

# Facilitator's Guide

# COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

for Parents with Children Ages 6-12

A resource to strengthen parents' knowledge  
and skills to improve their child's social and  
emotional wellbeing

## Parents Matter Project

Implemented by Middle Childhood Matters Coalition Toronto

Parent learning sessions are developed with input from the Paediatric Residents' Advocacy Committee at The University of Toronto and The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids)

**MIDDLE CHILDHOOD MATTERS**  
—COALITION TORONTO—

Ontario  
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## Middle Childhood Matters Coalition Toronto (MCMCT)

The Middle Childhood Matters Coalition Toronto (MCMCT) is a group of 20 social service, child welfare, education, recreation, health organizations and parent leaders promoting and influencing a system that prioritizes children ages 6-12 (middle childhood), and their families. MCMCT envisions a city where children ages 6-12 and their families have equitable opportunities and resources to thrive.

The Coalition believes, and research states, that this is an important time in a child's life. To support children's healthy development during this stage, MCMCT promotes high quality, affordable, accessible and culturally appropriate out-of-school time programs (before and after school time, summertime and holidays). The Coalition was one of the driving forces behind the development of the City of Toronto's first Middle Childhood Strategy, which prioritizes programming for this age group.

Our member organizations work with thousands of parents and children across Toronto. MCMCT recognizes the vital need to educate and support parents, caregivers and adult allies living, working and caring for these children across Toronto.

## Paediatric Residents' Advocacy Committee

The University of Toronto Paediatric Residents' Advocacy Committee was established in 2001 by residents who were passionate about the overall wellbeing of children and in response to the recognition by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada that advocacy is an integral part of a paediatrician's role.

This committee is resident-led and supervised by staff physicians from SickKids. Residents and staff volunteer their time and are committed to educating parents and children, running clinics, and advocating for children's issues at the national levels. The Parent Nights sub-committee develops curriculum and runs workshops for parents to provide health information to empower them to improve their child's overall wellbeing.

Learning sessions developed by the Paediatric Residents' Advocacy Committee:

- Sleep and Bedtime Routines
- Body Image and Self-esteem
- Healthy Eating and Nutrition
- Physical Activity
- Cognitive Development in Middle Childhood and Adolescence
- Emotional Development in Middle Childhood and Adolescence
- Social Development in Middle Childhood and Adolescence

### CONNECT WITH US



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[www.middlechildhoodmatters.ca](http://www.middlechildhoodmatters.ca)



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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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We wish to extend our continued appreciation to the Paediatric Residents' Advocacy Committee at the University of Toronto and SickKids for sharing their expertise and developing the Cognitive Development learning content and delivering learning sessions in diverse communities across Toronto.

Thank you to all the Middle Childhood Matters Coalition Toronto parent leaders and coalition members, who gave their time and insights into making this guide possible. As well, to all the Toronto service providers who promote the unique developmental needs of children ages 6-12, we are grateful to you all.

We also thank the Child Welfare Institute for creating the evaluation tools and data analysis for all the parent learning sessions.

Our deep appreciation to Shaden Jebahi, Project Coordinator, for her leadership and commitment to the Parents Matter Project.

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# INTRODUCTION

The Parents Matter Project endeavors to support and educate newcomer, low-income and racialized parents in Toronto with children ages 6-12 (middle childhood) on how to best improve developmental and social outcomes for their children. This includes the creation and implementation of topic-specific parent learning sessions. Parenting and family relationships provide the foundation from which children ages 6-12 can develop the skills to overcome challenges and thrive to adulthood. These parent learning sessions aim to build upon the assets, capabilities and strengths of parents to help increase their knowledge on a number of topic areas relevant to their child's social and emotional development.

This facilitator's guide provides practical learning sessions to increase familial relationships, including resources that can be utilized and accessed beyond the life of the session. This is grounded in the knowledge that families crave more meaningful time together and the need to have access to materials, tools and skill building knowledge on an ongoing basis that is accessible at all times. By attending a learning session, a parent will leave with more knowledge, awareness and confidence in their ability to parent throughout this developmental stage. The interactive activities and supplementary resources will help parents to solidify their learnings.

