

# Conscious Creative Courageous LIVING WITH CHILDREN

## Profiles of Development Eight Years

*The Gesell Institute of Child Development has observed that in childhood children go through a repeating sequence of six different stages with predictable changes in mood and behaviour in each. Eight Years includes just one such stage. The behaviour observed in these stages reflects the qualities associated in tradition with the planets — in the case of Eight with Jupiter.*

*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 Gesell are in 'single quote marks' or indented.*

### Eight

#### A stage with Jupiter qualities

Growth at Eight seems more straight forward than at Seven. The senses are now less sensitive and the children are more sure of themselves. What is most striking are the qualities traditionally associated with Jupiter, admittedly a perhaps immature Jupiter — bigness, boldness and strong will. At Eight everything is big and expansive; Eights are gregarious and somewhat egotistical; their gestures are dramatic and

exaggerated; their capacity to evaluate promises that the big picture thinking of a potentially wise Jupiter is evolving too; they love to feel their power and independence in physical activities; they are more adventurous and courageous; and ethically they show a basic reasonableness and desire to live up to their own and adult standards.

#### Physical growth

Physically, growth in eight year olds is established again in the head and nerve sense system. All their senses are maturing, refining the coordination of their bodies and their

observation of the world. Physically and emotionally they are now hardier, more resilient, more daring, more able to take on challenges and to persevere, despite obstacles.

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Gesell describes Eight physically: '[Eight] looks more mature than he did at Seven... He is much better coordinated when it comes to sports. Large muscle control is now well established. Small muscles develop noticeably during this year....There is an increase in speed and smoothness in fine motor performance and in eye hand coordination.... Posture is now more symmetrical than earlier... Bodily movements...are fluid and often graceful and poised.'

Eights like to feel their muscle power and athletic abilities, just as Younger Fours did. There is definitely something of a Jupiter quality in this. Eights now love group play, especially in athletic activities, both organised or unorganised, in the neighbourhood. They may now be more fond of rough and tumble play and boisterous games. Their play is also full of action especially in boys, for they love to dramatize— in accidents, fights, and car chases. Even their drawings are full of action. Boys may add a little bravado and swagger to their slapdash demeanour to emphasise their masculine toughness.

Eights are healthier, more robust, and have increasing energy, and in consequence are less fatigue-able— all consistent with what might be expected in relation to Jupiter. Most have good (even ravenous) appetites and sleep better with fewer nightmares. Gesell notes: 'Hay fever and asthma may return after not being present for a year or so; there may also be an increase in the occurrence of ear infections, but most Eights have fewer gastrointestinal difficulties and fewer communicable diseases than earlier, and tend to recover more rapidly.'

One sees this good health and energy in many ways— in their strong will and intensity, their liveliness and enjoyment of life, their speediness and their own power. Gesell researchers build a wonderful picture of this speediness:

[Eight's] tempo is rapid when he talks, reads, writes or practices the piano. He wolfs down food, sitting on the edge of his chair, ready to bolt outdoors without pulling up his socks or tucking in his shirt.... He darts around the house or yard, seemingly unaware of physical obstacles in his path. His entire body seems ready for action. He works fast, plays fast (loves running games), talks fast, even eats fast. When necessary he can shift very rapidly from one activity to the next, and wastes little time looking back.

All this speediness and boisterous adventurous action can unfortunately sometimes lead to trouble. Gesell notes: 'Eight-year-olds tend to be accident prone. In fact accidents are a major cause of death at this age— chiefly accidents from automobiles, falls, and drowning. The Eight-year-old...is out of bounds. He is out for action and is ready to try almost anything. He has lost the protective caution he had at Seven. He misjudges himself as better than he really is.' Nevertheless, this dauntless Jupiter stage offers much to the child in learning about risk, courage and resilience. Our task as carers is not to hold them back from the wonderful opportunity to experience these things but to give them appropriate skills (for example, swimming), teach them about safety and risk *and* the value of courage, adventurousness and attempting things.

Children of this age seem to have less need for tensional outlets. However there is one worth noting, that, when stressed about something difficult for them, Eights may need to urinate. Gesell notes: 'A difficult school subject such as reading may produce a distended bladder in a very short time. This reaction may be thought of as "internal perspiration," emotionally induced. It is not just an alibi.' Kidney function and stress on the nervous system are connected and such a

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reaction clearly needs adult understanding and an accommodating response.

Eye development at Eight matches their tendency to expansiveness—Gesell notes: ‘The

## *Sense of self*

Eights, in all their expansive exuberance, are very egotistical. The primary motivation for Jupiter, like Mars, is personal power. At Eight we see this in an unselfconscious enjoyment and exploration of self, in outer ways, in their expansive interest in the world. We also see it in their inner moral striving, in trying to understand what the rules of correct behaviour are.

