



# Children's Development and Interpretation

Generally, children grow through relatively sequential developmental phases. There is a vast difference between kindergartners and third graders, sixth graders and twelfth graders!

## **Pre-Schoolers:**

Pre-schoolers need to move through their environment -- that is how they learn. Preschool programs should focus on play, fantasy and their senses. Encourage them to listen, touch, feel, smell, (not taste) different things. If you must present a program which does not include a lot of "hands on," try to interact with children more -- have them shout out the answers to questions, point to animals in the book/on the slide screen, have them howl like a coyote when you show them the picture. At this stage, don't try to teach them wildflowers names or different ecological concepts; they are not ready. Effective strategies include games, puppet shows, songs, stories and senses exploration.

## **K - 3rd Graders:**

These children have fairly well-developed gross motor skills, but are just developing their fine motor skills. Therefore, using scissors to cut something out would be fine, but expecting them to do a complicated origami could be disastrous! This age group still has a fairly short attention span, and they like to be active. It is better to "play" rather than talk about concepts. A recent study discovered children at this age laugh over 400 times a day! Humor in your interpretive program is helpful if you want to keep their attention. Have fun!

## **4th - 6th Graders:**

This is BCPOS most frequent audience. At these ages, children are still developing their fine motor skills. They enjoy building things and create crafts, but don't expect them to be too precise or neat. These children can think inductively. By looking at concrete examples, they are able to make a general statement about those examples. But keep in mind, the examples must be concrete—not theoretical or abstract. For example, they can reflect on their own behavior and know right from wrong—that recycling can help save the world. Their attention spans are generally longer and they have more stamina than younger children. Effective strategies include questioning strategies, metaphors, activities and games that teach concepts, and sharing experiences/stories.

## **6th - 12th Graders:**

Adolescents are approaching the full capabilities of adults. They are in a period of very rapid growth towards physical maturity. Their fine motor coordination is highly developed, but individuals can be self-conscious about their own abilities and skills. It is better to incorporate group activities rather than activities that spotlight individuals. Adolescents can manipulate ideas even when subjects are not present. They are able to think about issues in terms of the past and the future. They can assume the perspectives of others—wildlife biologists, city council, and landowners. Adolescents enjoy deductive reasoning, testing hypotheses, expressing their opinions and assuming adult roles. Effective strategies include discussions, exploration and discovery, role-playing, and work projects. They often want to make a difference and care about the future of their world.