

# BANANAS CHOOSING CHILD CARE HANDOUT

## What School-Age Children Need in Child Care – Age 6 to 8 Years

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Each stage of child development presents different challenges for families and child care providers. This handout is one in a series of four which examines developmental needs in different age groups and suggests how child care settings can best meet those needs.

### What do Early School-Age Children – Six to Eight Years – Need in Child Care?

Early school-age children need to feel loved. They need to learn and to gain self-esteem. However, different children, even within the same age group, also have individual needs. Parents and providers should keep each child's unique qualities in mind when either selecting or providing care.

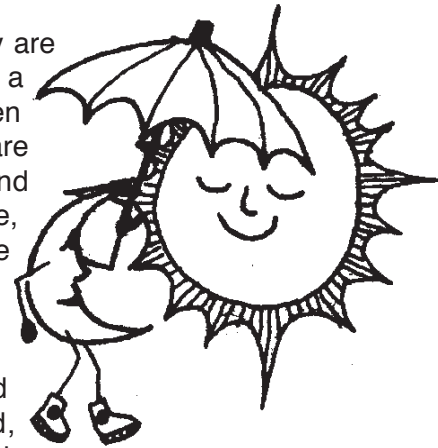
**Competence and Respect** – One of the most important needs of children this age is to feel that others appreciate and respect them as individuals, as well as for their abilities and skills. Unfortunately, some children do not get this essential support in school. After all, school often requires children to focus on the interests of others – the teacher and those who plan the school curriculum. That's why it is especially important to let children follow their personal interests while in child care. Natural abilities often shape personal preferences. Allowing children to follow their interests is a way to help them feel successful and to build self-esteem.

**Time to Relax** – After a busy day at school, most kids need some free time to relax. Quiet children, in particular, may find it stressful to be around so many others during the school day and often need quiet time alone. Children who find schoolwork difficult may also need some extra time to relax and play without pressure.

**Exercise** – Exercise is important for all children, but high-energy children are especially likely to need lots of vigorous exercise after a sedentary day in school.

**Friends** – Friendships are extremely important at this age and will continue to be so throughout life. Children need time to build their relationships with friends. Ideally, child care provides time to extend friendships with children who are either schoolmates or who live in the same neighborhood so it will be easier to arrange weekend and holiday play dates. Children this age often have a

best friend with whom they are especially eager to spend a lot of time. Friendships often form with children who share similar levels of energy and common interests. Talkative, outgoing children who have to sit silently during school or have to work alone really need time to talk and interact with others in child care. On the other hand, shy children may need help making friends. Child care providers can encourage friendships by pairing children with similar interests in a joint project such as cooking together, playing ball or creating an art project.



**Continued Opportunities for Social Development** – Support communication and problem solving skills. Let children settle their conflicts, because haggling about what to do next or about the rules for their game is part of the learning process. If youngsters seem really stuck, then each one may need time to talk about his or her wants or needs. Encourage children to express themselves by asking "What do you want right now?" or "What would help at this point?" Once wishes are out in the open, encourage the children to find a solution: "How can you work this out?" As children increasingly sense group pressure at this age, support individual decision-making by pointing out that people are different and don't always do things the same way.

**Support for Self-Evaluation** – Young children depend largely on adult praise to feel good about themselves. But starting around age four, and increasingly by ages six to eight, children compare themselves with the world around them. That's why it's so important for them to engage in activities which show their competence and thus build self-esteem. Starting around age six, we can help children value their own feelings about their actions, rather than rely on outside opinion. We do this by emphasizing how *they* feel, rather than telling them how *we* feel about their efforts. Instead of saying "You did a great job!," try saying "How did that go for you?" Rather than saying "I'm so proud of you," try, "Are you proud of how well that turned out?"

## Considerations for Parents

**Knowing Your Child** – The more parents understand their child’s interests, temperament and abilities, the better they can select suitable school-age care. Does your active, high-energy child need lots of exercise after sitting in school all day? Or, does your sensitive child crave peace and quiet after the excitement of school? Perhaps your child needs some of both.

How much structure does your child require from adults after a regimented day at school? How much help does he or she need to manage play and social interactions? Group dynamics are another consideration. Shy children may feel more confident with a small group of somewhat younger children. On the other hand, high-energy, athletic children may do better with somewhat older youngsters who share their physical skills and interests.

**Afterschool Activities** – What are your child’s personal interests and abilities? Many children begin to develop and focus on lifelong personal interests at this age. Other youngsters develop new interests every few weeks or months. (It’s better to sign up such children for a few weeks of an activity, not half a year!) Still other children don’t seem to have any special interests at this stage. These children, in particular, benefit from a program which offers many different opportunities to try out new activities. Ideally, child care can help children explore their interests, whether in music, sports, art, carpentry, drama, cooking, etc.

However, children also need some down time – time to relax and hang out with friends – without adult expectations and demands. In our fast-paced world, it’s very tempting to overload children with too much to do. There are so many exciting and worthwhile possibilities! It may help to remember that children probably have some 70 years ahead of them, so they don’t need to do everything this year. After school offers a good chance for children to enjoy this essential, unscheduled time.

