

Children's Needs by Age Group

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People are created with a common set of universal needs. We all need love, security, encouragement, significance, and purpose. As we develop, we begin to understand those needs in greater detail. If those who care for us do not satisfy those needs, we seek to satisfy those needs for ourselves. In ministry, it is our goal to do all we can to satisfy the needs of others while shifting their focus from us as providers, to God as the ultimate source of satisfaction.

It is important to understand the needs of the children by their age groups. These needs are divided into three major age groups; but, as the ministry grows, and the number of children increases, the divisions will need to be divided further. Here are some thoughts about the general needs of the children in each of the three major age groups.

Nursery (Birth – 3 years old)

1. The children in this age-group experience “separation anxiety” when they are dropped off in the classroom or nursery by their parents. It is our primary challenge to help the children adjust and “get through” this fear. Those who have been “regulars” in the nursery do adjust to being separated from their parents, and by the time they get to be 3-year-olds, they are ready for the preschool classrooms. It is the first-time children who have the most difficulty with the situation.
2. The children need to be loved.
3. The children need a fun environment.
4. The children need to feel secure and not scared.
5. We need to be sensitive not only to the children, but also to their parent(s). The parent(s) have the same concerns as the children. It would be good to develop a “First-time Parent Packet” that highlights how we care for their children (cleanliness, security, care, etc.).
6. The adults who serve in the nursery areas need to be trained to be sensitive to both the children and parent(s).
7. The environment needs to be visually stimulating and inviting. First-time children must be interested in coming into the room because of what they see or hear.
8. There needs to be fun things to do. There needs to be variety to suit the individual children (play areas, soft touch areas, cushion areas, etc.) There needs to be half-walls to divide areas. Children can wander and choose based on preference or mood.
9. We want the children to “learn” or feel: “Church is good.”



Overall theme: **“Others will care for me.”**

Preschool (3 – 5 years old)

1. Preschool-aged children also experience “separation anxiety” when they are dropped off by their parents. It is the first-time children who have the most difficulty. The CM team members who serve in this area must be good at personally greeting the children and getting them connected with other children or involved in some activity right away.
2. The children need appropriate tasks in which to engage.
3. The children need comfortable surroundings and furniture.
4. The children need to learn the “foundational” character traits of respect, kindness, and the “hows,” and “whys” of things.
5. The children have expectations for the adults who serve in the classroom. The parents, as in the nursery, share those expectations. The adults who serve in the preschool area must be gentle, yet sometimes firm, kind, patient, sensitive to the needs of the child, and fun.
6. The children need to begin learning basic Bible truths. The emphasis needs to be on the principles, not on the “facts” of the Bible story. The “major” Bible stories need to be covered.
7. The children are beginning to understand the difference between “good,” and “bad.”
8. The children need to be shown the “conflicts” in the stories. They are interested in “good guy” / “bad guy” aspects of stories.
9. The Bible stories that are “taught” must be applicable and familiar to the children, or at least contain applicable and familiar aspects to them.
10. The children need to learn how to share.
11. The children need to learn the value of getting along with others.
12. The children need to learn the value of an orderly classroom.
13. The children need to learn the value of “waiting their turn.”
14. The “lessons” and classroom environment must be visibly stimulating.
15. The adults who serve these children must give their primary attention to the children, not the “subject” of the lesson, or the “schedule” of the session.



Overall theme: **“Others have needs too.”**

Elementary (6 – 12 years old)

1. Elementary-aged children are able to consider “adult” reasoning. They are active, inquisitive, fun, confident, and very energetic. They want to do the right thing and will listen to reason when they sense they are respected.
2. The elementary child needs to feel loved personally, not just as a member of the corporate class.
3. The children need to learn how to follow directions.
4. The children need to learn how to share.
5. Correct choices and behavior must be rewarded.
6. The children need to be shown (or be inspired to discover) personal applications to the basic Bible truths.
7. The children need to know that God cares for them personally.
8. Bible memorization is valued only as much as it can be shown to assist in personal choice-making skills (not just to win a prize).
9. The children need to take responsibility for their own actions and maturity.
10. The children need to learn how to discern between right and wrong choices (both for themselves and for others).
11. The children need to develop a concern for others.
12. The children must learn that they need to care for others.
13. The adults who serve these children must teach through being role-models.
14. The adults who serve these children must become involved in the lives of the children apart from just teaching a “Bible lesson.”



Overall theme: **“I need to care for others.”**