In addition to Cognitive Development in Middle Childhood and Adolescence, 15 evidence-based learning sessions have been developed in collaboration with experts in the fields such as:

- Sleep and Bedtime Routines
- Body Image and Self-esteem
- Healthy Eating and Nutrition
- Physical Activity
- We All Have Mental Health
- Growing Health Minds
- Children's Mental Health Challenges and Seeking Support
- Counting on Math
- Reading is Everywhere
- Keeping Children Safe Online
- More than Just Video Games
- Raising Responsible Digital Children
- Emotional Development in Middle Childhood and Adolescence
- Social Development in Middle Childhood and Adolescence

# FLOW OF THE LEARNING SESSION

LEARNING SESSION STRUCTURE	DESCRIPTION
Learning Objectives	What parent participants can expect to learn by attending each learning session.
Warm-up/ Check-in	An activity to introduce and ground parent participants. The purpose is to begin getting to know each other by creating an inclusive and welcoming environment where all voices are heard and valued.
Group Agreements	An opportunity to collectively co-create the conditions of how learning will unfold. Creating a group agreement demonstrates that the space is shared by all.
Reflection Moment	Guiding questions are used to prompt reflection on current knowledge of the topic presented.
Content Development	How the information will be delivered and resourced (learning discussions) how learning happens- what do we need to know.
Action Moment	Each learning session will motivate concrete actions for parent participants to go from “reflection to action-now what?” with tips, tools and hands-on experience.
Evaluation and Check-out	Reinforce new learnings, takeaways and evaluate the learning.



# FACILITATION TIPS

- Prepare your session in advance; read content carefully and resources needed.
- Be clear and concise in your interactions.
- Listen to what is said.
- Remember to integrate important points that have not been raised by parent participants.
- Validate questions outside of the lesson plan raised by parent participants and direct them to their service provider.
- Be ready to accommodate changes and respond to your audience. Flexibility will be required from time to time and you may need to adapt the agenda in some situations.
- When appropriate, share your own lived experience as a parent or caregiver. However, be conscious not to dominate the conversation.



## Useful Tips to Successfully Facilitate a Group Discussion

### 1. Adults learn better when:

- They are personally motivated and engaged.
- They have the opportunity to reflect on what they are learning.
- They can exchange knowledge and experiences with others.
- They can have better understanding of what they learn and the implementation of that learning at home.

### 2. Adapting for inclusion:

- Know the diversity within the group: who are the participants? What experiences do they bring?
- Integrate cultural experiences: consider how both the facilitator and parent participants can bring their cultural experiences into the session.
- Be sensitive to emotional responses: depending on parent participants lived experiences, sometimes exercises can trigger participants' emotions.

# COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

## Overview

Middle childhood refers to the stage between early childhood and adolescence, usually defined as ages 6 through 12. During this critical period children go through significant changes in each of the five domains of development – cognitive, physical, emotional, social, communication and mental health.

It is time for learning, creativity, self-expression and increased autonomy and independence.

The Ages and Stages Curriculum is a 3-part module focusing on cognitive, emotional and social development during middle childhood and adolescence. Each module will present developmental milestones and events taking place across one of these three areas. Each module also includes a case scenario to bring the information to life.

## Learning Objectives

- a. Understand the cognitive changes that a child experiences in middle childhood to adolescence
- b. Describe the different ways children start to think throughout middle childhood and adolescence
- c. Discuss ways to encourage healthy cognitive development in children



### Materials and Supplies

#### FLIP CHART



#### FLIP CHART PAPER



#### MARKERS



#### LEARNING TOOLS



#### POST-IT NOTES



#### ATTENDANCE FORM



#### PENS



#### EVALUATIONS



# LEARNING SESSION OUTLINE

<i>Agenda</i>	<b>Length of the learning session (1 hour)</b>
1. Welcome and Introduction	(5 minutes)
2. Check-in	(10 minutes)
3. Reflection Moment	(5 minutes)
4. Content Development	(25 minutes)
5. Action Moment	(10 minutes)
6. Evaluation and Check-out	(5 minutes)

## **1. Welcome and Introduction** (5 minutes)

Facilitator(s) will welcome parent participants and organization(s) supporting the learning session. Housekeeping items should be introduced: washroom facilities, fire exit and additional information needed for the learning session.

