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## INTRODUCTION

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The New York State Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children was established in 1988 to improve the lives and life changes of children involved in New York courts. The Commission is chaired by Chief Judge Judith Kaye, and its members include judges, lawyers, advocates, physicians, legislators, and state and local officials.

As a means to promote the safety, permanency and well-being for all New York State children in out-of-home care, the Commission is working to increase the participation of children in permanency hearings-special court hearings where the health, well-being and future steps for children in out-of-home care are reviewed and determined with the goal of achieving permanency for these children. Their meaningful participation in these hearings will empower children, help New York State laws requiring Family Court judges to consult with children in an age-appropriate manner at all permanency hearings, and ultimately produce better fact-finding that will lead to better decisions and better outcomes for children and their families.

This handbook highlights the developmental stages of school-age children (ages 5-20 years), provides tips on how to engage children in their court proceedings and offers a series of age-appropriate questions. Considering the numerous biological, physical, social and cultural factors that contribute to a child's developmental trajectory, the developmental highlights are not intended as rigid guidelines but as tools to help understand why children act the way they do and to assist judges and other professionals interact with children in court. Materials can be adapted to fit the individual needs of the court and child.

The intention of this handbook is to provide basic knowledge, in an easy to understand format, related to children in court along with highlighted tips and guidance regarding developmental stages. Age-appropriate questions which judges might ask children are provided to both assist in preparation of children for their court proceedings and as a starting point for judges. The goal of this handbook is to encourage child participating in court proceedings and make the court experience easier, more comfortable and more production for all participants.

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## INVOLVEMENT IS GOOD

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Children in foster care often feel disconnected – by adult decisions that have not been fully explained or explained at all to them. Involving children in their critical life decisions helps build self-efficacy skills. Self-efficacy – a person’s own belief in his/her capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce a given goal – provides the building blocks for motivation, well-being and personal accomplishments throughout one’s life course. Giving children in foster care the opportunity to share their feelings, ideas, needs and desires will help them gain a sense of control over their lives, practice the art of advocating for their well-being and develop the decision-making and negotiating skills needed to be self-reliant. Child involvement also enhances the perception held by adults of children’s competence, heightens adults’ commitment and energy, makes adults feel more effective and confident and makes adults more aware of the needs and concerns of children. Seeing the children involved in the complex cases before the court reminds all participants of the importance of their work.

We know from a national survey of current and former youth in foster care that a large proportion of youth in care never attended (25%) or infrequently attended (60%) their court hearings. Nearly one out of four youth who did not attend or attended infrequently thought no one would listen to them. Nearly two out of five youth did not know they were allowed to go to court. More than 40 percent of youth did not know their hearing dates.

The Commission gained some insight into the extent of child involvement in New York State during a training that was produced by the Commission in collaboration with the New York State Child Welfare Court Improvement Project and the Judicial Institute, called Tools for Engaging Children and Youth in Their Court Proceedings. Presented at the 2008 Summer Judicial Institute, this venue gave all New York State Family Court Judges the opportunity to attend. Based on preliminary findings from the poll conducted at the training, we believe that nearly one in three children never or rarely attend (32%), one in three sometimes attend (36%) and one in three attends at least frequently (32%) (Table 1).

“Based on my experiences, I think it’s important for youth to be in court so you know what’s going on and what’s being said about you. If you don’t understand something you can ask questions and if you don’t agree, you can speak against it.”

Nunzio

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## HANDBOOK STRUCTURE

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This handbook is intended for judges, advocates and child welfare professionals involved with children in court. We focus on children ages 5 to 20 years. This is not intended to minimize the importance of infant and toddler development or the potential benefit of their interaction with the courts. By having young children attend court, the judge is able to visually assess their physical and emotional well-being and their developmental progress. For example, the judge could see if the child shows a bond with the birth parents or whether the child is able to walk and talk.

While the handbook separately provides information about personal development, relationships and attachments, and behaviors, these domains are interdependent. The cognitive, social and emotional growth that is expected during childhood is dependent upon numerous factors. Plainly, a discussion about “normal” development is relevant only within the context of each child’s individual characteristics and social and cultural environments. In addition, children can experience chaos, unpredictability, fear and other trauma. Children of all ages, and adults, use defense mechanisms to deal with these types of situations. In the short term, these mechanisms are protective. If prolonged, these mechanisms, like trauma, can interfere with child development.

