

Kids Can Be Clients: Understanding Development in Middle Childhood

By **Dr. Sarah L. de Marchena**, Pediatric Psychologist

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Domain

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING

COMMUNICATION AND PREFERENCE EXPRESSION

REASONING AND JUDGEMENT

| Lower Middle Childhood AGES 6 TO 8 | |
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| Skills | Implications for Attorney-Child Relationship |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to organize memories and recall past events Ability to tell stories with a clear sequence Emerging ability to filter out distractions, manage attention, and control impulses Emerging ability to update thinking based on new information Emerging ability to delay gratification | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use short, step-by-step instructions (e.g., <i>First we'll talk, then you can draw.</i>) Repeat key points and check for understanding to support engagement and focus (<i>Can you tell me in your own words what I just said?</i>) Use simple comparisons to highlight concrete cause-and-effect (e.g., <i>If you finish this now, you will have more time to play later.</i>) Offer reassurance and clear expectations when routines or plans change (<i>You'll see a new caseworker today, but I'll be there too, and we'll talk together like we always do.</i>) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to express likes, dislikes and personal experiences Ability to use conjunctions like "because," "although," and "so" to describe sequenced events Emerging ability to share relevant details in conversations Ability to take turns speaking during conversations Emerging understanding of non-literal language and humor | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen patiently without interrupting, even when children add extra details or leave out key information in their stories Ask focused, concrete questions (e.g., <i>What happened next?, What did you like best?</i>) Avoid use of non-literal language and humor (e.g., instead of saying <i>This will be a piece of cake.</i>, say <i>This will be easy.</i>) Keep conversations brief and focused on one topic at a time (e.g., <i>Let's talk about school first, then we'll talk about your visit.</i>) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to explain reasons for decisions Ability to follow routines Ability to solve simple puzzles and understand simple cause and effect Ability to follow rules to avoid punishment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain why events occurred or decisions were made (e.g., <i>This happened because...</i>) Ask children to explain what they think is happening (e.g., <i>What makes you think that?</i>) Connect choices to future outcomes (e.g., <i>When you share what you want, it helps others understand your needs.</i>) |

| Upper Middle Childhood AGES 9 TO 11 | |
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| Skills | Implications for Attorney-Child Relationship |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to hold and use more information in mind Ability to tune out distractions Ability to consider long-term consequences Improved delay of gratification Improved self-control and reduced impulsivity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Validate children's immediate wishes while helping them understand the steps that protect their safety and stability (e.g., <i>I will tell the Judge that you want to go home as soon as possible. The judge will also hear from your caseworker, your Mom, and your Dad and then decide when you should return.</i>) Support long-term thinking by reinforcing when children show patience or consider future outcomes (e.g., <i>Because you thought about it first, we made a plan that worked better.</i>) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to use expanded vocabulary (~20,000 words) and more complex, accurate sentences Ability to adjust tone, vocabulary, and message depending on the conversation partner Ability to express preferences, even when understanding or outcomes are unclear | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use open-ended prompts to encourage children to explain their thoughts in their own words (e.g., <i>Can you tell me more about why that matters to you?</i>) Encourage children to share what they want to happen and talk through possible results (e.g., <i>If we try that approach, this could happen...</i>) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ability to think more logically and abstractly (e.g., hypothetical scenarios) Ability to articulate their understanding of more complex information Ability to follow social expectations Ability to see others' perspectives in more socially nuanced and empathetic ways Increased value of justice and fairness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empower children to share their concerns and preferences, especially when they may be motivated to please others (e.g., <i>I want to know what matters to you and your opinion helps me understand what is important to you.</i>) Support perspective-taking to help children see how others' roles fit into decisions while maintaining focus on their voice. (e.g., <i>My job as your attorney is to tell the judge what you want and then show them why they should make that decision.</i>) |