

Age-level characteristics of children

Age 4-5

Overall characteristic: Questioning

Teaching tips

Change activities every 5 to 10 minutes

Children of this age:

Love them

Physical

Are constantly on the move but tire easily

Provide thick (Jumbo) crayons for art

Start to draw recognisable pictures

Effort is more important than perfection - comment positively

Are still learning finger control - may struggle using scissors

Use action songs

Want to do things for themselves

Teach them rhythm by clapping

Are talkative

Change activity often

Mental / Emotional

Are curious and questioning - ask how and why

Give short, clear answers to questions

Interpret words and sayings literally

Don't give more than one or two instructions at a time

Love repeating phrases, rhymes and songs

Teach short Bible verses and explain what the verse means

Have a creative imagination

Use large, colourful pictures

Enjoy stories

Allow children to feel and handle lesson objects

Cannot think chronologically (place events in time order)

Love and routine provide a sense of security

Experience emotions intensely but those can change quickly

Use the child's name when you speak to him or her

Struggle to discern between fantasy and reality

Social

Are learning to participate in small group activities

Lay down a few basic rules and explain the reason for them

Seek adult approval

Acknowledge each child and notice the things he or she does

Are confident

When talking with a child, stoop to his or her level

Want to please

Eye contact is important when answering a question

Dislike a change of routine / venue / people

Encourage group play

Ensure that there is a familiar face (teacher) in the classroom

Spiritual

Can learn to pray simple prayers

Teach about God, creation, doing wrong, forgiveness, Jesus

Understand that disobedience is sin

Avoid the abstract and symbolic (e.g. fishers of men)

Are not able to make moral decisions

Allow children to pray after you (let them repeat the sentence)

Believe everything they are told without question

Memory: use part of a verse or a phrase (e.g. God loves me)

See God as a super-parent with human features

Age-level characteristics of children

Age 6-8

Overall characteristic: Activity

Teaching tips

Vary the program every 10 to 15 minutes

Children of this age:

Notice them

Physical

Have better coordination which enables them to play sport
Understand rules and the consequences of breaking them
Want to help adults
Are growing in their skills and abilities
Learn more by doing than by listening

Plan activities that allow for movement at regular intervals
Use activities such as writing, drawing, cutting and gluing
Make them feel useful (like holding something for you)

Mental / Emotional

Are eager to learn
Learn by repetition
Cannot really understand the distant past or the future
Become easily discouraged
Enjoy organised games but are poor losers
Like action stories and enjoy silly humour
Are likely to carry scars from emotional trauma into adulthood

Encourage children to memorise verses / books of the Bible
Let them repeat stories / tell of their own related experiences
Use pictures and maps to explain time and place concepts
Avoid long or difficult tasks
Include problem solving to teach principles and application
Let children use pencils and have an eraser at hand

Social

Have a growing need for approval
See winning and being first as important
Enjoy organised games but are poor losers
Desire to have a pet - something to care for
Are increasingly influenced by what the teacher says
Develop distinct personalities (recognisable traits)
Have empathy for poor and suffering people

Let children take turns to respond, recite, help and play
Promote fairness and treat each child equally
Allow them to help you with certain tasks
Take time to listen - you may be one of the few who do
See each child as unique - be aware of personality traits
Teach them to pray for the needs of others

Spiritual

Sense the greatness and the love of God
May struggle to understand the non-physical nature of God
Have great faith
Are trusting

Teachers are a role model; be trustworthy, loving and fair
Let the children look up Bible verses and read them
Use songs, games, crafts etc. related to the Bible story
Explain Bible terms such as sin, grace, salvation and worship
Encourage short-sentence prayers in the group

Age-level characteristics of children

Age 9-11

Overall characteristic: Energy

Children of this age:

Teaching tips

Be creative in planning the lesson time

Trust them

Physical

Enjoy hobbies

Involve them in mini dramas, singing, preparing and tidying up

Want to go places and do things (they love adventure)

Movement is a natural way of dealing with growing pains

Are more independent

Arrange special events and outings for your group

Enjoy the outdoors and nature

Point out the marvels of God's creation / how special they are

Mental / Emotional

Are able to remember well and concentrate

They need affirmation and encouragement - come alongside

Develop reasoning skills

Explain the meaning and significance of symbolism in the Bible

Like to make lists

Ask rather than instruct them to do something

Like to collect things

Avoid embarrassment - allow the slow and weak to succeed

Are creative

Encourage a high standard (the best they can do)

Read well - they may start reading novels

Use more involved actions with songs and explain the actions

Are interested in facts and true stories

Encourage them to memorise a short passage of scripture

Tend to worry more

Relate more easily to Jesus (as a friend) than to an unseen God

Are concrete thinkers (no longer fantasy, not yet abstract)

Social

Place greater importance on friends and group approval

Trust them

Form close friendships

Encourage them to help the younger ones to complete a task

Can do projects and work in a group

Live what you teach - they can spot inconsistency

Have a strong sense of fairness and justice

Point to Jesus as the One who is superhuman, and a friend

Start taking responsibility and like to be trusted

Encourage them to choose good friends

Look to adults for role models

Don't talk down to them

Become self-aware and are critical of themselves

Setting boundaries for the group shows that you care

Usually have a hero (with superhuman qualities)

Compare themselves to their peers

Spiritual

Are most easily lead to Christ at this age

Encourage them to read the Bible and pray (daily devotions)

Relate Bible stories to their own experience

Let them voice their worries and concerns; pray with them

Can participate in meaningful worship

Teach about worship and facilitate worship experiences

Can understand basic doctrinal principles (truths)

Apply the lesson to their everyday lives

Want their leaders and role models to be good people

Explain the way of salvation

Provide regular opportunities for children to accept Christ

Your role as a teacher is more than merely teaching a lesson

Let them suggest things to pray for - then pray in small groups

Age-level characteristics of children

Age 12-14

Overall characteristic: Change

Children of this age:

Teaching tips

Challenge on all levels - lead by example

Believe in them

Physical

Are growing fast (disproportionally)

Notice their strengths and give them tasks they can do well

Have spurts of energy that are followed by fatigue

Show interest in that which interests them

Feel awkward and are embarrassed about it

Mental / Emotional

Are quick to learn - get bored with the same old 'stuff'

Keep the lesson interesting and challenging

Have a sense of humour

Encourage and affirm to help build a positive self-image

Are very moody - feelings of elation, sadness and rebellion

Facilitate discussions to determine how and what they think

Overreact emotionally

Children at this age need to know that they matter

Often daydream

Teach about choices and making good decisions

Can follow multiple instructions and the steps of a process

Social

Have a great need to feel accepted

Talk about appropriate / inappropriate behaviour

Are easily influenced by their peers

Be open to discuss their pressures and related feelings of guilt

Can become more loyal to those at school than at home

Encourage a practical project to reach out to others

Begin to notice and be attracted to the opposite sex

Teach about setting one's own boundaries

Start to look to older young people for values

Enjoy competition

Spiritual

Ask deeper spiritual questions as they gain understanding

Provide opportunities for them to use their gifts and abilities

Question previously accepted aspects of the faith

Encourage involvement in church and youth activities

Have a general sense of guilt (conviction)

Teach them to use God's Word to guide them

Point out that even godly people in the Bible weren't perfect

Challenge them regarding their relationship with the Lord

Be in a position to mentor and guide them

Have a time when they can pray for each other (small group)