NO PREP

School-Age Development

Includes: Student reading, case study, differentiated questions, teacher key

Name: Period: Date:

School-Age Development

The Years of Getting Good at Things

The school-age years, roughly six to twelve, are the least dramatic and most underrated stretch of childhood. There is no equivalent of learning to walk or hitting puberty, and the changes are steady rather than explosive, which is exactly why they get overlooked. Erik Erikson named this stage industry versus inferiority, and the word industry means something specific here, referring to the drive to produce, build, and become genuinely competent at real things. School-age children want to be good at something, whether that is reading, soccer, drawing, video games, or an encyclopedic knowledge of some narrow topic. When they find areas where effort produces visible improvement, they build a durable sense of competence. When they repeatedly try and fail without support, or when the only feedback available is comparison to someone better, they build inferiority, which is a belief that they are simply not capable. This is the stage where a child's self-concept shifts from concrete description to comparative judgment. A four-year-old says they

Name: **Period:** **Date:**

School-Age Development

The Years of Getting Good at Things

The school-age years, roughly six to twelve, are the least dramatic and most underrated stretch of childhood. There is no equivalent of learning to walk or hitting puberty, and the changes are steady rather than explosive, which is exactly why they get overlooked. Erik Erikson named this stage industry versus inferiority, and the word industry means something specific here, referring to the drive to produce, build, and become genuinely competent at real things. School-age children want to be good at something, whether that is reading, soccer, drawing, video games, or an encyclopedic knowledge of some narrow topic. When they find areas where effort produces visible improvement, they build a durable sense of competence. When they repeatedly try and fail without support, or when the only feedback available is comparison to someone better, they build inferiority, which is a belief that they are simply not capable. This is the stage where a child's self-concept shifts from concrete description to comparative judgment. A four-year-old says they have a red bike. A ten-year-old says they are the third-fastest kid in their class. That shift toward social comparison is developmentally normal and it makes this stage the one where adult framing of failure matters enormously, since the child is now actively deciding what kind of person they are based on evidence. That is why praising effort and strategy tends to hold up better than praising ability. A child told they are smart has a label to protect, while a child told they worked through something hard has a method to repeat.

Thinking That Finally Holds Still

Piaget called this stage concrete operational thought, and the changes it brings solve most of the puzzles that stumped the preschooler. Conservation now makes sense, and the same child who insisted the tall glass held more will look at the identical demonstration and explain that it is the same water, just in a different shape. Underlying that is reversibility, the ability to mentally run an action backward, so

the child can imagine pouring the juice back and see that nothing changed. Classification develops, meaning children can sort objects by multiple features at once and understand that a category can sit inside a larger category, so a child grasps that beagles are dogs and dogs are animals. Seriation develops, meaning the ability to arrange items in order along a dimension such as length or weight. Egocentrism substantially declines, and school-age children become far better at taking another person's perspective, which is what makes real friendship, cooperation, and genuine apology possible. The word concrete is the important limit. These children reason powerfully about things they can see, handle, or picture, but they struggle with the purely abstract and hypothetical. This is why school-age math instruction leans on manipulatives, diagrams, and real quantities, and why a word problem about actual apples lands where the same problem stated as pure algebra does not. The limit is genuinely a limit rather than a teaching failure. Abstract reasoning arrives with the formal operational stage in adolescence, and no amount of earlier drilling reliably moves that arrival forward.

Friends Become the Main Event

The social center of gravity shifts decisively during these years. Preschool friendship is built on who happens to be nearby, but school-age friendship is built on shared interests, mutual trust, and loyalty, and children this age can articulate what they value in a friend. Peer groups grow more structured, often organizing by gender through the middle of this period, and they establish their own norms about dress, language, humor, and behavior. Peer acceptance becomes a major driver of well-being, and social status differences become visible and stable in ways adults often underestimate. Children who are consistently rejected face genuinely elevated risks for loneliness, academic difficulty, and later mental health problems, which is why adult attention to social dynamics matters even when the conflicts look trivial from the outside. Belonging to a group also brings conformity pressure, and this is the stage where a child may abandon a favorite shirt or interest because of a single comment. Bullying becomes a recognizable pattern in these years, defined by repeated aggression combined with a power imbalance, which distinguishes it from ordinary conflict between equals. Meanwhile family remains critically important even as it becomes less visible, since children who feel securely connected at home handle peer difficulty markedly better. The peer world is where they practice, but home is

still where they refuel. Parents often read a child's growing privacy as rejection and pull back in response. The research points the other way, since availability matters more than access, and a child who knows where the adult is uses them more.

