Lots of physical energy  
Most boys showing first signs of puberty; most girls are menstruating and have reached almost full physical development  
Skin problems are common; hygiene becomes more important  
Health and sex education classes can embarrass them and lead to silly or rude behavior | Often tentative, worried, and unwilling to take risks  
Abstract reasoning skills continue to grow  
May have strong opinions about likes and dislikes  
Often highly judgmental of the adults in their lives  
Often complain about fairness and tend to argue when working in groups | May experience a bumpy transition to increasing independence  
Can be moody and sensitive, may isolate themselves  
Acts of meanness may come from insecurity  
Increasingly sarcastic  
Feel and exert a lot of peer pressure  
May use social media extensively  
Personal appearance is a top concern, but neatness of their room is not |
| 14  | Energetic, loud, rambunctious  
Need lots of snacks, sleep, and exercise  
Girls are almost fully developed; boys have growth spurts and upper body strength begins to develop  
More interested in sex at this age | Respond well to academic challenges  
Like learning how things work  
Small cooperative learning groups are appealing to them  
Take pleasure in developing individual skills  
May say “I’m bored” when they mean “I don’t understand” to save face | Tend to feel that they “know it all”  
Dislike and respond poorly to adult lectures  
May express contempt with facial expressions or body language as they try to distance themselves from adults  
Still depend on adults for empathy and boundaries  
More willing to make mistakes and learn from them  
Enjoy tackling big ideas |