

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRAM PROGRESSION

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OUTDOOR MINISTRIES PROGRAM LEADERSHIP MANUAL

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Nothing about me is hidden from you! I was secretly woven together deep in the earth below, but with your own eyes you saw my body being formed. Even before I was born, you had written in your book everything I would do (Psalms 139:15-16). (CEV)

Seeking to understand the children and youth that participate in our programs is an important step towards, serving their needs. We give our staff members the incredible task of relating to vastly different age groups during the summer. In order to form this vital relationship, they need to understand the developmental changes that a camper will experience over the years. This article will explore the physical, mental and social characteristics that are developmentally appropriate for children and youth from 7 to 17 years of age (see also the chapter on Faith Development). It will explore how these characteristics impact the day-to-day operation of our camps and conference centers. We will also look at program progression or how the Outdoor Ministries experiences we offer change when we program for each of the different age groups.

For centuries, researchers have studied the behavior of children and youth that are associated with the different stages of development. Several prominent theorists have described children and youth from 7 to 17 years of age in terms of some overarching themes that seem to follow children and youth in their growth toward adulthood. Although children and youth come from a wide variety of backgrounds, there are some generalizations that can be made about an age group that seem always to apply.

Among the theorists whose work inform our understand of the way children develop are Jean Piaget, Erik Erikson and Laurence Kolberg. You will find some detailed information about each of their theories on Handout One, "Developmental Theories." A thorough study of these theories would be an incredible benefit to your staff. However, in the interest of conserving your valuable training time, the handout will serve as an introduction to each theorist.

When a new program or building is planned at a camp and conference center, one of the first factors to consider is the needs of the intended participants. A director or committee seeks to understand this target group and to design the program and/or building to address their needs. What were our Outdoor Ministry forebears taking into consideration when they built the camps and conference centers that we have today? What kind of understanding of children and youth did they have when they first designed the summer camp program? The logic of our site and program decisions needs to be constantly re-examined due to our current understanding of the changing needs of today's children and youth.

Program progression is the product of a careful process of choosing challenging and appropriate activities for each camper age group. As we seek to include the interests of an age group in planning, we want to offer them activities that are unique to the camp and conference environment. We want to challenge the campers with new experiences that will allow them to grow as individuals and to learn the value of group interaction.

In order to cater to the interests of children and youth, there is an incredible temptation to offer the kind of activities that they enjoy at home. The activities found at camps and conference centers (canoeing, group initiatives, cookouts, etc.) are not found in the daily routine of a typical camper's home life. It is activities like these that make our programs different from other options available to children and youth during the summer. While this difference allows us to attract campers to our programs today, they will not

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come back year after year unless their level of interest is sustained. The activities in your program need to change as your returning campers grow older. It is the tradition at some sites to offer the same activities to all the summer campers, regardless of age. In order to provide a varied experience, different challenges or activities can be offered to each age group (i.e. lake canoeing for elementary campers, river canoeing for junior highs and whitewater canoeing for senior highs).

This intentional sequencing of program challenges is called step programming. Step programming addresses the desire of campers to work toward goals and to look forward to future adventures. This can be a key reason for campers to return summer after summer. The fun and valuable programs of Christian camps and conference centers are just a small segment of the growing number of summer options for children and youth. It is important that the campers have an interest in their activities, see the value of advancing to the next level and want to return the following summer for additional challenges.

It is our responsibility as educators to offer games and activities that will stress the abilities of a particular age group. Activities that do not meet these criteria can possibly be adapted. Younger children can go out in canoe on flat water with adults doing the paddling, while older campers can learn the strokes and be challenged by more difficult types of water.

The developmental characteristics of the age groups can be used as a check list as we take a second look at the games and activities offered at our sites. Creative adaptations can be made in most activities that will allow participants, regardless of ability, the opportunity to enjoy and benefit from the programs of Outdoor Ministry.

Developmental characteristics give us incredible insights into the needs and abilities of our summer campers. When we combine this knowledge with our current understanding of the interests of children and youth, we can see the importance of program progression. While most camp activities are selected by a director or committee long before the program brochure is mailed out, there are smaller program progression decisions that will be made by the staff each day.

How we choose to challenge our campers is decided in the activities that we offer them today and the goals that we provide in the years to come. It is important that the staff who make these short-term and long-term decisions understand the unique characteristics of each age group and how these relate to the ministry of the camp or conference center. This not only creates a more satisfying experience for both camper and staff member, it also contributes to the success of the program as a whole. When we design our programs with the interests and developmental characteristics of the campers of the 21st century in mind, then we create a firm foundation for the future of our ministries.

