



"Half-way Up the Stairs "

from www.kidsgrowth.com

The 8-year-old is growing slowly and steadily. You might say they are "half-way up the stairs." Eager, very active and friendly, an 8-year-old is quite mature in many ways; They know right from wrong. They are able to accept moderate responsibilities. They like to be a member of a group. They want a best friend. They want to do well.

Around age 8, your child will enjoy helping with household chores. Having some simple jobs for your child to do is important. It helps to organize his or her time. It also lets the youngster feel a part of the family and gives him or her a sense of importance and accomplishment. Just remember to fit the job to the child's age. Examples of jobs for this age might be: empty the dishwasher, set the table and clean up after dinner, fold clothes and put them away, vacuum the car and dust furniture.

The 8-year-old is looking outside the family for new ideas and activities. Peer groups become important and the child will identify with other youngsters of the same sex and with similar interests and activities. The child will often have a "best" friend - an important milestone in development.

The growing influence of peers often presents a challenge to parents. As a parent, you must realize that your 8-year-old is beginning to value his or her peers' opinions as well as yours. But, at this age, parent opinion and values are still the strongest. Keep lines of communication open by not talking down to them, offering reasonable explanations and continuing to give praise and encouragement.

Possible Questions for Your Child's Doctor

Some of the questions or concerns you may have about your 8-year-old can be raised at this checkup.

These might include:

- Hyperactivity which interferes with school performance.
- Concerns about reading or other aspects of school performance.
- Inability to get along with peers or siblings, or lack of friends.
- Poor school progress or school avoidance.
- Being overweight.
- Bed wetting or soiling.
- Recurrent nightmares, tics, aggressive behavior, fears.
- Disobedience, talking back, being uncooperative.

Parenting and Behavioral

- Tell your child every day that you love him or her.
- Always find words of praise that encourage schoolwork and friendship. Use more encouraging than discouraging words when speaking to your child. He or she needs to feel valued in the family and with friends.
- Provide personal space for your child at home, even if it's limited.
- Encourage your child to talk with you about school, friends or feelings. Answer his or her questions.
- Spend individual time with your child, doing something you both enjoy.
- Enhance your child's experiences through family trips.

- Help your child develop an ability to deal constructively with conflict and anger in the family, at school and in the neighborhood.
- Find good friends for your child. Promote interaction and allegiance with peers through participation in social activities, community groups and team sports. Help your child learn how to get along with his or her peers. Talk to your child about the enjoyable and difficult aspects of friendships.
- While parents should establish fair rules with respect to chores, TV watching, outside activities, homework, bedtime, etc., the number of rules should be kept to a minimum. The role of peers in the life of an 8-year-old increases, and children may resist adult authority at times.
- The TV can become a major pastime for the 8-year-old. Don't let it. Television can be a positive resource if watched in small and controlled doses. Always watch TV with your child and explain the differences between reality and fantasy.
- Ensure that an adult is present with your child (or make another appropriate arrangement) when you are not at home.
- Spend active time with your child on a daily basis, if possible. Especially show interest in your child's daily school activities.
- Understand the importance of serving as a parental role model.
- Praise and encourage your child's activities. Build his or her self-esteem. Show affection. If there are siblings, promote the individual strengths of each child.
- Encourage age-appropriate independence and self-responsibility.
- Encourage reading. Read together. Your example will help reinforce that reading gives pleasure. If you haven't already done so, get a library card and use it.

Development

- Able to tell time.
- Can read for pleasure.
- Has a sense of humor ("do you know any good jokes? What's your favorite joke?").
- Is concerned about rules - good (fair) vs. bad (unfair).
- Cares for herself, her room, and her belongings; can take responsibility for home chores.
- Has more control over small muscles, and therefore writes and draws with more skill.
- Likes to belong to informal "clubs" formed by children themselves.
- Performs at grade level in all subjects (e.g., scores at the 40th percentile or better on school achievement tests)

Oral Health

- Ensure that your child brushes his or her teeth twice a day with a pea-size amount of fluoridated toothpaste. Teach him or her how to floss.
- Give your child fluoride supplements as recommended by the health professional based on the level of fluoride in your drinking water.
- Schedule a dental appointment for him or her every six months, unless the dentist determines otherwise based on your child's individual needs/susceptibility to disease.
- As your child's permanent molars erupt, ensure that his or her dentist evaluates them for application of dental sealants.
- Teach your child how to handle dental emergencies, especially the loss or fracture of a tooth.
- Teach your child not to smoke or use smokeless tobacco.

Nutrition

- Growth in weight and height should remain steady. Report to your physician any rapid weight gain or if there has been no weight gain at all.
- Allow your child, with supervision, to choose and prepare family meals. This will help teach good food habits.
- Encourage your child to eat three regular meals per day and nutritious snacks.