Encouraging children’s involvement in their court hearings requires thoughtful planning. It is a win-win situation for the professionals and children when children know what to expect when they attend their hearings and know what is expected of them. Children—regardless of age—need to be prepared to attend their court hearings and they need to be debriefed after their hearings.

This handbook examines three age groups: 5 to 11 years, 12 to 15 years and 16 to 20 years. The term “children” is used when referring to all age groups and the 5 to 11 age group in particular. The term “youth” is used in the two older age group sections and when referencing older children. Each age group section includes age-specific tips on how to engage children in court and highlights age-specific developmental aspects related to personal development, relationships, and attachments, and behaviors that are relevant to appearing in court and participating in permanency hearings. The materials are intended as guidelines that are flexible and can be adapted to fit the individual needs of the court and child. We hope this handbook will encourage you to encourage child participation in court proceedings and make the court

“ Youth should understand that Judges are the key to getting what they want or need. And Judges should understand we are more than those statements—we could possibly be the next them.”

Ace

experience easier, more comfortable and productive for judges, advocates, child welfare professionals and children.

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## CHILD DEVELOPMENT

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The developmental progression of children shed light on why they act the way they do in their everyday lives and in the context of appearing in court and participating in court proceedings. The field of child development examines changes from the time of conception and infancy through adolescence. This non-linear, interconnected path is influenced by many factors, including genetics; social, physical and emotional environments; nurturing; and the child’s own activity. Children can also become too mature—an issue that can jeopardize their health and development. Often times when an older child has been neglected or is the child of a parent with substance abuse or mental health issues, the child (called “a parentified child”) will assume the care giving responsibilities for family members.

The following highlights some of the expected developments during childhood (Table 4).

**Table 4. Developmental Progressions: From Infants to Older Youth**

Development	Infant	Older Youth
Sense of Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desires control over immediate wants, needs and likes</li> <li>• Depends on caregivers to set limits and boundaries and gains perspective of self and others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Desires control over most aspects of life</li> <li>• Understands limits to own control</li> <li>• Comes to terms with not having control over others, including authority figures</li> </ul>
Independence and Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begins completely dependent on caregiver</li> <li>• Develops autonomy and independence with walking and talking</li> <li>• Wants to do things but also wants help on demand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begins taking care of self (e.g., financially and emotionally)</li> <li>• Wants to make own decisions and often believes he/she must do it alone</li> <li>• Wants input but does not always want other to know it</li> </ul>
Self-regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires caregiver to help regulate emotions and behaviors</li> <li>• Needs help to soothe distress, follow rules, and control impulses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develops ability to regulate emotions, impulses and behaviors</li> <li>• Continues to need help from others but can ask for this help</li> </ul>

Empathy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Begins to develop understanding of how others might feel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gains ability to put self in the shoes of others</li> <li>• Gains understanding of chain of events that lead to different life consequences</li> </ul>
Thought Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thinks in the here and now</li> <li>• Interprets words literally</li> <li>• Sees things as extremes with no middle ground</li> <li>• Begins to develop ability to consider different perspectives and meanings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grasps the “bigger picture”</li> <li>• Understands hidden meanings and agendas</li> <li>• Becomes more idealistic</li> <li>• Becomes more logical</li> </ul>
Relationships and Connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Needs to physically connect with caregiver to feel safe and develop secure, healthy attachments</li> <li>• Develops understanding that people exist even if not physically present</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Struggles for independence can create conflicts with relationships but secure attachments serve as a foundation for future relationships within and outside the family</li> </ul>

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## DEFENSE MECHANISMS

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For too many children involved in the child welfare system, their social, emotional and physical environments have exposed them to chaos, unpredictability, fear and trauma. Additionally, the very act of removal from home and placement into foster care is traumatic. People—regardless of age—use various behaviors to help deal with such overwhelming events, thoughts and emotions. These behaviors are called defense mechanisms.

In the short term, defense mechanisms are protective and help individuals maintain a sense of balance or control. If prolonged, they can interfere with development, daily functioning and the ability to relate to and get along with others. Children, including infants, often use defense mechanisms before and after they visit with their family. As children develop, their defense mechanisms become more complex. Less mature defense mechanisms (e.g., acting out) are supplemented or replaced by more complex defense (e.g., idealization) that require cognitive developments beyond the functioning of the younger children.

The following highlights are some common defense mechanisms (Table 5).

