

# Your School-Age Child (6–12 years old)

**ALTHOUGH SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN SEEM SO GROWN UP**, their social skills are not yet well developed. They may argue and fight a great deal with friends. School-aged children need a lot of help learning social skills like how to make friends, trust others, work in a team and resolve conflicts. Children also need to be taught how to use good manners, ask for help and negotiate with others. Often they have to be reminded to carry out homework responsibilities or household chores. Learning self-discipline is an ongoing process that improves each year.

Children this age have not had much experience in setting and achieving goals or in measuring their own strengths and weaknesses. They need adults to provide experiences that are challenging, yet achievable.

## Physical Development

- › Needs vision, dental, and hearing to be checked starting in the first grade
- › Grows very slowly, so there is a huge range of weight and height differences
- › Needs parents to provide a healthy diet as obesity sometimes becomes a problem during middle childhood; fast food should be limited
- › Develops coarser skin; freckles and moles may begin to appear
- › Begins to lose baby teeth
- › Coordinates many motor skills (jumping, skipping and running)
- › Begins to focus on “competition” rather than “cooperation”

## Social and Emotional Development

- › Develops a greater understanding of themselves and their role in the family, at school and in the community
- › Gains greater control of their emotions and becomes less fearful
- › Learns to value themselves and develop an overall sense of self-worth

- › Has opportunities for socializing outside of the family
- › Begins to worry about making mistakes, being ridiculed or failing in school
- › Interacts in a give-and-take fashion when playing with peers
- › Prefers other children who are outgoing and supportive
- › Interacts more effectively when parents have been affectionate, warm and accepting with them, and less effectively when there is stress in the family

## Cognitive Development

- › Needs clear, concrete and specific directions (there are still limitations in their thinking and parents need keep that in mind)
- › Uses visual cues and objects to help them solve problems
- › Uses reason in logical steps in order to solve problems
- › Has improved memory
- › Understands cause and effect
- › Understands what is real and what is not real

## ADDITIONAL SAFETY TIPS FOR YOUR SCHOOL-AGE CHILD

Parents need to provide education and supervision to prevent passenger and pedestrian accidents, drowning and serious burns, which are the leading causes of death for school-age children.

- ▶ All children whose weight or height is above the forward-facing limit for their car seat should use a belt-positioning booster seat until the vehicle seat belt fits properly. This is typically when they have reached 4 feet 9 inches in height and are between 8 and 12 years old. Children under the age of 13 should always ride in the back seat.
- ▶ Texting, talking or listening to music through earbuds is distracting and prevents students from seeing and responding to dangerous situations. Make sure your children put away their phones and other electronics when walking, biking or using other forms of transportation so they can pay attention to their surroundings.
- ▶ Make sure your child's bicycle, skateboard, scooter or skates are the right size for your child and that your child knows traffic and pedestrian rules and always wears a helmet.
- ▶ Teach your children how to swim and remind them about water safety around the home and while visiting friends and neighbors.
- ▶ Teach your children about the dangers of playing with matches and lighters and the safety rules for using barbecues and stoves.

## Positive Parenting Activities that Promote Nurturing and Attachment

Parents and caregivers can develop or maintain close bonds with their school-age children by playing an active role in their children's lives. Being involved in their activities, education and friendships and providing positive and developmentally appropriate discipline are important to bonding and attachment.

- ▶ When your child wants to talk, turn off the television, put your phone down and give your child your undivided attention.
- ▶ Attend your child's sporting events, chaperone a class field trip or volunteer together in the community.
- ▶ Take advantage of *The Most Important 8 Minutes of the Day*. This idea comes from Gary Benton, a parent trainer in Washington. The first 4 minutes of the day and the last 4 minutes at night are a time to reconnect. Make those minutes count by making eye contact and providing reassuring touch, such as a pat on the hand or a kiss.
- ▶ Dad and award-winning author of *Love Limits*, Bill Corbett, suggests that you make bonding a part of the bedtime routine by asking kids three questions while tucking them into bed: 1. What is the best thing that happened to you today? 2. What is the worst thing that happened to you today? 3. What is the silliest thing that happened to you today? "Accept whatever they provide as answers, and don't say anything that might devalue them," he says. "If they struggle in the beginning with coming up with answers, just let it go. If they detect you're doing something different, it might feel uncomfortable to them and they might answer 'nothing' [but], this simple exercise will bring the parent and the child closer together."



## When to be Concerned

Children develop at various rates, but if your child's physical, emotional or cognitive development appears to be outside the normal range, talk to a healthcare provider. Talking to your child, their teachers and their friends' parents will help you learn about any possible problems your child may be having. Pay attention to your child's behavior. Children often show you more than they tell you. You may need to seek help for your child if he or she:

- ▶ Has trouble paying attention and concentrating
- ▶ Often disrupts classroom activities
- ▶ Does poorly in school
- ▶ Frequently gets into fights with other children at school
- ▶ Reacts to disappointments, criticism or teasing with extreme, intense anger, blame or revenge
- ▶ Has few friends and is often rejected by other children because of his or her behavior
- ▶ Withdraws socially
- ▶ Makes friends with other children known to be unruly or aggressive
- ▶ Is not sensitive to the feelings of others
- ▶ Is cruel or violent toward pets or other animals

## HERE'S HELP

Use the **Family Resources on pages 72–78** to learn about a variety of family support services available in your community.

