



Second Grade— Lots of Energy, Lots of Ideas

Maturing Sevens—Energetic Eights

Important things to know about— Your child in Second Grade

- Energetic, enthusiastic—an idea a minute! Needs help planning and following through.
- Manual skills don't match ideas, so expect frustration.
- Why helping kids focus on their skills and succeeding in school makes them *happier* and more *optimistic*. Hint: kids want to know themselves and love doing well.
- Second graders are growing very quickly, so they *must* have eight hours of sleep and a nutritious breakfast.

Sevens and Eights in Second Grade

Second grade is a “wonder year” for kids. Think about a bouncing red ball. Give it a toss and watch it go up, down, in and out, eager to go off in random directions, always ready to do more, more, more!

They have new ideas, new questions. Their energy is contagious. They have lots of plans for big projects, love to talk, tell jokes, and on and on. They are “into” rules, want things to be logical, and above all *fair*. Watch out, the “fairness police” are coming!

All in all, be prepared to be delighted, amused exhausted, surprised, and maybe, a little confused by your second grader.

If second graders are so excited about things and seem to enjoy so much, why does self-doubt creep in? While boys and girls played together before, they'll now only play with other kids their own gender. If they have so many ideas and interests, why are they now suddenly so frustrated?

As you have probably guessed, it's due to very rapid changes in their brains and their bodies. They are growing very quickly, are very energetic and move quickly, but tire easily. They have noticed the difference between boys and girls, so tend to stick to their own kind.

Their wonderful mental bursts result in exciting, charming ideas, but their motor skills are not quite up to *doing* all these great things. Be ready for “I'm dumb,” “This is too hard,” “I'm no good at this,” “I'm bored.” *Each is just a way of saying “I thought I could do this, but I can't.”*

That's why they're often frustrated and embarrassed by failure. They *want* adults who can help them think ideas through ideas, make a plan, learn to take smaller steps, and help (only) with things they can't do.

Their lack of skills means that second graders need to spend a lot of time practicing their hand/motor skills, like handwriting, arts/crafts, charts, and simple geometric shapes. *Practice will help them get ready for third grade.* Set aside time and support them as they work at improving their skills. Skills equal pride and a determination to try again.

Most importantly, don't let them quit and abandon projects feeling like a failure. *That creates pessimistic children.* Fortunately, at this age, they are willing to try again with a little help. Learning to keep at it and complete difficult projects is essential for these kids. *Trying again and again, improving on skills and results, helps create optimists.*

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

Discovering Inborn Talents

You have brains in your head.

You have feet in your shoes.

You can steer yourself in any direction you choose.

No one says it better than Dr. Seuss in *Oh, the Places You'll Go*.

Brains, feet and choices. What a great message to give children! Repeat it over and over and over.

Why? Jennifer Fox, author of *Your Child's Strengths*, ask us to imagine going through life with people telling you what was *right* with you instead of what was *wrong* with you.

That's exactly what children should hear and exactly what they should feel, for we are all born with specific talents. We are all good at something; otherwise, the human race wouldn't have survived.

Characteristics of a typical seven-year-old

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| 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 and is more serious about work. Can get tense about work, gets 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, good talker. Likes to have "conversations." Knows more words, very interested in the meaning of words, so <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> complete 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, tend to have an inner focus. Can be moody/touchy. Has <i>strong</i> likes and dislikes. Doesn't like to take risks, so give lots of praise for trying. Can do only one thing well at a time. Good age to teach optimism. Ask: What did you do to succeed? Why do you think you failed? Blaming 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.

Second grade is the perfect time to help kids understand their own brains and bodies, and their own inborn talents and skills. It'll help them understand themselves and others. They'll gain confidence in themselves and praise others: "Wow, you're good at that. I'm not, but I am good at..." It'll help them tolerate their mistakes and work harder to develop skills.

It's hard to discover one's strengths, though, right? We need tests or counselors or... No. We don't.

Simply watch your children. If they love doing it, they are good at it. If they spend free time on it, it's a strength. If they chose to do an assignment one way rather than another, it's an inborn talent.

The greatest gift you can give your child is helping them know who they are and how they shine. They will be able to use their best skills to learn in school. They'll feel like they have something to give the world. Most of all, they'll feel like they are worthwhile and valuable. They are!

Characteristics of a typical eight-year old

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| Physical | Energetic, enthusiastic. Lots of speed. Plays hard, tires easily. Short attention span. Needs active breaks, then try again. Growth spurts, good vision, somewhat more coordinated. Hand skills not caught up to their ideas, which means a lot of impatience and self-doubt. Requires lots of time to develop skills in writing, arts and crafts. Needs a lot of physical outdoor time to work out. "I can't do this" and "This is too hard!" |
| Mental/ Academic | Lots of ideas and energy, works hard. Clueless about how to complete projects. Needs help focusing and planning a step-by-step approach. Excited about outside world, but insecure about trying things out. Needs help and encouragement to get out there and try! Interested in rules, logic, and what's fair! |
| Emotional/ Social | Loves working in groups, but chooses own gender. Awareness of others' talents creates insecurity. Needs help seeing and developing their strengths. <i>Show how they shine!</i> Great talker, so listen, listen, listen. Funny, loves jokes. Ask: "Got a good one today?" Not a good planner, gets frustrated with failed projects but bounces back easily. <i>Criticism is wounding for insecure eights.</i> Help with limits, planning, step-by-step approach. |

Based on *Yardsticks Children in the Classroom Ages 4 – 14*, by Chip Woods, NE Foundation for Children, Turner Falls, MA, rev. ed. 2007. *Your Child's Strengths: A Guide for Parents and Teachers*, by Jennifer Fox, M.Ed. Penguin Books, 2008.