*Materials needed:* Pens

**Appendix 1 - Tool 1.1** Agenda

**Tool 1.2** Attendance and Photo Release Form

**Tool 1.4** Evaluation (Pre)

## **2. Check-in** (10 minutes)

*Getting to know each other:* Introductions of parent participants (5 minutes)

Facilitator asks parent participants to sit/stand in a circle; and share their name, their children's names and ages, and invites them to describe their week using a word that begins with the first letter of their first name.

EXAMPLE - **Lori:** Lousy or **Theresa:** Terrific.

## 2.a Group Agreements

(5 minutes)

Materials needed: post-it notes, markers, flip chart paper, pens.

Facilitator asks parent participants any of the following

### ? Guiding Questions

- What do we need from each other and ourselves to create a safe learning space?
- How are we going to learn together in this space?

Parent participants are asked to write their answers on a post-it note and place it on the flip chart. Facilitator will read them out loud for parents' consensus.

The list should be posted visibly for the length of the learning session.

*Building a group agreement with parent participants is an important step to take when working with groups. It invites members to co-create a safe space for sharing where all voices are heard and valued.*

## 3. Reflection Moment

(10 minutes)

Materials needed: **Appendix 2 - Learning Tool 2.1** Areas of Cognitive Development

Facilitator asks parent participants the following:

### ? Guiding Question

*What do you think cognition is? Can you provide some examples?*

### Discussion Points

- Cognition and cognitive development looks at thought processing, memory, problem solving, and decision-making skills.
- Once a child reaches the school-age years their inability to put themselves in other people's shoes shifts to a more mature, perceptive and imaginative way of thinking.
- School-age children will demonstrate a genuine enthusiasm for learning new concepts, make strides in gaining self-confidence and will develop the necessary skills to understand the world and people around them.
- By age 8, your child will be able to properly articulate their feelings, a range of ideas and effectively solve problems through dialogue.



If not brought up during group agreements, facilitator should explore the importance of **confidentiality** and sharing in a safe space.

	COGNITIVE
Middle Childhood (age 6-9)	- Concrete thinking - Focused on here and now - Develops conservation of thought
Early Adolescence (age 10-13)	- Concrete thinking - Unable to see long term implications of decision making
Middle Adolescence (age 14-16)	- Abstract thought develops - May be aware of future implications but may not apply to decision making
Late Adolescence (age 17-20)	- Future oriented - Idealism - Able to think things through independently

Facilitator hands out **Learning Tool 2.1** Areas of Cognitive Development

Facilitator invites parent participants to further discuss by asking the following:

### ? Guiding Question

*What are the important cognitive tasks in middle childhood and adolescence?*

### Discussion Points

- One of the most important tasks of middle childhood is **transitioning from how a child thinks to how an adult thinks**.
- There are differences in the way the brains of adults and children receive and process visual information and the ways in which they understand spatial relationships.

## 4. Content Development

(25 minutes)

Materials needed: **Appendix 2 - Learning Tool 2.2** Overview of Cognitive Development in Middle Childhood and Adolescence

**Learning Tool 2.3** Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development

Facilitator hands out **Learning Tool 2.2** and invites parent participants to turn to an elbow partner to discuss the three main areas of cognitive development.