Eights are increasingly aware of themselves as individuals and are interested in what makes them tick. They are more able to see psychological states in themselves. They are more conscious of their own feelings and realise that they can feel more than one feeling at a time (e.g. angry *and* sad). They are also conscious of their own appearance and personal qualities. Eights also test out their sense of self in relation to others and possessions, in their love of browsing catalogues and imagining “If I had that ...”

With the increasing awareness of their own abilities and that of others, their self-esteem is becoming more realistic and they basically feel pretty good about themselves.

## *Thinking development*

In Eight’s thinking we can again see this new expansiveness and something of Jupiter’s capacity for big picture thinking and more profound thoughts about life and the world. The new consciousness of their own thinking and cognitive processes, evident at seven, is maturing at eight and makes them a little more

eight year old may be thought of as peripherally orientated....[visually] the child can shift from near to far with greater ease, though he may still have difficulty in shifting back from far to near.’

Nevertheless, their characteristic *evaluativeness* also impacts on Eights’ sense of self—the capacity to evaluate and compare, which brought such boastful statements at Four and sometimes now at Eight, gives Eights some angst as they compare themselves with others and compare their behaviour with their own and other’s expectations and ideals. Eights tend to be hard on themselves for their mistakes and failures. This evaluativeness also makes them conscious of when other people do not respond as they would like them to. Eights are extremely sensitive to the perceived criticism of others.

On the other hand, this evaluativeness sometimes helps them make sound judgements as to what they can or cannot accomplish, when they are not going to be successful. This helps them curb their headlong rush into things and can sometimes prevent them from taking on the totally impossible. It can make them more realistic. This capacity to evaluate, to judge a thing, to contrast and compare, to prioritise, is also a preparatory step necessary for the planning, organisational skills and high ideals seen in a mature Jupiter type.

independent. While at seven, they consolidated their new impressions of the world, at eight they are active and curious in their search to understand the world. They make sense of their new observations in terms of themselves and human values not just bare facts. They are now interested in things beyond the here and now,

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and are cosmopolitan by nature. Eights are now able to see more of the whole—contexts, implications and conclusions— where before they only saw one part. Conceptually their universe is more connected.

Gesell's descriptions of Eights illustrate this:

He is growing aware of the impersonal forces of nature. He can distinguish fundamental similarities and differences when comparing a baseball and an orange, an airplane and a kite, wood and glass. The origin and growth of plants from seeds begins to intrigue him. He takes a deepening interest in the life processes of animals. He is even beginning to believe that all men are mortal and that even *he* will one day die. But at this relatively positive age, this knowledge does not depress him as it might have done earlier. ... As with other intellectual concepts, Eights tend to show a lively interest in death...[and] interest in right and wrong [versus good and bad].

Eights' thinking is also becoming less animistic, and is less reliant on information from their inner world and more based on their outer perceptions. In the past this was a time of rich, imaginative, adventurous play. In an eight year old who can still play, we can see that their play is more reality-based. For example, Eights take great delight in creating the 'fine details' observed in the world, like making the tickets or the money or the house in the tree for the game

## **Emotional development**

The Gesell researchers place Eights on the side of being in *equilibrium* despite their being difficult sometimes. Like the Jupiter type, Eights have an ability to hold the balance in themselves well, despite sometimes being a challenge to others. Emotionally too Eights are expanding. Gesell describes them as lively and outgoing,

where some years ago pretending might have done. Unfortunately this rich life of play, essential for so much healthy brain maturation, has been stultified in many children by too much screen time and limited opportunity to play in wild, unorganised places of their own.

Eights thinking now also has the beginning of more abstract reasoning, and it is also clear that Eights want to feel their own power and independence in this thinking. Gesell writers illustrate this: 'He can be influenced to check up on his clues when he has jumped to a conclusion too quickly. But he does not want you to think for him—he only wants a hint that will help him to work things out for himself.'

Their new capacities in thinking also bring challenges to us, for with their increasing awareness and observation they have new critical capacities and have begun to doubt the infallibility of adults. They like to test, trick and catch them out. At the same time they also want them to be their heroes who can admit fault.

They have strong admiration and affection for parents and want them to be models of striving human beings. Lack of healthy adult models can feed the "cognitive conceit" of this age and disappoint the child. Eights say they want a teacher whom Gesell describes as a 'beneficent potentate'. What a wonderful picture of what they want of all of us, an authoritative adult who is also fair and good.

willing to stay with challenges even when things get tough. They are optimistic and positive. They ask for and expect praise "This is good, isn't it?" In the playground they are more robust in giving and taking criticism and are learning to lose.

