

Character Development Age by Age

Research on children's character development suggests that the strongest influences on children's character development are modeling by adults, peers, and others, as well as age-appropriate discussions about the thoughts and feelings of others along with reasons for rules. Here are some general expectations we can have for character development in young children, age by

2- and 3-year-olds may:	4-year-olds may:	5-year-olds may:	6-year-olds may:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">» express fears of separation and abandonment from loved ones» begin to show signs of empathy toward observable distress in others» be preoccupied with "good" and "bad" behavior and expect happy outcomes» learn to rely on familiar and predictable routines as a way of feeling safe» seek comfort and reassurance through stories» form strong attachments to particular objects such as blankets or toys» prefer stories with simple plots and no digressions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">» be attracted to separation and reunion stories and stories about forgiveness for transgressions» recognize the basic emotions in story characters: for example, mad, sad, and glad» have a growing appreciation of incongruity due to a better grasp of the real and the pretend» be dealing with self-control issues and coping with powerful emotions» invent stories that are action-packed chains of events with little unifying theme	<ul style="list-style-type: none">» worry about doing things for the first time» be more concerned about peer acceptance» define bad behavior as whatever results in punishment» base most judgments of behavior on outward expressions» begin to consider underlying reasons for behavior» be better able to recognize more subtle emotions in characters (for example, disappointment, confusion), even though they may not have the vocabulary for it» gradually realize that a person's actions and intentions could be contradictory» respond to stories that show triumph over adversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">» have an expanded network of human relationships and emerging interpersonal skills» realize that other people have different feelings and thoughts and have an emerging ability to adopt another perspective» use a growing vocabulary to discuss characters' virtues and shortcomings such as envy» accept more responsibility for care and nurture of living things» learn to accept individual differences and show tolerance» see the larger community as a potential source of support» appreciate that mixed emotions are possible» read and invent stories that depict emotional responses and changes in the character