

In their words...

What is it like to be a 6th Grader?

- “Get more privileges, but don’t feel older.”
- “We have emotional changes. It is hard to be the youngest in middle school after being the oldest in elementary school.”
- “Kind of fun because little kids look up to us.”
- “You have a lot more responsibility—it is hard, but fun.”
- “Not much different for 5th Grader.”
- “Hard work because: tempted to do wrong; to fit in with bigger people; acting more mature; and lots of homework.”



What is the best thing about being a 6th Grader?

- “Able to play violin and other instruments.”
- “The freedom—teachers not watching every move and you’re expected to make good choices.”
- “I get to help out more at church and I like that!”
- “Being in Preteens at church and starting a Preteen Band at church.”
- “I get to be the “baby” in a new school and look forward to next year in the Youth Group.”
- “Change—I like change.”
- “Having my own locker.”
- “Fun Things”



What is hardest about being a 6th Grader?

- “Homework”
- “Being Organized”
- “Responsibility has increased.”
- “Thinking about college and what I’ll be.”
- “Peer Pressure—everyone likes being like everyone else.”
- “Being Christian—laughed at when I talk about prayer.”
- “Not to follow the crowd because you can lose some of your best friends.”



Because of the pressures they face, sixth graders need the very best that our churches can offer them. Many school systems today place sixth, seventh, and eighth graders in middle school. Often churches in the same location believe they must do the same.

State conventions have jointly prepared this material to help workers, parents, and church leaders provide for the developmental needs of sixth graders as they grow from childhood to adolescence.

Suggestions for appropriate sixth grade activities...

FALL

- Fall Festival
- Breakfast for parents before Sunday School (Open House)
- Parent/sixth-grade meeting to hear all the tentative plans for the new year
- Special Mission Bible Study
- Cookie Bakes and/or regular visits to Nursing Homes
- Start Bible Drill

WINTER

- Day Camp on school holidays
- Valentine Banquet for parents
- Easter sunrise service
- Computer to print a newspaper
- Sunday lunch — pizza at church
- Games Night

SPRING

- Bible Drill
- Weekend retreat
- Luncheon with pastor and/or spouse
- Fishing trip with Ministers
- For Girls Only (hair/nail)
- Sports Night
- Parent/child visit to funeral home, hospital, jail, etc.
- Plan and conduct service projects for rest of year
- Plan for summer children/youth music camps

SUMMER

- VBS
- Preteen Camp (getting ready for adolescence)
- Recreation Workshops (studies and recreation one day per week)
- Special Themed Bible Study (getting along with parents, peer pressure, witnessing)
- Crossover events with 7th and 8th grade (“Seven Up” Party to prepare for Youth Ministry)
- Children/youth music camps

RECOMMENDATIONS & TIPS

- 1 Plan to involve both Children and Youth Staff, Coordinators and volunteer workers in making decisions about organizational patterns, curriculum materials, learning activities and social events for sixth graders.
- 2 Whether sixth graders are in the Children or Youth Division, use the suggestions found in the children's curriculum materials specifically for sixth graders.
TIP: Meet the needs of your sixth graders. Plan ways to adapt learning activities and the learning environment, such as moving activities away from tables when sixth graders' legs get too long to fit underneath the tables.
- 3 Organize in small groups so that the sixth graders' needs can be met whichever age division they are in.
TIP: Some smaller churches may choose to organize two to four sixth graders into a class or group rather than grouping them with younger children or the youth.
- 4 Keep sixth graders in the Children's Division if at all possible, but upgrade their social activities. This will require effective parent/worker communications.
TIP: Upgrade sixth-grade activities and have these events more often than for the first through fifth graders, even if they are in the same department. Keep most youth activities as events to be anticipated when promoted into the Youth Ministry.
- 5 Plan to help the church staff, parents and sixth graders understand what they have to look forward to as sixth graders.
TIP: Develop a communication process, including meetings and mailings, so that all leaders and parents involved know that decision have been well thought-out and choices made to benefit sixth graders.
- 6 Develop and maintain a strong relationship with parents prior to their children becoming sixth graders.
TIP: Provide ways to help parents understand the preadolescent and deal with problems that arise. You may want to plan regular and special conferences for parents of all children.
- 7 Make sixth graders feel special by giving them a unique name; such as, "Super Sixes", "Tweens" or other catchy names. Provide a department or classroom away from or at the edge of the children's area. You may want to decorate their classroom in a unique or special way.
TIP: Sixth graders will not mind being a part of the Children's Division if they are made to feel that they have a special group of their own.

