

**Chapter 5:  
Age Group Characteristics  
Pages 107-122**



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**Objectives** (1 of 2)

- Explain the reasons an educator needs to understand developmental age group characteristics (NFPA 4.1.1). (p. 107)
- Define *cognitive*, *affective*, and *physical areas* of development (NFPA 4.1.1). (pp. 107–108)
- List basic characteristics of preschool children, elementary age children, adolescents, adults, and older adults in each of these domains (NFPA 4.1.1). (pp. 108–119)

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**Objectives** (2 of 2)

- Explain how age group characteristics help determine the content, teaching methods, materials, and lesson planning for fire and life safety education (NFPA 4.4.1, 4.4.3). (pp. 108–119)
- Choose appropriate activities and materials and effective classroom management techniques for each age group (NFPA 4.4.1, 4.4.4). (pp. 108–119)
- Recognize the needs of an audience based on the stage of development and age group characteristics (NFPA 4.1.1). (pp. 108–119)

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## Introduction

- Understanding the stages of various age groups assists educators in:
  - Meeting the needs of the audience as learners
  - Choosing appropriate teaching methods, timelines for activities, and support materials and handouts
- For the purpose of this chapter, age groups are broken down as:
  - Preschoolers
  - Elementary age children
  - Adolescents
  - Adults
  - Older adults

Which age groups are comfortable with?  
 Which age groups are you least comfortable with?

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## Domains of Development

- Three general areas
  - Cognitive domain
    - Ability to think and reason
  - Affective domain
    - Social, emotional, and personality development
  - Physical domain
    - Physical development
    - Gross and fine motor skills

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## Preschoolers (Ages Three to Five)



- Developmental characteristics
  - Zone of proximal development
    - Appropriate level of readiness
  - Important theorists
    - Piaget and Vygotsky
  - Assimilation
    - Fitting information into preconceived notions
  - Accommodation
    - Adjusting experiences to fit new information

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## Preschoolers

- Preschoolers are 3-, 4-, and early 5-year-olds.
- This is a period of rapid growth.
  - But methods and language too advanced for their readiness levels will result in frustration and disappointing results.
- Teaching should be in the zone of proximal development (ZPD).

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## Developmental Characteristics

- Preschoolers show a rapid growth in their language and intellectual capacity
- But methods and language too advanced for their readiness levels will result in frustration and disappointing results.
- Very young children are generally happy, active, restless people.
  - The use of **onomatopoeia** (using words that sound like the noises objects make) is a fun and creative way to enhance presentations for very young children.

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## Preschoolers Learn by Seeing and Doing!



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### What This Means for Fire and Life Safety Educators (1 of 2)

- Gain children's confidence and alleviate their fear at the beginning of a lesson.



Courtesy of Marsha Giesler

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### What This Means for Fire and Life Safety Educators (2 of 2)

- Teach only one idea at a time and allow the children enough time to grasp the concept.
- Role playing, demonstration, puppets, songs, rhymes, and stories work well to reinforce a point.
- Send educational materials home to the parents and caregivers.

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11

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### What This Means for Fire and Life Safety Educators

- Suggestions
  - Teach one idea at a time
  - Reinforce, repeat, and praise (use call-back!)
  - Keep games and stories short (10 -15 min total lesson)
  - Plan a quiet activity for the lesson ending

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12

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## Elementary School Students (Ages Six to Eleven)



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## What This Means for Fire and Life Safety Educators

- Suggestions
  - Use realistic scenarios, visual aids, etc.
  - Engage affective and cognitive domains
  - Draw two-dimensional plans, charts, graphs
  - Introduce basic first aid
  - Discuss risk taking and consequences
  - Use interaction
  - Align with school curriculum
  - **Critical thinking skills**

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## What This Means for Fire and Life Safety Educators

- Effective methods of instruction (cont'd):
  - Interviews
  - Station tours
  - Contests and games
  - Problem solving
  - Active and engaged learning.
- Use the method of Socratic dialogue.
- Interact with the children and send home information for their parents with them.

