



# 4-H VOLUNTEER INFORMATION SERIES

Nebraska 4-H Youth Development

## How Kids Develop - Ages and Stages of Youth Development

### Children Show Common characteristics of Youth Development

Certain characteristics are common to children at each age level. Although children differ in the rate at which they develop, the order of the stages does not vary. While it is extremely important to remember that every child is unique and special in his or her own right, some needs and interests are universal to all children to ensure successful development.

We all need to:

- Experience a positive self concept.
- Experience success in what we attempt to do.
- Become increasingly independent.
- Develop and accept our own sex identity.
- Give and receive attention.
- Experience adventure.
- Be accepted by people of different ages-peers as well as those in authority.

These needs continue from infancy through old age. Other needs vary for different children and different ages.

*Age appropriateness* refers to how well a youth development program matches its educational offerings with the universal, predictable sequences of growth and change that occur in children. Children's development proceeds in stages. Each stage is distinct, characterized by abilities, attitudes, and priorities that are qualitatively different from those of preceding and subsequent stages.

From kindergarten through high school, youth pass through four developmental stages. Specialists often identify these stages as:

- Early Childhood: Ages 5-8
- Middle Childhood: Ages 9-11
- Early Adolescence: Ages 12-14
- Middle Adolescence: Ages 15-18

**Please remember:** Children develop at their own pace, and all characteristics will not be observed in all children at the same age or at the same stage of development.

For each child, consider uniqueness, needs and interest.

To do this, keep in mind the following two basic development principles.

1. Age is not a perfect predictor of maturity. Most children go through predictable order, but ages at which they do this will vary enormously. An activity that is well within the capability of one child may be much too difficult for another child exactly the same age. Providing a choice of activities or providing multiple levels of difficulty within one activity is the ideal.
2. Growth may proceed at different rates in various developmental areas within an individual child. A child who is advanced physically may be average in terms of emotional and social growth. A child may need different experiences in each of these areas to reach his or her full potential.

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Query, S. How kids develop. Iowa 4-H volunteer. Revised: Levings, J. 2006. Iowa State University Extension. [http://www.extension.iastate.edu/4H/Documents/VI950902F\\_AgesStages.PDF](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/4H/Documents/VI950902F_AgesStages.PDF)



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