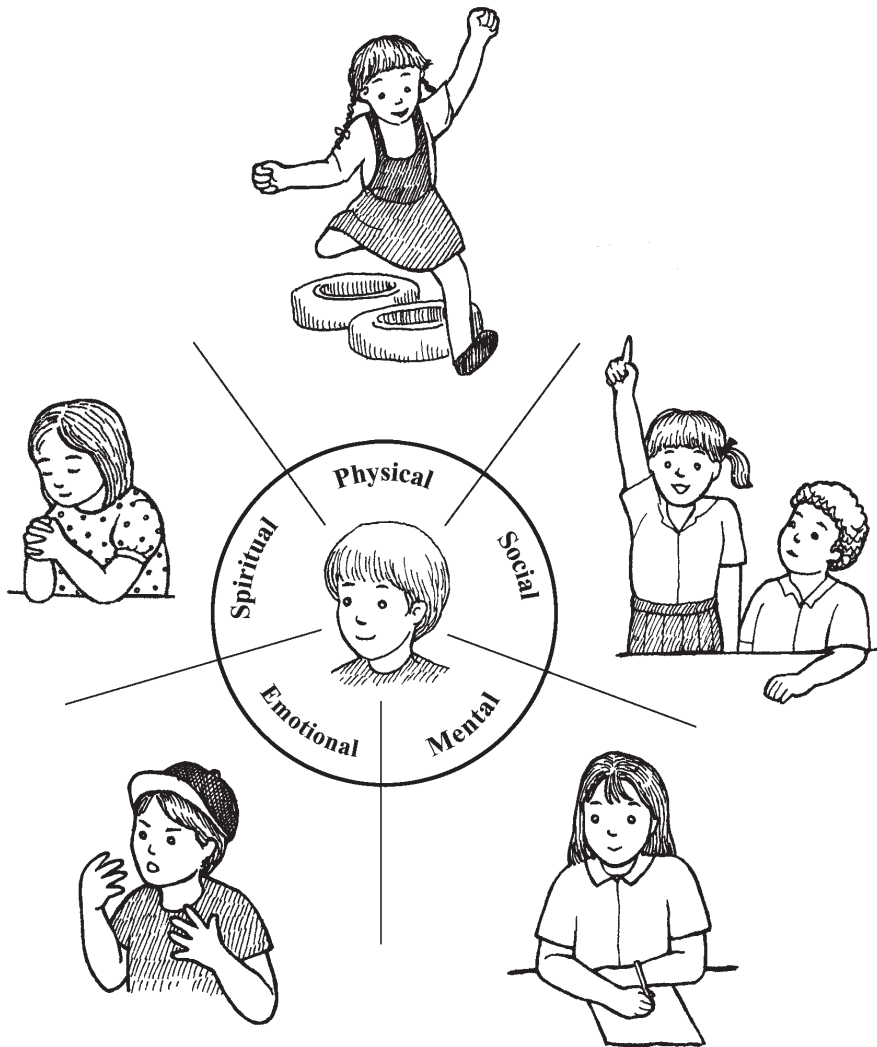


# THE PRIMARY CHILD

## AGE 6-8



# THE PRIMARY CHILD

Children aged six to eight years are usually in Classes 1-3 of Primary School. In Sunday school they can be grouped together and called Primaries.

## 1. PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

### **Bodily Changes**

Between five and five and a half years of age, the child experiences rapid physical changes. The body which before was short and rather chubby becomes taller and thinner. The legs and arms become longer. The round face changes into an oval shape and shows a more mature expression. The first teeth come out and are exchanged for permanent teeth. The heartbeat is faster.

With these changes the child's body balance is disturbed for a while. He often feels tired and the risk of falling sick, especially in an epidemic, is greater. Children of this age should have enough rest.

### **At Six Years Still Very Active**

A six year old child is very active, but he can control himself better than the Kindergarten child. The child seems to be constantly on the move, because of his rapid growth and interest in many activities, which he follows through with enthusiasm. Play is a very important part of his life. Indoor activities, which Primaries enjoy and can do well are drawing, cutting out, and using short sentences in lettering. The small finger muscles have developed so that their muscle coordination enables them to perform accurate handwork.

### **At Seven Years Beginning to Manage Himself**

The seven year old child begins to manage himself. He is able to take a shower or bath on his own, dress himself neatly and comb his hair. The child becomes more responsible for his personal books and writing materials. He notices the lesson timetable and understands time.

There are Primaries who wake up on Sunday morning and get ready for Sunday school by themselves, even if their parents enjoy sleeping in.

## 2. SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

### **Challenges at School**

Primaries enter a new world: School. They learn to know many more people, teachers and classmates. During their last year in Kindergarten they were the oldest and strongest ones. After changing to Primary school they suddenly find themselves the smallest

among the Primary school pupils. They are also away from their home for more hours than before.

