

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