

# Ages and Stages of Children's Development

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When working with children of any age and in any activity, you have to be aware of what they are physically and mentally capable of at their age or stage of development. If you are not aware of the limitations that each child has, training can be frustrating for both instructor and student. The instructor will think that the child is not listening or practicing enough and the child will feel that they are a failure and unable to develop into an effective Taekwon-Do practitioner. If a feeling of failure continues, that child will most probably quit the art altogether.

For example, attempting to teach most 5 year olds Chon Ji would be an impossible task if their mental development has not reached a level where they would be capable of recalling all of the movements in the correct order and with correct style and technique. There are of course, as always, some exceptions to the rules. There are some 5 year olds capable of keeping up with older children's stages and some older children have not yet reached a stage that other children their age have reached. But if an instructor is aware of each stage that a child progresses through in their developmental growth then it will make them more aware of when a child is physically or mentally capable of performing certain tasks. A good instructor will know all of their students and their capabilities well and will be able to adapt the lessons to suit their stage of development.

As you can see from the development chart below, certain age groups are much more capable of the demands of a normal Taekwon Do lesson. That does not mean that we have to exclude younger ages and that is where the mini kids and Kubz syllabus comes in.

## **5 – 6 years**

This age group are developing the capability to learn Taekwon Do. But due to their limited attention span and the limitations with their fine motor and gross motors skills, they have to learn in small chunks with lots of practise. They require repetition, praise and encouragement and learning has to be "hands on". They have lots of energy but tire easily. They do however, recover quickly so a good instructor will alternate high energy activities with theory or other lower energy activities.

Training has to be made fun or the child will not want to return. They will respond better to drills etc practised in the form of games and relays or with pads. They will quickly become bored with line work unless this is broken up with running, jumping etc that doesn't require lots of thinking and trying to control their body movements. All of the above is especially important when you keep in mind the amount of repetition this age group requires to be able to learn, remember and to correctly execute a technique. Being able to make the learning fun is an essential part of being a good mini kid's instructor. There are many games that can be adapted to teach Taekwon Do skills. The children are having so much fun they are unaware they are practising and learning at the same time.

Practise kicking and hand techniques with pads. As children of this age have difficulty imagining an opponent, the children respond better when they have a target and you can set the height so they don't get into the habit of executing their kicks at a low height. They also love to work with partners of their own age with the pads which will help them to learn how to hold a pad correctly and brace themselves for an impact.

Children this young generally find the theory very hard to learn but if you get them to repeat the Korean words while they are executing the technique then you are creating action based learning which will assist them in remembering. It is important to remember with this age group: repetition, repetition, repetition.

## **7 -8 years**

Most of the training techniques and strategies used with 5 -6 year olds are still relevant to this age group. They are developing slightly better control over their large muscles and they can now control their running speed and can swerve and zigzag but they are developing anxiety about their performance. Even more than the 5 - 6 year olds, 7 - 8 year olds need lots of encouragement and praise. Find things they do really well i.e. kicking with power/ accuracy and praise them often. This will increase their self-confidence.

Having the 4 stripes in the mini kids syllabus is a big advantage when teaching this age group as it gives them something to work towards and successfully gaining another stripe on their belts is a big boost to their ego and motivation. They will enjoy lining themselves up in the correct order of their stripes and the children that have been training longer have a visual representation for all to see that they “know more” than the newcomers.

7 – 8 years olds still have a limited attention span but this is improving. When practising line work or when teaching fundamental movements, after one or two different techniques, get them to run and do some star jumps or sit ups to give their brains a break and their bodies an opportunity to do some physical exercise that doesn't involve too much thought. They are more capable now of remembering the movements for Saju Jirugi and Saju Makgi but are still developing a knowledge of left and right so may still start with the wrong side, particularly in Saju Makgi.

Theory is still a problem for them to learn and children of this age are generally not motivated and forward thinking enough to go home and try to learn these words themselves and a majority of parents are too busy to take the time to help. Continue teaching and practising this through action based learning during training to ensure they will know the theory they require to grade to each new level.

All children need to have goals that are achievable and don't take too long to gain or else they become bored and lose interest. If the mini kids syllabus and stripe system were unavailable then young children commencing training would find it difficult to maintain interest as it could take them 1 – 2 years of training to attain the level required to attend a “formal grading” for yellow stripe.

