

The Child of Eight - source unknown

The eight-year old has reached another dividing line – the line between early childhood and the middle childhood years. The eight-year-old is growing up and he knows it. He wants others to know it, too. He is no longer a little child, nor is he the responsible boy or girl he will be in another year or so. He is not so easy to guide as last year nor so capable of self-guidance as he will be next year. Eight has been called an eager year, a year of reaching out to new experiences. (Jenkins, et al., *These Are Your Children*, p. 150)

His Physical Self

The eight-year-old begins to look more mature. His body is stretching; his arms and legs are getting longer. His head is beginning to assume its right proportion to the rest of his body. It is at this time that his eyes are beginning to accommodate themselves to near and far vision, and that near-sightedness may develop.

An eight-year-old's muscular co-ordination is such that he can react with smoothness and speed. He has lost some of the awkwardness of the past two years. His movements are more free and graceful, and he is more sure of his physical reactions. He needs much bodily activity.

His tempo has increased – he wants to get things done. He is impatient at delay in starting any activity, and once started he goes at it full gear.

His Emotional Self

He wants new experiences, wants to experiment with things, wants to try things out. As a result, eight is often a year of hazards. The child frequently attempts more than he is physically able to do. Consequently he is often disappointed and frustrated by his lack of physical ability to do the things he attempts. Since his enthusiasm often exceeds his wisdom, conflict and tension are inevitable.

The child is torn between his need for guidance and his desire for self-guidance. He wants to appear grown-up. He often surprises his parents with his more or less successful attempts to do so when he is among adults. In spite of this desire, however, he often acts like a little child. One part of him wants his mother's attention while another part of him rebels against it. At the same time that he wants his teacher to help him, he resents the implication that he is faced with something which he cannot do alone.

The child of eight cannot take much criticism from adults but is able to take and give severe criticism within his peer group. He is learning to lose gracefully and can enjoy a game even when he does not win. He is likely to be less of an introvert than he was at seven, and he increasingly centers his interest in things and people other than himself.

The eight-year-old wants others to be aware of him as a person. He wants to extend his own potential for achievement. His expansive trend may lead to experiments, some of which may have dangerous implications unless he is under the wise guidance of adults who understand him. (Cf. Havighurst, *Human Development and Education*, pp. 62,63)

The conscience and the ethical sense of the eight-year-old shows marked advancement. Ideas of good and bad have progressed to the ideals of right and wrong. He often has guilty feelings because he cannot live up to the dictates of his own conscience. He has a tendency to evaluate what happens to him and what causes it to happen. Fortunately, he is more likely to talk about these things than to brood over them. He sees himself as a person and is beginning to be able to look at himself objectively.

His Intellectual Self

The eight-year-old's control of words is progressing far enough for him to communicate in a lively fashion. He is developing a fair amount of silent reading skill, and greater reading differences become evident as some children advance further beyond their peers. His critical judgment enables him to stop reading and discuss what he has read and his own reaction to it but sometimes his ability to talk runs away with him. Money becomes important to an eight-year-old, and he has some concept of saving. He is not interested, however, in saving for something idealistic or intangible, such as a college education. He is willing to save for something within both his reason and his comprehension, such as a season ticket to the swimming pool or a set of saddle bags for his new bike.

The eight-year-old is a collector, but his interest in an item is not prolonged. He changes collections often and may

be collecting several items at one time. He is a bargainer when following his hobby and often uses poor judgment in making a deal. He may trade an expensive toy for a relatively worthless item which he wants for his collection. The child of eight has a strong interest in dramatic play. A group of children of this age can work with puppets or put on plays in which they are the actors. With some help they can write their own script, set up their own scenery, and stage their own play. Sometimes they can solve some of their own problems through role playing. Eight-year-olds enjoy creative art in a new measure because they are generally relaxed in holding pencils and tools. They are ready to use different media for art work, and embryo talent is often discovered at this age. At eight, children enjoy and develop interest in activities requiring mental skill, such as quiz games and table games. They no longer need to work singly or in pairs but can enjoy work or play in which taking turns is necessary. The eight-year-old's mind spreads into new territory. His interest reaches out beyond his immediate environment to other parts of the country, to other parts of the world, and to other cultures. He notices differences in people of other lands and other races. (Kearney, *Elementary School Objectives*, pp. 80-81) Time, space, and distance take on meaning for him. He gradually moves away from the here and now concept and relates himself to a past and a future. His world is vastly larger than it was a year ago.

His Interpersonal Relationships

The eight-year-old conducts considerable social experimentation within his peer group. He finds it important to belong to a club or gang. The purpose and membership of the club may change often. Belonging is the important thing.

Belonging to a club or gang is a socializing experience of great importance to the eight-year-old. It can help him acquire socially approved action patterns, such as to be democratic and co-operate with the group. It can help him to develop character traits which the culture regards as necessary to success or desirable in adult life, such as courage, fair play, self control, loyalty and the like. (Kearney, op. cit., p.78) On the other hand, bad qualities may develop in the same way unless the right kind of supervision and group climate is provided. Organizations, such as the Scouts for example, work with groups of eight-year-olds in order to promote good action patterns and to overcome bad ones.

In group behavior, although the child of eight cannot grasp complex rules, he is a stickler for rules; and he often improvises them as occasion arises. He is inclined to be bossy, particularly with younger children. The eight-year-old's need for and dependence upon adults decreases somewhat as he makes more contacts with his peers. There are still a number of significant adults in his life, but the eight-year-old is gradually getting away from total dependence upon them. On the other hand, self-directed activities among eight-year-olds are likely to end in bickerings and squabbles. It is then that the eight-year-old welcomes friendly adult guidance which gets his gang out of their muddle. Even when there is quarreling and bickering, he sticks it out and does not quit the scene as he did at seven.

The sexes pull apart in interests and activities at this age, and clubs are usually composed of one sex. The eight-year-old needs individual social contacts. He seems to need a best friend and a special enemy, both of his own sex. This is the age when a child begins to understand himself and his relation to others his own age. He realizes that some children can do some things better than he, some not as well. He is beginning to be aware of his own abilities and limitations. This is the time when he can be guided into a feeling of self-respect and respect for other persons.

Implications for Christian Education

Because of his growth in social skills, this is a good time to introduce church-related and church-sponsored clubs into the life of the child. An organized class also offers opportunities for making use of these new skills and interests. He is practical and matter of fact and wants "yes" or "no" answers to his questions about things he heretofore accepted without question. Even so, he shows a readiness to learn that there are some things we cannot explain or understand but we accept on faith.

His increasing interest in a wider world and his growing independence make him ready for more extensive missionary education and greater participation in extra curricular activities.

His interest in collecting, his increased manual skills, and his liking for dramatic play suggest methods and projects for Christian education.

The eight-year-old is ready for the beginnings of a basic personal religion and worship experiences can take on

greater meaning for him.

His increasing ability in silent reading makes possible the beginnings of independent Bible study and the use of a personal copy of the Bible.

Because of his awakening conscience, eight is a good time to help a child experience forgiving love through the interpersonal relationships of the church school. This will be an outgrowth of similar experiences he has had if his home is a Christian home. The church school cannot take the place of a Christian home in a child's life; but it can, in some measure, make up for the inadequacies of a home that is not Christian.