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They like to challenge themselves and, though they do not like to fail, they will try. This is the age of Erik Erikson's 'Industriousness versus Inferiority' developmental tasks. Those eight year olds who have already learned helplessness in terms of their own capabilities and efforts, do indeed feel inferior. Those who have learned they can be masters over their situation and can improve abilities by effort, are more positive, enthusiastic and industrious in their learning and approach to life. Children at this age who are low in self-esteem and defeatist in attitude, who consistently blame their failures on "bad luck", can and need to be helped now, not later. The belief of professional golfer, Ben Hogan, might help your Eight here: "The more you practice, the luckier you get!"

Eights' new expansiveness and exploration of self can be seen in their speech and gesture where they tend towards extravagance and hyperbole. Their actions may have a dramatic quality and new flexibility - by impersonation they can assume one role after another and appraise each for themselves. They like drama

## *Expansiveness, courage and personal safety*

Eights' personal space is also expanding. They want and need to move out into their environment to explore new territory, to seek new horizons. While Sevens stayed close to home, Eights like to venture further into the neighbourhood. They are capable of returning home alone by bus from some distant point. They love being taken on trips to new cities, to visit museums, zoos, and other places of interest. They are interested in geography.

Suburban children today have less freedom to move out into their neighbourhoods in a world which puts safety above learning courage and resilience; interestingly it is often poor children who have the most opportunities to explore

and putting on public shows. Observing Eights, standing with chests out, with their hands on their hips, with extravagant gestures, their parents wonder if they have a budding actor in the house.

Eights love to talk. They come home from school bursting with news. "Oh, it was awful!" "You never saw anything like it!" They may be over-dramatic about something that is not so big really, and they seem to enjoy their drama even when they are suffering. "I am going to die of this!" Their defence of their newly evolving sense of self also has this dramatic quality; they boast and attack in order to protect themselves.

Gesell describes other exaggerated gestures in Eights: 'When things go very wrong for Eights, they truly do get angry. Some show their anger at least partly in jest. Thus they may tense up their faces in exasperation, project their lower jaws, and draw back and flex their arms at the elbow as they clench their fists. This dramatic pose is sure to produce laughter from other children at school.' And inward smiles in parents!

their own neighbourhood in freedom and to become "street-wise".

It is important to recognise children's capacities at each age, to teach them about safety and assessing risk, and about self-protective strategies. (Freda Briggs' books and video talks on "keeping children safe" from sexual abuse are recommended here.) However, over the next few years, children also need appropriate opportunities to practice such strategies, to learn about freedom and responsibility for oneself and for others in the wider world. Fear has its place as a survival instinct, but unreasonable parental fears today may be stultifying the development of courage and confidence in

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children. The gift of Eight is courage and confidence. Don't waste it.

Having taught our children about keeping themselves safe, it is necessary for us as parents to take a deep breath, to let go of our fears and to replace them with trust in the greater good. Then it is helpful to put our positive loving thoughts around our children and let them "go play" and for us to get on with our other tasks. Accept that accidents can still happen but that in

## *Relationships with others*

Eights are overcoming their earlier shyness and are more confident in relating to others, even strangers. Relationships are important to them and they are curious about them, particularly those of the adults close to them. Gesell says of Eights that they can be described as 'downright nosy.' They are beginning to understand more subtlety in human communication; they can sense the difference between facial expression and situational clues which brings a rise in empathy in those who develop this sense of the other's point of view (perspective taking).

They want a psychological interchange with their parents now. Eights' relationship with their mothers (or major care giver) is particularly notable. It is reminiscent of the relationship between a ruling monarch and his or her advisor. Eights want to be the monarch in their own kingdom but they rely on their mother for advice, for attention, for company, for play and conversation, for respect and support; they are demanding and possessive of her; they want a close, intense relationship with her but they also want her to do what they want and to be available to them. Therein lies a potential conflict between Eights and parental authority.

Gesell assures us that Eights are basically reasonable when their power is not too

the long run children will be better off. This will be good practice for later in adolescence when you have absolutely no control over your children's activities when, like it or not, they are outside your sphere of authority. It is then that all you have taught them about caution *and* courage, respectful care of themselves *and* belief in themselves when they were younger will protect them in the outside world.

challenged. The secret is to manage the relationship with Eights with the diplomacy of a wise advisor. For Eights want their mothers to advise them, but not direct or command them; they prefer 'a hint' or 'a wink or a nod' not to be told directly what to do; they need to feel that they can be in control and decide for themselves what they do, to try things their own way. However Eights do care what she thinks and so can be worked with if it is in the right way. When she gives to them they want to give to her too. They respond well to positive feedback which helps them to evaluate how they are going. They need her praise.

