



What About Sixth Graders?

Do They Belong in Youth Sunday School?

In children and youth Sunday School conferences, the question is often asked, “How do I plan for sixth graders? Youth Sunday School or Children’s Sunday School?”

The following information was provided by **LifeWay Christian Resources**:

Fact: Teenagers do not all develop on the same timeline. In relationship to peers, some reach puberty earlier than others.

Fact: Girls mature, on the average, two years before boys.

If you add up these two facts and do a little deduction, you come to the conclusion that there is a great possibility of having a class of sixth graders with a wide developmental gap. If you have a late maturing boy and an early maturing girl, they can be four years apart developmentally, even if they share the same birthday.

This dilemma is multiplied if you group sixth graders with seventh and eighth graders in middle school type grouping. The gap is magnified if you include sixth graders with the entire youth group.

Here are a few general principles to consider as you make your decision:

- No matter where sixth graders are located in a school system, they will still learn content on a sixth grade level.
- Because sixth graders think mostly in concrete terms, they need materials and methods that do not require them to think in abstract terms (at least not all the time).
- Although some sixth graders have matured physically, emotional maturity often lags behind. A sixth-grade girl in a tenth-grade body may be attractive to an eleventh-grade boy.
- While sixth graders may be only two years behind eighth graders chronologically, some late maturers are as much as five years behind developmentally. Loss of self-worth may be the price paid when a child cannot succeed at the skill levels of older kids.
- Most sixth graders are not ready to interact socially with seventh through twelfth graders. When grouped with the junior high and high schoolers, older youth may drop out, rather than cope with the immaturity of sixth graders.
- “Too much too soon” for a sixth grader often results in boredom. Involvement in all youth activities at an early age may lead to burnout and dropout by the time they become older youth.

The important thing, of course, is to help your sixth graders have the best possible church experiences. If you already have sixth graders in your youth ministry or if space or numbers dictate that you must have them in your youth ministry, make every effort to assure that they have the opportunity to learn and mature at their own God given level.