## **9 – 10 years**

Children older than 8 are capable of learning more difficult techniques, patterns and theory than the younger age group but other problems arise at this stage. They are becoming more independent and can be rebellious at times. They can still struggle with staying still long enough to follow instructions and they find it hard if they are given more than 3 or 4 instructions at a time. This age group have changeable moods and can be very critical of themselves so require a lot of support and encouragement. If they are having an “off day”, it is important not to be too hard on them and on these days may require even more support and encouragement. They need to know they can have a second chance if they do have a bad day or make a mistake.

At this age they have loads of energy and need to be kept moving and constantly supervised or they will find their own fun which may not be related to Taekwon Do and may not be the safest as they tend to overestimate their abilities. They enjoy partner/group work and anything competitive such as relays and sparring. Instructors will need to be firm with them at times as their high energy levels and lack of focus can make it difficult to teach them. They

are however, also very concerned about fairness so instructors must ensure they are not seen to favour one student over another.

Children of this age are very proud of achievement so a successful promotion (grading) or doing well at a tournament is a great boost to their confidence and a motivator to train. They seem to especially enjoy tournaments but we need to keep in mind that as they can be anxious about their performance and can also be very critical of themselves we must not set them up to fail. Instructors and other club members should not place too much of an emphasis on winning a medal but more on the opportunity to compete and to see others compete. They need to have lots of chances to practise the areas they will compete in and also be given repeated exposure to the rules and regulations they need to abide by such as how to enter and leave a ring etc. This will ensure that when they arrive at a tournament there will be no surprises for them which may put them off and destroy their confidence.

At this stage of development, children are starting to look up to and imitate others. You can maximise this “hero worship” by using the role model as a teaching tool. This pairing will work well as the younger student will be eager to please and will most likely put more effort into their training.

Children of any age need to feel accepted and worthwhile so having comparisons made of their performance to the performance of others will erode their self-confidence. This needs to be avoided if at all possible.

## **11 – 12 years**

Children from around 11 years and up are becoming more social and they enjoy the sense of belonging to group. They like group activities and enjoy working cooperatively with others which is why they tend to prefer team sports and this is when we find a percentage of students drop out of Taekwon Do. Quite often this also coincides with attaining a green/blue belt level where more practise, self-motivation and effort is required to continue moving up the grades and this also contributes to the drop off of students at this age.

If you have a good core group of this age students at your club, you can attempt to keep them interested and involved by having them work together in teams and give them an opportunity to compete against each other. i.e In warm ups, have relays and set groups of these age children against each other or against groups of adults/children to give them a challenge and an opportunity to show their skills. They also enjoy measuring their own individual bests so you can record their achievements in fitness i.e number of sit ups, press ups, squat kicks and they will enjoy seeing their numbers increase. They can also set themselves challenges against their mates to see who can improve their figures the most over a month.

If they are interested in competing at tournaments, this is another good way to keep them involved with the sport and giving them a challenge. This is especially useful if there is the possibility of training a group of young students together. This will give them the team comradery and competitiveness that they enjoy. They will want to do well at the competition so the training in the lead up to a tournament will have more meaning to them and will give them the motivation to work harder. If they are successful, they will feel good about themselves and feel satisfaction with their accomplishment.

At this age they also enjoy teaching younger children. They have a strong sense of their own achievement and having younger children look up to them will help stroke their ego and further their enjoyment of the martial art. The younger children seem to really enjoy having people closer to their own age instructing them so this has two benefits to the club. Older children tend to have different methods of explaining things while instructing and at times these methods work better with the younger children than when adults teach them. They also have more patience with the repetition of instructions and corrections necessary when working with the younger age group.

Pre-teens and teenagers also need to save face, so if you need to discuss problems or issues with a student at this stage of development, it is best to take them to one side and have the discussion where others won't hear what is being said which could make the student feel embarrassed in front of their peers. If they are shamed in front of the whole group, their reaction may be to rebel against the instructor openly which creates unnecessary conflict in the dojang or to just walk out and not come back again. Neither of these outcomes is desirable for the student or the club.