They have come out of a protected world - their family and Kindergarten world, where they lived a sheltered life - and now enter a new and tougher world. This change of environment can cause the child to be nervous at first, but this will pass in time. They should be helped to adjust to their new physical and social surroundings. For example, the teacher can praise them when they have done their work well. In Sunday school little tasks can be given to them, to include with the older children.

### **The Need for Teacher's Attention**

Primary children respect their teacher very much, and even imitate him or her. They do the tasks given to them eagerly in order to please their teacher as they want to be noticed and praised. To do what their teacher asks them is an honor and a pleasure at this stage of development. When their teacher asks a question in class, they raise their hand, "I know!", even though they may not know the answer. Such eagerness is stimulated by the need to be acknowledged and praised because they feel insecure. A teacher who is too strict can scare children in the first year of Primary school.

### **Socializing With Friends of the Same Age**

Even though Primaries feel nervous at first, they quickly adjust to their classmates. They open up to others and begin to lose their self-centeredness. Their ability to work together improves. This process of socializing is very important and should be encouraged by the teacher. Children in grade 2 and 3 can be assigned to group activities where they have to work together. This is good training. When they succeed, the teacher can commend them for the way they worked together as well as recognize individual achievements.

At this age children will begin to have a special friend, but they are also happy to play in a small group together with other children. They continue to be naturally content in their families, socializing with older and younger siblings, cared for and directed by Father and Mother.

### **Living Carefree From Day to Day**

This age group learns best when their childhood is not burdened with adult responsibilities of rears. Play is important to learning, in a stress-free way. It is the right of Primaries to live carefree from day to day, simply obeying the directions they are given by parents and teachers. They do not look back to the past too much and are not worried about the future, because they trust the adults who care for them.

Today the situation in many families all over the world has changed drastically. Often Primaries are already burdened with their parent's problems, with global calamities and disasters, and tragedies too deep for them to understand. Horror films, which keep them awake at night or make them wake up with screams of terror, leave a strong impression on their minds. If they live in callous, uncaring or violent families, Primaries are driven out of the rightful paradise of childhood, where they were meant to lay a foundation for strong, reliable years of adulthood.

### **3. MENTAL DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Learning to Write and Read**

In first grade, children begin to learn to write and read. They are proud if they can read sentences in newspapers and magazines. As third graders, they begin to read a children's story book even though slowly.

This new skill can be used by the Sunday school teacher in teaching memory verses and songs. The lettering used to write memory verses and songs must be clear and large enough so that it can be read from where the children are sitting.

#### **Eager to Listen to Stories**

Although they learn to read, Primaries are not yet able to read quickly. Therefore they love listening to stories. Through every good story the children's emotions are touched and they learn something new. Primaries prefer stories about real happenings to imaginary ones. They begin to differentiate between reality and imagination.

When Primaries understand that God speaks to us through his Word, and that the events in the Bible really happened, they listen enthusiastically and accept Bible stories with confidence and faith.

#### **Longer Attention Span**

While a small child can only sit quiet for a few moments to listen to a story, Primaries can pay attention for longer periods of time. Their power of concentration is increasing. They can follow Sunday school for one hour or longer. They are also able to understand and follow the teacher's instructions. When the Sunday school lesson is thoroughly prepared and interestingly presented by the teacher, Primaries love to attend. Bible stories at this age can be longer than those told to Kindergarten children.

#### **Not Yet Able to Understand Abstract Concepts**

Primaries are not yet able to understand abstract concepts and ideas, that is, something that they cannot see or touch. Words like, faith and forgiveness need to be made concrete for them. It is good to explain them through story events.

For example: There was a father from the town of Capernaum. His son was very sick, almost dying. The father went and met the Lord Jesus and asked him to come to his house and heal his boy. Jesus said to him, "Go, your son will live." The father believed the words of Jesus, even though Jesus did not come along to his house and he did not yet see his son healed. He went home believing and trusting the Lord Jesus. Even before he arrived at his house his servants met him and told him that his boy was healed. John 4:46-54.

Through a story like this a child is taught the meaning of faith.

Primaries understand words literally. For them, fishing means catching fish. Words used as figures of speech such as "fishers of men" must be explained carefully: "Peter and John used to catch fish; but now Jesus wanted them to look for people and bring them to Jesus. This is why he said, " I will make you fishers of men."

### **Thinking in Black and White**

The Primaries' understanding is still simple, without shades of difference. This is what is meant by "thinking in black and white". The good is really and totally good and the bad is really and totally bad. They cannot fathom that a person can at the same time be partly good and partly bad. For them there are only good people and bad people. They also see themselves as good, on certain days, or bad on others, and say of themselves, "This morning I was bad, but now I am good." They are too inexperienced to understand the complexities of human nature.

