

## How Kids Learn in Third Grade

### **Confident Learners**

Third graders are generally courageous, confident, and open to new experiences at school. They work to understand the reasons things happen. Although most third graders begin to prefer some subject areas over others, they will take pleasure in mastering new skills across the curriculum. At home, however, many third graders start to strive for more independence from their parents which can make talking about school a challenge.

Your third grader's command of language is growing rapidly, and she enjoys using her linguistic power for all the reasons adults do: to converse, debate, explain, argue, protest and create. They love to discuss the things that they learn about and the books that they read. Their organization, logical thinking and problem solving also improve this year. They're frequently able to make connections about the world in deeper and more abstract ways.

### **Group Work**

In third grade, friendships become extremely important, as children long to be part of a group. In fact, they may be overly sensitive and dramatic about their school friendships. Skillful teachers take advantage of third graders' need for social interaction by planning small and large group work on longer and more complex projects. Group work is also a good way for teachers to match students with different strengths and weaknesses. A struggling reader might pick up a new reading strategy from a more literate peer, but may also take pride in being the "master" artist that the group relies on.

### **Worries & Anxieties**

Third graders are doers, but they have a tendency to undertake more than they can handle. They may get anxious if they feel like they have failed. The increased competitive attitude in the third-grade class can magnify reading struggles and other learning difficulties, and the pressures of standardized testing can sometimes distress a child who is already unsure of her abilities. Parents should pay attention to changes in their child's attitude about school and learn to make sure their child isn't internalizing any anxieties. They should be ready to provide support at home when needed.

From PBS

## How Kids Learn in Fourth Grade

### **Finding a Niche**

Fourth graders straddle two worlds. In one world, they may be advanced and independent learners who can use their new abilities to express themselves in exciting ways. In the other, they may be dramatic worriers who have a hard time managing all the work that is expected of them.

Fortunately, fourth graders begin to find their academic niche. They prefer to spend time doing things that interest them where they have the most confidence in their abilities. Strong readers will be extremely interested in reading books in genres or subject areas that excite them. They often devour book series like bags of chips.

Teachers who work well with fourth graders take them seriously — and work to keep their interests alive.

Fourth graders are also finding their social niche, but competitive feelings may interfere with the learning process. Cultural and socioeconomic differences become more apparent to children, who may begin to group accordingly. Students who have trouble understanding a difficult topic may be afraid to ask for help for fear of looking less smart than their peers, others may not participate for fear of looking too smart. “This is a very typical response for children of this age,” says Linda Lendman, M.S.W, family coordinator at the Rand School in Montclair, New Jersey. “Fourth graders are overly concerned about peer responses and need to be encouraged to continue to ask questions. They need to be reminded that smart people ask questions, and that it is the best way to learn.”

### **The Social Challenge of Fourth Grade**

Fourth graders are more socially sophisticated and outspoken than their parents were at the same age. As a group, girls today start puberty earlier than they did in the past, with some getting their periods by age nine. Many children show off the “hip teen” attitude they pick up from pop culture at a time when their parents were still playing with toys.

Fourth grade can be a year packed with social dilemmas. “Every day, I work with groups of girls who are angry with other groups of girls,” says Lendman. “There’s a lot of drama, they’re hormonally charged, and living in a more sophisticated culture. But they are only nine and things can still feel overwhelming to them. The good news is that many kids want to work issues out. They can learn to improve their communication skills with the support of adults and structured social emotional learning programs.”

From PBS

## How Kids Learn in Fifth Grade

### **The Big Distractions**

Fifth graders are flip-floppers. They think of themselves as mature and independent but can revert to immature behavior when they want the comfort they are often afraid to ask for. They spend much of their day learning the complex and ever-changing social rules for interacting with their peers. This can make it tough for teachers, who have to steer them back to the academic tasks of the classroom. It can also make it tough for some fifth graders, who may need to switch their focus from classroom social dramas to good study skills and time management.

Fortunately, by this stage, fifth graders have developed the ability to think logically about concrete problems. This means that when they look at a problem, they can pull out the necessary facts and strategies needed to solve it, and then move those thoughts around in different ways until they are able to figure it out.

### **Hitting Puberty**

Puberty can create a classroom that contains a broad mix of maturity levels, both physical and emotional. Some girls are interested in boys while others haven't noticed their charms yet. Some girls have begun to develop physically, while others may still have a few years to go. And boys often still have a year or two before they even begin to mature.

Both girls and boys pay more attention to their appearance and to the ways their bodies are changing. The hormones of puberty can create mood swings that range from open conflict to giggling playfulness all in a few minutes. This can distract some from schoolwork and the complicated tasks of fifth grade.

