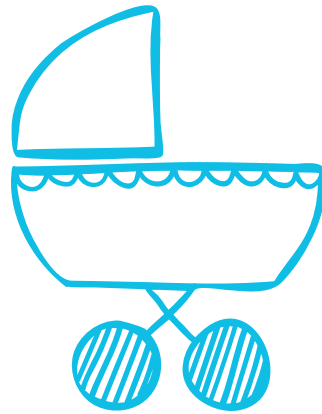




THE HEART OF A SHEPHERD

building relationships that build disciples

As we look at who our kids are, we need to take a step back and realize that God has created a natural order in how we develop. We don't run before we crawl or walk. We don't talk in sentences until we walk. Our bodies grow, our minds grow, our emotions grow, and our understanding of God grows over time. With that in mind we want to walk through some typical stages we can expect in all the groups we lead.



BIRTH TO KINDERGARTEN

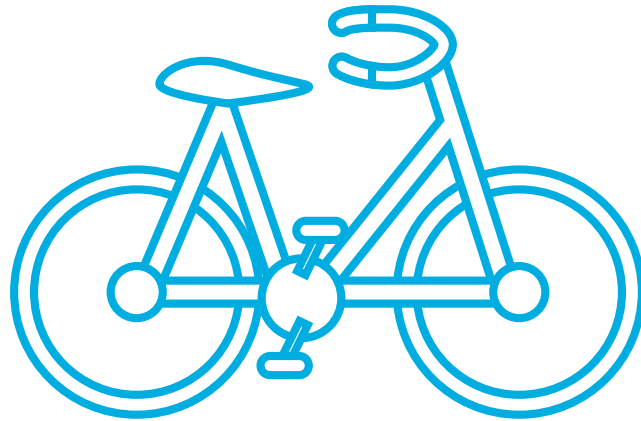
As leaders, we need to focus on giving kids opportunities to know God's love and meet God's family. That is through a friendly greeting as they arrive. Attending to their physical needs while they are in your care. Rescuing them when they fall or are hurt. Helping kids work through how to relate to the other kids in the room with redirection. We can also encourage kids to approach conflict by asking for forgiveness and saying I forgive you when they have been wronged. All of learning to live in community allows kids to trust and be trusted which sets the stage for embracing God loves me, Jesus is my Savior and God's Word is True.

Babies - 2-year-olds

- Physically: bodies change dramatically in these early years. The brain has 100 billion neurons (roughly the number of stars in the Milky Way), more than any other time in life. Birthweight is doubled and then grown to half of their adult height by age 2. Rolls over, crawls, walks, opens doors, and understands roughly 70 words.
- Socially: The social circle begins with mom and begins to widen. Is working to answer the question Am I Safe? And then Am I able?
- Brain: It is said this stage is the “meaning maker”. Every experience is a learning experience. Curiosity abounds. Kids learn values-what is important and what isn't and then weighs that against learning to trust and who to trust. By the time they are 2 trust becomes more of a question of will power and “Me do it” or they doubt their abilities and don't try.
- Morally/Spiritually: Motivated by safety, giving kids consistent boundaries and a loving relationship to introduce basic truths: God loves me, Jesus is My Savior, God's Word is True. Because kids are spiritual creatures at this stage, they learn to worship and rely on Jehovah God, or they learn to bow before lesser gods.

3 & 4-Year-Olds

- Physically: Can stand on one foot, jump, walk, walk backward, and pedal a tricycle and is learning to manipulate objects with force and speed.
Socially- Kids are learning what endears them to others by seeking approval in his ever-widening world of social relationships. Could even begin to have their own friends.
- Brain: 1,000 trillion connections between brain cells (twice as many as any adult.) Talking about everything is a way of processing their world. They can be funny and sometimes very serious. They are learning values of what is important and what isn't. Preschoolers learn to initiate tasks and carry out plans, or they feel guilty about efforts to be independent. (Initiative vs. guilt)
- Morally/Spiritually: Continued motivation by safety as well as learning to value fun. They think about this question frequently, “Am I ok?” in order to cultivate self-control. Because this stage is aware of peers small group interactions are best to cultivate relationships and help them process who God is and why He loves us. Most kids by this age will begin to understand that Jesus could be their Savior.



