

Profiles of Development Younger Fives

Background: The Gesell Institute of Child Development has observed that children go through a repeating sequence of six different stages with predictable changes in mood and behaviour in each. Five Years includes two such stages, the first, Younger Fives, is six months long, while the second includes Older Fives as well as part of Six. The behaviour observed in these stages reflects qualities associated with the planets – in the case of Younger Fives with The Moon and Older Fives with Mercury.

The developmental traits in these profiles represent only one aspect of children's behaviour and may be masked, modified or intensified by other factors, both individual and environmental, such as temperament, gender related behaviours, high stress levels, over-stimulation, too much screen time or organic problems.

Note: If your child has turned this age but shows none of these behaviours, please read the previous age level, or just wait a few months, then read this again!

These profiles integrate the wonderful descriptions from the Gesell Institute of Child Development research, and the ideas of Rudolf Steiner into my own research. Direct quotations from the Gesell Institute's books are in 'single quote marks'.

Younger Fives – Five to five & a half years.

A stage with Moon qualities

In Younger Fives we see qualities and motivations traditionally associated with the Moon, particularly the importance of *love* and *relationships*—children of this age are more amenable, sympathetic, sociable and non-confrontational; they are home loving and happy to live in the present; they reflect more youthful qualities in being intuitive, dreamy, creative and imaginative; their intellectual interests may be more broad and factual, than deep; they like an ordered world and are conservative by nature. All this contrasts greatly

with the nature of Four year olds before them, and Older Fives after them.

The emphasis in physical growth at Five is still in the chest, limbs and metabolic system, which are all associated with new forces of the *will*, of power and action. There is a maturity in Younger Five, a completion of the earlier stages of development, which is evident from the beginning; we find that even physically Younger Fives have a finer motor control and coordination which will be lost again by the end of this year, as the growth in the limbs

consolidates and brings new neuro-skeletal connections and associated challenges for coordinated movement and balance.

The increasing *will power* in Younger Fives shows in their “doing”; they are practical, competent, persistent, and empirical; they are interested in the completion of things. They are not interested right now in pioneering and new challenges for they are self-limiting and self-protective; their preference is for doing things that are within their abilities so that they can feel a sense of achievement. They are more conservative and serious in their approach; they like little responsibilities and privileges. They are composed, self-contained, stable and direct. These are all gifts of the age to be appreciated by their carers.

When Younger Fives’ needs are being met well, they are not overly demanding or particularly self-assertive. For Younger Fives wish to please others, rather than be in confrontation with them. They seek affection, approval and applause and are motivated by reward. This naturally makes them more amenable. Younger Fives have good adjustment in themselves and confidence in others. Their sunny disposition, their generous love of people and their goodness are characteristics of the age and of Moon qualities. Their positiveness and acceptance of people can extend beyond their personal world. Gesell researchers quoted one little girl as declaring, “I love everybody in the whole world. Even God.” Younger Fives also want to be good and try to be good; they try to do everything just right. They demand help when they need it and often ask permission before acting, even when not necessary. This innocent goodness (or what could be called “love of the deed” or “love in the will”) is heart-warming after the challenges of Four.

It is also consistent with Moon qualities that Younger Fives feel at home in their world, in the here and now, for they live in the present and are not generally worriers. They are homebodies with mother (or major carer) at their centre. They love home and family; they love to help and potter. Their play is naturally very domestic at this age. For some Younger Fives, starting school at this time can be a burden and stressful because the place they want to be most may be home, which is without the stress and challenges that some schools demand. These children adjust best when the school/ kindergarten situation is warm and home-like in atmosphere, with play based activities, meeting their love of domesticity and things they know. Fortunately, Fives often enjoy the company of other children, which can help to make school more attractive.

Younger Fives have a sense of shame and disgrace. Their fears are generally temporary and concrete— like fear of thunder, the dark or solitude, or loss of mother. These can be exacerbated by seeing inappropriate news/video/television content, or fear-provoking real experiences. They may also have a good sense of when they are overstimulated or overburdened and can be good at trying to take measures to protect themselves, if only their adult carers will heed the signs in their comments and behaviours.