Table 5. Common Psychological Defenses

Defense	Definition	Examples
Acting Out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Behaviorally expressing feelings or attitudes toward others-often involves lasing out, breaking rules, destroying toys or objects and showing aggression</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child in foster home breaks new family rules to see if the family will “keep” or send him/her away</li> <li>Child is angry at parents and breaks his/her toys</li> </ul>
Denial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refusing to believe facts or accept real events and possibly accusing other of lying or failing to do their jobs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child does not think mother has been drinking even when the floor is covered with empty beer cans and mother cannot be awakened</li> <li>Child blames police for taking dad away and “wrecking” things after arresting him for stealing and drug use</li> </ul>
Dissociation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disconnecting with reality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child who is actual victim describes sexual abuse as if it happened best friend</li> </ul>
Humor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focusing on the lighter aspects of situations and events</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Older child learns that brother is being moved to another home and jokes about not having to watch him eat with his mouth open</li> </ul>
Idealization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Believing someone or some “power” exists that is omnipotent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child believes parent or teacher knows everything or can do anything</li> <li>Childe believes parent can do no wrong despite mounting evidence of that parent’s wrongdoing</li> </ul>
Projection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trying to hide own flaws by seeing them in others and denying them in self</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Child claims sibling is name-calling when the opposite is true</li> </ul>

Regression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Going back or retreating to a younger developmental level- often an attempt to return to an earlier stage that felt safer or more nurturing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child begins wetting bed, sucking thumb, waking during the night, becoming clingy, having toddler-like tantrums after progressing beyond those behaviors</li> </ul>
Unlovable Attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acting in ways that portray self as aloof as a result of feeling unwanted and unworthy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child treats people rudely, puts self-down, repeatedly picks the “worst” choice and uses behavior to push others away</li> </ul>
Withdrawal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoiding person-to-person interaction, including falling asleep, shutting down, using substances and running away</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Child refuses to talk or look at others</li> <li>• Teen refuses to leave his/her room</li> <li>• Child spends hours on the internet but does not personally socialize with anyone</li> </ul>

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## BEFORE CHILDREN ATTEND THEIR HEARINGS

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Before attending their permanency hearings, children need to receive information and support (Table 6). When they know what to expect, the experience is less intimidating for them and more productive.

**Table 6. Everyone has a Role in Preparing a Child for Court**

	Role
Attorney for the Child	The attorney for the child makes certain the child is aware of the hearing and lets the child know he/she is entitled but not required to attend. The attorney is the point person for familiarizing the child with all aspects of the hearing, for explaining what is going to happen, and determining the child’s preferences and wishes so that they can be

	<p>taken into consideration. Here are some things children will want to know:</p> <p><b>Initially</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What does the courtroom look like?</li> <li>➤ Who will be in the courtroom?</li> <li>➤ What does each person in the courtroom do?</li> <li>➤ Where will the child sit? Who will sit next to the child?</li> </ul> <p><b>Ongoing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ What is the purpose of the hearing?</li> <li>➤ Who will be attending the hearing?</li> <li>➤ Will the child be expected to speak? What if he/she does not want to speak? Can the child use other means of communication?</li> <li>➤ What should the child do if he/she has questions, needs to use the bathroom or feels scared?</li> <li>➤ How is the child expected to behave? What happens if the child misbehaves?</li> <li>➤ Can the child bring quiet toys to court?</li> <li>➤ Can the child bring a support person or item to court?</li> <li>➤ How should the child dress for court? Why is attire important?</li> <li>➤ How long will the hearing last?</li> <li>➤ How long will the child have to wait for the hearing?</li> <li>➤ Where will the child wait for the hearing?</li> </ul>
Caseworker	<p>The caseworker is also a source of information and can answer questions about the purpose and expectations of the hearing. Discussing who will be in court, what the child will see and what is expected of the child will help alleviate stress and provide a better understanding of what to expect.</p>
CASA	<p>Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) volunteers can be a resource for the attorney</p>

	for the child and can share insight if the volunteer has a connection with the child.
Foster Parent	The foster parents should support the child and provide reassurance about the hearing, answer questions, encourage participation and support the child's decision whether to attend court.
Birth Parent	Where appropriate, the birth parent(s) can speak to the child about the hearing, answer questions, encourage participation and support the child's decision whether to attend court.
Judge	The judge can request the children attend their court hearings and can ask why a child is not in court. It is not the responsibility of the judge to prepare the children for court but the judge can determine if a child has been prepared for court and proceed accordingly.

