

# Ways Children Learn

The first five years of life provide children with the foundation to understand the world around them, and the following years allow them to continue to grow and expand upon that core development. The remarkable period of growth between the ages of 6 and 11 continues to be shaped by both play and relationships with important people in a child's life.

As children grow, their play begins to encapsulate both drama and fantasy as their imaginations expand. They have the tendency to model behaviors of influential people around them through role playing. Their ability to communicate and express themselves grows with rapid vocabulary development and the increased ability to identify emotions and express opinions by playing and spending time with groups of children. Spending time together and modeling behaviors through play builds on children's foundational understanding of life as they develop and shape their ability to navigate through life. In the setting of missions discipleship, role-playing as children pretend to share about Jesus, inviting others to church, and showing compassion are great ways to help children understand the life of a Christian.

Children value play and require movement due to their high energy levels. At this stage of their development, they are beginning to play more within groups than on their own, and rules are being developed within their play. Children on the younger end of this age bracket may still find it challenging to follow rules but are generally better at controlling their own behaviors and emotions, allowing them to cope better with games that involve rules. Leaders should make sure children know they are expected to follow the rules while playing games.

Children between the ages of 6 and 11 are often motivated by the desire to please those around them. They are generally sensitive, with an increased empathy for others while also turning a self-critical eye toward themselves. However, they are better able to express their feelings, although they may still need some help and time to identify and talk through bigger emotions they are experiencing. As children ask questions about a missionary's experiences, leaders can gauge how much children are learning based on the questions they ask and their responses to the stories about the missionary's work and life.

As children's motor skills continue to improve, so does their independence. Children at this age also enjoy making small decisions and insist on knowing their options. Children's morals and values are developing and becoming evident in their actions and words, which is a critical part of this stage. Children also have a heightened awareness of what others are doing and often model the behaviors and words that are practiced and used around them.

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Children's growing curiosity and desire to understand all that is around them is especially evident in the questions they ask and their love and desire to talk. Children's vocabulary development is rapid at this stage, with their thinking often moving quicker than their ability to speak, contributing to attention spans that continue to remain short during this period of time. Leaders should begin to explain "church" language to children and revisit it frequently so children incorporate new words into their vocabulary.

Children's attention spans and their understanding of concepts and ideas continue to grow and expand throughout this stage. They tend to be able to grasp concepts, but they also hold onto a black-and-white mindset and are very literal. They can also reason, discuss, and explore concepts through conversations, and they enjoy doing so. This contributes to their knowledge and growing understanding of right from wrong. It also allows them to view Jesus as very real and to understand stories in the Bible as very literal as well.

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