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16

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DGFD Third Grade Video

## A LITTLE SOMETHING FROM THE DGFD

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17

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## Adolescents (Ages Ten to Eighteen)

- Time of dramatic change
  - Cognitive, psychological, and physical
    - Early adolescents: ten to fourteen
    - Older adolescents: fifteen to eighteen
- Developmental characteristics
  - Cognitive maturity
  - Deductive reasoning
  - Rational and systematic thought processes



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18

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# Adolescents



Courtesy of Marsha Gaele

- Lessons and presentations for this group must be carefully planned and executed to accommodate their many needs.

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19

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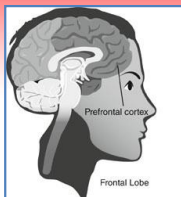


FIGURE 3-9 The adolescent's prefrontal cortex has not fully developed. Without this "internal police" of the brain, adolescents engage in risk-taking behaviors even though they are cognitively aware of the potential dangers.

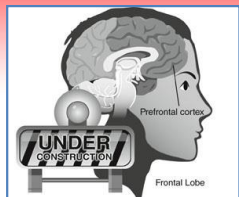


FIGURE 3-10 New research tells us that this area of the brain is the last to develop, a process that can take up to 25 years to complete.

Page 113

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21

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## Developmental Characteristics

- Children become much more cognitively mature; they are able to use deductive reasoning and rational and systematic thought processes.
- There are many changes taking place in the affective domain of adolescents' lives.
- Physically, this period is marked by sporadic growth spurts and maturing reproductive systems.

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## What This Means for Fire and Life Safety Educators

- Suggestions
  - Content: relevant to day-to-day lives
  - Connect information to what is known
  - Emphasize hands-on, cooperative learning
  - Demonstrate respect and concern
  - Use multisensory experiences
  - Self-assessment instruments
  - Talk through possibilities and options

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23

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## What This Means for Fire and Life Safety Educators (cont'd.)

- Additional suggestions
  - Don't single out students
  - Watch lavishing praise
  - Diffuse any disrespect
  - Be careful with humor
  - Avoid criticism and sarcasm
  - Role play not always successful

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## Adults

- Cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains continue to change and grow throughout adult life along multiple paths and multiple dimensions.
- Individual differences among people increase with age.
- Therefore, adult education must make optimal provisions for differences in style, time, place, and pace of learning.

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## Characteristics of Adult Learning

- They function best in an environment of respect, open-mindedness, tolerance, and compassion.
- They are better active than passive learners and thrive on stimulating activities, where they can draw on their own experience and personal insights.

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## Adults (cont'd.)

- Characteristics of adult learning
  - Need to anticipate knowledge use
- Barriers to adult learning
  - Contradictions to long-held beliefs
  - Lack of time, money, etc.
- Teaching concepts from learning theories
  - Educator's role changes to "coach"
  - Adults bring their own experiences to learning

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27

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## Barriers to Adult Learning

- They may reject new information when it contradicts long-held beliefs.
- The new demands of learning have to be accommodated within their many other responsibilities and constraints.



Courtesy of Marsha Gaele

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28

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## Andragogical Model – Malcolm Knowles Early 1970s

Study of core adult learning principles

- Need to know
- Self-concept
- Role of learners' experience
- Readiness to learn – **Teachable Moment**
- Orientation to learning
- Motivation

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29

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## What This Means for Fire and Life Safety Educators (1 of 2)

- Educating adults requires additional work to present a program that best facilitates learning.
- Allow adults some control over their learning experience by way of collaborative work.
- It is the instructor's responsibility to develop *meaningful* paths for the adult learners, besides being cognizant of their attitudes and beliefs.

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## What This Means for Fire and Life Safety Educators (2 of 2)

- Additionally, the instructor should:
  - Seize the moment, like getting information to an affected population immediately following a fire.
  - Try to accommodate the busy schedules and other responsibilities of adults.
  - Tolerate and invite discussion, including differences of opinion.
  - Encourage learners to contribute their experiences and use them as resources.
  - Be prepared for those who come ready for a lecture and little participation on their part.
  - Involve adults in the evaluation process.

