Developmentally Speaking

We are all different. This is especially true as children grow and develop. Below is a brief outline of characteristics of developmental stages children pass through along with some considerations for 4-H leaders. Most pass through each stage, but they may not reach the stages at the same age.

Characteristics of five to seven year olds:
♦ Are at a period of slow, steady growth.
♦ Learning how to use their bodies by mastering physical skills.
♦ More interested in process than product.
♦ Thinking is concrete.
♦ Enjoy doing.
♦ Moving from dependence on parents to dependence on another adult.
♦ Learning how to be friends; may have several "best friends."
♦ Boys and girls may enjoy playing together.
♦ Wrapped up in self.
♦ Seek adult approval because not confident enough yet to set their own standards.
♦ Like to play games but not ready to accept losing.
♦ Short attention span.

Characteristics of eight to eleven year olds:
♦ Want to make choices, but have limited ability to do so.
♦ Need simple, short directions.
♦ Still in a slow steady growth, but skills more developed.
♦ Need to feel accepted and worthwhile.
♦ Thinking is concrete, but beginning to think logically and symbolically.
♦ Look to adults for approval.
♦ Like to be part of an organized group similar to themselves.
♦ Interests change rapidly.
♦ Admire and imitate older youth.

Considerations for leaders:
♦ Use active learning experiences.
♦ Use small and large muscle activities; allow for repetition of the activity and instructions.
♦ It's okay for 5-7 year olds to work on a project rather than completing it.
♦ Use the senses to help child experience things.
♦ Provide lots of opportunities for them to be active.
♦ Be a friend that the young person can count on.
♦ Provide small group activities.
♦ Involve both sexes in the activities.
♦ Make believe activities allow youth to imagine clearly what other people think and feel.
♦ Offer support to the young people.
♦ Emphasize cooperative games in which everyone wins.
♦ Plan numerous short learning activities that have a limited number of steps and allow for immediate success.

Considerations for leaders:
♦ Limit what they undertake, they are better starters than finishers; help members select projects that use tools and equipment they can manage.
♦ Go over instructions several times in different ways.
♦ Continue to emphasize active/hands-on learning experiences.
♦ Judge projects against a standard where all can receive the same recognition rather than competition; don't compare successes of one youth against another; emphasize successes, minimize failures.
♦ Teach abstract concepts that can be related to something they can do or experience.
♦ Praise and encourage; help them understand where they’ve improved.
♦ Emphasize group learning; have them work in pairs, but choose a partner they like; hold initiation and installation ceremonies for new members and officers so they can be recognized and feel a sense of belonging.
♦ Encourage a variety of short learning experiences; need guidance from adults to stay on task to achieve their best performance.
♦ Encourage apprenticing with older 4-H’ers.
Characteristics of twelve to fifteen year olds:

♦ Great developmental variety among peers.

♦ Rapid physical changes.
♦ Self-conscious, may need help to overcome inferiority feelings.

♦ Beginning to think more abstractly with many new interests and feelings, plus longer attention span.
♦ Moving away from dependence on parents, but still need positive adult guidance.

♦ Identify with peers and want to belong; use groups as proving grounds for independence from adults.
♦ Uncomfortable with, but interested in the opposite sex.
♦ Seek limited independence; may imagine themselves as invulnerable.
♦ Their world is constantly expanding; they begin to see themselves as part of their community and society.
♦ Question rules and beliefs.

Characteristics of sixteen to nineteen year olds:

♦ Mastering abstract thinking skills.

♦ Are becoming better judges of their abilities.

♦ Have interests and an interest span similar to adults, but may feel only peers understand.

♦ Can select and master skills that hold their interest.
♦ Need training, encouragement, and experience on an adult level.
♦ Have the ability to make and execute plans.

♦ Have increasing ability to see how things relate and to use it in solving problems.
♦ Have great need to make their own decisions.

♦ Need and want guidance on an adult level, but seldom ask for it.
♦ Accept guidance readily from one with prestige.

Considerations for leaders:

♦ Provide learning experiences that will develop and show special skills.
♦ Need lots of physical activity and time to rest.
♦ Help members recognize and appreciate their own good points; allow for small group testing of ideas (less intimidating); show praise and recognition for progress made.
♦ Allow time for and encourage learning experiences that help them understand themselves.
♦ Show warm affection and a sense of humor, no nagging, condemnation or talking down; help members recognize their own limitations and weaknesses and help them improve.
♦ Give directed group work and guidance in acceptable behavior.
♦ Encourage co-educational groups that are largely social and recreational.
♦ Set few rules, but be firm.

♦ Provide meaningful learning experiences that help them feel needed and a part of the community.

♦ Give good reasons for your requests or limits.

Considerations for leaders:

♦ Provide opportunity to explore and think about future career plans.
♦ Help members develop judgment and decision making ability; help them evaluate what they are doing.
♦ Don't expect them to tell you everything; they feel their own peer group understands them and their problems.
♦ Allow for self-directed group responsibilities.
♦ Give members the opportunity to plan and carry out programs on their own.
♦ Encourage group leadership in club activities and community service.
♦ Urge them to lead groups in processing activities.

♦ Encourage independent thinking and decision making.
♦ Be alert to opportunities for them to assist less skillful or younger club members.
♦ Leader/member relationship should move from director/follower to advisor/independent worker.