



Working with Youth

The key to success in working with young people is planning and doing activities *with* the youth. With your support and guidance, they will take ownership for their own learning. Remember that each young person is unique. But growth and development tend to proceed in predictable stages. Following is a set of characteristics

for youth in four of those stages: Grades K-2, Grades 3-5, Grades 6-8, and Grades 9-12. As you will see, the characteristics change as the youth grow older. Your helping or teaching strategies should change along with the youth. The grid below gives you some valuable teaching tips for each developmental stage.

Grades K-2

Characteristics	Teaching Tips
Thinking is in the here and now ("concrete" thinkers).	Youth need real experiences to learn.
Attention span is about 20-30 minutes.	Vary the length of activities based on how interested the youth are.
Begin to develop friendships, usually with youth of the same sex.	Plan activities that youth can do in groups rather than individually.
Want to be liked and please adults.	Let youth know when they have done a good job.
Learn best when physically active.	Allow youth to participate in activities where they can use physical energy.
Have a special attachment to older youth.	Allow youth to choose an older youth to be their helper and role model.
Are easily motivated.	Use encouragement to keep them motivated.
Competitive activities are less appropriate.	Plan some cooperative activities.
Differentiation between fantasy and reality can be difficult.	Build in transitions and discussions to help distinguish the imaginary from the real.

Grades 3-5

Characteristics	Teaching Tips
Learn best when physically active.	Allow youth to participate in activities where they can use physical energy.
Have a special attachment to older youth.	Allow youth to choose an older youth to be their helper and role model.
Are easily motivated.	Use encouragement to keep them motivated.
Reading becomes an individual experience.	Allow time for youth to read on their own and think of activities before working with others.
Attention span is about 45 minutes.	Use varied activities to keep them interested.
Acceptance by peer group is important.	Use the peer group to recognize good work; e.g., applauding completed activities and avoiding put-downs.
Interests expand from home, to neighborhood, to community.	Talk to youth about their friends and neighbors, and what goes on in their community. Involve them in community service.
Enjoy both cooperation and competition.	Plan activities so that sometimes youth work together, sometimes compete with each other.
Show independence by seeking individual attention and sometimes disrupting the group.	Involve youth in selecting activities they would like. Give individual attention.
Feelings of competence enhance self-respect.	Provide activities that will let youth feel good about themselves and succeed. Recognize them for their accomplishments.
Show loyalty to members of their own sex, and antagonism towards those of the opposite sex.	Involve youth in choosing partners.

opportunity in programs and employment.

Grades 6-8

Characteristics	Teaching Tips
Can take responsibility in planning and evaluating their own work.	Give youth responsibility for group activities, including planning, implementing and evaluating.
Can plan their own social and recreational activity.	Provide opportunities for youth to work together. Form committees to plan recreational and social activities.
Can discuss current events, international affairs and social issues with some help.	Use discussion activities and games that encourage awareness of current events and issues.
Want to make decisions but still depend on adult guidelines.	Establish guidelines that give parameters for youth peers and adults.
Gain skills in social relations with peers and adults.	Provide activities that foster social interaction with peers and adults.
Peer pressure mounts, first from same sex, then from opposite sex.	Use peer pressure to influence positive behavior. Have group give encouragement to individuals.
Can be quite self-conscious.	Avoid asking youth to share their work individually until they feel more comfortable with the group.
Strong emotional attachment to older youth and adults.	Encourage youth to participate in activities with older youth and adults.
Choices are often unrealistic.	Assist youth in making realistic choices. Review their plans, discuss alternatives, and help them weigh options before making decisions.

Grades 9-12

Characteristics	Teaching Tips
Personal philosophy begins to emerge.	Use activities where youth search for experiences that will allow them to identify their own philosophies.
Enjoy discussing the world situation as well as personal activities.	Encourage discussion of events and feelings.
Abstract thinking and problem solving reach a higher level.	Put youth into real-life, problem-solving situations.
Strong desire for status in their peer group.	Develop a climate in which youth are encouraged and supported by peers.
High interest in social activity.	Encourage youth to plan and carry out their own social activities.
Need freedom from parental contact to make decisions.	Help youth realize that their decisions have consequences.
Widespread feelings of inferiority and inadequacy.	Encourage and help youth see their positive worth.

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