Gesell writers suggest that Eights' relationship with their mothers is more intense than at any other age, but needs to be clearly understood if mothers are to get along with Eights. They suggest it is worth trying to satisfy Eights' need for attention. It is also worth helping them to experience their own personal power in legitimate ways. This is a good time to teach children about the unacceptability of bossy and bullying behaviours (including in tone of voice), and about the illegitimate use of power. Nevertheless, Eights' needs are intense and time consuming and Gesell also advises mothers of Eights to take breaks from them. A wise monarch needs to respect his advisor as well and allow her or him time for other tasks to be

done. Of course the advisor needs to be authoritative and show her or himself worthy of respect! There is no place for weakness in dealing with Eights, these monarchs and Jupiters!

The power and authority issues penetrate into relationships with others at home as well. This need for exclusive attention is not entirely restricted to their mothers either. Gesell writes note: 'The typical Eight-year-old does not like to play along. He wants not only to have other people to share his play but wants their complete time and attention as well.' However they also note that in two parent family, the relationship with the second parent who is the lesser carer, 'tends to be less intense and therefore as a rule smoother.'

Problems with siblings are often complicated by the intensity of Eights' relationship with their mother and their jealousy of her. Siblings also suffer under Eights' intense criticism. A sense of rivalry can increase with their new awareness of their own and their siblings' abilities. Parents can avoid aggravating rivalry by discouraging competition and comparisons and valuing each child for their own uniqueness. The value of banning all insults and "put downs" of others to create safety within the family should not be

### *Moral development*

Eights' ethical sense is intricate. At seven and a half they showed simple feelings of shame, now at eight they can be contrite ("I will never do it again".) Eights have a growing aversion to falsehood. Their tall tales usually have a grain of truth. They have a germinal sense of justice based on "rules" and precedents - they impute unfairness to others. They are beginning to be more benevolent themselves, as they can accept that some people need to be given special consideration. Earlier they

underestimated. As a culture we use use put downs a lot in humour and this may need to be reconsidered within the family situation if we want to make home an emotionally safe place to be. The "no put downs" rule has to begin with the adults.

Grandparents, especially grandmothers, can also meet trouble with Eight, if they try to intervene in family squabbles, especially 'when the child's father and mother are handling him.' As we have seen, Eights are sensitive about being told too directly what to do and this may be at the bottom of grandparents' problems if they act in an authoritarian manner.

Grandparents, like parents, may need to be reminded that Eights prefer a clue or hint to a command; that they do not want to be joked with about their shortcomings; that their feelings are easily hurt as they misconstrue our words and gestures. It also helps adults to remember that Eights are not long estranged or depressed and actively seek reconciliation.

In play Eights do not grasp complex rules yet, nor 'understand the ballot box'. There is much bickering and disputations, but the games go on more independently of adults and with more "on the spot" rules. Seven year olds would have quit, but Eights muddle through.

would have demanded absolute equality. They can admit wrongdoing, but soften the admission with alibis (to indicate why they didn't do it, rather than blame).

Despite Eights' expansiveness and challenges, there is something very admirable in the Jupiter stages in their moral striving. At eight they want to know what is right and to do what is right. They are not backward in commenting on what others do which they see as 'wrong' - 'Mummy you are going over

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the speed limit by 2 k.p.h.!' We may be quite embarrassed by their sometimes public declarations about what we have told them is not healthy or not right. They have good intentions and try to be responsible for

## *Gender and sexual development*

Awareness of differences in gender roles is increasing and for some boys is becoming more rigid. Girls manage to cross gender boundaries more often and with less condemnation from same sex peers than boys, but their self-esteem may be more fragile. This is a time for adults to encourage children to be true to who they are as individuals, with their own preferences and tendencies and not to be limited by other people's gender expectations. Provision of a great variety of role models helps this: gentle sensitive men *and* women, assertive powerful men *and* women, quiet thinkers, practical doers, artistic creators, reliable dependable people and adventurers. Children also need to understand that we all

themselves— for example they are more responsible in regard to time than they were—all of which reflects their independent spirit.

have masculine and feminine qualities within ourselves and that the most fully human people can access all these sides of themselves when it is appropriate.

Eights are aware of sexual differences, have an interest in babies and have questions on the origins of life, procreation and marriage. A very small proportion of girls may get breast development and if this is happening in class both boys and girls need to be told of the need for respect for this. Talk about this can be brief and straightforward for Eights. First menstruation follows about two years after breast development starts. More on this is in the profile for Nine.

*So Eights show Jupiter's bigness, expansiveness, egotism, and drama as well as new capacities in broad thinking, ethical understanding and self-responsibility. Living with eight year olds can be challenging for adults for it needs a little of the fiery choleric in us to match theirs, to lead them and love them with the enthusiasm they deserve. We need to be people worthy of their respect and model how to use power wisely and compassionately. We may also need to give ourselves permission for a well-earned rest!*

## *Further reading*

Bates Ames, Louise, Chase Haber, Carol *Your Eight-Year Old. Lively and Outgoing* (A Dell Trade Paperback New York 1989) A 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 children 7 to 10 years and Healthy play*