

The Child of Six – source unknown

The six-year-old is stepping out into an ever-widening world. His life is one of change and adjustment. He is in a period of transition from being a little child whose world was largely bounded by his home and family to becoming a boy or girl who must find his own place in the world of his school and wider neighborhood. (Havighurst, *Human Development and Education*, p. 30) How well he can make this transition depends on such factors as his social experiences outside his home and his preparation for being more independent. The patterns of development which was established in his pre-school years tends to persist in his later childhood. For most children, however, the age of six is a time when so many changes take place within the child that he seems to be becoming a different person. From the balanced, well-organized, well-adjusted individual of five he becomes a person given to extremes in behavior and attitudes. (Cf. Gesell and Ilg, *The Child from Five to Ten*, pp. 88, 89) This may perplex and disturb his parents if they are not prepared for these changes.

His Physical Self

Generally speaking there is a marked decrease in the rate of the physical growth of a child which begins about the time of his sixth birthday. By this time second dentition is beginning and he is losing the rounded contour of the face and body of preschool years. He now becomes the solid, compact boy or girl or the slender, rangy youngster he will probably be during his middle childhood.

The size of the six-year-old's body is likely to be out of proportion to his muscular control, and as a result he may often seem to be awkward and clumsy. His large muscles are still developed far ahead of his small muscles, and his eye-hand coordination is not well established.

Activity is the keynote of this age. The six-year-old seems to be in constant motion whether sitting or standing. He wriggles and squirms. "He seems to be all legs and arms as he dances about the room." (Gesell and Ilg, op. cit., p. 100) He feels an incessant urge to be doing something. The purpose of an activity is not so important; the doing of it is the child's reward.

His Emotional Self

When a child enters first grade in school, his nervous system is more completely developed than his general bodily growth. This degree of nervous maturity is reflected in new impulses, new feelings, and new action patterns. Because he must experiment with his new feelings before he can integrate them, his action patterns go from one extreme to another. He swings abruptly from smiles to tears, from love to hatred. And whether he laughs or cries, loves, or hates, he does so with utter abandon. Only gradually will he be able to control his emotions and modulate his violent behavior.

The six-year-old goes through a period of unavoidable tensions. He must adjust to two worlds—home and school, and it is a constant struggle for him to shift from one to the other. Emotionally he is still anchored to his home and parents, particularly to his mother. He discovers it is necessary for him to find some semblance of security in school and with his teacher. (Gesell and Ilg, op. cit., p. 96) He moves rapidly from largely family relationships to wider relationships outside his home; from chiefly supervised group activity to the unsupervised activities of his peer world; from being accepted by his family because he belongs to having to win his own acceptance in a group of six-year-olds; from little competition at home to the severe competition of the class room. The result of these many tensions is a temporary loss of emotional equilibrium.

Our six-year-old's life is full of inconsistencies. He wants to be big and often feels so small. He wants to be grown-up and sometimes seems so immature. He wants to be independent and frequently reverts to babyish dependence. He cannot make decisions as readily as he could at five, and once a decision is made, he finds it difficult for him to abide by it. Frequent emotional explosions result from these inconsistencies.

On the other hand, ready for anything new, the six-year-old is usually enthusiastic and eager, and enjoys life to the full, particularly when things go well for him. In general, this is a year of emotional adjustments, many of them difficult to make. The way in which the six-year-old makes these adjustments depends upon a number of factors, chief of which are his own pattern of individual growth and the kind of home experiences he has had. The kind of person he will be emotionally is beginning to show at the age of six.

His Intellectual Self

Six is the "why" age, indicating an eagerness to learn. Every normal child of six has an innate desire to grow intellectually. He wants to know more and more about more and more. He asks innumerable questions and often tries to answer them himself.