If, however, you have positive praise to give them, this can and should be done in front of the whole group. This will give the student a real sense of pride and accomplishment. These students will thrive on being put in front of a group to show how something is done correctly so if it is possible to find something that they excel at make sure you use that as an opportunity to let them show off their abilities in front of their peers and other club members.

### **13 – 16 years**

When they reach puberty, children have the added pressure of being aware of and trying to cope with the physical and mental changes they are going through. Instructors need to be aware of and have empathy for how this may affect their training. They have an increased awareness of body image so may become more self-conscious. In puberty the skeletal system grows faster than the muscular system which increases the risk of injury and these growth spurts also affect their coordination and they may become clumsy. They also have a sense of invincibility so safety and supervision in activities is important.

Peer groups are very important at this age and they are moving away from a reliance on family. Role models are still influential in their lives so once again, having good role models at their club are a great teaching tool. The strategies used with teaching 11 – 12 year olds are still relevant here as they still need to feel successful and need to save face so ensure that they are not embarrassed in front of their peers.

Instructors also need to be aware of the lifestyle and commitments this age group may have and alter training to suit these needs. Exams and pressures at school, peer group interactions, male/female relationships can all affect the student's ability to focus and/or make time for training so good communication between instructor and student is essential. Setting realistic expectations and goals for the year, taking into consideration outside commitments, will help the student gain success.

As they wish to be treated like adults, instructors need to give them a bit of responsibility and ownership of their own training but there will still need to be consequences if they are irresponsible and don't do as they have agreed to do or break with the etiquette of the club.

An instructor that is aware of all of these ages and stage of development and has a good knowledge of their own students can adjust their teaching styles and lesson planning to suit all members of their club. Students will learn at their own pace and receive the support and encouragement, as well as the necessary discipline to achieve their goals and to continue moving through the grades. This will result in happy students and a successful club.

Age	Fine Motor	Gross Motor	Social Skills	Language	Cognitive (thinking)
5 -6 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visions focused on objects nearby</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing control over movement</li> <li>• Mainly use large muscles, have better control of large than small muscles</li> <li>• Have low aerobic and anaerobic capacity</li> <li>• When running, can start, stop and turn</li> <li>• Hops, gallops, jumps</li> <li>• Can kick with increasing accuracy</li> <li>• Likes structured games</li> <li>• Needs plenty of movement based activities</li> <li>• Practise balancing (stand on one leg, walk along a line)</li> <li>• Can match actions to words</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be a bit bossy and demanding</li> <li>• Can be cooperative</li> <li>• Often competitive – can be jealous of others</li> <li>• Strong awareness of right and wrong</li> <li>• Difficulty seeing things from another’s view</li> <li>• Encourage listening to and looking after others</li> <li>• Needs consistent guidelines, routine and structure</li> <li>• Learning to wait turns (sometimes hard) needs practise at this</li> <li>• Values the instructor, likes to copy them</li> <li>• Needs shorter activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needs and asks permission</li> <li>• Thinks out loud</li> <li>• Developing the ability to follow two unrelated directions</li> <li>• Give simple instructions – ones with one or two directions at a time</li> <li>• When asking questions use mostly closed questions</li> <li>• Encourage children to ask questions</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enjoys copying</li> <li>• Bound by sight and senses (often has difficulty imagining)</li> <li>• Learns best by doing</li> <li>• Needs repetition</li> <li>• Responds to routines</li> <li>• More interested in the process than the outcome</li> <li>• Lack spatial awareness and understanding of time</li> <li>• May have difficulty expressing their own ideas</li> <li>• Works hard</li> <li>• Still developing knowledge of left and right</li> </ul>

Age	Fine Motor	Gross Motor	Social Skills	Language	Cognitive (thinking)
7 – 8 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong vision – near and far</li> <li>• Attention span can still be limited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Girls and boys have similar abilities</li> <li>• Can control running speed and can swerve and zigzag</li> <li>• Still has low aerobic and anaerobic capacity</li> <li>• Have high energy levels but tire easily and recover quickly</li> <li>• Developing graceful movements</li> <li>• May give up easily but bounces back quickly</li> <li>• Use a variety of equipment (kicking pads, boxing bag, sparring gear)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be anxious about own performance – needs encouragement and praise</li> <li>• Has changeable feelings and moods</li> <li>• Often doesn't risk mistakes OR can over estimate their own ability</li> <li>• Generally cooperative</li> <li>• Can have trouble with limits</li> <li>• Developing skills to regulate emotions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good listener</li> <li>• Vocab expanding</li> <li>• Asks questions</li> <li>• Enjoys 1:1 conversations</li> <li>• Exaggerates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be a perfectionist</li> <li>• Enjoys repeating activities</li> <li>• Are easily motivated – like trying something new</li> <li>• Needs to be warned about finishing times</li> <li>• Can understand and follow 3 – 4 step instructions</li> <li>• Developing an ability to answer more complex questions</li> <li>• Beginning to master many skills and feel competent</li> </ul>

