

The Child of Seven - source unknown

The seven-year-old has reached something of a leveling-off in his development. He is not so explosive nor so dispersive as the six-year-old who seems to be rushing pell-mell in all directions at once. Nor is he so sure of what he wants and where he is going as is the eight-year-old. Seven is a comfortable year. It seems to be a quieting down year when the child is recovering from being six and getting ready for being eight. Gesell calls seven an "assimilative age, a time for salting down accumulated experience and for relating new experiences to the old." (*The Child from Five to Ten*, p. 131) Through conscious and unconscious activity within himself, the seven-year-old is integrating the experiences of his brief past at the same time that he is absorbing experiences of the present.

His Physical Self

Although a child continues to grow in stature steadily from age seven to eight, there are no spectacular increases in growth. At no time during the year does he seem to "shoot up over night." (Garrison and Gray, *Educational Psychology*, pp. 39-41)

His general need for activity continues and carries over into all of his behavior. He wriggles while he eats, moves his chair and shuffles his feet while he reads, and screws up his face while he writes. (Jenkins et al., *These Are Your Children*, p. 134) He is not as continually active, however, as he was a year ago, and is more likely to balance physical activity with relatively quiet play.

Children of seven are developing manual dexterity and, therefore, like to use their hands. They can learn to print well. They are increasingly skillful with tools. This is the age of paper dolls for girls, and model airplanes and boats for boys. Seven-year-olds build things out of many kinds of boxes. Their interest in drawing continues, and their drawings are more representational. Skill in the use of their smaller muscles and eye-hand co-ordination are developing more rapidly.

His Emotional Self

Seven is often referred to as a period of withdrawal. The child seems to live within himself. He daydreams and procrastinates. He is absent-minded and sometimes pensive. He takes in more than he gives out, and yet he is by no means an isolationist. On the contrary, the seven-year-old is increasingly aware of others. He is more sensitive to the approval or disapproval of others, particularly of adults. Due to this hypersensitivity, it is not uncommon for him to complain to his parents that his teacher does not like him or treats him unfairly.

Although extremely sensitive to the criticism of others, a child of seven is increasingly critical of himself. He is something of a perfectionist and is much disturbed over an unfinished task or one with which he is not satisfied. He scorns his own work yet craves the approval of it by others. Paradoxically, he does not like to be singled out for either praise or reproof before a group.

Seven is an age of inner conflict. The child wants to be independent but does not trust his own judgment. He drives toward independence but feels a need to depend on adults. He wants to be on time at school but cannot take responsibility for it. He wants his work to be done correctly but forgets directions easily.

A seven-year-old picks his heroes. His teacher and some of the persons he meets on television and in books become his models whom he tries to copy. Identification with the parent of the same sex advances rapidly, and yet both parents lose some of their prestige. The parent of the opposite sex is beginning to have rivals, both in the adult world and among the child's peer group.

His Intellectual Self

Language development is noticeably rapid from seven to eight. Words become tools which the seven-year-old can use with some facility. On the one hand, he uses words increasingly to express his aggressive reactions. He fights with words instead of fists. On the other hand, he finds that words serve him in satisfying his tremendous curiosity concerning the world about him.

Storybooks open up a new and wider world for the seven-year-old. Fairy tales and myths are his favorite stories. His interest is increasing in things that really happen and how things work. Although he can begin to read some books for himself, he still prefers being read to. He is a good listener and often shows a tendency to think and talk about some of the things which are read to him, particularly those things which answer his "how" and "why" questions. His interest in stories is no longer confined to the short story which must be completed in one sitting, but it can carry over from day to day. He enjoys listening to a book-length story, chapter by chapter. The serial type of TV program becomes his favorite. Because his attention span is increasing and his capabilities are growing, he can develop a greater perseverance in his work. He writes and erases, writes and erases. He builds and tears down and builds again. He strives for perfection and is seldom satisfied with his own efforts. Seven may be called the eraser age. (Gesell and Ilg, *The Child from Five to Ten*, p. 154)

A seven-year-old shows new evidence of reasonableness. He takes time to think things out. He has sufficient command of language to talk things over satisfactorily with others, particularly with adults. His behavior is more rational and less impulsive. He is ready for more freedom of choice.

His Interpersonal Relationships

The seven-year-old is still self-centered but his self-absorption takes on a different character than it did a year ago. He takes others into his plans and activities, but he likes to have things revolve about himself. He shows great interest in competition, but he always wants to win and is not a good loser. If he cannot win, he is likely to withdraw from the game. Tantrums have vanished almost completely but instead he may sulk.

He is trying desperately to hold his own in his peer world. At the same time he wants just as desperately to win the approval of his adult world. Conflict is inevitable as a result of these two inner drives.

The community of play continues to be an important factor in helping him work out his problems of social relationships.

The seven-year-old has developed a set of action patterns. Some should be reinforced, but others should be discouraged and, if possible, changed. The older a child becomes the more difficult it will be to modify his action patterns and replace bad habits with good ones.

At seven a child's ethical sense begins to take in more abstract relationships. No longer is his behavior so completely dependent on literal regulations set up by adults. Instead, the child begins to develop his own concept of what is good and what is bad. (Havighurst, *Human Development and Education*, pp. 53-54) He distinguishes good behavior from bad in himself as well as in other children. Seven wants to be good - but he often fails. He is inclined to excuse his failure by making alibis or by blaming others. This may lead to lying, to attempting to deceive both himself and others.

The seven-year-old may have a different set of social habits at home and away from home just as his vocabulary may vary according to the situation. Good social habits which have been established at home do not always carry over into school. The reverse may also be true. Parents are often surprised to see their child show social graces away from home which they have despaired of ever teaching him at home.

Implications for Christian Education

A church school session planned for the seven-year-old may include more mental activities than had previously been possible because of his wider experiences and greater language skills. These enable him to take part in discussion and to evaluate and profit from the contributions of other children as well as his teacher.

He thinks deeply about God and about his place in the world. He is interested in the omniscience of God. He wants to know about Heaven. He tries to distinguish between what he has been told and what he has experienced. He is eager to talk over these things because there is so much about them which he really wants to know.

He has a sense of wonder about the world. He is ready for Christian discussions about the universe, but he is not ready for detailed theological explanations of it. He will retain his sense of wonder if it is not destroyed by premature attempts at explaining things.

His interest in stories includes Bible stories. There is a wide range of reading skill among seven-year-olds. Many are not ready to read the Bible stories themselves. He shows a tremendous interest in stories of some of the Bible heroes. They come alive to him and help him see some of the facets of the Christian way of life.

Because he is acquiring a sense of values, an emphasis on the Christian sense of right and wrong is timely for the seven-year-old. He begins to talk meaningfully of such things as fair play and honesty and to look for them in himself and in others.

His manual dexterity, his ability to print, and his interest in drawing and construction can be used to advantage as natural learning experiences.

His relatively short interest and attention span make it imperative to offer a variety of activities both mental and physical.

While he has greater reasoning potential, he needs encouragement and help to apply it to develop insights which will undergird Christian action patterns.