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL YEARS

As leaders we need to keep expanding kid's knowledge base of who God is through understanding that God's Word can be Trusted, Jesus is My Savior, and I can love God and Love People. Every week we can be sure that some kids walk in with some knowledge of God and His sovereignty. While other kids walk in with very little Biblical understanding or authority. The challenge will always be to introduce Jesus to kids at this stage for the first time while encouraging those who have been in church for a while to find new ways to engage with these truths and find their place to serve and grow in faith. As Pastor Mike has encouraged us all, we all have a next step. We will always give invitations to trust God with our whole lives and follow Him in our day to day lives.

K- 1st Grade

- **Mental and Physical Changes:** Can draw a person (with a body), write their name, and brush their own teeth. They understand ironic humor, are learning to read and recognize words and begin to master tying their own shoes.
- **Socially:** They are attention seekers. As their abilities improve they want to hear that you saw them and notice they are learning and growing. They also like to tell long stories.
- **Morally/Spiritually:** They are motivated by fun and will seek fun in mundane tasks. They are also asking big questions about their relationship with God and themselves. Through activities you can begin to engage their brains at the same time by asking discussion questions provided weekly. Kids need to see, “I am created in the image of God and for God.” This sets a foundation for authority in their lives.

2nd- 3rd Grade

- **Mental and Physical Changes:** Categorizes information and enjoys games with codes and puzzles. Understands different points of view. They are broadening their competence in all areas. Kids are growing in independence with choices and personality. Because they spend more time away from home, they begin to have their own thoughts, ideas about what is fun, what is challenging, and what is worthwhile.
- **Socially:** Their abilities are defining their interests that express their individuality. Character issues arise and will most often be the biggest topic of discussion as well as talk about who my friends are. This is also the stage you will hear the threat of “They aren’t my friend anymore.” They want to know do I have what it takes to be a friend, have a friend(s), and still seek authority approval.
- **Morally/Spiritually:** Fun is still the major motivator. As they grow in competence, addressing character places emphasis on issues of the heart. This opens the door to really look at the Bible for “instructions” and God’s character to experience God at work all around them.

4th- 5th Grade

- **Mental and Physical Changes:** Masters hand-eye coordination and reads to learn instead of learning to read. Attention span increases up to 45 minutes, and the average girl begins puberty. Becomes more aware of strengths and weakness in themselves as well as for the first time, that people in authority can be wrong sometimes. So they begin to challenge authority.
- **Socially:** At this stage, relationships are the big motivator, they want to know “Do I have any friends?”. Kids do everything as a group or to get the attention of the group. Kids feel uncertain of their body changes, and begin to take notice of the opposite gender more. They have mood swings and test limits. Their friendships are more complex including peer pressure and the struggle with self-esteem. Relationships become more than just shared interests and should be encouraged to seek friends with more similar worldviews.
- **Morally/Spiritually:** Armed with enough knowledge of God’s character and His design to have relationships with people who worship Him alone, kids at this stage can begin to trust God’s character and experience God’s family. The bonds they are beginning to form in small group set the stage for the relationships that will sustain them in the next 3-4 years. Kids should begin to find ways to serve with their gifts and abilities and find joy in serving and worshipping God with their whole lives regularly.

Content Taken From

Shepherding a Child’s Heart by Tedd Tripp Chapters 14- 17
Shepherding a Child’s Heart Parent Handbook by Tedd Tripp Chapters 11-12
Think Orange The Phase Study and Resources by Kristen Ivey and others
Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development
Developmental Milestones for typical 4th and 5th graders by Amanda Morin at www.understood.org