

As you prepare to lead second- and third-graders, remind yourself of who these delightful children are. There's much more to be said than what is stated here and, of course, each child is unique. The best way to get to know the children is to observe them from week to week, listening to what they have to say and being their friend as well as their leader.

Having survived learning the basics of reading and writing, children in this age group are (usually!) eager learners. And their thought processes are also advancing, enabling them, for example, to grasp a simple chronology of Bible stories.

Here, then, are a few “typical” characteristics of this age group.

## Intellectual Characteristics



### Children at this age

- are becoming capable of thinking logically (simple classification, grouping, and ordering) but they are not yet able to reason abstractly; they still need specific, “concrete” representations to tie their thinking to.
- exhibit a wide variety of reading skills. Some are reading well above grade level but others are still struggling to learn the basics. Some are able to read from the Bible; others will struggle with this.
- are beginning to understand the use of religious rituals and symbolism (as in the sacraments).
- are developing the ability to think in sequence and to understand cause and effect.
- have a growing sense of time and space; are able to differentiate between now and long ago, between fantasy and reality.
- are great collectors of just about anything you can name.
- enjoy listening to well-told stories, making up stories, retelling and reenacting stories, and comparing one story with another.

### Tips for Leaders

- Be sensitive to the wide variety in reading abilities. To avoid embarrassing weaker readers, choose reading aloud activities carefully. Over the course of the year their reading ability will improve but continue to be careful not to point out reading weaknesses.
- Nurture each child's strengths and continue to provide learning experiences that appeal to different kinds of intelligences (word smart, number smart, picture smart, music smart, and so on. See the introduction to your leader's guide and individual sessions for examples).
- Build on the desire to collect and categorize things by going on nature “treasure hunts,” by setting up display tables, by being “detectives” and finding out information, by making lists, and so on.
- Emphasize that Bible stories are true stories from God's Word; help them to begin to develop a simple chronology of what happened when in the Bible; occasionally have volunteers read directly from simple passages in the Bible.
- Continue to avoid most analogies and figures of speech to explain religious truths; however, basic religious symbols—such as the cross and the elements of the sacraments—can be explained to the children.

## Social Characteristics

### Children at this age

- are gradually moving from being totally self-centered and are developing better ways of functioning within a group.
- take a more active role in worship services (singing, praying, listening) and have a stronger sense of church as God's family.
- are making friends and are discovering what it means to be kind to each other.
- value rules and expect them to be followed. They have a developing sense of justice and fair play.
- enjoy showing off their new abilities and want to know that their abilities and gifts are valued.
- will often be very aware of media and of what is on television or in movies. Some of them will also know a lot about cell phones, computers, the Internet, and video games.

### Tips for Leaders

- Give children opportunities to work together in groups, but vary the makeup of the groups, since kids will often pick the same partners if you give them the choice. They will seldom pick partners of the opposite gender on their own, but boys and girls can work well together if they are assigned to do so.
- Take time to remind the children that they are a valuable part of the church, that the church cares for them, that they can contribute to the worship service by singing, praying, and so on.
- Try to model fairness in the way you deal with the children; from time to time remind children of the rules of your classroom so you can work well together.
- Invite the kids to help you with tasks such as cleaning up the room or passing out materials; give them small responsibilities and praise their efforts.

## Spiritual Characteristics

### Children at this age

- are capable of understanding basic salvation concepts and making a commitment to Jesus. But they may do so simply out of a desire to please you or parents.
- often express opinions and feelings about God and church. They enjoy asking a great many “why” and “how” questions.
- often include prayer in their daily routines. Their prayers are frequently self-centered but are sincere and offered in faith.
- often still see issues in black and white.

### Tips for Leaders

- Provide opportunities for children to express—in their own age-appropriate way—their commitment to Christ.
- Pay close attention to the questions children ask; help them discover the answer rather than tell it to them.
- Involve the children in different kinds of prayer experiences; guide them to include thanks, praise, and requests for others in their prayers.