About the Writer

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Module One for Trainers of Trainers

Expected Outcomes:

- Participants will demonstrate a better understanding of the developmental characteristics of the age groups they serve in their programs.
- Participants will identify the developmental appropriateness of and age group interest in camp and conference activities.
- Participants will suggest changes and adaptations that will allow more age groups to participate in camp and conference activities.

Estimated Time: 2 hours.

Materials Needed: Flipchart; markers; copies of Handouts One, Two, Three, Four and Five for each participant. Write out the questions in step #4 and the sample in step #5 on a flipchart sheet.

Notes to Leaders:

It is not often that we go back to “square one” and look at the selection process for camp and conference activities. You will need to help group members look past the “we-have-always-done-it-this-way” mindset and see their program activities in a new light. It is important that you familiarize yourself with the developmental characteristics that are listed in the handouts, so you can help guide the group through the following steps. This exercise covers children and youth from 1st-12th grade. If your programs do not serve all these ages, you can narrow the focus of the exercise by making copies of only the handouts that you need.

Process:

1. Ask the participants to introduce themselves and to name specific activities that are offered to children and youth during their camp and conference programs (i.e. swimming, Bible study, canoeing, group initiatives, etc.). List the activities on the flipchart.
2. Give each participant a copy of Handout One, “Developmental Theories” and review this with participants.
3. Divide the participants into groups of 4-6 people. Have the groups form circles of their chairs in different parts of the room. Give each group a sheet of paper from the flipchart and a marker. Pass out copies of Handout Two, Three, Four and Five which describe developmental characteristics for different age groups.

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4. Referring back to the list of activities created in step #1, have the participants look over the handouts and answer the following questions for each of the activities on the list. “Based on the developmental characteristics in the handouts and your knowledge of the interests of these age groups, is this specific activity appropriate for

Younger elementary children (ages 7-9)? [yes=✓, no=✗, maybe=?]

Older elementary children (ages 10-12)? [yes=✓, no=✗, maybe=?]

Junior high youth (ages 12-14)? [yes=✓, no=✗, maybe=?]

Senior high youth (ages 14-17)? [yes=✓, no=✗, maybe=?]

If your answer is “no” or “maybe,” please list the developmental characteristic or the interests of this age group to “back up” your conclusion.

5. Ask the groups to indicate their answers on their flipchart sheet like the sample below:

	Young Elem.	Older Elem.	Junior High	Senior High
Canoeing on lake	✗	✓	✓	?

Young Elem.—do not have the upper body strength for paddling, concrete thinkers—some do not understand paddling on the left side of the boat in order to go to the right.

Senior Highs—many of them have been doing this activity for four or more summers and are bored with it.

Have the groups leave a space after each listed activity.

6. Once the groups have completed their task, bring them back to the large group. Have a representative from each group tape his or her sheet to the flipchart and present the answers to the rest of the group.
7. After each group has shared their findings, ask the whole group to brainstorm ways that the activity could be adapted or augmented in order to make it more appropriate/interesting for the age groups. Write these ideas in the blank space provided under each listed activity. Do this for all of the circle’s activities. Post the completed sheet and continue until all groups have reported.
8. Using the list of brainstorming ideas, lead the group in a discussion of ways to enrich their programs through making these adaptations.

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Handout One: Developmental Theories

Jean Piaget (1896-1980) developed theories that dealt with how children think and understand the world around them. He believed that the way a child's mind processes information changes over the years. Piaget's theory of cognitive development deals with the movement from concrete to formal operational thinking. Concrete operational thinkers (ages 7 to 11) understand classification, logic and mathematics as it relates to concrete, identifiable objects. Formal operational thinkers (age 12 on up) develop solutions using abstract concepts like intangible objects, imagined hypotheses and the perceptions of other people.

Erik Erikson (1904-1994) believed that there are key struggles or turning points in a child's life. How children choose to solve these crises shapes their identities (and impacts their decisions at future turning points). Erikson studied the impact a child's relationship with parents, teachers and peers has on these struggles. His psychosocial theory places children ages 6 to 12 in the stage of industry versus inferiority. This stage deals with the child's focus on developing skills, completing tasks, earning recognition and comparing their work to that of children their same age. The stage of identity versus identity diffusion (ages 13 to 18) involves a youth's search for identity through the integration of their past roles (friend, student, sibling, family member, etc.). The youth seeks to resolve conflicts between who they are, who they are in relation to others and who they want to be.

Lawrence Kohlberg (born 1927) developed a theory of moral development. It traces the steps children take toward making their own moral judgments. Although Kohlberg's theory does not assign stages to age groups, most children and youth age 7 to 17 would be found in either the preconventional or the conventional levels. In the preconventional (or premoral) level, a child or youth's moral decisions are governed by the rules of right and wrong dictated by our society. These decisions are further impacted by any punishments or rewards offered by the authority who imposes the rules. The conventional level is based on social conformity to the expectations of family, peers and country. The child or youth makes decisions in order to gain approval and to maintain the larger social order.