- Share meals as a family on a regular basis. Make mealtimes pleasant and companionable. Encourage conversation.
- Model and encourage good eating habits. Serve a variety of healthy foods.
- Teach your child how to choose nutritious snacks rich in complex carbohydrates. Limit high-fat or low-nutrient foods and beverages such as candy, chips or soft drinks.
- Teach your child how to eat a balanced diet. Teach her to choose plenty of fruits and vegetables; breads, cereals and other grain products; low-fat dairy products; lean meats; and foods prepared with little or no fat.
- Teach your child how to eat a nutritious lunch at school, either through the school lunch program or by packing a balanced lunch.
- *Children watch what their parents eat, so set a good example.*

Sleep

- Ensure that your 6-year-old child gets adequate sleep. For children 6-10 years of age, the suggested bedtime is 8-9 p.m.

Health Promotion

- Be a role model for your child by having a healthy lifestyle.
- Supervise your children's play with their peers.
- Encourage regular physical activity.
- Limit television watching to an average of one hour per day of appropriate programs. Watch the programs together and discuss them.
- Reinforce with your child personal care and hygiene.
- Discourage interest in tobacco products. Parents are very influential in teaching children to avoid tobacco. If a parent smokes, the parent should set a quit date and stop smoking. Modeling nonsmoking is a powerful example with important health consequences. Tell your child that smoking is related to the cause of death for 1 in every 5 people in the U.S.

Immunizations

Since immunization schedules vary from doctor to doctor, and new vaccines may have been introduced, it is always best to seek the advice of your child's health care provider concerning your child's vaccine schedule.

- Annual flu vaccines for children with chronic illnesses like asthma and heart defects. Check with your doctor.
- Vision and hearing, as well as blood and urine, are usually checked at this visit. Other screening done at this age may include a tuberculin test (if indicated) and blood pressure. If there is a family history of elevated cholesterol, some physicians will also obtain a screening blood test.
- By this age, most children have received the following immunizations:
 - 5 doses of DTaP vaccine
 - 4 doses of HIB vaccine
 - 1 dose Chickenpox vaccine
 - 4 doses of Prevnar vaccine (if born after 1999)
 - 3 doses Hepatitis B vaccine
 - 2 doses of MMR vaccine
 - 4 doses of the Inactivated Polio Vaccine

Safety

- Exploring, experimenting and curiosity lead to accidents and injuries from firearms, falls, automobile accidents and drowning. Anticipate that your child may make errors in judgment because he or she is trying to imitate peers. Educate and reinforce the principles of safety especially since the 8-year-old is usually under less adult supervision.

- Continue to ensure that your child wears a seat belt in the car at all times. Make sure everyone in the car wears a seat belt.
- Reinforce safety rules for swimming pools. Teach your child how to swim.
- Ensure that swimming pools in your child's community, in the apartment complex or at home, have a four-sided fence with a self-closing, self-latching gate. Children should always be supervised by an adult whenever they are in or around water.
- Ensure that your child puts on sunscreen before he or she goes outside for long periods of time.
- Continue to keep the child's environment free of smoke.
- Test smoke detectors to ensure they work properly. Change batteries yearly.
- Reinforce with your child the safety rules for the home, including what to do when home alone. Discuss visitors, not tying up the telephone for long periods of time, and what to do in case of fire or other emergencies. Conduct fire drills at home. Lock up poisons, matches and electrical tools.
- Ensure that guns, if in the home, are locked up and ammunition is stored separately.
- Reinforce your child's knowledge of the neighborhood safety rules.
- Reinforce with your child the safety rules for bicycles, including use of proper traffic signals. Ensure your child always wears a helmet when riding a bicycle.
- Ensure that your child is supervised before and after school in a safe environment.
- Reinforce with your child the safety rules for interacting with strangers (e.g., answering the telephone or the door, never getting into a stranger's car). Ensure that your child's school curriculum includes information on how to deal with strangers.
- Reinforce sports safety with your child, including the need to wear protective sports gear such as a mouth guard or a face protector.
- Make sure windows are closed or have screens that can not be pushed out.
- Do not allow your child to play on a trampoline unsupervised.

Sexuality

- Have age-appropriate sexual education books in the home that will answer some questions and encourage your child to ask other questions.
- If your child receives family life education at school or in the community, discuss it with him or her.
- Answer questions at a level appropriate to your child's understanding.
- For parents of girls: Prepare your daughter for menstruation.

The information presented in Growth Milestones was obtained with the help of our pediatric experts and with material from The American Academy of Pediatrics' Guidelines for Health Supervision and Bright Futures' Guidelines for Health Supervision of Infants, Children, and Adolescents. Bright Futures is supported by the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.