

Supplemental Material: Working with Students

Understanding how students feel and think can at times be very difficult. This supplemental reading is designed to help you understand and develop the necessary skills to work with students, parents and educators.

As children get older we begin to notice more active moves on their part to organize their lives independently from adults. The roles children begin to develop start to become increasingly gender specific. During childhood, kids play together and sit together at school, but this togetherness disappears by the age eleven and does not return until the child reaches age sixteen.

Research has helped us understand the developmental stages that children go through and how they handle conflict as they seek independence. The following are some of the findings from several studies, and are descriptive of the general characteristics children experience as they move from different ages.

1. Children are sociable...One of the most apparent characteristics of primary school is the desire for group activity with children their own age.
2. Children's activities are organized...Children now accept the need for some organization and begin to see the value in rules. There are frequent moments of anxiety because rules are hard to accept when they go against one, but these moments become less frequent and less as the child begins to develop.
3. Children have their secret activities and codes...Children begin to develop small worlds of their own, often secret from adults.
4. Adults are judged more objectively...Aided by discussion; primary children acquire enough skill to judge critically and to discuss the good and bad sides of their teachers. Children's critical discussions of adults make them fallible human beings in their eyes and help them with the dependence once felt.
5. Children desire the approval of their peers and fear ostracism...Children need the approval of adults, but are beginning to hold more value in the approval of members of their own groups.
6. Children want to learn...Children have a desire for knowledge that is more self-motivated and systematic. They also seek a more scientific explanation for events.
7. Children seek adventure...Independence from adults is sought, but the home is still the primary base for safety and sympathy when the child experiences emotional stress.
8. Boys and girls play separately...The two groups now tend to go their separate ways, but there is increased antagonism in any interactions they do continue to have.

Eleven year olds are right in the middle of so many different developmental changes. The beginning of middle school intensifies these for many students. Eleven can be described as a search for knowledge, adventure and social experience. When in groups, they want to know what is going on, make suggestions and try their hand on the job. This curiosity can be seen in the child's own activities, like the acquisition of hobbies and collections of all sorts. Group activities tend to be more thoroughly planned and executed. Girls tend to like these activities as well, but they concentrate more on relationships within the group. Girls activities tend to stay close to, and center around, the home, while boys activities are as disconnected from the home as possible. Girls will play games in a more real way, while boys play involves more competition and creativity. It is important to realize that these characteristics are never completely negative. Being restlessly active can indicate self-motivation; questioning represents a natural curiosity to grow and learn; their impatience is a representation of the many roles that they take in life.

At age **twelve**, children are working towards an even greater independence from adults than previous stages and the learning of definite masculine and feminine roles is more apparent. The characteristics used to describe eleven year olds can be applied to this age group as well.

1. Children are sociable...Friendships at this age tend to be more stable. Most activities take place in groups and for success to be achieved the group must conform in ways of thinking and behaving.
2. Children's activities are organized...Boy groups have a definite social structure, with a leader and others that follow. The leader is chosen based on that ability the group deems as significant. Girl groups are bound more by mutual friendships, small groups composed of smaller pairs/trios. Personal friendships take precedence over loyalty to the group. Girl groups are most evident in school, whereas after-school, the groups tend to break up into their smaller groups of best friends.
3. Children seek adventure...Groups now become a place to learn new skills in a sport and develop a different perspective on current paradigms. Schools do not always provide this knowledge.
4. Children have their secret activities and codes...At this age there is a realization that there are things that you don't talk about with adults.
5. Adults are judged more objectively...A group at this age is looking to find a deeper understanding of what it is like to be an adult. In their groups they begin to discuss their relationships with parents or teachers and start to evaluate them. They begin to seek out occasions to be around interesting adults who are willing to talk and listen.
6. Children desire the approval of their peers and fear ostracism...There is an increasing need for groups to provide a haven for safety and organized activity. Members of a group are to provide psychological comfort in times of distress. The fear of social isolation can be so great to even cause one to keep the secrets of their group, even if it means to tell a lie or defy an authority figure.
7. Boys and girls play separately...Boys are determined now to be masculine at all costs. This is seen by the increased aggressiveness in their talk, behavior, and desires. Girls see boys as rude and nasty and many of their activities as childish. At this age, girls start to show greater maturity in their development

The twelve year old continues to show the energy of the eleven, but with a much greater capacity to control extremes of anger and impulsiveness. The "In-group" of a twelve year old is very important. Children often have several groups they hold high appreciation for, but may differ in the degree they feel loyal to. At this age, children often find themselves faced with pressure to perform delinquent acts to gain group acceptance. Girls move from creative play towards using and developing their creative skills. They may begin to play an instrument, start a new craft or start writing short stories.

At **thirteen** children start to slow down and begin to specialize. Thirteen year olds tend to be a little distant and pre occupied. This may reflect the necessity for making choices and the beginnings of a more acute self-awareness. Although this age can be difficult, they will respond to someone who is in control of the situation, who is able to organize skills they have learned, and who can channel a child's energy towards purposeful activities. At this time students have begun to realize the importance of education and the usefulness of conformity.

At **fourteen**, teens start to develop an overall evaluation of themselves. Adolescents are beginning to experience problems which include self-absorption, social-absorption and sexual development:

- Self-absorption: physical appearance, examination, ability, money, achieving and self-consciousness.
- Social-absorption: The "crowd" is now more mixed with the presence of girls. This presence tends to cast a civilizing affect on boys.
- Sexual development: Changes in both body and emotions.