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Handout Two:

Developmental Characteristics

Younger Elementary Children (7-9 years old)

Physical Characteristics

- minimal upper body strength
- mastering bowel control
- energetic, but tire easily
- developing body coordination

Mental Characteristics

- concrete, literal thinkers
- rule-based morals
- short attention spans—learn best through senses and activity
- easily frightened

Social Characteristics

- learning to live apart from family and friends
- outgoing and loving
- prone to hero worship
- mirror the behavior and actions they see in adults

Handout Three:

Developmental Characteristics

Older Elementary Children (10-12 years old)

Physical Characteristics

- girls maturing faster than boys
- greater self-control when performing motor activities
- beginning to develop sexually
- high energy, but may complain of being tired

Mental Characteristics

- beginning stages of abstract thinking
- beginning to challenge the answers adults give
- strong sense of right and wrong
- strive to complete projects and to do them well

Social Characteristics

- learning to live apart from family and friends
- boys often relate to others in contests of strength
- girls will often develop crushes
- some boys beginning to relate to girls

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Handout Four:

Developmental Characteristics

Junior High Youth (12-14 years old)

Physical Characteristics

- deepening of male voices
- concerned with personal appearance
- females begin to menstruate
- awkward due to incredible growth spurts

Mental Characteristics

- idealistic—may come across as negativity
- starting to be able to put themselves in another person’s “shoes”
- decision-making process focuses on the present
- competitive

Social Characteristics

- fear of embarrassment
- urgent need to belong
- dealing with strong sexual feelings
- desire and respect strong adult leadership

Handout Five:

Developmental Characteristics

Senior High Youth (14-17 years old)

Physical Characteristics

- largest and strongest campers at camp
- physical appearance and attributes are a major concern
- need privacy
- need more sleep

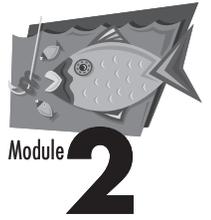
Mental Characteristics

- abstract thinkers
- specialization in selected skills
- experience strong feelings and emotions
- critical of self

Social Characteristics

- urgent need for acceptance or attention
- increasing peer pressure to engage in drinking, smoking, drugs and sex
- question authority
- able to take on responsibility

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Module Two for Trainers

Expected Outcomes:

- Participants will demonstrate a better understanding of the developmental characteristics of the age groups they serve.
- Participants will state how the developmental characteristics affect the staff's day-to-day interaction with the campers.
- Participants will cite the policies and procedures of the camp or conference center that impact the age groups the ministry serves.

Estimated Time: One hour for each of the four age groups (if done independent of one another) or two and a half hours if all four age groups are combined in one session (plus any time spent discussing the policies and procedures of your camp and conference center).

Materials Needed: Flipchart, markers and copies of Handouts One, Two, Three, Four and Five.

Notes to Leaders:

- If your group of trainers will only be discussing one age group:

Use Module Three: Practitioners which follows this one. If your group is smaller than nine participants, deal with the three sections of developmental characteristics one at a time. Use the final product (the combined collections of situations) as a training tool for the rest of the staff.

- If your group of trainers is discussing two or more age groups, one at a time or together in one session:

It is important that you familiarize yourself with the developmental characteristics in the handouts, so you can help guide the group through the following steps. This exercise covers children and youth (1st-12th grade) in four age groupings. The steps are the same for each age group, so you can make copies of the handouts for just the age ranges you want to address. This allows you the flexibility to present the age groupings at different times or all at once. The training design is intended as a “springboard” for opportunities to discuss your site’s policies and procedures on a variety of topics (i.e. homesickness, bedwetting, discipline, etc.). A list of topics that might be prompted by a discussion of developmental characteristics is included.

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Process:

1. Ask the participants to introduce themselves and to name the age group with whom they most enjoy working and one thing about that age group they particularly appreciate.
2. Give participants copies of Handout One, “Developmental Theories,” and any other handout that relates to the age groups you will be discussing. It may help to walk through the programs your site offers campers of the different age ranges
3. Divide the participants into small groups according to the age group with whom they will be working with during the summer (try to make the groups no larger than 6 people). Have the groups form circles of their chairs in different parts of the room. Give each group a sheet of paper from the flipchart and a marker.
4. Give each group the task of looking at the physical, mental and social characteristics of their assigned age group. Ask the groups to brainstorm and then discuss situations the staff might encounter from a camper this age based on the developmental characteristics. (i.e. younger elementary children lack of upper body strength. Staff may need to help these camper with drink pitchers when they want more to drink in the dining hall).
5. Once the groups have completed their task, bring them back to the large group. Ask a representative from each group to present the collection of situations to the rest of the group. When all of the groups from that age group have presented their collections of situations, open the discussion up to the whole group and ask guiding questions that lead to any important points that were not mentioned by the circles.
6. (Optional) With the completed collection of situations from that age group, you can now discuss particular site policies and procedures that tie in to these particular developmental characteristics. Use the list below for suggestions of areas to be discussed. Even though there will be different age group leaders represented in the large group, many of the discussed policies and procedures will apply to all of the site’s programs.