### Facilitator Tip

Allow 8 to 10 minutes for parents to share the following:

- Children's age
- Identify what changes in cognitive development they have noticed in their children
- A significant moment about those developments
- Why they think it is important for children to learn abstract thought

**Learning Tool 2.2** Overview of Cognitive Development in Middle Childhood and Adolescence.

## Concrete Thinking

- **Children think in terms of what they can see.**
  - » Combine (addition).
  - » Separate (subtracting/dividing).
  - » Order (sorting).
  - » Transform (1 nickel = 5 pennies).
- **Children start to learn that they can conserve number (age 6), mass (age 7), and weight (age 9).**
  - » Conservation is the understanding that something stays the same in quantity even though its appearance changes.
  - » Unable to understand long term consequences of decision making.

## Emergence of Abstract Thought

- As children transition through this phase of development, they become better at imagining things not seen or experienced.
- Youth who remain at the level of concrete thinking focus largely on physically present or real objects.
- Concrete thinkers may be unable to understand the consequences of actions, unable to link cause and effect in regard to health behaviour and may not be prepared to avoid risk. Example: “You said I would get sick if I did not take my asthma medicine. I did not take them twice and I am fine so I do not have to take it”.
- Children start to think hypothetically.
- Start to use logical thought process.
- They ask more questions.
- Children develop the personal fable.
  - » If the imaginary audience (peers) is watching and thinking about the child, then the child must be special or different.

## Learning

- **Children develop traits that are useful in the learning process, such as curiosity, creativity, imagination, cooperation, confidence, commitment, enthusiasm, and persistence.**
  - » They begin to understand cause and effect.
  - » They become more aware of strategies to improve their memory and learning.
- **Children become more future oriented with a sense of perspective.**
  - » Think through things independently.
  - » Children start to develop the ability to think about thinking.
  - » Children start to develop a capacity to think about what they are feeling and how others perceive them.



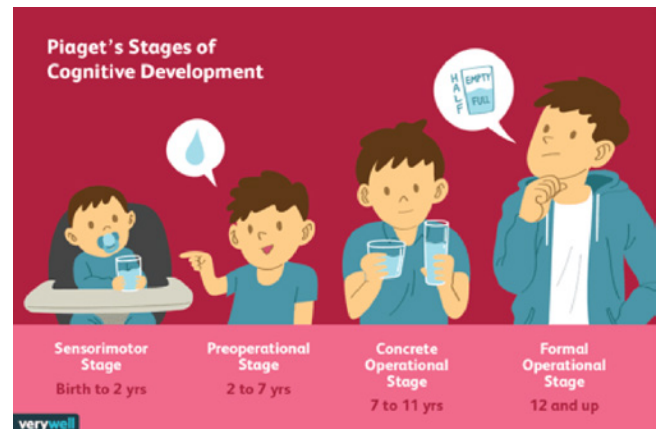
## Facilitator Tip

Once parent participants have had an opportunity to share Learning Tool 2.2, introduce the following parent tips for further discussion.

## How to Encourage Healthy Cognitive Development During Middle Childhood and Adolescence

- Complement and praise for well-thought-out-decisions.
- Encourage them to share ideas and thoughts with you.
- Encourage discussions about a variety of topics and current events.
- Stimulate adolescents to think about the future.

Facilitator hands out **Learning Tool 2.3** and asks parents participants to describe what the child may be thinking at each age group shown in the picture, using what they have just learned regarding cognitive development throughout childhood and early adolescence.



### Answers may include:

- Infant: Once a baby starts to form language, they may develop a word label for water, i.e. "wa". Splashing in the water is an exciting sensory experience with no recognition for consequence.
- Toddler/Child: The child can identify the liquid in a glass as water (appropriate label for object).
- Middle Childhood: Though the glasses look different, they hold the same amount of water (conservation of thought)
- Teenager: A glass of water can be a metaphor for outlook on life—is the glass half empty or half full?

## 5. Action Moment

(10 minutes)

Facilitator reads out loud the following case scenario to parent participants to further reflect on cognitive development in middle childhood.





## CASE SCENARIO

You are the parent of a 9-year-old student. You get a phone call from your local grocery store across from the school informing you that your child tried to steal a chocolate bar from the front counter. Your child has never stolen anything before that you are aware of.

