



First Grade — An Extraordinary Year

Magical Sixes—Maturing Sevens

Important things to know about — Your child in First Grade

- Amazing kids, *amazing* brains
- Why sixes are open, but sevens are less so
- Why helping kids succeed in school makes them *happier* and more *optimistic*. Hint: kids *hate* failing.

Six-Year-Olds in First Grade

Welcome to the wonderful, complex world of first grade. It's a fabulous year, and it's a study in contrasts. In general, sixes are open to everything new, while sevens need to regroup from six! In fact, your child's development will follow this pattern of up/down and inner/outer focus from now on.

One year is a year of open, outward-looking children; the next they turn inward, are more moody and less secure. This is sure true for ages six and seven. Sixes are outgoing and normally cheerful. Sevens are still happy, but more self-conscious and sometimes feel that "nobody likes me." Don't worry, it's all right on schedule. Listen and reassure. Provide love and support, so they can bounce around. Both years are wonderful years for kids, but ***only if they sleep eight hours and eat a good breakfast. Learning brains need protein to work.***

No matter the phase, the best way to keep them feeling confident and happy is to help them succeed in school. Reading is the key to success at school and beyond. Young children learn to love reading by being read to. Read, read, read to them. *Thirty minutes a day keeps failure away.* Good readers learn more easily, get higher grades, and look forward to the next grade. Reading well makes for

more successful, happier kids. It feels good to do well. It feels awful to fail. Self-esteem is a *result* of success, not a *cause* of success. Optimism comes from knowing they did their best.

Sixes are hard-working, even if messy. They have a "need for speed," so work is often sloppy. At this stage adults need to remember, "It's the process, not the product." Criticism is met with a flood of tears; praise with hugs and smiles. It is your choice!

All in all, first grade is a great year. Enjoy your child in this year of six—it truly is a miraculous year. Specialists say this is the year of the largest brain development in our lives. Who wouldn't want to be six?

Characteristics of a typical six-year-old

Physical	Active, with somewhat better control of body. Still tends to fall sideways out of chairs. Likes lots of physical activity, but tires easily and is often sick. Vision is maturing, reads more easily. Points to one word at a time, as eyes can't track well from left to right. Chews pencils, hair, or fingernails to help with discomfort of new teeth. Being speedy seems a need. Expect sloppy work. "It's the process, not the product."
Mental/ Academic	Loves new games and new ideas. Enjoys cooperating with others. Asks <i>lots</i> of questions, loves to paint, color, fix things, be in plays. Tries <i>way</i> more than can finish. Beginning to take an interest in skills, techniques. <i>Their inborn skills start to show up this year. Watch for their interests and help them explore ways to enjoy what they love.</i>
Emotional/ Social	Competition is natural at this age, so not always a "good sport." Either rushing or falling behind. Enjoys playing with other kids. Easily upset when makes mistakes or is criticized. Needs a lot of reassurance. Tests authority, complains, tattles, and even throws tantrums.

Based on *Yardsticks Children in the Classroom Ages 4 – 14*, by Chip Woods, NE Foundation for Children, Turner Falls, MA, rev. ed. 2007.

Seven-Year-Olds in First Grade

Seven-year-olds are very dear. They have just been through the amazing experience of being six. They learned a great deal, and their brains and bodies matured very rapidly. They are more aware about life, adults, school and *themselves*. So, it's not surprising that they need to withdraw once in a while to find somewhere to process all these things by playing alone.

Expect that your sunny six-year-old will gradually turn into a more serious seven-year old who needs time alone to just "be." No need to discuss, just be patient and offer lots of love and support. Yes, even when they are moody and sulking. It will pass. They are still very young children, still love you and still need you. In fact, sevens need *constant* reassurance.

Seven is a great time to start talking to them about things that they like and dislike, because sevens *do* have strong opinions about each. Also take note of their interests and inborn skills. We don't get to choose whether we have a great voice or mechanical ability, but we *all* come with inborn talents and particular strengths. Help your child identify these and then show them how they can use them to do well in school.

Do they learn best by reading or by using pencils and paints? By talking about what they are learning or by playing games that teach the lesson? The more you know about them and how they learn, the better they'll do in school.

Teaching Optimism

Optimism is a mindset that focuses on *what we do*. Pessimism is a mindset that focuses on things *outside of us*.

People are not born as pessimists or optimists. We learn to feel helpless or hopeful based on how much our actions matter. Infants who cry and get help are on the way to being optimists. They learned that they matter.

Later on, children who try something and succeed and take credit are stronger optimists. If they say, "It was only luck," they're pessimists. However,

children who fail and own up to *why* they failed are *super* optimists!

Adults can help kids become optimists by focusing on them: their ideas, plans and hard work. Adults who allow the "blame game" are reinforcing a *deadly sense of pessimism*. They are telling children, "What you do doesn't matter. What matters is the teacher, the other kids, the stupid book...."

Pessimistic children feel helpless, give up, and think, "Why try?" Optimistic children try, succeed or fail, and try again.

It's up to us to teach them that "It won't fly if you don't try!" Their happiness depends on trying.

Characteristics of a typical seven-year-old

Physical	Vision is "myopic." Focuses on details, presses down hard with pencils, makes tiny letters. Tends to work with head on desk. Can work alone for longer periods, is more serious about work. Can get tense about work and get ill from worry. Needs help staying calm, managing stress. Enjoys confined spaces. Tends to hurt a lot, with some hurts real, some not.
Mental/ Academic	Good listener and talker. Likes to have "conversations." Enjoy! Knows more words, very interested in the meaning of words. <i>Have dictionary ready</i> . Loves "codes," board games, taking things apart, putting back together. Enjoys writing notes. Help them write "thank you" notes, invitations, directions, etc. Works slowly, but emotionally, <i>must</i> compete work. Likes to review and fix work. <i>Buy lots of erasers!</i> Loves to classify things. Play guessing games: "Is it a...or a...?"
Emotional/ Social	Sevens are more self-aware and tend to have an inner focus. Can be moody/touchy. Has <i>strong</i> likes and dislikes. Needs a lot of security. Is serious, works hard. Doesn't like to take risks, so give lots of praise for trying. Can do only one thing well at a time, so choose one: neat work or correct answers? Good age to teach mental habits that result in an optimistic child. Ask: What did you do that led to success? Why do you think you failed? Blaming others leads to pessimism, so focus on what <i>they</i> could have done differently.

Based on *Yardsticks Children in the Classroom Ages 4 – 14*, by Chip Woods, NE Foundation for Children, Turner Falls, MA, rev. ed. 2007. *The Optimistic Child*, by Martin Seligman, Ph.D., Houghton Mifflin Co., 1996.