

**Parents often approach me with questions about what is common and developmentally appropriate for their child's age, so the school counselor at St. Anne and I researched and compiled information about 5th graders. Be aware that children move through these stages at different rates, some sooner, some later. - We hope this is helpful! - Jennifer Moyer-Taylor, St Joseph School Counselor*

Your Fifth-Grader

Common Cognitive, Social and Emotional Developmental Behaviors of 5th Graders

Classroom:

- As the brain develops, your child's neural pathways are becoming faster and more efficient, resulting in the ability to think more abstractly. Some subjects, such as math, become easier.
- The ability to classify information, arrange things in a series, and to pinpoint exactness all grow stronger.
- Enjoy being noticed, rewarded for efforts. Proud of academic products.
- Quick tempers can lead to physical outbursts and tears, but these brief incidents are generally quickly and easily solved.
- They remember faults more than assets, both in themselves and others.

Social/Emotional Behaviors:

- Increased neural pathways have created a unique sense of "self," but their upgraded analytic ability also enables them to become keenly, painfully aware of how they fit, or don't fit into certain social groups. You can't keep your child from trying to locate their place in their peer group and children this age need to discover how their "self" fits into the world — in terms of gender, social status, ethnicity, and belief systems. Parents can be loving and wise guides, offering perspective, advice and support to boost their fragile egos during this shaky time. Encouraging friendships from different areas of their life will help.
- Friendship groups that were more fluid in earlier years now grow more rigid, and even the most sensitive and caring girls and boys can be socially aggressive.
- As mentioned above, anger is the most common emotional expression for both boys and girls. However, quick to anger – quick to forgive.
- Boys tend to get along well with other boys. Some boys still tend to form large groups and may move from one group to another fluidly. Others may have one or two "best friends".
- By 5th grade most girls are sliding into puberty while most boys will not be there until 8th grade.
- Fifth grader brains may waffle between *recklessness and paranoia*. Try and warn them about the dangers of unsafe behavior (drugs and alcohol, no helmets), and for those who lean towards timid; encourage them to try new challenges and that it is alright to make mistakes.

Communication Style:

- Cooperative *and* competitive.
- Expressive, talkative, likes to explain.
- Good listeners, actively receptive.

**You're the best judge of your child's development and what is "normal" for him. Just when you think you've figured out your child, something changes. You may find strategies that once worked no longer have any impact on him. Don't worry, this normal. If you would like more resources or information, please contact your pediatrician or you may contact Jennifer Moyer-Taylor at 206-329-3260 X220 or at jmoyerta@stjosephsea.org.*

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ASK THE EXPERTS: *A Snapshot of a Common Homework Problem*

My Child Won't Complete His Work

By Allison Gardenswartz, Consulting Educator, *from greatschools.com*

Question:

Help! My child refuses to complete any class work. The teacher gives him plenty of time to complete his work in class. At the end of the day, she fills out what he is missing and sends it home with him with a note telling us he did not accomplish anything today. She tells us that when she asks him to complete a task (any task) he moves with very deliberate slowness, and it sometimes takes him up to five minutes just to move across the classroom from one spot to another. The other day, she kept him in at lunch to have him write one definition for one vocabulary word. He was unable to complete it in the 40 minutes she allotted him. He is capable and able to complete this work, and he does not have a learning disability. He can do it at home for us, but it takes him forever if we are not standing over him every second.

Answer:

I have several suggestions for you. Initially, I think you should talk with your son and ask him if he can explain why he struggles to complete the tasks.

Does he lose focus? Sometimes setting up a reminder cue can be helpful - tie a colored string around his wrist and when he sees it tell him he should ask himself if he is on task.

A behavior-modification system set up with small, specific positive rewards for daily tasks completed could be very helpful. You can then add on larger rewards weekly for consistent completion of work. For example, if class work is completed at school on Monday, then your son gets a reward after school - a treat or extra playtime or whatever you decide on. Then, if it continues throughout the week, the rewards are greater - three days of consistent completion of class work gets a bigger prize, and the whole week an even bigger one. You can sit with your son and discuss the rewards so that he is a part of choosing them.

Additionally, a timer is a great tool to use with children who procrastinate. Allot a specific amount of time for a given assignment - perhaps 20 minutes for a math sheet that you think should take 10 minutes. Set the timer and have him start working. Let him know at 10 minutes that he should be half-way done with the task and then stop him at the ring of the timer. Make it into a game in which he is trying to beat the timer, and ultimately beat his own times and improve. Again, offer rewards: stickers, pencils, extra playtime, computer time. Rewards have to be dependent upon the likes of the child.

Finally, if you find that despite a reward system, a reminder system and tools to help your son stay on task, he is still struggling to stay focused and complete his work, then you should pursue the issue with a medical professional, such as a psychologist, to determine if there is something more going on.

Advice from Great Schools' experts is not a substitute for professional diagnosis or treatment from a health-care provider or learning expert familiar with your unique situation. Great Schools recommends consulting a qualified professional if you have concerns about your child's condition. If you have any questions or concerns about your child, consult your pediatrician.

Your 5th Grader References:

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Wood, Chip (1997). *Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom 4-14*. Maine: Northeast Foundation for Children.

**For more resources and parenting tips, go to <http://stjosephcounselor.weebly.com>