### **The Pressures of the Group**

Being part of a group, what their friends think of them, and what they think of their friends are very important issues for fifth graders, particularly (but not exclusively) girls. Both sexes become more self-conscious and somewhat insecure about how they appear and whether they "fit in." Struggles with schoolwork can often cause children to feel isolated from their peers, and embarrassed. Occasionally, students who excel in certain subjects try to downplay their intelligence in order to fit in. "It's important for parents to build upon children's strengths to help them with their weaker areas," says Susan Becker, M. Ed., teacher at the Rand Family School. "It's also a good time to look at children's passions to find extracurricular activities in areas in which they can excel. This can give them a sense of pride of accomplishment, and can broaden their peer group to include friends who have common interests."

From PBS

## **The 11- 12 year old (6th grade)**

### **Physical**

- Vast appetite for food, physical activity and talking.
- Growth spurts! Typically occurs early for girls and can result in feeling awkward and clumsy. Boys may worry they will never grow.
- There can be wide differences among individuals in rate of development
- Increased need for personal hygiene – daily showers, deodorant and shaving.
- Tiredness and increased need for sleep.
- Curiosity about opposite sex (girls usually interested first)

### **Social and Emotional**

- Less overt affection and attention shown to parents, with occasional rudeness.
- Impulsive, unaware.
- Focus on self, alternating between high expectations and poor self-concept.
- Tendency to return to childish behavior, especially when stressed
- Extremes in emotions
- Inclusion/exclusion: the height of cliques and seeking social acceptance.
- Experimentation with identity, behaviors, appearance and self-image.
- Demand for privileges, but may avoid responsibilities
- They feel that their experience is unique, believing that no one has ever felt as they do.

### **Intellectual**

- Short term thinking; concerned about the present, not necessary long-term.
- Intellectual interests expand
- Development of ideals and selection of roles models
- May experiment with dangerous risk-taking behaviors
- Increased ability to think abstractly and from various perspectives.
- Even if students can think abstractly, they learn best with active, hands-on and can relate to real-life.
- Very concerned with fairness, rules and sense of justice; especially as it relates to themselves.
- Do not distinguish between what they are thinking and what others may be thinking; they assume that everyone is as concerned with their behaviors and appearance as they are

# 8 Things I Know for Sure About (Most) Middle School Kids

OCTOBER 1, 2014

By JENNIFER GONZALEZ

## 1. THEY CARE MORE ABOUT THE OPINIONS OF THEIR PEERS THAN PRETTY MUCH ANYTHING ELSE.

This means they will sometimes do things that make no sense, like not turning in an assignment you know they worked hard on, because they just found out they will have to read it out loud in front of the class. Or refusing your offer of a chocolate milk, even though they love chocolate milk, because someone else is around who recently declared all chocolate milk to be babyish.



**How to deal with it:** See if you can make this quality work *for* you: Find the most confident kids in class, the ones everyone looks up to, and try to get them to take on a new project or help you lead the charge toward some endeavor you want everyone else on board for. If Josie the cool girl says she likes Shakespeare, others are more likely to follow. Also, know that socializing is a huge motivator for middle school kids. If you promise five minutes of talking time at the end of class in exchange for hard work the rest of the hour, you're likely to get full cooperation.



## 2. THEY ARE HORRIFIED BY WHAT THEIR BODIES ARE DOING.

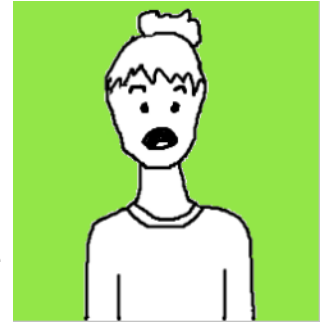
For those of us who are well past adolescence, it's easy to forget what it was like to deal with the constant betrayal that comes with a new body: There you are, going about your regular kid business, when one day your skin explodes with zits. Popping them turns out to make them *even more noticeable*. Or you're sitting in third period, quietly suffering through some kid's serious B.O. Escaping to fourth period, you discover the smell is there, too. After a quick check, you are struck with the devastating realization that *the person with B.O. is YOU*. Every couple of weeks, some new phenomenon introduces itself into the middle schooler's physical life, threatening to destroy their social lives until high school graduation.

**How to deal with it:** Try not to call attention to their bodies; they would prefer that no one point out that their voices are changing, their feet are getting bigger, or worse, that they don't seem to be growing at all. Also? If you're trying to get a kid to do something public, like do a problem on the board or pass out a worksheet, and they *really* resist you? There's

probably a physical explanation, be it a boner, a suspected period leak, or the sudden discovery of a muffin top. If you get inexplicable resistance, back off. Don't try to figure out the reason. Just move on to another kid. The one you let off the hook will be eternally grateful.

