

## Profiles of Development Older Six years

*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. Six Years includes two such stages, the first including Older Fives and Younger Sixes and the second being Older Sixes and lasting six to nine months. The behaviour observed in these different stages reflects the qualities associated with the planets – in the case of Older Sixes, with Venus.*

*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 only just turned this age and 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'.*

### Older Sixes – Six and 3-6 months to Seven years

#### A stage with Venus qualities

This stage is described by Gesell researchers as beginning at Six and a half years. However the stage may begin a few months earlier than this, with it taking a little time for the somewhat turbulent behaviours and disequilibrium of the previous age to settle down into a more harmonious place. At any rate, by Six years and six months children are described by Gesell researchers as being 'in equilibrium, rounded and well balanced'. They do not give a great deal of information on this age, but what is given is consistent with the qualities of Venus. More observation is needed here.

In Older Sixes we do see many of the qualities and motivations traditionally associated with Venus: a priority for love and good personal relationships, and personal qualities like cooperation, compromise and cheerfulness as well as, personal warmth, amicableness, kindness and sociability. Venus is traditionally associated with the feminine aspect of ourselves and with beauty (artistic, in nature, in sensual experiences) and living through their feelings, in both sympathy and antipathy; the Venus types can be so amenable that they can lose their sense of themselves and of their own needs and they particularly need "soul warmth".

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Gesell comments that it is good for parents to remember 'that there was, for many, this brief, blissful, enthusiastic, warmly responsive and exciting time when son or daughter was Six-and-a-half.' For Six-years-and- 3-to-6 months to Seven years is again an easier age for the children and their adult carers.

By Six and a half the growth forces are very well established in the limbs and metabolic system. Forces in the will—the ability to make decisions, to persevere, to bring things to a conclusion—which earlier were not very much under the child's control, are beginning to mature. By six, or even more by six and a half, behaviour begins to lose its rigidity and becomes more susceptible to shifts in direction, both inwardly motivated and outwardly stimulated. A marked decrease in emotional explosions continues. At the same time there is a spurt in brain growth occurring at Six and Seven, which makes new cognitive capacities available. The children's previously separate cognitive and sensori-motor functions now become more coordinated, making it possible for more complex cognitive functioning and for the children to become more receptive to teaching. So here we see three different influences on Older Sixes: Venus qualities, more control in the will and its associated activities, and growing cognitive capacities with a spurt in brain growth.

All these can be seen in the Gesell researchers' observations about Older Six in their book *Your Six Year Old Loving and Defiant* by Louise Bates Ames and Francis Ilg. They observe that by Six and a half there comes a 'delightful time when all the lively, exuberant responses characteristic of this age come to full flower.' 'Early Six was a handful. Six-and-a-half can be truly gorgeous...can be one of the nicest and most rewarding periods in early childhood.' Joy is more strong, they have new enthusiasm, 'love'

to do things, 'enjoy the effort of working on a thing'. They enjoy surprising parents. 'Six-and-a-half year old child likes you and you like him. No question. There is warmth at this age quite unlike anything seen at most ages.' 'For a brief little time the child relates to you, and you are able to relate to him, almost as if he were another, very sympathetic, appreciative and satisfactory adult. There is a certain maturity to the child of this age that is very appealing.' They can plan and resolve to be good for the rest of the day.

Gesell researchers continue: 'What makes him so much fun? His lively intellectuality, for one thing. Intellectual tasks are now a challenge. He *loves* to count for you, loves to say his ABCs...he is as proud of his new found abilities as if he had discovered America...He is amusing and has a wonderful sense of humour...He loves to play guessing games...'

'Though the negative aspects of [younger] Six's opposite extremes may have been trying, the positive part [of Older Sixes] is very easy to take: biggest hugs; most "I love you, Mummy"s; worries that something may happen to Mother; boundless enthusiasm for any prospect or proposal; love of exploration, physical and intellectual.' 'The child of this age loves new places, new ideas, new bits of information, and (his own) new accomplishments. His capacity for enjoyment is tremendous. Make him a present or a surprise, give him praise, propose a treat, and his vigorously expressed joy and enthusiasm will well repay you.'