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## AFTER CHILDREN ATTEND THEIR HEARINGS

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Just as children need to be prepared for their hearings, they should be debriefed after a hearing. Debriefing is a process that requires immediate and ongoing discussion to ensure the child understands what happened, what it means for the child and what are the next steps. Debriefing also provides an opportunity to identify any supports the child might need going forward. As with the preparation, the attorney for the child is the point person for the debriefing. Children also need their foster parent(s) and caseworker to be supportive, answer questions and provide ongoing support.

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## AGES 5 to 11 YEARS

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### *Communicating with Children*

- **DEFINE** the purpose of the hearing and ask everyone in the courtroom to identify themselves and their role.
- **BUILD** rapport by talking with the child at the beginning of the hearing.
- **ENSURE** the child understands why he/she is attending.
- **ASK** and answer one question at a time, using child-friendly terms.
- **ALLOW** breaks for emotionally intense or overwhelming situations.
- **CONSIDER** age-related attention spans: 15 to 30 minutes for a child 6 years or age vs. 30 to 60 minutes for a child 11 years of age.
- **ALLOW** alternative ways of communicating (e.g., pictures or notes).
- **USE** terms and language the child will understand.
- **ACKNOWLEDGE** even the smallest attempt at participation-this adds to a child's sense of control and self-confidence.
- **ENSURE** the child understands what is being said and what is happening.
- **FOCUS** the child by asking why he/she wants to be there and hopes to gain.
- **EXPLAIN** to the child that an important rule is to tell the truth and that it is all right to change an answer or correct a mistake.
- **REASSURE** the child that he/she is in no way responsible for the court proceedings or events.
- **BE ATTENTIVE** for signs of frustration, being overwhelmed or being tired (e.g., squirming or shuffling).
- **AVOID** known conflicts.
- **REASSURE** the child that the court received and noted his/her input.
- **COMPLIMENT** the child on accomplishments and contributions.
- **ENCOURAGE** participation in court proceedings by asking the child to attend the next hearing.

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## AGES 5 to 11 YEARS

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### The Court Connection

**Building Confidence:** Talking with a child at the beginning of the hearing makes the child feel more comfortable in court as well as provides insight into his/her level of preparedness, well-being and communication skills. This helps inform the judge as to how to proceed and sends a message to the participants that the child is the most important person in the room. The child should have been prepared for the hearing. If this conversation shows otherwise, the judge may choose to explain what will happen, the reason for being there and what is expected of the child. Children will want to know who is in court and their respective roles, where to sit, who to tell if they feel talking is “too hard” or what to do if they feel they need a break. Making the physical environment more welcoming (e.g., posters and books) can help children feel more comfortable in court. Children also need support after the hearing and the judge can inquire about the plans for debriefing.

**Reassurance:** Children need reassurance that the court is concerned about their best interests. They need to feel safe and understand that they can say they *don't know* or *can't remember* if that is the case. To help reduce anxiety and build confidence, some children may benefit from the presence of a supportive adult or favorite comfort item, like a stuffed animal or toy.

**Framing Questions:** When a child articulates reasons for wanting to attend and what he/she hopes to gain, it provides context, structure and meaning to the hearing that benefit both the child and the court. To get to this point, the judge will need to ask questions and know how to ask the questions. Asking “how school is going” is apt to get the response “good.” When asked, “What grades did you get on your last report card?” the same child could respond, “I’m failing two classes and have C’s in the other three classes.” Questions that start with “how” often elicit non-informative responses.

“ We had not been told why we were going to court or how to act and we had no clue what was going to happen.”

Kelly and Charlie

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## AGES 5 to 11 YEARS

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### The Court Connection

“ There have been times that I have been at court waiting and have seen things that I really didn’t want to see or hear, like my mom being upset and people arguing over what to do with me. I knew that I would be all right. Just as other youth will be when they experience these emotions in court.”

Antonio

**Difficult Discussions:** Children may be hesitant to speak about a caregiver when the caregiver is present. One way to make it easier is by exploring a non-threatening topic first (e.g., a pleasurable activity shared by the child and caregiver). Children can also hear or see things that are upsetting. At the same time, their presence gives them opportunities to gain accurate insight into the situation, to see that the court is focusing on their best interest and to gain a sense of closure. If a particular part of the court proceedings is expected to be especially upsetting, children should be excluded from that part of the hearing.

