Age Level Characteristics

Note: Applies to typically developing students ONLY; special needs and other students may develop at a different pace!

**Infant & Toddler**  
(0–3 Years)

Faith Development
1. Beginning to trust
2. Senses love of parents and those in the church community

Physical Development
1. Fast physical growth and changes
2. Hand-eye coordination improving

Mental and Intellectual Development
1. Actions first based on reflexes
2. Searches, imitates, learns from concrete activities and objects

Values and Ethics
1. Does what adults say is right and wrong
2. Size determines importance, not intention

Interpersonal Relationships
1. Relationships with adults primary
2. Dependent on parenting persons
3. Self-centered
4. Often shy with strangers
5. Parallel play
6. Develops relational skills through group experience

Hints for Leaders
1. Use free downloadable lessons at cokesburyvbs.com to find age-appropriate lessons for the youngest in this age group.
2. Consult the Preschool/Kindergarten Leader book for lesson plans for the oldest in this age group.
3. Many students will not be ready for toilet learning until after age three; treat accidents calmly and matter of factly.
4. With three-year-olds, use simple rhythm instruments and a variety of body movements with music.

**Young Child**  
(4–7 Years)

Faith Development
1. Imitates religious behavior of adults
2. Begins to ask religious questions
3. Expresses wonder, joy, thanksgiving, and praise
4. Begins to use faith language

Physical Development
1. Talks more clearly
2. Most can run, skip, jump, throw, catch, and climb

Mental and Intellectual Development
1. Episodic thinking
2. Begins to differentiate reality from imagination
3. Learns best from concrete activities
4. Recalls, invents, begins to converse

Values and Ethics
1. Obey to avoid punishment
2. Understands the significance of intention
3. Begins to see consequences of actions

Interpersonal Relationships
1. Relationships with adults primary
2. Parallel play moves to relational play
3. Develops relational skills through group experience
4. Increasing empathy
5. Sees “big” people as good

Hints for Leaders
1. Use the Preschool/Kindergarten Leader book for lesson plans for four- and five-year-olds.
2. Use the Young Elementary material for six- and seven-year-olds.
3. Provide opportunities for active play.
4. Take students’s fears seriously.
5. Encourage students to create and use their imaginations.
Older Child  
(8–12 Years)

**Faith Development**  
① Begins to identify with “my” church  
② Learns stories of the faith  
③ Understands God in concrete terms  
④ Begins to engage in acts of service and discipleship

**Physical Development**  
① Physical growth slow  
② Finer coordination and muscular growth, but wide differences

**Mental and Intellectual Development**  
① Concrete thinkers  
② Stories have meaning and coherence to life  
③ Developing the ability to memorize  
④ Learns through projects, games, songs, and stories

**Values and Ethics**  
① Reciprocal sense of justice  
② Strong belief in “the rules”  
③ Sees consequences of actions and understands the significance of intent

**Interpersonal Relationships**  
① Increasing empathy  
② Cliques of same gender  
③ Begins to develop loyalty  
④ Peers become important but still wants to please significant adults  
⑤ Belonging to the group is important

**Hints for Leaders**  
① Provide opportunities for the older students to help out with projects.  
② Maintain proper adult supervision even though the group may think it doesn’t need it.  
③ Continue to give each one personal attention. When they are left to care for themselves they are lonely, unhappy, and sometimes frightened.  
④ This age group may be asked to help with younger students. Don’t overdo, as older students should not be burdened with adult responsibilities.

Early Teen  
(13–14 Years)

**Faith Development**  
① Moving toward a more abstract concept of God  
② Asking deeper questions about God, faith, and the church  
③ May see God as distant

**Physical Development**  
① Physical growth more rapid  
② Maturity levels different between boys and girls  
③ More self-conscious

**Mental and Intellectual Development**  
① Beginning to think abstractly  
② Can ask complex questions beyond ability to understand  
③ Short attention span

**Values and Ethics**  
① Desire to save the world and great empathy for those who suffer  
② Trouble distinguishing between group values and personal values

**Interpersonal Relationships**  
① Seeks peer relationships and is influenced by peer perceptions  
② Needs to know significant adults

**Hints for Leaders**  
① Provide opportunities for the older students to help the younger students.  
② Provide opportunities for the group to experience many of the same activities as the younger students. They will engage in the activity at their level.  
③ Continue to give each one personal attention.