But there are also times when they look too far into themselves and begin to worry. In this we also see the new mood, awareness and sensitivity of Seven coming.

This warmth, love, sympathy and appreciation in relationships are all consistent with Venus

qualities, and the children's expansive interests reflect their new cognitive capacities.

There is one other area associated with Venus qualities in Sixes which needs adult awareness and follows on from the genital interest and play mentioned in the Older Fives and Younger Sixes profile. The Gesell researchers Bates Ames and Ilg comment specifically on the 'sexual interest' at this age:

It's fair to say that the typical Six year old is a rather sexy individual and one who is interested in sex and its ramifications...Sex play is quite customary, and suggests the (admittedly immature) sexual appeal of the child of this age. It is our impression that more Six-year-olds than children of other related ages are subjected to sexual molestation or advances by strangers and others.....Things are obviously blossoming at this time. Children are feeling something or other rather strongly. They need help and calm, un-anxious understanding when their actions or their questions give us clues that they have sex on their minds, at this undoubtedly rather sexy age. (One day, we hope, specialists can tell us just exactly what *is* going on, or at least can tell us about the level of sex hormones in the child's bloodstream at this time.)

In Older Sixes, the interest seems to move on from the physical, exploratory curiosity of Five and Younger Sixes to a rather more flirtatious psychological tension between the sexes, even a sensuality, consistent with a Venus influence in the older Sixes. In adults, Venus is associated with sensuality and erotic tendencies. The games Older Sixes play contain a certain coquettishness; they now become kiss chasey, locking the girls in a cupboard or trapping them (out of the teacher's sight) in a cubby

somewhere. If pants are pulled down it seems less with the intent to see something (as younger children would do—"I'll show you mine if you show me yours") and more with a boy-girl teasing intention. There may be shy talk of girlfriends/boyfriends, short cryptic notes passed around in class. Many of these behaviours disappear again at Seven. These somewhat flirtatious behaviours between the sexes also appear at the next Venus age at Twelve Years.

As was stressed in the Older Fives & Younger Sixes profile, now is the time to clearly re-state the rules about respect for privacy and touching people's private parts to help them to develop healthy, clearly defined, personal boundaries and to teach protective behaviours. Children need to be able to say both yes and no strongly. This may be harder for children to do in a people-pleasing stage like this Venus one; the boundaries between the self and others can become more blurred within the warmth of relationship. Note that sensuous children are particularly at risk here; for them strong personal boundaries should always be emphasised even more. More careful observation may show that many more children show more sensual qualities at the time of this Venus age. Note also that children who have difficulty learning what is socially appropriate, like those with Asperger's, autism or with intellectual or physical disabilities are even more vulnerable here—more at risk of imitating other children's inappropriate behaviours and accepting inappropriate behaviour from others. The books by Freda Briggs are recommended for help on this. More information can be found in the article *Developing sexuality and the prevention of sexual abuse in young children*.

One further odd but minor phenomenon about this age is that freckles appear particularly at 6

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years but also 12 years, the next Venus year. Freckles are associated with the formation of melanin in the skin, and melanin is associated with the copper containing enzyme Tyrosinase—another odd link with Venus influences for the metal associated with Venus (and women and pregnancy) is copper.

So this stage gives the child the chance to experience the wonderful warmth and sociability of Venus qualities, the rewards of giving to others and in embracing the world with joy and enthusiasm. Seven will bring a quite different mood.

## *Further reading:*

Bates Ames, Louise, & Ilg, Frances L. *Your Six Year Old Loving and Defiant* (A Dell Paperback, New York, 1979) Gesell Institute of Child Development Book.

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*