At **fifteen**, students start to become annoyed and moody...like before. These attacks are outbursts followed by the slamming of the door or storming off. Boys and girls are on much better terms because of puberty and you see an increase in “horse play”. Teens start to show more embarrassment towards family affection. Fifteen-year-olds are beginning to be more concerned about their bodies as well.

Sixteen is a point where students become more socially aware. Conversation is more controlled and future-oriented. In school, students see the need to do well in their classes and start to think beyond high school years. There begins to be differences in physical development among people, which guides some of the activities they feel comfortable with. Adolescents are more concerned with who they are and how others see them.

Working with Parents and Teachers

In order for us to gain an understanding of adolescence, we must first start with determining key guiding influences that students face each day: the two most important are parents and teachers. Teachers and adults have a profound effect on the decisions they make and the paths they take in life. Parents are put in one of the most difficult positions because they are responsible for the life and development of their children. The hard part is the very “process” of this development. If a parent is too strict, the child will rebel; if the parent is too lenient, the child goes wild. The main responsibilities of parents to their children may be summarized as follows:

1. To provide food, clothes, shelter, toys... versus being over-indulgent and neglectful
2. To give affection... versus being over-affectionate or rejecting
3. To protect from physical and psychological harm... versus being over-protective or indifferent
4. To encourage the development of skills... versus being over demanding or unconcerned
5. To control... versus being authoritative or over-permissive

Some effects of parents “overdoing it”

1. Over-possessive Parents... Possessive parents = over-controlling/indulgent + over-affection. They tend to become too involved and have the appearance that the parent is using the child to fill a personal void. Possessive parents have often had circumstances where the child is made so precious that the parents are so anxious for their welfare and safety that they over-protect the child. Children of possessive parents often view the world as a more dangerous place than it actually is. In school, over-protected students tend to be well behaved and studious, but they find it difficult to make friends and participate in new experiences. This well-behaved student at school commonly misbehaves at home. Being disobedient, acting out and throwing tantrums are often signs of a child trying to free themselves from their parents while keeping the role of “good student” at school.
2. Rejecting Parents... Not only do these parents reject their children, but they also show a general indifference to their child’s safety, and a lack of concern for their personal and social development. Rejecting parents will neglect their children physically, but the way in which it happens differs greatly. A well off parent may spend all their efforts trying to find a sitter that works around current obligations. When the child asks for a kiss, the mother quickly points to her cheek as to not smudge any make-up. Children in these situations tend to be less physically active, quiet, and sometimes very insecure. Because of the lack of affection at home, any participation on their part must be rewarded by praise and recognition or there will be no persistence in activities.
3. Authoritarian Parents... Authoritarian parents are over-controlling and lack affection. The control may be obtained through moral concepts with little or no physical punishment. The authoritarian imposes high standards in many non-essential aspects of life, such as table manners, care of household furniture, neatness, tidiness, and order. Authoritarian parents may not be consistent with their punitive actions but may express themselves through continuous nagging with an

occasional resort to physical punishment. Where control is accomplished through moral judgments, children often find themselves socially timid and non assertive, whereas if control is fostered through physical punishment the child is socially outgoing and aggressive.

4. Over-Permissive Parents... These parents allow the child to do more or less what they wish. Usually, they are over indulgent so that the child is given far more than they reasonably need. The parents may seem indifferent because they have not stopped the child's aberrant behavior. The over-permissive parent is concerned for the child's safety but find themselves unable to be assertive until it comes to a point of "boil-over." Children of permissive parents are often very unstable and have big mood swings. These students are the "split" child and find themselves acting in these ways because they have no external control from their own impulsiveness.
5. Democratic Parents... These parents work with a balance between the extremes in parenting styles. For the very young child, they provide chances to explore, but are reminded that they must stay close by for potential hazard; for older kids, freedom of choice whenever possible, yet the realization that they do need help, support and advise on many issues that are important to them. At school, these students are independent, responsible and co-operative. They are often capable of conversing with adults on a surprisingly adult level.

After discussing several parenting styles and how they may affect the way children see the world, it is good to know that teachers act in many of the same ways. Differences are found in the climates that teachers develop in the classroom. The word "climate" refers to the environment that the teachers develop and how the students react to this development. This climate is very strong and has a lot of influence over the behavior of students, not just in the class but academic success overall. Sometimes simply a change in class or teacher will not better the "climate," as perceived by the student, which was already established.

Teaching styles and the climates they foster...

1. An authoritarian climate...The teacher is a strict disciplinarian. They give instructions and orders in a very direct manner. Lessons in the classroom are very organized and filled with routine that must be followed step by step. Compositions are short and neat but seem to be very scripted and unimaginative. There is a hushed silence in the classroom that seems unnatural.
2. A laissez-faire climate...In this climate there is no routine; students are working on different parts of the same book. Composition pieces are scattered and thoughts are unorganized, but there are a few that stand out because of their creativity. The classroom is noisy and students are walking from desk to desk.
3. A democratic climate...The appearance and climate is determined by the activity at hand. Sometimes the class is quietly sitting in rows reading a book and other times the class is noisy, active, and working on group projects. Attention is paid to what is being written and not how it has been written, corrections in grammar and punctuation will be eventually made as the student's writing abilities develop over the year. These teachers are extremely flexible and pay close attention to "how" the students are learning. Just as strict environments inhibit individuality of thought, expression, and impede exploration, children in democratic climates behave more spontaneously, volunteering suggestions and asking more questions.

Explain: You will often find yourself acting one way and then switching to a more effective style when the situation calls for it. Similarly, if you find yourself acting in one way more than others, this is not a predictor of your behavior, unless you stay there and are unaware of the benefits of other methods.

This supplemental reading is intended to help you understand people differently and potentially aid you when facilitating a large group.