

shift books or tote bags from one arm to the other. Backpacks, when worn correctly, distribute weight more evenly.

Wider differences between children are observed at the end of middle childhood than at the beginning. These differences become increasingly apparent and, if they are extreme or unique, may create emotional problems. The associated characteristics of height and weight relationships, rapid or slow growth, and other important features of development should be explained to children and their families. Physical maturity is not necessarily correlated with emotional and social maturity. Seven-year-old children who look like 10-year-old children will think and act like 7-year-olds. To expect behaviors appropriate for an older age is unrealistic and can be detrimental to their development of competence and self-esteem. Conversely, to treat 10-year-old children who look young physically as though they were younger is an equal disservice to them.

## **Prepubescence**

**Preadolescence** is the period that begins toward the end of middle childhood and ends with the 13th birthday. **Puberty** signals the beginning of the development of secondary sex characteristics, and **prepubescence**, the 2-year period that precedes puberty, typically occurs during preadolescence.

Toward the end of middle childhood, the discrepancies in growth and maturation between boys and girls become apparent. On the average, there is a difference of approximately 2 years between girls and boys in the age of onset of pubescence. This is a period of rapid growth in height and weight, especially for girls.

There is no universal age at which children assume the characteristics of prepubescence. The first physiologic signs appear at about 9 years old (particularly in girls) and are usually clearly evident in 11- to 12-year-old children. Although preadolescent children do not want to be different, variability in physical growth and physiologic changes among children of the same sex and between the two sexes is often striking at this time. This variability, especially in relation to the onset of secondary sex characteristics, is of great concern to preadolescents. Either early or late appearance of these characteristics is a source of embarrassment and uneasiness to both sexes.