Steady Bodies, Uneven Timing

Physical growth during the school-age years is the slowest and steadiest of childhood, typically running about two to three inches and four to seven pounds per year. Coordination, balance, strength, and reaction time all improve substantially, which is why organized sports become genuinely playable at this age in a way they are not for preschoolers. Fine motor control reaches near-adult precision, so handwriting becomes fluent and detailed drawing, instruments, and construction projects all become possible. The steadiness ends abruptly toward the back half of this stage. Puberty begins earlier than most people expect, typically starting around ages eight to thirteen for girls and nine to fourteen for boys, which means a single sixth-grade classroom can contain children at wildly different points of physical development. That variation is normal and it is socially loaded, since early-maturing and late-maturing children face different pressures and are often treated as older or younger than they are. Health habits established during these years, meaning sleep, physical activity, and eating patterns, tend to persist, and school-age children need roughly nine to twelve hours of sleep, a requirement that collides badly with homework, screens, and activity schedules. Chronic insufficient sleep in this age group shows up as inattention, irritability, and academic difficulty, and it is frequently mistaken for other problems entirely before anyone asks how much the child is actually sleeping. The collision is largely structural rather than a matter of willpower, since homework, activities, and screens all expand into the evening while the school start time does not move to compensate.

Rules, Fairness, and the Inner Voice

Moral reasoning takes a recognizable step forward in the school-age years. Younger children generally judge behavior by consequences, so the child who broke more cups is naughtier regardless of intent. School-age children increasingly weigh intentions, understanding that an accident differs from deliberate harm even when the damage matches. Fairness becomes a dominant concern, and adults working with this age group learn quickly that these children have finely tuned and loudly expressed detectors for unequal treatment. Rules take on unusual importance, and school-age

children often become rigid rule enforcers, insisting on the letter of a game's rules and objecting fiercely to anyone who bends them. That rigidity gradually softens as children begin to understand that rules are social agreements that groups create and can change by consent, which is a genuinely sophisticated insight. Emotional development centers on regulation and on the growing ability to hide feelings, since school-age children learn that emotions can be managed and concealed, which is both a real skill and a reason adults sometimes miss distress. Self-esteem in these years becomes domain-specific rather than global, so a child can feel confident academically and insecure athletically at the same time. The most protective factor across all of it is having at least one area of genuine competence and at least one adult who consistently notices it. The area does not have to be academic or impressive to anyone else. What matters is that the child can see their own improvement in it, because visible improvement is the evidence the whole stage runs on.

Key Information: The School-Age Years

Detail	Information
Age Range	About 6 to 12 years old
Erikson's Stage	Industry versus inferiority
Piaget's Stage	Concrete operational thought
Reversibility	Mentally running an action backward; makes conservation work
Seriation	Arranging items in order by length, weight, or another dimension
Friendship Basis	Shared interests, trust, and loyalty rather than proximity
Bullying	Repeated aggression plus a power imbalance, not ordinary conflict
Sleep Need	About 9 to 12 hours; shortfalls look like inattention

Case Study: The Fastest Kid in Fourth Grade

Ms. Okafor keeps a note in her fourth-grade plan book about Diego. In September he described himself as fast. By November he described himself as the fourth-fastest boy in the class, and he was correct, because the class had timed themselves at recess. By January he had stopped running at recess entirely. When she asked, he shrugged and said there was no point since he was not going to win. He said it flatly, the way a person states a fact they have already checked twice and stopped arguing with. Ms. Okafor had seen this before. She started asking him to help time the younger students at the Friday fitness block, and to record the results. Within three weeks Diego was running again, mostly to demonstrate the starting stance to second graders. In her notes she wrote that nothing about his speed had changed all year. What changed was whether the only available measure of himself was a ranking against people who were faster.

1. Using Erikson's stage for this age, explain what was at risk when Diego stopped running.

2. Explain how the shift in how Diego described himself reflects normal school-age development.

Multiple Choice

1. A child mentally pours juice back to see nothing changed. This ability is called what?

a) Classification

b) Seriation

c) Reversibility

d) Centration

2. What distinguishes bullying from ordinary conflict, according to the reading?

a) It is repeated aggression combined with a power imbalance

b) It occurs between children of different ages

c) It happens only at school rather than at home

d) It always involves physical rather than verbal aggression

3. Why does school-age math instruction rely on manipulatives and real quantities?

a) Children this age have not developed seriation skills

b) Manipulatives are the only way to teach conservation

c) Children this age cannot yet classify all objects into groups

d) Concrete thinkers reason best about things they can picture

Matching

Write the letter of the correct definition on the line next to each term.

Term	Definition
1. ___ Industry	A) Judging oneself by measuring against how others are performing
2. ___ Concrete operational	B) The drive to build, produce, and become genuinely competent at real things
3. ___ Seriation	C) Piaget's stage of logical thought about things that can be seen or pictured
4. ___ Social comparison	D) Feeling capable in one area while feeling insecure in another
5. ___ Domain-specific self-esteem	E) Arranging a set of items in order along a dimension such as length

Fill-in-the-Blank

1. Erikson called this stage industry versus _____.

2. School-age children need about 9 to _____ hours of sleep.

3. Sorting beagles into dogs and dogs into animals is called _____.

Short Answer

Answer each question in 2-4 complete sentences.

1. Explain why the word concrete is an important limit on school-age thinking.

_____

_____

_____

2. Explain why school-age children can feel confident and insecure at the same time.

3. Explain why insufficient sleep in this age group is often misread as another problem.