Middle Years (7-10 years) Factsheet

Prepared by Child Witness Service

Children in this age group face many of the same linguistic and cognitive challenges as pre-schoolers although they are more advanced in their language and understanding. They are less literal than preschoolers and are beginning to develop logical thinking which allows limited problem solving. They begin to imitate 'adult-like' conversation, but may not always have a mature grasp of the language and ideas.

Words and Language

- Sometimes have difficulty with the conditional and passive voice, i.e. "You went there after school. Is that what you are now saying?" Instead, "Did you go there after school?"
- Will learn an additional 5000 words during these years, but will not always understand their meanings.
- Know primary colours but will not know shades.
- Will still have difficulty understanding questions put as statements or fact, i.e. "I put to you… or "I suggest that…".
- Frequently misunderstand questions involving negatives, particularly multiple negatives; they may apply the negative to the wrong part of the sentence.
- During this stage, children develop the ability to think about more than one idea at a time, however lack the linguistic skills to put all the parts of a complex sentence together.
- Will not remember the beginning of a long question by the end.
- Understand sentences better when phrased in the subject-verb-object order.
- Until they approach adolescence, they cannot interpret pronouns that precede the referring noun, i.e. "They talked to you about what Bill did".
- Still frequently misunderstand complex sentences that contain "Do you remember?", or tag questions, i.e. "You went to school that day, didn't you?"
- Understand generalisations and can give more than one meaning to a word, i.e. a persons 'house' can be an apartment, and that you can 'touch' something with a part of your body other than your hand.

Cognitive

- Children make substantial gains in development during this period.
- Becoming aware of differing perspectives, however they cannot infer other people's intentions or feelings.
- Developing logical thinking so they can reason and solve problems. They can also predict events and foresee some consequences. They employ these logical operations before they can identify or understand them.
- Cannot apply logical processes to abstract ideas, i.e. hypothetical questions.
- Continue to have difficulty self-regulating emotion and monitoring comprehension, particularly under stress.
- Assume rules of every day conversation when giving evidence and do not understand the adversarial context, leading to misunderstandings.
- Attribute knowledge to adults, do not appreciate that adults do not know something that they know. Tend to give little or no details in their account because they assume that the adult listener knows the details.

Time and measurement

- Can recognise similarities and differences between groups of objects or events, i.e. if something is "like" something else; or "taller/shorter" than another.
- Beginning to compare time periods with other time periods with which they are familiar, i.e. the length of recess or a TV program. May know current year and the year they were born.
- Telling the time begins about 8 and is usually well established by 9 or 10.
- Know several common periods of time including seasons, days of the week, and towards the end of this age stage the months of the year.

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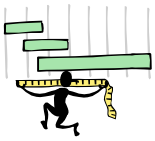
- School aged children can use logical reasoning to help isolate dates, i.e. “I was wearing shorts so it must have been summer”.
- Cannot accurately estimate distances or sizes.
- May also have trouble relating events in chronological order
- Will have familiarity with numbers, but may use them in a rough way i.e. saying something happened 50 times, and later saying it happened 200 times (indicating it happened many times).



- Scale drawings and models made by children under 10 may not accurately depict distances or placement of objects. The ability to use scale models increases gradually with age. “Young children may have difficulty simultaneously viewing the model as an object in its own right and as a symbol of something else.[i]”

Things to Avoid

- Hypothetical and tag questions.
- Frowning, loud or cross tone.
- Repetitive questions.
- Questions that jump around in time.
- Jargon and legal terms.

Things that are helpful

- You can check that children of this age understand uncommon words by asking them to use the word in a sentence.
- Rule of thumb a question should not include more words then the age of the child, i.e. for a 7 year old there should not be more then seven words in the sentence.
- Starting evidence early in the day with regular, planned breaks.
- Signpost a change of topic and set the scene for the new topic. “We have finished talking about when you lived at the farm. We are now going to talk about when you lived with your grandparents.”
- When asking questions requiring logical thinking to predict events use examples.

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[i] Sas, L. **The Interaction Between Children’s Developmental Capabilities and the Courtroom Environment: The Impact on Testimonial Competency**. Department of Justice Canada. November 2002 page 19