PRINCIPLES & GUIDELINES

- 1 No matter where sixth graders are located in a school system, they are learning content on the sixth-grade level.
- 2 Because sixth graders think mostly in concrete terms, they need materials and methods which do not require them to think in abstract terms.
- 3 Many sixth graders have the physical characteristics of teenagers without the emotional maturity or stability to function in a youth program for sixth through twelfth graders.
- 4 Most sixth graders are not socially ready to interact with seventh through twelfth graders. When this occurs, eleventh and twelfth graders may drop out of Sunday School rather than cope with the immaturity of sixth graders.
- 5 Since sixth graders are social beings, they need more social activities appropriate for their age. Often they are more secure and better satisfied in a smaller group without the constant pressures of the more advanced activities with older children.
- 6 The insecurity of sixth graders who are grouped with seventh through twelfth graders often cause them to drop out before they can develop the social or educational skills to participate in that grouping.
- 7 "Too much too soon" for a sixth grader and even for younger youth results in boredom or "burnout" by the time they reach eleventh- and twelfth-grade levels.
- 8 School systems may make grouping and grading decisions in relationship to their enrollment, space, and budget. These decisions do not always apply to your church. Thus, each church must make decisions that meet the needs of their sixth graders.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SIXTH GRADERS

Social Characteristics

- Accepts Responsibility
- Likes an authority figure or model
- Likes to be part of the "group"
- Has varied interests
- Is a hero-worshiper
- Usually dislikes the opposite sex
- Is developing a value system

Churches Should...

- Provide opportunities for a student to help
- Set limits and freedoms within limits
- Because sixth graders are cliquish, activities should be grouped in ways that keep them from excluding others
- Provide variety in projects
- Set a Christian example; challenge them
- Provide separate groups for boys and girls or let them go to mixed groups voluntarily
- Plan developmental opportunities to solve problems involving values



Spiritual Characteristics

- Is developing spiritually
- May have some spiritual questions
- Sets high standards
- Emotions play part in religion and the child may respond to emotional appeals
- Is capable of using the Bible
- Needs encouragement in daily devotions
- Is more likely to be reaching the age of accountability than younger children

Churches Should...

- Approach each student at their level
- Answer simply and honestly
- Avoid pressures
- Visit in each home for a private time and sharing
- Provide achievable goals for each student
- Provide devotional helps
- Provide opportunities to use the Bible
- Present the gospel message simply
- Provide opportunities for worship expression through music

Emotional Characteristics

- Dislikes outward display of affection
- Has some fears; feels threatened by competition
- May be quick-tempered
- Can accept rules and limits for behavior
- Enjoys humor
- Needs acceptance and encouragement

Churches Should...

- Be consistent; help them feel secure; use team approach
- Provide a choice of projects; keep them busy
- Let each student know you like him or her, but avoid a display of affection
- Enjoy humorous situations with a student, but not at their expense
- Lead them to set rules for behavior; be firm in enforcing the rules
- Listen; accept each student



Mental Characteristics

- Likes things to relate to the present
- Likes to collect
- Inquisitive
- Likes to read and write
- Can think and reason
- Has a good memory; memorizes easily
- Does not generally understand symbolism
- Has approximately a 10-12 minute attention span
- Likes to be commended

Churches Should...

- Plan "here and now" activities and projects
- Plan projects that require collecting
- Help each answer their own questions
- Provide Bible games, activities, and projects requiring reading & writing
- Provide opportunities for making right choices
- Provide Bible-searching games and projects; opportunities to memorize Scripture
- Avoid object lessons which confuse thinking (examples: boxes, ropes or colors to explain salvation)
- Plan for pupil involvement
- Praise good behavior; avoid condemning unacceptable behavior before the group; discuss behavior patterns individually.



Physical Characteristics

- Active and likes to do things
- Strong and healthy
- Noisy
- Has more developed hand skills
- Likes the out-of-doors
- Likes the difficult and competitive
- Cannot sit still long because he or she is still growing
- Approaching puberty; girls mature more rapidly than boys

Churches Should...

- Plan the schedule so that some physical activity is included
- Arrive at church site early
- Provide nature projects
- Provide difficult and challenging projects and activities
- Provide a place of recreation and refreshments separate from preschoolers and younger children (example: in Vacation Bible School)
- Encourage musical growth opportunities