### ? Guiding Questions

*Why do you think the child stole the chocolate bar?*

*What do you think the child thought about before stealing the chocolate bar?*

*What would you say to the child as their parent?*

*How would this be different if the child was actually 16-years of age?*

#### Answers may include:

- The child stole the chocolate bar because they are still in a concrete phase of cognitive development. They are egocentric (unable to view how actions impact others) and have taken it for the immediate gratification.
- As a parent, you may want to address why your child stole the chocolate bar. It may be helpful to explore how those actions have impacted other people, for example, the owner of the store may have to pay for it them self.
- As children get older, they start to have a better understanding of how others are affected by their actions. If they were 16-years-old, they would be able to recognize both how their actions may impact others and also how it can impact their future if they were to get in trouble.

### 6. Evaluation and Check-out

(5 minutes)

Materials needed: Pens

**Learning Tool 1.5** Evaluation Form (Post).

**Evaluation:** Facilitator hands out **Learning Tool 1.5** and invites parent participants to give their feedback. Provide participants with pens and evaluation forms to be filled out. Encourage them to be honest. Their responses are anonymous and they do not have to answer any questions they do not feel comfortable answering..

**Check-out:** Thank parent participants for their participation and time.

# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX 1

**Tool 1.1** Agenda - Cognitive Development in Middle Childhood and Adolescence

**Tool 1.2** Attendance and Photo Release Form

**Tool 1.3** Facilitator's Check List

**Tool 1.4** Evaluation (Pre)

**Tool 1.5** Evaluation (Post)

## APPENDIX 2

**Learning Tool 2.1** Areas of Cognitive Development

**Learning Tool 2.2** Overview of Cognitive Development in Middle Childhood and Adolescence

**Learning Tool 2.3** Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development

## APPENDIX 3

References

### Tool 1.1 Agenda - Cognitive Development in Middle Childhood and Adolescence

1. Welcome and Introduction (5 minutes)
2. Check-in (10 minutes)
3. Reflection Moment (5 minutes)
4. Content Development (25 minutes)
5. Action Moment (10 minutes)
6. Evaluation and Check-out (5 minutes)

**APPENDIX 1.2 - ATTENDANCE AND PHOTO RELEASE FORM**

**Tool 1.2 Attendance and Photo Release Form**

FULL NAME	EMAIL	PHONE NUMBER	DO YOU CONSENT TO HAVE YOUR PHOTO TAKEN?	SIGNATURE REQUIRED
1.			<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
2.			<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
3.			<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
4.			<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
5.			<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
6.			<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
7.			<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
8.			<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
9.			<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
10.			<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
11.			<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
12.			<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
13.			<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
14.			<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
15.			<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
16.			<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
17.			<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
18.			<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
19.			<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	
20.			<input type="checkbox"/> Y <input type="checkbox"/> N	

### Tool 1.3 Facilitator's Check List

#### *Materials and Supplies:*

- Markers
- Flip Chart (if needed)
- Flip Chart Paper
- Post-it Notes
- Pens
- Learning Tools
- Attendance Form
- Evaluation Forms (Pre & Post)



PARENT EVENT: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / 20\_\_

Do at START of Event

Please answer the questions below.

PART 1: About You

1. **Your gender:**  Female  Male  Trans  I describe my gender in a different way
2. **Your children's age(s):**  0-5  6-12  13+
3. **Parenting status:**  I'm a single parent  I'm **not** a single parent
4. **What country were you born in:** \_\_\_\_\_
5. **What is your postal code:** \_\_\_\_\_
6. **Do you have any relatives living with you at home?**  Yes  No  
If YES how many? \_\_\_\_\_

PART 2: About the Event

7. **How did you hear about this event?**  Friend/Family  Another Organization  
 Internet  Flyers  Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
8. **Please rate your knowledge on:** (Circle ONE answer per question)

		HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW	DON'T KNOW
a	Cognitive development in middle childhood children	H	M	L	DK
b	How children think at different ages	H	M	L	DK
c	The difference between concrete thinking and abstract thinking	H	M	L	DK
d	How to encourage healthy cognitive development in my child	H	M	L	DK
f	I can identify one (1) resource to support my child's cognitive development.	Yes		No	

PART 3: About your Learning

9. **What do you hope to learn today?**

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THANK YOU!

