

Five to Six Years

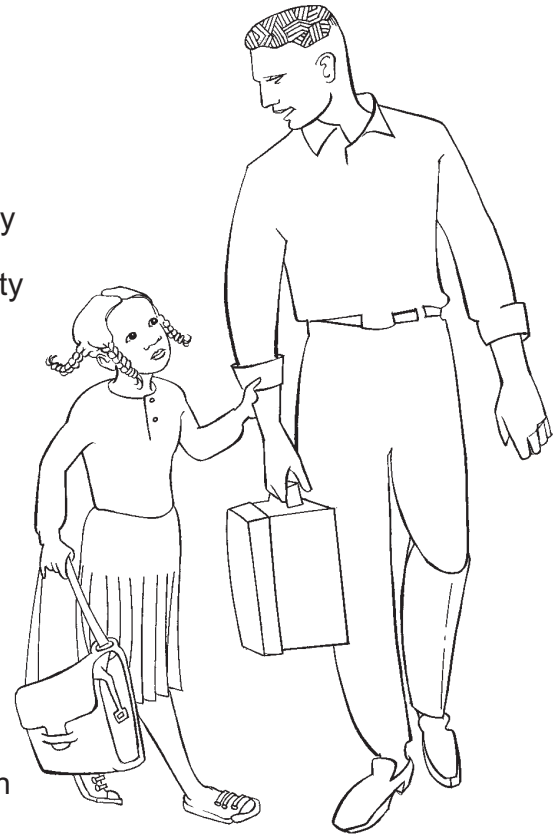
Developmental Tasks

Learning to distinguish between reality and fantasy

Becoming comfortable with personal sexual identity

Learning to make connections and distinctions between feelings, thoughts, and actions

Learning to solve problems by initiating and creating



What's Happening in the Brain?

During this stage, the child's brain:

- ❖ Is nearing adult volume and size
- ❖ Is in the middle of a critical growth period, which is why school districts routinely screen children entering kindergarten to understand their mental, social, and emotional development
- ❖ Should be primed for reading in this and the coming year, as the language center continues to help children make meaning of their world

Domains

Physical

Typical Characteristics	Suggested Behaviors for Effective Parenting
Is able to dress and undress him/herself	Allow independence in getting dressed/undressed.
May be farsighted, a common condition that often causes eye/hand coordination problems	Accept awkwardness as a normal condition at this stage; if the problem persists, have the child's eyes examined.
Is able to care for personal toilet needs independently	Encourage hygienic behaviors (washing hands, etc.).

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Physical

Typical Characteristics

Prefers plain cooking but accepts wider choice of foods; may have increased appetite

Suggested Behaviors for Effective Parenting

Do not force-feed the child. Rather, offer appealing varieties of food in adequate amounts. Use natural rewards and limited choices to encourage child to eat, e.g., "You can have dessert when you eat the vegetables on your plate" or "Do you want to eat the chicken or the beans?"

Social

May fear the mother (or primary caregiver) won't return (with mother/primary caregiver still being the center of his/her world)

Avoid leaving until the child is prepared for the departure and later return of mother or primary caregiver.

Copies adults and enjoys their praise

Model appropriate behaviors and provide lots of praise and reassurance.

Plays with other boys and girls; is calm, friendly, and not too demanding in relations with others; is able to play with one child or a group of children (though prefers members of the same sex)

Rejoice and provide opportunities for group play!

Enjoys conversation during meals

Allow and respond to child-initiated conversation.

Knows differences between the sexes and becomes more modest

Don't shame child for interest in sexual differences or for touching him/herself.

Is interested in where babies come from

Offer a simple, accurate explanation.

May develop nausea and start vomiting to avoid going to school (when school is not liked)

Encourage the child to find enjoyable activities at school.

Is experiencing an age of conformity and is critical of those who do not conform

Help the child learn tolerance and the value of individual differences.

Emotional

Typical Characteristics	Suggested Behaviors for Effective Parenting
In general, is reliable and well-adjusted	Be grateful!
May show some fear of dark, falling, dogs, or bodily harm (though this is not a particularly fearful age)	Don't dismiss fears as unimportant.
If tired, nervous, or upset, may exhibit the following behaviors: nail biting, eye blinking, throat clearing, sniffing, nose twitching, and/or thumb sucking	Try not to appear overly concerned, since an increase in nervous habits is temporary and normal; deal with the cause of the tension rather than the habit exhibited (by structuring the child's time to include quiet play and rest, reading the child a story, etc.).
Is concerned with pleasing adults	Show your love by recognizing positive behaviors.
Is easily embarrassed	Be sensitive about situations that may be embarrassing and help the child avoid them.

Mental

May stutter if tired or nervous; may lisp	Do not emphasize any language disturbance, since it is probably only temporary.
Tries only what s/he can accomplish; will follow instructions and accept supervision	Reinforce mastered skills and provide opportunities to be successful in new, simple activities.
Knows colors, numbers, etc.; may be able to print a few letters and possibly learn to read a little independently	Encourage identification of colors and numbers, as well as printing of own name and short names of favorite people and objects. Introduce words when reading to child, e.g., explain that the letters D-O-G make up the word "dog" and see if the child can find the word in a story you are reading.
Likes to explore all kinds of new and different activities, e.g., enjoys a different playground, a new book, a new joke, or a new hands-on game.	Patiently provide as many new learning experiences and challenges as possible; these are like "nutrients" that build the brain's connections and help it grow.
Can identify appearance and significance of various coins	Provide opportunities for child to make change (in restaurants, stores); give the child a piggy bank.

Typical Characteristics	Suggested Behaviors for Effective Parenting
Is interested in being good, but may tell untruths or blame others for personal wrongdoings because of intense desire to please and do right	Help the child learn to accept responsibility for personal actions in a positive, caring manner. Do not be shocked by untruthfulness; instead gently help the child understand the importance of honesty.
Wants to do what s/he believes is right and avoid doing what is wrong	Acknowledge attempt to act in accordance with personal beliefs, and don't discipline him/her for the inability to behave properly at all times.

Indicators Related to Developmental Lag or Potential Trauma

Excessive or specific fears (especially of adults and strangers) and/or extreme separation anxiety

Shyness and/or lack of interest in others; not playing

Threatening or bullying peers

Excessively repetitive behaviors (especially around food or toileting)

Persistent speech problems

Bedwetting; toileting problems

Persistent concern for safety, including self and others

Extreme difficulty concentrating in school

Attention seeking, emotional swings