**Attention Span and Cues:** Children provide a wealth of information through non-verbal expressions-such as showing affection, fear or dislike-that can assist in decision-making. Most children also signal it is time for a break by becoming squirmy or displaying other signs of distress or boredom. Children have relatively short attention spans and may become distracted if their court appearance last too long. Generally younger children (6 years of age) can stay focused for 15 to 30 minutes while older children can participate for as long as 30 to 60 minutes (11 years of age). Children can read, color and use quiet games and still pay attention. Attention spans in court can be influenced by numerous factors, including the wait time before a hearing and symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

**More Perspective:** The following provides questions to consider asking children in court and further insight into the interrelated personal and social development behaviors of children ages 5 to 11 years.

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## AGES 5 to 11 YEARS

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### Questions to Ask

#### Initial Questions

- Did I pronounce your name correctly?
- Do you know who everyone is in the courtroom?
- Tell me about something that happened to you since I last saw you.

#### Feelings

- What do you do when you are happy?
- What worries you the most?

#### School

- What is your favorite part of school?
- Do you like to read?
- Do you have someone who helps you with your homework?

#### Friends

- Do you have a best friend?
- What do you do after school? Who do you do that with?

#### Family

- How often do you visit your parents? Your brother(s)/sister(s)?
- What did you do during your last visit with your family?
- Do you talk, text or email your brother(s)/sister(s) or parents between visits?

#### Health

- Have you been to the doctor since I saw you last? The dentist?
- What do you do for fun?
- What games do you play?

#### Wrap-up Questions

- Did anyone use any words you didn't understand today?
- Is there anything that we are missing?
- Do you have any questions?

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## AGES 5 to 11 YEARS

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### Personal Growth

**Self-awareness:** The understanding that others-in particular caregivers-exist even when they are not present, allows children to enter school or participate in non-familiar activities without becoming overwhelmed or anxious. For many children, this cycle of separation and re-unification has become routine by attending preschool.

**Self-reliance:** Children's increasing ability to depend upon themselves is influenced by their environments and school is a primary context of childhood. The school environment provides much more than academic opportunities as it encourages children to hone their ability to plan and follow directions, complete tasks independently, sharpen their language skills and develop attachments beyond members of their family and immediate community. Children gain an increasing sense of self-pride that builds on their successes.

**Cause and Effect:** Children tend to think in the present, about tangible things and events that they can observe. They begin to develop an understanding of cause and effect. For young children, their interpretation is generally concrete and dichotomous (e.g., good vs. bad). As children approach preadolescence, they are learning to reason, think abstractly and negotiate, which gives them a more in-depth perspective. Along with learning to take responsibility for their own actions and to accept the consequences of their behavior, children also recognize when others do not accept responsibility for their actions and behaviors.

“ My first placement I remember it being like a playground setting...I got tired of playing and wanted to go home. There was an uncomfortable silence around me. They then began to explain-I was going to be here longer than I thought.”

Antonio

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## AGES 5 TO 11 YEARS

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### Personal Growth

**Independence:** Children are gaining a sense of independence while achieving more self-reliance and control. They begin testing values and beliefs and recognize that parents and other authority figures are not always right.

**Identity:** As puberty approaches, children become more aware of their body and continue to develop their gender and sexual identity. They are apt to have periods of curiosity about the opposite sex but tend to focus more on the same-sex friendships. Their perception of themselves and their activities are influenced by family and societal norms and behaviors. Children are apt to imitate or reflect what they see and hear from adults, siblings, peers and the media.

**Trauma:** Trauma can interfere with children's ability to bond and develop trusting relationships. Children may blame themselves for these unpleasant situations even when they know the truth. To cope with stressful situations, children may alternate between reality and fantasy and use other psychological defenses. Defense mechanisms in the short-term can be protective if prolonged, they can interfere with physical and social development and daily functioning. Prolonged effects can lead to speech and language difficulties and to behavioral learning problems. Children may also tune out some feelings as a means to deal with other feelings. Since development is cumulative, it is crucial for children to reach milestones that will in turn be foundational for future growth and well-being.

Trauma during childhood can lead to disruptions in personal growth, causing...