## APPENDIX 1.5 - EVALUATION (POST)

PARENT EVENT: \_\_\_ / \_\_\_ / 20\_\_

Do at END  
of Event

Please answer the questions below.

### PART 1: About the Event

1. Please rate your knowledge on: (Circle **ONE** answer per question)

		HIGH	MEDIUM	LOW	DON'T KNOW
a	Cognitive development in middle child hood children	H	M	L	DK
b	How children think at different ages	H	M	L	DK
c	The difference between concrete thinking and abstract thinking	H	M	L	DK
d	How to encourage healthy cognitive development in my child	H	M	L	DK
e	I can identify one (1) resource to support my child's cognitive development.	Yes		No	

### PART 2: About your Learning

2. What did you learn today?

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### PART 3: About your Satisfaction

1	How often will you use what you learned today with your child(ren)? (Circle <b>ONE</b> answer)	Never	Sometimes	Always
If never, please tell us why not?				
2	How informative was the facilitator? (Circle <b>ONE</b> answer)	Not Informative	A little Informative	Very Informative
3	How satisfied are you with this event overall? (Circle <b>ONE</b> answer)	Not Satisfied	A little Satisfied	Very Satisfied
4	If we could improve ONE THING - what would it be?			



## Learning Tool 2.1 Areas of Cognitive Development

## AREAS OF COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

	COGNITIVE
<b>Middle Childhood (age 6-9)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Concrete thinking</li> <li>- Focused on here and now</li> <li>- Develops conservation of thought</li> </ul>
<b>Early Adolescence (age 10-13)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Concrete thinking</li> <li>- Unable to see long term implications of decision making</li> </ul>
<b>Middle Adolescence (age 14-16)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Abstract thought develops</li> <li>- May be aware of future implications but may not apply to decision making</li> </ul>
<b>Late Adolescence (age 17-20)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Future oriented</li> <li>- Idealism</li> <li>- Able to think things through independently</li> </ul>

*\*Adapted from Neinstein's Adolescent and Young Adult Health Care: A Practical Guide  
Summary provided by Dr. Alene Toulany, adapted with permission*



### Learning Tool 2.2 Overview of Cognitive Development in Middle Childhood and Adolescence

#### Concrete Thinking



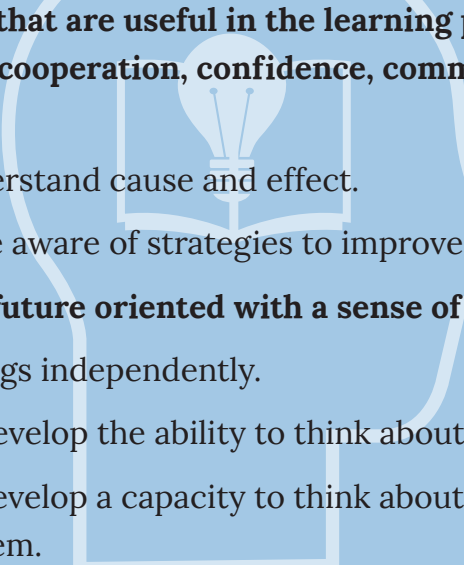
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#### Emergence of Abstract Thought

