

Your Child's Mental Health: Mental Wellness in School-Age Children

Kids change quickly between the ages of six and 12. When you take your child for a primary care visit, the questions you ask are very different depending on your child's age.

As kids get older, they use the basic skills that they've mastered in the first five years of life to broaden their world. Educators say that by around age nine, kids move from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." Imaginary play gets more complex. There are more in-depth storylines and a focus on the power and ability to complete tasks. Children also learn about complex rules for board games, video games, or games that they play outdoors.

To find more information about what social and emotional development milestones children reach at this age, take a look at the [Guide for Parents of Five to Ten Year-Olds](#) or the [Guide for Parents of Ten to Twelve Year-Olds](#) brochures.

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER BEFORE A PRIMARY CARE VISIT — AGES 6 – 12

As you prepare for your child's primary care visit, take time to think about their mental health and their physical health. Certain mental health problems are more common in school-age children. For example:

- School-age kids who are depressed have lots of physical complaints, like stomach aches or headaches.
- Kids with ADHD might have a hard time resisting the normal temptations that other kids learn to manage.
- Learning problems can become obvious at this age, when reading, writing, and math skills are so important.

At this age, kids start to spend much more time in the classroom than when they were younger. So, you may hear about these issues from your child's teachers. Part of a parent's role at this age is to bridge the gap between school and the doctor's office. If your child is struggling in any of these areas, let your doctor know.

To prepare for your child's primary care visit, ask yourself these questions:

- Does your child seem happy?
- Does your child have a lot of worries?
- Does your child read? What do they read?
- Does your child have aches and pains?
- How does your child sleep?
- How does your child eat?
- How does your child act when they feel frustrated? How do they respond to limits?
- Does your child have a best friend? What kinds of things do they do together?
- Does your teacher have any concerns about your child? Does your teacher worry about your child's attention?
- Do you worry about your child's learning or behavior, but the teacher tells you not to worry?

SUMMARY

Remember, there are no wrong answers to these questions, and no answers that guarantee there is a problem. But if your answer makes you think, look at it as a chance to ask more questions. And involve your doctor in these discussions. You know your child best. If you have questions, your doctor is there to help you figure out whether there is truly cause for concern.