

Working with students of all ages

How do you know if the activities you've planned are appropriate for the students who are visiting on a particular day?

Will the activity that was a hit with the preschoolers yesterday be a hit with 5th graders tomorrow? It depends on the activity. Milking a cow or harvesting vegetables from the garden are activities for all ages. An activity about trait selection in animal breeding, on the other hand, would be most appropriate for high school-age students or older.



The following is a partial set of characteristics and tips for working with youth in four general age groups: 3-7 years, 7-11 years, 11-13 years, and 13-18 years. It should be noted that to communicate effectively with youth, the whole context of a child's background and special needs, as well as the particular circumstances of any given situation, must be taken into account. This includes various social, ethnic, and cultural traditions or communication styles or patterns not within the scope of this listing.

AGES 3 - 7	
CHARACTERISTICS	TEACHING TIPS
Thinking is in the here and now ("concrete" thinkers)	<i>Youth need real experiences to learn.</i>
Attention span is about 20-30 minutes; need hands-on experiences	<i>Vary the length of activities. Try rotating small groups through stations.</i>
Begin to develop friendships, usually with youth of the same sex	<i>Plan activities that youth can do in groups rather than individually.</i>
Want to be liked and to please adults	<i>Let youth know when they have done a good job.</i>
Learn best when physically active	<i>Allow youth to participate in activities where they can use physical energy.</i>
Have a special attachment to older youth	<i>Allow youth to choose an older youth to be their helper and role model.</i>
Are easily motivated	<i>Use encouragement to keep them motivated.</i>
Competitive activities are less appropriate	<i>Plan some cooperative activities.</i>
Differentiation between fantasy and reality can be difficult	<i>Build in transitions and discussions to help distinguish the imaginary from the real.</i>



AGES 7 - 11

CHARACTERISTICS	TEACHING TIPS
Learn best when physically active	<i>Allow youth to participate in activities where they can use physical energy.</i>
Have a special attachment to older youth	<i>Allow youth to choose an older youth to be their helper and role model.</i>
Are easily motivated	<i>Use encouragement to keep them motivated.</i>
Reading becomes an individual experience	<i>Allow time for youth to read on their own and think of activities before working with others.</i>
Attention span is about 45 minutes	<i>Use varied activities to keep them interested.</i>
Acceptance by peer group is important	<i>Use the peer group to recognize good works, e.g., applaud completed activities and avoid put-downs.</i>
Interests expand from home, to neighborhood, to community	<i>Talk to youth about friends and neighbors, and what goes on in their community. Involve them in community service.</i>
Enjoy both cooperation and competition	<i>Plan activities so that sometimes youth work together, sometimes compete with each other.</i>
Show independence by seeking individual attention and sometimes disrupting the group	<i>Involve youth in selecting activities from a "short-list." Give individual attention, like assigning tasks to "special helpers."</i>
Feelings of competence enhance self-concept	<i>Provide activities that will let youth feel good about themselves and succeed. Recognize them for their accomplishments.</i>

continued

**AGES 11 - 13**

CHARACTERISTICS	TEACHING TIPS
Can take responsibility in planning and evaluating own work	<i>Give youth responsibility for group activities, including planning, implementing, & evaluating.</i>
Can discuss current events, international affairs, and contemporary issues with some help	<i>Use discussion activities and games that encourage awareness of current events and issues.</i>
Want to make decisions but still depend on adult guidelines	<i>Establish guidelines that give parameters for youth to follow.</i>
Peer pressure mounts, first from same sex, then from opposite sex	<i>Use peer pressure to influence positive behavior. Have group give encouragement to individuals. Provide opportunities to work in groups.</i>
Can be quite self-conscious	<i>Avoid asking youth to share their work individually until they feel more comfortable with the group.</i>
Strong emotional attachment to older youth and adults	<i>Encourage youth to participate in activities with older youth and adults.</i>
Choices are often unrealistic	<i>Assist youth in making realistic choices. Review their plans, discuss alternatives and help them weigh options before making decisions.</i>

AGES 13-18

CHARACTERISTICS	TEACHING TIPS
Personal philosophy begins to emerge	<i>Use activities where youth search for experiences that will allow them to identify their own philosophies.</i>
Enjoy discussing global situations as well as personal activities	<i>Encourage discussion of events and feelings.</i>
Abstract thinking and problem-solving reach a higher level	<i>Put youth into real-life, problem-solving situations.</i>
Strong desire for status in peer group	<i>Develop a climate in which youth are encouraged and supported by peers.</i>
High interest in social activity	<i>Encourage youth to plan and carry out own activities.</i>
Need freedom from adult control to make decisions	<i>Help youth realize their decisions have consequences.</i>
Widespread feelings of inferiority and inadequacy	<i>Encourage and help youth see their positive worth.</i>

Adapted from 4-H Cooperative Curriculum Systems 1997 – Theater Arts Adventures. Used with permission.