

THE WORLD OF PRESCHOOLERS



Intellectual Characteristics

CHILDREN AT THIS AGE

- think very concretely and literally, not abstractly or figuratively as youth and adults do; to a preschool child, things *are* as they appear to be.
- are not capable of reasoning or organizing abstract faith concepts along logical lines.
- learn through their experiences at home, at church, at preschool, and from caregivers.
- learn with their whole bodies. They love to taste, touch, move, explore, smell, watch, and wonder.
- are beginning to develop some literacy skills; some can write their own name, recognize the letters of the alphabet, and count to twenty.
- love to use language to please adults; “right answers” do not necessarily indicate comprehension.
- enjoy being told stories and read to. Repetition is an important way to learn.
- are often easily distracted from staying “on task.”

TIPS FOR LEADERS

- Try for a reasonable balance between times of quiet listening and active, “hands on” participation.
- Relate learning to the experiences children already have or to new experiences you can share with them.
- Give your little ones plenty of opportunities to move around.
- Keep games, stories, and other activities short, with transitional periods that enable movement from one part of the room to the other.
- Provide a variety of learning experiences: stories, art, music, words, numbers, group interaction, and so on.
- Avoid using figures of speech, symbolism, or analogies.
- Remember that each child develops at his or her own pace; nurture each child’s strengths.



Social Characteristics

CHILDREN AT THIS AGE

- are blissfully egocentric; they see the world through their own eyes.
- are developmentally incapable of understanding another’s perspective or emotions.
- are self-centered, yet are significantly influenced by others, especially mom, dad, teachers, and other significant adults.
- are on the verge of experiencing a wider world of people; many young children still want to play alone and must make a real effort to have any meaningful play with others.

TIPS FOR LEADERS

- Accept children’s developing concepts of themselves without judging their apparent egocentrism.
- Emphasize the theme that we are special to God; we’ve been created by God, belong to God, and are dearly loved by God.
- Recognize that you are a role model—a picture of God’s love and care—for little ones.
- Encourage cooperative play with others while remaining sensitive to individual needs for attention and recognition.
- Do your best to make learning fun; make your room a safe and friendly place where kids will want to be every week.



Spiritual Characteristics

CHILDREN AT THIS AGE

- have a growing sense that God is very special and real.
- tend to have a very literal concept of God, perhaps as a “grandfather” figure.
- readily accept what you say about God.
- sense that God loves them and cares for them.
- enjoy some Bible stories, especially about Jesus; want stories retold often.
- can develop attitudes of love and trust toward Jesus and God.
- do not yet have a built-in control (conscience) that nudges them toward right behavior for its own sake; they do the “right thing” out of fear of punishment or to win approval.
- sense that “church” is a good place to be.
- recite simple prayers; in some cases they may add their own ideas to form prayers.

TIPS FOR LEADERS

- Above all, let kids know that God loves them and cares for them; teach this in the context of common childhood experiences with which children can identify.
- Let these little ones sense your own wonder and awe about who God is and what God has done.
- Focus on attitudes and actions that exhibit faith.
- When you do teach religious concepts, keep them simple and few (God loves us; we love and obey God; God is good; Jesus is God’s Son); repeat them often.
- Nurture faith by giving little ones a love for the stories of Scripture and by laying attitudinal foundations for later understanding of Scripture’s great truths.