Age	Fine Motor	Gross Motor	Social Skills	Language	Cognitive (thinking)
9 – 10 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased coordination, strength and balance</li> <li>• Starting to focus and concentrate well</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pushes self to physical limits and needs challenges</li> <li>• Likes to race against others or the clock</li> <li>• Loves to challenge self</li> <li>• Can still struggle to sit still</li> <li>• Enjoys groups games, relays etc</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Starting to be independent and rebellious</li> <li>• Highly competitive</li> <li>• Self aware and sensitive to criticism</li> <li>• May be critical of self and others</li> <li>• Can be moody</li> <li>• Likes partner work</li> <li>• Concerned about fairness</li> <li>• Success needs to be emphasised and failures minimised</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be negative “I hate..., boring</li> <li>• Developing skills to negotiate</li> <li>• Second chances are important</li> <li>• Likes to talk and share ideas</li> <li>• Good listeners</li> <li>• Expressive and talkative – enjoy to explain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be self critical</li> <li>• Has ability to consider multiple factors</li> <li>• Seeks purpose “Why do we have to do this?”</li> <li>• Seeks facts</li> <li>• Enjoys rules and logic</li> <li>• Proud of achievements</li> <li>• Starting to consider all aspects of situations</li> <li>• Memorises but may not fully understand</li> <li>• Good problem solvers</li> </ul>
11 – 12 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be restless</li> <li>• Hand-eye coordination is relatively mature</li> <li>• Physical aggression possible</li> <li>• Has patience to practise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prefers team sports</li> <li>• Enjoys measuring individual bests</li> <li>• Enjoys teaching younger students</li> <li>• Likes training and regular exercise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tests limits</li> <li>• Has emotional extremes</li> <li>• Can be self-absorbed</li> <li>• Need to feel accepted and worthwhile</li> <li>• Likes challenge but dislike public failure - “saving face “ is critical</li> <li>• Realistic short term goals</li> <li>• Peers are more important than adults</li> <li>• Practising leadership skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impulsive</li> <li>• Often talks before thinking</li> <li>• Imitates adult language</li> <li>• Loves to discuss and debate</li> <li>• Likes to share thoughts and reactions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Memorisation works well</li> <li>• Able to reason and think in abstract ways</li> <li>• New ideas are best understood when related to previous experience</li> <li>• Can differentiate between ability and effort (If I work hard, I will improve)</li> <li>• Enjoys work that feels grown up</li> <li>• Will initiate own activity</li> <li>• Can be both playful and serious</li> </ul>

Age	Fine Motor	Gross Motor	Social Skills	Language	Cognitive (thinking)
13 – 16 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complex motor skills are more refined</li> <li>• Maturity differences within and between genders.</li> <li>• Growth spurts occur causing clumsiness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In puberty, skeletal system grows faster than muscular system, thus increasing injury risk</li> <li>• Capable of handling appropriate physical training</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer groups are very important</li> <li>• Role models are influential</li> <li>• Hormones cause mood swings</li> <li>• Want responsibility and to be treated as an adult</li> <li>• Vulnerable to negative criticism</li> <li>• Respond well to constructive feedback</li> <li>• Starting to forward plan – thinking about career goals and roles in life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing their own language</li> <li>• Use teen slang</li> <li>• Learning to cooperate with others</li> <li>• Require effective communication between instructor and student</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Longer attention span</li> <li>• Like to find their own solutions</li> <li>• Have a sense of invincibility</li> <li>• Beginning to value goal setting and achievement of goals</li> <li>• Capable of appreciating leadership roles</li> </ul>

Reference:

FYD Child Development Chart –Coordinators Manual

Understanding the student