### **Depending on the Opinion of Adults**

Primaries still depend on the opinion of their parents and teachers. What they voice as their opinion is usually what they have heard their parents and teachers say. It is a good time to plant positive images and healthy thinking in the pliable minds of Primaries. By asking them questions they can be taught to think for themselves and and form or recognize their own opinions. They also should be allowed to make simple decisions. For instance:

What coat or dress will I wear this afternoon?

Will I play at my friend's house or go with mother to the supermarket?

## **4. EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **Exaggeration**

Primaries tend to exaggerate. They want to be noticed because they feel small and unimportant among the older children.

*Example:* Johnny is a first grader. One day Robby, who sits next to him in class, asks to borrow his rubber/eraser. Johnny does not want to lend his rubber to him, so Robby gets angry. He pinches his arm and whispers, "Stingy!". When Johnny arrives home, he cries and reports to his mother: "Mum, this morning Robby kicked me and called me wicked."

In the process of transition from first to second grade, the attitude of exaggeration can still be considered natural, but it should decline as children achieve balance in their emotional life.

### **Hesitant, at Times Unsure of Themselves**

At times Primaries will hesitate to accept a task. "I can't do it," they say. Therefore when giving a task, or asking a question, it should be explained in a way that the children can clearly understand. Then they can do the task or answer the question. If however a task or a question is too easy and does not present a challenge, Primaries may respond by saying, "Kid's stuff", meaning, "That is for little children, not for me!" As first graders, Primaries become offended when they are laughed at, because they are not so sure of themselves. Competition is difficult for them, because they have not yet learned how to lose graciously.

Primary children learn to organize their time. When they go to school or have to participate in an activity they are afraid to be late. Time management will improve as Primaries move to second and third grade.

### **Afraid of Darkness at Night**

Many Primaries are still afraid of the dark at night, also of shadows. Although their imagination has lessened, a shadow can seem to them to be an animal or someone hiding to hurt them. The tendency to fear is stronger if children are told stories of ghosts and goblins to frighten them into obedience. If a Primary child wants his mother and father near him at night, they can take this opportunity to talk with the child about what is disturbing him. It is very important to teach Primaries to understand that the Lord Jesus is with them even though the day has turned to evening and night.

At this stage it is better not to invite Primaries to attend a camp program away from home. They are not yet ready socially and emotionally. They might do fine during the day but get homesick at night.

### **Trusting Others**

Primaries want to be loved, liked and valued; and they in turn love and trust others. It is beautiful to observe the trust of a Primary child, if this trust has not been abused by adults. It is easy to mislead Primaries, because of their trust. They trust parents and teachers and are eager to learn from them, because they want to become like them. This is the reason why at this age children learn a lot by copying adults in their actions and attitudes.

### **Compassionate Towards Other People**

Primaries grow out of their egocentrism, and begin to consider the importance of other people's views and situations. They begin to relate to others and feel with them. For example they observe elderly people and become aware of their handicaps. They can feel for Mother when she comes home so tired from work. They feel compassion for other children who are experiencing famine or calamities through natural disasters. Whether in Sunday school or at home, they can be encouraged to pray for others. It is important that Primaries feel involved and are shown how to express their feeling of compassion as well as help in a simple, appropriate way.

## **5. SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **Enjoying Sunday School**

Primaries enjoy coming to Sunday school. They are able to get ready by themselves, and if the situation allows it, can walk to Sunday school without having to be taken by parents or older brothers or sisters. They are happy to go with friends of the same age. Primaries often make up the largest classes in Sunday school. They can be easily organized because they have respect for their teacher and apart from that long to hear Bible stories, if the teacher is a good storyteller.

For the teacher this is a golden opportunity, which will only last for a few years. Later on he will have to work much harder to keep the attention of his class! The Sunday school hour will be even more effective if it is conducted in an atmosphere of love and order.

### **Growing in the Understanding of God**

Primaries grow in their understanding of the greatness and love of God. They learn about God through Bible stories. They receive what they are taught with full trust. It might have been a Primary child that Jesus had in mind when he said that adults must turn around and repent and become as a child in order to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

### **Responding to the Love of Jesus**

Primaries are deeply impressed by the fact that Jesus loves them and wants to help them. Knowing and believing that they are loved by Jesus, they love Jesus with trustful hearts. Primaries can understand about their sin, feel sorry for it and ask for forgiveness. But most of them do not understand the depth of the root of evil in man's heart.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Teaching Primaries is very satisfying. They are easy to lead, full of life, want to listen and want to learn. As they begin to take responsibility, their attitude of self-centeredness diminishes.

They may be compared with clay which is ready to be formed by the Word of God, and like cement in holding on to what they have received.

## **7. ASSIGNMENT**

1. Observe several Primaries and find out what makes them glad and what makes them worry.
2. Make a poster or several flashcards showing:
  - Activities typical of Primaries
  - Certain characteristics typical of Primaries.