### 3. THEY TREND TOWARD HYPERBOLE.

You say there's a spider in the corner of a seventh grade classroom? Get ready for a wall-climbing, horror-movie-screaming, Armageddon-style wig-out. Did it just start snowing outside? Sit back and watch them all act like they never saw snow, complete with squeals and fist-pumps and fist-bumps and the whole gang *rushing to the window!* Wait — is someone crying in the bathroom at the dance? Observe as ten girls sprint through the gym, tugging each other's arms, with faces that say *this is the most important thing that has ever happened. Ever.* Whether it's due to limited life experience, hormones wreaking havoc on emotions, or the trying on of identities, young adolescents tend to exaggerate just a bit.



**How to deal with it:** Validate the real feelings behind these exaggerations while trying to re-frame their experiences in more realistic terms: "Yep, spiders can be scary. Let's take care of this little guy so we can get back to work." By describing problems in calm, rational language, you're modeling the way a healthy person navigates life's little surprises. And try to have a sense of humor: Instead of getting annoyed by this behavior, know that it will pass, and in a certain light, it's actually kind of funny.

### 4. THEY ARE MORTIFIED BY PUBLIC PRAISE.



Elementary school kids seem to delight in being recognized in front of their peers: Winning the perfect attendance award, student of the month, highest math score – all of these make them beam with pride. But pull a middle school kid up in front of his peers to wax poetic on his good qualities, and you may see that kid shrivel up like an old grape. I had a student once, a tough Bosnian guy who also happened to be a fantastic writer. One day while returning papers I

called out, "If you want to see a really well written essay, take a look at Emir's." My thinking was that they would be all, *Wow, if a cool guy like Emir writes well, then I want to do that, too.* Nope! Emir looked at me like I just took his wallet. And for the rest of the year, he turned in crappy writing. It's not that the praise was unwelcome, it was the public part he didn't like. If I wanted him to keep writing well, I should have kept quiet about it.

**How to deal with it:** Definitely keep up the praise, but if you notice that a student doesn't respond the way you'd hoped, it may be a sign that he'd prefer to hear it in private.

### 5. THEY CAN'T BE TRUSTED.

Just found out you're pregnant and want to share it with a student you're close to? Might as well put it in the morning announcements. Throwing a surprise party for another teacher and want to let your kids in on the secret? Consider the surprise ruined. Middle school kids may have every intention of keeping confidential information to themselves, but when an opportunity to share presents itself, they won't be able to resist being the one who's in the know. At this age, they don't yet understand the consequences that can result from sharing something that's not meant to be shared. What's worse, they have a way of dropping all subtleties from the original message, so when you happen to say, "Mrs. Flowers' class is a little more structured than mine," it is passed on to Mrs. Flowers as "Ms. Gonzalez said you're too strict."



**How to deal with it:** Treat your middle school kids the same way you should treat the internet: Don't share anything you aren't willing to see broadcast in public.

### 6. THEY JUST NOW REALIZED YOU ARE A HUMAN BEING. WAIT...NEVER MIND.



As children move through Piaget's stages of cognitive development, they go from being completely egocentric — perceiving themselves as the center of the universe — to being more aware of the existence of life outside their immediate surroundings. Right around age 11 or 12 is when people typically enter the final stage, *formal operational*, where they start to understand that others might experience the world differently than they do. But getting firmly into this stage takes time, and it's a bumpy road. This means a couple of things: (1)

They will be intensely interested in you, *sometimes*. They'll ask all kinds of questions about your personal life, your family, the kind of food and music you like, and whether or not you cuss and drink outside of school hours. (2) Their awareness of other people's needs is still patchy. On days when you're not feeling well and ask them to *just give you fifteen minutes of quiet* at the end of a class period, they'll agree, fully intending to help you out. Cut to five minutes later and your room is a fucking zoo.

**How to deal with it:** Enjoy the admiration and interest when you get it, but don't be surprised if there are times when they forget you exist at all. That formal operational stage can be awfully slippery at first. And as for those super personal questions? Answer them within reason: In school you are a role model, a professional, and *you are not their friend*, so always give them the G-rated version of your life.

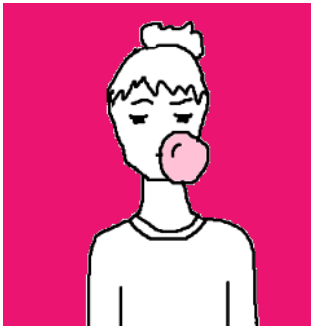
### 7. THEY ARE PULLING AWAY FROM THEIR PARENTS.

I can't count the number of parents who told me their kids barely told them anything anymore, who said they had no idea what their kids' school lives were like. Pulling away from parents is a normal part of adolescence. Although kids this age need adult guidance possibly more than at any other time in their lives, they have reached the point where their parents may be the last ones they'll look to for it.