There is one place that Younger Fives are expansive, and that is intellectually, loving the challenge of learning new facts; they love to be talked to and read to, and to practice new intellectual abilities in recognising symbols (as in writing) and counting. However this developmental intellectual interest is *not* the equivalent to school readiness, which is more complex than being able to count or write letters. For most children it will take another

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year or two to be ready for intellectual work *imposed* by others, as well as to be ready to sit still to concentrate. In addition boys' development can be up to a year behind girls'.

Fives' main natural method of learning is still by imitation and doing. This is learning through physical everyday activities and imaginative play, including big apparatus play, which develops their senses of space, movement and balance more fully. Many children today lack the full development of these senses because of limited opportunities to move freely and adventurously; adult anxieties and limited physical environments affect this amongst other things. Much emotional development occurs in the social interaction, conversation, work and negotiations within their play.

The importance of such play for physical, emotional, social and intellectual development has been clearly demonstrated in research and cannot be over-emphasized. Waldorf Steiner Schools are play-based up to when children are six turning seven for this reason. Some of the most successful schools systems (like that of Finland) also start children at school at six or seven, much later than the school starting ages of most English speaking countries. See the Gesell researchers' books *Your Five Year Old* and *Your Six Year Old* (both listed in Further Reading below) for more on Kindergarten and school readiness. Not surprisingly, they generally suggest that children are better off being older than younger in a class.

Younger Fives think before they speak now. They are great talkers, use connectives, can tell a tale, can ramble and exaggerate but are not over fanciful. They use words to help them understand their world. They ask lots of questions, especially in relation to *what things do*.

(This can be a very good guideline for adults in answering Younger Fives' questions.)

Younger Fives, consistent with the influences of the youthful Moon forces, should have good health, improved appetite and, in spite of occasional nightmares, good sleep. There are fewer tensional outlets compared to the previous year and fewer temper tantrums. Stomach aches are fairly common, sometimes as a result of stress showing itself in the metabolic system, and this can be taken as a clue to seek for the cause and remedies (a gentle foot massage with lavender or calming chamomile tea drink might suffice.)

Consistent with the emphasis in physical growth moving downwards in the trunk, the children will experience increasing curiosity about genitals and excretory processes. Their play and language will naturally reflect this curiosity and it is up to the adults in their lives to provide simple guidelines about privacy and personal boundaries in a clear, unembarrassed, unambiguous way as opportunities to do so arise. For example if there is a visitor coming to stay the parent might remind the children that "People should have their privacy respected in the toilet, bathroom and bedroom, because they may not like to be seen by others with no clothes on, or only half dressed. That is a private matter, just as you (the child) do not get undressed in front of strangers." The responsibility for teaching these protective behaviours lies with the parents, as they have the most intimate relationship with the child. One cannot assume children will know or pick up these things. Some may, but some will not. More on this can be found in the article *Developing sexuality and the prevention of sexual abuse of young children*.

In general, while Younger Fives can present challenges if their needs are not fully met, for

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much of the time life with them is plain sailing. The danger for Younger Fives is that they are *too* amenable, *too* good, that they protest *too* gently, that we expect too much from them with their new competencies, and that others impose on them inappropriately (e.g. bully them). They need encouragement to say “Yes!” and “No!” firmly, but not bossily, before they get to the next stage! (A question about whether they would like an ice cream would make good practice for this. “Say yes –or no—like you mean it!”)

In this hurried, stressed world, Fives have a lot to teach us about living in the present, about happy pottering at home, about the value of pure goodness. When we adults can enter a little into the contentment of children in the Moon stages (Two, Five and Ten) our world too may become a happier place.

At Five and a half years the children’s behaviour changes and more challenging forces in the ‘will’ combine with more chaotic tendencies associated with Mercury.

Further reading

Bates Ames, Louise, and Ilg, Frances L. *Your Five Year Old. Sunny and Serene* (A Dell Paperback, New York, 1979) A Gesell Institute of Child Development Book. Contains good information about readiness and un-readiness for Kindergarten.

Payne, Kim John, with Lisa M. Ross *Simplicity Parenting Using the Extraordinary Power of Less to Raise Calmer, Happier and More Secure kids*. (Ballantine Books Trade Paperbacks, New York, 2009)

Other Articles of interest on the website

Avoiding trouble with young children.

Healthy play

Developing sexuality and the prevention of sexual abuse in young children