

Working with 7th and 8th graders

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Some organizations use the term *transescent* to describe kids in the 10-14 age range, those in transition from childhood to being young adults. They are also referred to as "emerging adolescents" or "young adolescents". Whatever you choose to call them, they are a unique group who are not always easy to understand or work with, but who can be very enjoyable and rewarding to work with when you do understand them. Most of the characteristics of adolescent development can be grouped in four categories – physical, intellectual, emotional, and social – PIES. Certainly not all kids show all of these characteristics all the time. In fact, wide differences among kids of the same age are another characteristics of this group. Also, the settings in which you as foresters might work with this age group may very well result in you seeing them in a different light than a classroom teacher or parent might. Still, knowing a little about their development provides some insight into why they learn and behave as they do.

Physical Development

- Rapid, erratic growth
- Awkwardness, lack of coordination
- Can't sit still
- Bizarre eating habits
- Girls usually mature before boys
- Puberty begins
- Display mysterious energy source
- Talkativeness
- Considerable attention to personal appearance
- Concern with irregularities in appearance (blemishes, etc)
- Conformity with "in" styles of clothing, hair, etc.

Intellectual Development

- More worldly and smarter than previous generations
- Mind is changing from childlike to adult like
- Shallow thinking powers
- Disorganized
- Challenge authority
- Think in the present only
- Curious and inquisitive
- Prefer active rather than passive learning activities
- Desire opportunities to express individuality
- More capable of dealing with abstract concepts
- Primarily a concrete thinker
- Show interest in races and cultures other than their own
- Challenge "idealistic" teachings

Emotional Development

- Fragile self-concept; easily offended
- Easily embarrassed and sensitive
- Distractible and short attention span
- Pre-occupied with self
- Spontaneous/impulsive
- Seek adult approval
- Believe their problems are unique
- Tendency to exaggerate simple occurrences
- Ambivalent desires (want freedom, but fear loss of security)
- Wide range of behaviors and moods (quiet-loud, shy-boisterous, fearful-confident, anxious-assured)

Social Development

- Strong peer influence
- Need to belong to a group
- Need for independence
- Need for positive strokes
- Resist adult authority
- Attempt to identify with adults other than parents
- Have multiple and short-lived interests
- Sensitive to criticism
- Frequent changes in "close" friendships
- Concern for fairness and social justice
- Concern for less fortunate "others"

What works (at least some of the time!) *These are in no particular order.*

- Humor (but not sarcasm)
- Flexibility (be ready to change you plans to go with "teachable moments")
- Kid involvement (have them help you, be volunteers, do as much as possible)
- Personalize (use kids' names, examples related to where they're from or things they're interested in)
- Being a good role model (show enthusiasm, be willing to poke fun at yourself, give kids a chance to "show you up" occasionally)
- Food (as an integral part of your lesson, if possible or during breaks, when reasonable)
- Don't expect logic (at least adult logic) to work with this age group
- Allow responsibility (give kids the chance to take charge or make choices about some things)
- Have limited numbers of rules with consequences which are clearly stated and explained
- Recognize successes and creativity; try to understand and "dignify" what ma seem like unusual responses. Divide into smaller groups when possible (use random methods to split groups)

- Keep kids active (many short activities usually works better than one longer one; incorporate a "hands-on" approach and physical movement)
- Listen
- Be patient
- Pick your battles (arguing often escalates things; many situations can be diffused better by giving a kid a little time and space)
- Avoid embarrassing kids
- Expect short attention spans and an inability to concentrate (brain research seems to indicate that there is a plateau of brain growth in adolescents)
- Anticipate sexual connotations (kids this age are great finding them, so it's good to think of time about double meanings some works may carry and to try to avoid them; when you don't, a sense of humor usually goes a long way!)
- "Walk a mile in their shoes" and remember the "golden rule" (try to remember what you were like at that age and treat kids as you would like to be treated)