**How to deal with it:** As a trusted adult in their lives, you're in a unique position to influence these kids and fill in the gaps that have been left by their self-imposed isolation from their own families, so remember to *be the adult*: Advise responsibly, model smart decision-making, and unless you suspect genuine abuse, avoid taking the child's side over their parents'. You are in partnership with the student *and* their primary caregivers; be sure your students are always clear about that.

### 8. THEY ARE STILL KIDS.



One minute you're having a deep philosophical discussion with them about the symbolism in a Robert Frost poem, they're *really getting it*, and you can almost see them maturing right before your eyes. Ten minutes later they're making armpit farts and asking if it's okay to drink the water from the fish tank. And then there's the *wiggling* — an almost unbearable amount of it, especially from the boys. The demonstrated maturity level of middle school kids is all over the map; changing from child to child and within each individual.

**How to deal with it:** Don't expect mature behavior to last, and when childishness shows up, know that it's normal — they *are* acting their age. Learn how to capitalize on it: Unlike high school kids, middle schoolers are much more enthusiastic about things like review games, and they are unbelievably willing to take a note to the office or hand out papers for you. The wiggling is normal, too — those bodies are growing like crazy, and with no more recess, there are few opportunities to burn off that energy. If you find that the wiggles are disrupting class, it's a good sign that you haven't built enough movement into your plans. Add that in and you should see more self-control when it's absolutely necessary.

**Most of the time, when I told someone I was a middle-school teacher I got the same basic reaction:** They'd wince, or say *whoa*, and then add something along the lines of "Tough age." And I would smile and nod, knowing that *tough* didn't begin to cover it. One word could never quite capture the ridiculous, smelly, stubborn, fragile beauty of them all.



# Developmental milestones for high-schoolers

By [Amanda Morin](#)

Expert reviewed by [Molly Algermissen, PhD](#)

In high school, kids' development really takes off. Just as with [middle-schoolers](#), high-schoolers develop at widely varied rates. For the most part, tweens turn into high-schoolers who start looking more like adults while also building the skills to think about and plan for the future.

## Physical milestones

The difference in growth between boys and girls is very noticeable at this age. And there's a big difference in physical milestones among individual kids, too. Boys are hitting the age when they start to grow rapidly, while girls are just starting to slow down.

By the end of high school, many girls are likely to have grown as tall as they're going to be. Boys, on the other hand, often are still growing and gaining muscle strength.

Many high-schoolers:

- Have a big appetite
- Need more sleep and may be sleepy in school
- Have the visual-spatial coordination to judge distance and speed and react quickly when learning to drive
- Are more agile and coordinated, making it easier to do things like type on a keyboard or build complex projects (Some teens may be uncoordinated, though, because they're growing so quickly.)

## Cognitive milestones

In the mid- to late-teenage years, kids start thinking not just about their own lives, but also more about how the whole world works. That change is a gradual process. It doesn't happen all at once. During high school, teens are likely to:

- Show an increasing ability to reason, make educated guesses, and sort fact from fiction
- Start thinking more abstractly, comparing what *is* to what *could be*
- Think about and come up with ways to deal with hypothetical situations
- Begin to set their own goals for the future; take other opinions into account but make their own decisions
- Understand the consequences of actions, not just today, but also in far-reaching ways (For example, understanding that failing English isn't just a bummer — it can mean summer school, too.)
- Develop a strong sense of right and wrong and make decisions based on following their conscience
- Write with complexity about a variety of content areas (science, social studies, literature)
- Use strategies to search for, use, and compare information from multiple sources
- Use numbers in real-life situations (like calculating tax or a tip)

## Social and emotional milestones

There are huge changes in social and emotional skills between ages 14 and 18. The emotional maturity of a high school freshman is very different from that of a graduating senior. Here's what you might see at different ages.

### 14-year-olds

- Can recognize personal strengths and challenges
- Are embarrassed by family and parents
- Strive to be independent
- Are eager to be accepted by peers and to have friends
- May seem self-centered, impulsive, or moody

### 15-year-olds

- Don't want to talk as much; are argumentative
- May appreciate siblings more than parents
- Narrow down to a few close friends and may start dating
- Analyze their own feelings and try to find the cause of them

### 16- to 18-year-olds

- Start relating to family better; begin to see parents as real people
- Develop a better sense of who they are and what positive things they can contribute to friendships and other relationships
- Spend a lot of time with friends
- Are able to voice emotions (both negative and positive) and try to find solutions to conflicts

From learning to drive to starting to think about the future, high school is a time of big change and growth. Learn about [different paths to success](#) kids can take after high school.