Much important language development occurs *before* a child is six. He has already acquired a large listening vocabulary, much of which he, himself, does not use. Between six and seven he is usually ready to acquire skill in the actual use of language. He begins to see a connection between the spoken and the printed word and can relate both of his experiences. This characterizes his readiness to learn to read. His vocabulary is concrete. He defines a noun by explaining what it is used for.

The child of six has little concept of time and space. He thinks largely in terms of here and now. He thinks of himself as always living, past and future.

This is the age of cutting and pasting. He likes to make booklets. He likes to draw. He uses wax crayons and is beginning to want to use pencil crayons. He likes to work on simple construction. His interest span, however, is relatively short, and his work is crude.

The age of six is a time for broad learning and not for academic achievement. If required to measure up to a degree of perfection in his work which calls for long periods of concentration, he will lose interest in what he is doing and will lose self-confidence. His success must be judged by the direction of his progress and his growth measured from a long range point of view. (Jenkins et. Al, *These Are Your Children*, p. 120)

He enjoys stories which are read or told over and over again. He enjoys acting them out. Because of his tremendous powers of imagination he can easily identify himself with one or more of the characters in a story. When he plays a story, he feels that he actually becomes the character he portrays. He may carry over into other experiences some of the vocabulary, ideas, and attitudes he absorbs from this dramatization.

His Interpersonal Relationships

The child of six is at an age when social consciousness develops rapidly. He begins to be concerned about social approval or disapproval. This may be the early beginning of the “gang age,” which leads to an eagerness to gain the approval of the gang and avoid their disapproval.

In preschool years most of a child’s playmates were parent selected. He played with the children of his parents’ friends or relatives. Now his associates in the public school are “all the children of all the people.” He must make his own selection of playmates. He begins to learn the kind of behavior which attracts or repels other children. A six-year-old wants to make friends but often goes about it in the wrong way. He may hit a child whose attention he craves. He may tease one whom he likes very much. Many a child is so sensitive to his own social status in a group of peers that he imagines they must not like him whenever he must take second place.

The child of this age shows a readiness for group activities. He loses interest in playing around the house alone. He likes to play on a team but is not capable of teamwork because of his limited sensitivity to the abilities of others. He wants to be “it” and is seldom willing to give up his place to one with more ability. He has not arrived at the point where it is natural for him to look at himself and his capabilities objectively.

A six-year-old child begins to show more of an awareness of sex. Boys and girls play many of the same games when they are together, but the sexes play different games when they are separated. Girls are more likely to play the games commonly known as boy’s games than vice versa. A six-year-old’s best friend is usually one of his own sex.

A child’s relationships with his own family change when he enters school. Mother’s place may be challenged by a child’s first teacher. At home he may question mother’s opinion about anything in which it seems to differ with that of his teacher. AT school the very opposite may be true. He is often torn between loyalty to his mother and to his teacher without cause and without either adult being aware of it.

He is only beginning to acquire a sense of values — a sense of proportion and disproportion which is the essence of common sense and of a sense of humor.

The awakening of social consciousness which comes to a child at about the age of six is fundamental to his social development. The way in which he is helped to meet his social needs is a determining factor in the kind of personal relationships he will develop in his later years.

Implications for Christian Education

The six-year-old’s enjoyment of group work and his readiness for it makes the church school important to him. Church school can widen his world and help him to learn further skills of Christian living.

The type of attitudes which the six-year-old develops can be influenced tremendously by a Christian teacher. Since the six-year-old is only beginning to develop a sense of values — he wants to be honest but often finds it difficult; he wants to be fair and cannot always decide what is fair; he wants to be unselfish and yet is full of selfish desires — he will be greatly influenced by the character of his teacher.

God is important to the six-year-old. He can accept the idea of God as Creator and Provider, as one whom he cannot see but who can see him. He accepts these ideas—but he thinks about these things and asks questions which challenge an adult Christian to give him the clear, honest, straight forward answers which he deserves.

Prayer is important at this age and the child expects his prayers to be answered literally and immediately. He needs much modeling and guidance in developing a satisfactory prayer life.