Long-term grief

Attachment disorders

Inadequate coping skills

Suicidal feelings

Self-blame for the actions and decision of others

Lack of resolution or closure

Decrease sense of mastery and self-reliance

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## AGES 5 TO 11 YEARS

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### Relationships and Attachments

**Thoughts and Emotions:** Developing more complex socially-based feelings (such as guilt, envy, modesty, embarrassment and shame), children's emotions surpass feelings based on survival (such as pleasure, fear and sadness). By gaining an ability to distinguish between their feelings, thoughts and actions, children learn to control their behaviors and regulate their emotions. Children begin to communicate their feelings as they link words with emotions.

Children are still grasping and meshing concrete and abstract thought and often struggle with their understanding of events and situations. This age group is apt to take things personally and be particularly sensitive to criticism. Further, the onset of puberty and hormonal fluctuations can have a profound effect on emotions.

**Social Network:** The age group has a wider social network than younger children. Their peers take on a greater significance- with children often developing a "best friend" relationship. Children are also able to understand the relationship between people and concepts, such as judges and their authority. Children are able to reach out beyond their family and use friends and other adults as resources to meet their emotional needs. If their basic needs are not being met at home, children will search for other people who can provide a sense of being cared for or feeling wanted. Research suggests girls are apt to seek emotional support from their network while boys are less apt to seek emotional support but will share their feelings in response to a request of information.

" The judge would ask me how I was doing, how is school going and how was I doing in my current placement. By doing this the judge developed a relationship with me so that I actually felt comfortable going to court. This gave me the motivation to attend all of my hearings."

Anthony

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## AGES 5 TO 11 YEARS

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### Relationships and Attachments

Positive peer relationships help children develop the skills needed for healthy social interactions. These relationships can increase self-esteem, reduce emotional stress and increase social competence in children.

**Trauma:** Children's emotions and social interactions are affected by their thoughts and perceptions of the world and their place in it. Trauma can have devastating effects on that perspective as well as on the development and maintenance of relationships. Children who experience trauma may exhibit changes in their behavior, social interactions or academic achievements or they may show no signs of their suffering. When children are distressed, they often demonstrate defensive behaviors and can strike out, sulk, withdraw or regress. Seemingly minor provocative cues may lead to a "fight or flight" reaction with the child using impulsive violence as a defense.

The brain responds to the stimulation associated with fear and trauma. The persistent activation of the fear response plays a major role in the various behavioral and cognitive problems associated with traumatized children. Considering the normal emotional fluctuations during this stage of development, trauma is apt to intensify mood swings or provoke unexpected or exaggerated responses to nonthreatening sights, sounds or events.

Trauma during childhood can lead to disruption in building healthy relationships, such as...

Children assume parental role

Children develop inadequate social skills

Children show aggression toward others

Children have difficulty with peers

Children lose interest in friends, schools, exploration and age appropriate interests

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## AGES 5 to 11 YEARS

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### Behaviors

**Array of Behaviors:** Children’s behaviors reflect a culmination of not only their age and temperament but also societal and family norms and expectations, parenting styles, social relationships and their experiences. Children are eager to please adults and want to show off their knowledge and skills. They also tend to want to keep everyone happy. As a result, they may be slightly resistant to talk about difficult situations. While children are also gaining a greater sense of responsibility and independence, they may seem very competent and mature one moment and quickly regress to exhibiting toddler-like behavior.

**Fairness:** Children begin to evaluate and judge others- including friends, siblings, parents and other adults. Their critiques are fueled by an increased awareness of social norms and rules that guide behavior. Children become concerned with fairness and enforcing the rules, which may result in tattling behaviors. At the same time, it is not uncommon for children to act out behaviorally with those they trust or to act in sneaky ways to exert and maintain control.

“ I entered foster care directly after entering this world...Initially I was placed with two of my siblings but then we were separated when I was still a baby...I was lucky because they were placed in a home that was nearby.”

Anthony

**Friendship:** Children may identify a “hero,” adult or another child who they want to emulate or impress. In building stronger, more complex friendships and peer relationships, children choose a “best friend” or friends that may or may not share similar characteristics. Children can assume and fluctuate between reciprocal, leader or follower roles and begin to experience more peer pressure. They are likely to imitate newly observed behaviors that can be limit-testing. Such experimentation helps children gain a better understanding of social norms while further their moral and conscience development. Ultimately, children gain a sense of securing through limits and containment. Through this process, children learn to take reasonable risks, to deal with failure and to recover.

Tools  
for Engaging  
Children  
In Their  
Court Proceedings



**CASA**

Court Appointed Special Advocates

**FOR CHILDREN**

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**CAPITAL CITY CASA**