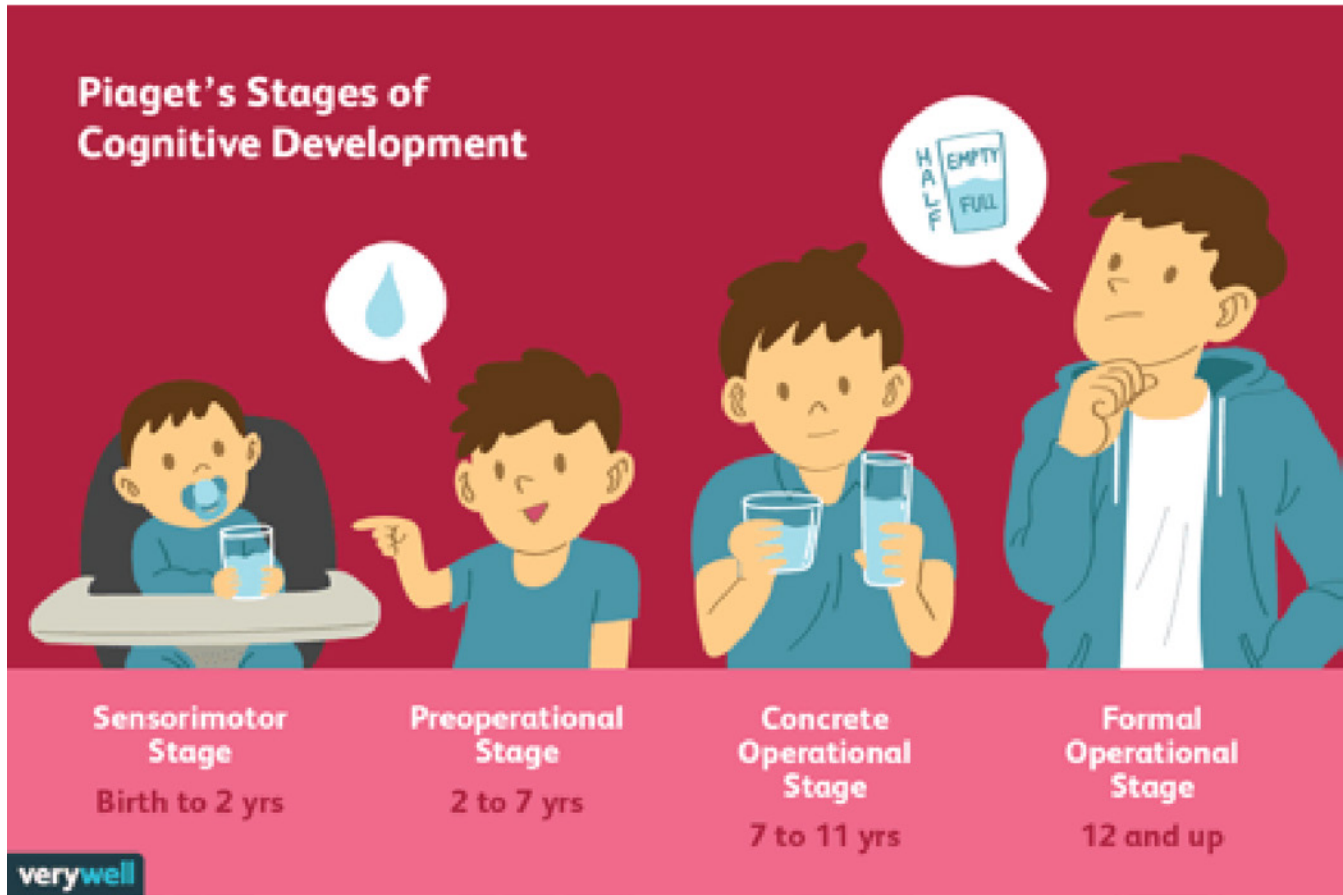


- As children transition through this phase of development, they become better at imagining things not seen or experienced.
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## Learning

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    - » They begin to understand cause and effect.
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    - » Think through things independently.
    - » Children start to develop the ability to think about thinking.
    - » Children start to develop a capacity to think about what they are feeling and how others perceive them.
- 

Learning Tool 2.3 Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development



## APPENDIX 3

### Resource Share

Cognitive Development in School-Age Children. AboutKidsHealth Sickkids.

<https://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/>

**Article?contentid=711&language=English&hub=YourSchoolagechild**

Social and Emotional Development in School-Age Children. AboutKidsHealth Sickkids.

<https://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/>

**Article?contentid=713&language=English&hub=YourSchoolagechild**

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