

Resource Article

Understanding Young Children

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When teaching children ages 6–8, it is important to remember that they are still developing ideas about themselves, their lives, and the world around them. While children of this age may be confident about what they know, they still have a lot to learn. It is our responsibility to teach them. As we do so, however, we must be aware of each child's mental, physical, and spiritual needs and abilities.

Mind

Most children ages 6–8 begin to understand when they know something. As a result, they may get distracted and stop paying attention when they believe they already know and understand the information being taught. In contrast, other children may not be confident that they know anything and might think they cannot learn a given concept.

To help children focus on the lesson being taught, try the following.

- Give children small pieces of information and repeat them multiple times. This will help children remember it. This is especially important when teaching about difficult topics.
- When possible, sing songs, use actions, and let the children interact with objects as part of their learning.
- Give children clear instructions. Refocus children between activities with a song, hand claps, or another transition signal. It is mentally difficult for children to transition from one activity to the next, so having a visible break between activities helps them.
- When possible, allow children to process their learning with other children. This is very important for children who are shy. Giving children time to talk with their friends about what they are learning helps them to be actively involved in learning.
- Do not limit what you teach because you think the children will not understand. Children in general, but particularly those ages 6–8, can understand complex ideas if they are given detailed explanations.

Body

Children ages 6–8 are still developing physically. This can sometimes affect their ability to learn. This shows in their inability to sit still and the need for active learning. This is especially true for boys. To help them, try the following.

- Give children time to wiggle. Have the children stand up and stretch, or guide them in a short, directed time of movement between each activity they do. Young children need to move around a lot.
- Keep activities short. Young children have short attention spans. If you see that children are no longer paying attention, include a brief time for movement or move on to a new activity.
- Allow children to sit down or move around after short periods of standing. While children need to move, they cannot be expected to stand in one place for a long time.

- Provide physical transitions between activities. This will help children to see and feel they are moving from one activity to the next.

Spirit

Spiritually, children are just beginning to learn about God. The following suggestions will help guide the spiritual growth of young children.

- Make learning interactive. Children remember information they have physically and mentally interacted with, so the same is true when they are developing spiritually.
- Do not try to answer a spiritual question if you do not know the answer. Take the time to look for the answer, or simply say to the child, "That is a really great question! I am not sure what the answer is. If I find out, I will let you know."
- Explore basic information about a topic before explaining the details. Children need to understand the basics of their faith before they can understand some of the more complicated parts of it.
- Help the children to know God and to understand that He loves them regardless of what they say or do. This is the foundation of Christianity. If they know and believe that they are precious and loved, they will be more likely to accept other teachings of the faith.
- Remember to listen to them. Young children often are subjected to a lot of adult talking time, but they need opportunities to have their voices, thoughts, and opinions heard by others.

It is important to know that children ages 6–8 differ greatly in their mental, physical, and spiritual development. However, in general, they will respond to well-explained information, talking with friends about what they are learning, and movement.