Younger Elementary Children (ages 7-9)

Physical	Mental	Social
Bedwetting	Ghost stories	Homesickness

Older Elementary Children (ages 10-12)

Physical	Mental	Social
The importance of rest time	Camper discipline	Rough play during swim time

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Junior High Youth (ages 12-14)

Physical

When a female camper menstruates for the first time

Mental

Competitive games

Social

Camper crushes on staff

Senior High Youth (ages 14-17)

Physical

Fighting

Mental

When campers ask the tough questions

Social

Camper-to-camper relationships

7. Repeat step #5 for all of the age groups addressed.
8. The three collections of situations could later be combined on one sheet of paper and hung on the wall during staff training. This paper could be used as a training tool to help give the staff a better understanding of the age group that they will be working with during the summer. This combined list could also be part of a staff manual that the staff, use as a reference tool throughout the program season.



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Module Three for the Practitioner

Expected Outcomes:

- Participants will demonstrate an understanding of the developmental characteristics of the age groups they will serve.
- Participants will state how the developmental characteristics affect their day-to-day interaction with the campers.
- Participants will apply the policies and procedures of the Outdoor Ministry to specific camp situations.

Estimated Time: 45 minutes for each of the four age groups. Additional time may be spent covering the policies and procedures of your camp and conference center.

Materials Needed: Flipchart, markers and copies of Handouts One, Two, Three, Four and Five.

Notes to Leaders:

It is important that you familiarize yourself with the developmental characteristics in the handouts, so you can help guide the group through the following steps. This exercise covers children and youth (7-17 years of age) in four age groupings. The steps are repeated for each age group, so you can make copies of the handouts for just the ages you serve. This allows you the flexibility to present the age groupings at different times during your training. The exercise is designed as a “springboard” for opportunities to share your site’s policies and procedures on a variety of topics (i.e. homesickness, bed-wetting, discipline, etc.). A list of topics that might be prompted by a discussion of developmental characteristics is included.

Process:

1. Review with participants the kinds of programs your site offers campers of this age range. Give a brief introduction to developmental theory. Pass out copies of Handout One, “Developmental Theories,” and quickly introduce the theories of Piaget, Erikson and Kohlberg.
2. Give each participant a copy of the handout for the age group they will be considering and divide into three groups. Be sure there are experienced staff members in each group. Give each small group a sheet of paper from the flipchart and a marker. Assign each group the task of looking at the physical, mental or social characteristics of the age group being considered. Ask the groups to brainstorm and then discuss situations the staff might encounter from a camper this age based on the developmental characteristics.
3. Once the groups have completed their task, bring them back to the large group. Ask that a representative from each group share findings with the rest of the group. After

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each group has reported, open the discussion up to the whole group and ask guiding questions that lead to any important points that were not mentioned by the circles. (Optional) If you wish, you can now share particular site policies and procedures that tie in to these particular developmental characteristics.

Younger Elementary Children (ages 7-9)

Physical	Mental	Social
Bedwetting	Ghost stories	Homesickness

Older Elementary Children (ages 10-12)

Physical	Mental	Social
The importance of rest time	Camper discipline	Rough play during swim time

Junior High Youth (ages 12-14)

Physical	Mental	Social
When a female camper menstruates for the first time	Competitive games	Camper crushes on staff

Senior High Youth (ages 14-17)

Physical	Mental	Social
Fighting	When campers ask the tough questions	Camper-to-camper relationships

- The three collections of situations could later be combined on one sheet of paper and hung on the wall during staff training. This paper could help the staff when they begin work on the next age group and also help them to understand the transitions that take place between the age groups. This combined list could also be part of a staff manual that the participants use as a reference tool throughout the program season.
- Repeat this process until all age groups with which participants will be working have been discussed.

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RESOURCES

Bloom, Joel W., A. Cooper Ballentine, et al. *Camper Guidance: A Basic Handbook*. Martinsville, Indiana: American Camping Association 1996.

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Thomas, R. Murray, *Comparing Theories of Child Development*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth Publishing 1996.