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31

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## Older Adults – (Ages 65 and Older) Fastest Growing Segment of our Population!



- Gerontology: study of aging
  - Social, psychological, and biological aspects
- Developmental characteristics
  - Physical, cognitive, and psychological changes
- Cognitive characteristics
  - Slowing of speed
    - Dementia
    - Alzheimer's disease



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32

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## Older Adults

- Gerontology: The study of the social, psychological, and biological aspects of aging.
- 65 years old is considered the chronological threshold for consideration as an older adult.
- 85 years and older population growing faster than other age groups.

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33

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## Developmental and Cognitive Characteristics

- Older adults experience physical, cognitive, and psychological age-related changes, which present challenges that must be accommodated.
- Older adults are not cognitively impaired.
  - There is just a slowing down of the speed with which information is processed.
- For adults older than 65 years old, there are chances of them having dementia.
  - Most common form of dementia is Alzheimer's disease.

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## Physical Characteristics

- Sensory losses occur gradually and make it increasingly difficult for older adults to adjust to new environments.
- Older adults are also challenged by conditions such as macular degeneration and glaucoma.
- Hearing impairment is usually moderate or mild, but it is widespread.
  - The severity increases with aging.
- They are less agile and mobile due to some chronic conditions like arthritis and diabetes.

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## Psychological Characteristics

- Most older adults successfully adjust to the challenges of aging, reporting a **high level of life satisfaction**.
- They are often interested in civic engagement, to give back to the communities or organizations that provide emotional significance.
- Some adults find it difficult to part with their things when the time comes to downsize, which is a matter of concern for the fire service.

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36

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### What This Means for Fire and Life Safety Educators

- Suggestions
  - Be aware of increased independence
  - Encourage use of universal design
  - Use materials printed with high contrast
  - Avoid presenting with light in the background
  - Show images of real people
  - Discuss babysitting and prevention safety
  - Allow time for questions and answers

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37

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### What This Means for Fire and Life Safety Educators (cont'd.)

- Additional suggestions
  - Do not inundate with facts and information
  - Inquire about key influencers
  - Look into intergenerational programs
  - Investigate prevention and safety technology
  - Schedule activities early in the day
  - Use comfortable chairs
  - **Limit length to 30 minute classes**

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### What This Means for Fire and Life Safety Educators (1 of 2)

- Try to help them maintain their independence by discussing ways in which their living environment can be more user friendly for them.
- When conversing with them, sit to the side.
- Reduce background noise as much as possible, taking care to pronounce each word clearly, deliberately, and slowly.

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### What This Means for Fire and Life Safety Educators (2 of 2)

- This age group prefers real messages to lectures and prefers to be told where they can find the information.
- Try to include their caregivers and families into the programs and activities.
- Ensure that their homes comply with fire safety regulations.
- Stress the importance of taking medication as prescribed as well as keeping them out of reach of children.

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### Summary (1 of 3)

- Safety educators must be able to reach and educate all demographics of the population.
  - To do this effectively, educators need to be aware of the general characteristics of each age group in terms of cognitive, physical, and affective development.
- Although there is a great deal of overlap in the safety messages, techniques, and learning styles of all age groups, there are also specific differences that need to be addressed if educators are to be successful.

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### Summary (2 of 3)

- A working knowledge of the characteristics of each age group will assist educators in selecting the appropriate message, method of teaching, and support materials.
- The rate of development, strength of a particular characteristic, and level of maturity among individuals within each age group can vary greatly, but most children and adults pass through the same sequence of development.

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## Summary (3 of 3)

- Educators are better prepared and provide a more valuable service when they pay attention to the general characteristics of each stage of development.
- Characteristics of learners are also affected by cultural norms, physical or mental challenges, socioeconomic level, and other attributes. Educators must take these factors into consideration.

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