**When Should My Child Do Homework?** – If children have homework, should they do it during child care? Or, do they need to relax and exercise during the afternoon so they can do homework more easily in the evening? Families need to decide what works best for the adults and the children and choose a program accordingly.

**Problems at School** – When children have ongoing problems with school and homework, it is important to get more information. Here are some possibilities:

- For starters, children’s minds develop very quickly at this age, but they don’t all learn the same skills in the same order. For example, they may be faster or slower at learning large muscle skills, or small muscle skills,

or social skills, music, etc. Furthermore, in any given school grade, some children are a full year older than others. Not surprisingly, school work reflects these differences. Talk with the child’s teacher to see whether or not s/he is concerned about the progress your child is making.

- Some teachers do better with certain kinds of children than others. Things may go better with a different teacher next year. (When children have difficulty with more than one teacher, it’s time to consider other issues.)
- The school may expect too much homework of children this age. Talk with other parents to see how *their* children are doing. (According to research, doing lots of homework in elementary school doesn’t necessarily make for better high school students.)
- Children have different learning styles and some have “learning differences” or learning disabilities. Some learn most easily by listening, others by watching and still others by actively moving their bodies as they learn. Because our brain cells connect in different ways, some children have unusual difficulty learning to read, spell, do math or manage other specific types of learning. Some find it impossible to focus their attention in the middle of a busy classroom. In order to succeed and feel competent in their school work, children may need help.
- Alternatively, some very fast learners get painfully bored doing the repetition that other children need in order to learn. If homework is an ongoing struggle, talk with your child, the teacher, your child’s doctor and the school learning specialist. The sooner learning difficulties are addressed, the better for the child’s self-confidence.



**Arriving Home after Child Care** – Children need to reconnect emotionally with parents after a long day away. When you first arrive home, schedule 10 to 15 minutes to relax with your children. Give them your full attention even though your first impulse may be to prepare dinner, listen to phone messages or tackle other household chores. If needed, enjoy a healthy snack or a glass of juice to take the edge off hunger. With such a beginning, the rest of the evening will likely go much more smoothly!

## Considerations for Caregivers

**Respect Individual Needs** – After a closely controlled day in school, some children need time alone and others need time to socialize. Some need lots of exercise, others little. Some benefit from exploring long-term interests, while others need frequent exposure to new topics. Many need a break from the formal structure of school, while others do better with a certain amount of structure at all times. In short, don't expect all children to participate in the same activity at the same time. Set up a quiet area for those who want time alone to read, do art work or start their homework. Set up another area for socializing and fantasy play, with optional projects. Finally, encourage high-energy youngsters to run off steam with outdoor play (or dancing and active games if bad weather keeps them indoors).

**Communication** – Observe and use a child's body language to find out how a child is feeling. For example, "From the way you are walking, you look angry – are you upset about something?" Clarify communication and show children you value their opinions by repeating what they have said: "Let me see if I heard you correctly. You said...."

Be a good listener. Children this age often need a listening ear, so they can talk of their frustrations with school, friends, a sibling, parent or someone else. Don't assume you have to solve problems for the children. Often children just need someone to hear them out.

**Teach Problem-Solving Skills** – It's tempting to use adult wisdom and tell children what to do. However, children learn more when adults teach lifelong problem-solving skills with such questions as "What happened?" "How did it make you feel?" "What could you do differently next time?" or "Who, or what, do you think might help?" Often children are louder, more active and more silly when with good friends. When arguments break out, adults are often inclined to act as judge and jury. But at this age, children will learn more if we act instead as newspaper reporters: "It seems that Carlos wants ... and it seems that Sean wants ... How can you solve this conflict?"

**Teach Respect for Differences** – Children are very aware of how they are different from others. Left on their own, they can be cruel to those who look different (weight, glasses, etc.), have a different social or cultural background or have special needs. Teasing and name calling should **not** be ignored. If children use hurtful or stereotyping words, take the opportunity to teach: "What does that word mean to you? Where did you learn it? We don't use that word here because it hurts people's feelings. What is a nicer way to say what you mean?"

Help children learn to respect and appreciate each other's differences by suggesting "Cookies look different on the outside, but they are all good on the inside," or asking "How would *you* feel if someone called you a mean name?" Alternatively, share an experience from your life when someone did or said something nasty to you and describe how that made you feel.

Cruelty often grows out of lack of personal confidence. Point out that we all have things we are good at. Encourage children to notice their own talents and abilities as well as those of others.

**Use Age-Appropriate Discipline** – Start by looking behind the behavior to find the cause. For example, maybe Ariella is mean to a younger child in child care because an older classmate is mean to her in school. Keep in mind that children need some relief from the tight discipline during school hours. As much as possible, "catch" them being good: "I like how you helped Austin" or "Thank you for closing the door quietly."

If problems persist, sit down together with the children involved when things are calm. Invite the children to come up with rules and consequences that relate directly to the problem. "If you grab all the crackers today, you'll be served last tomorrow" or "Because you hit Michelle, you need to sit on your hands in this chair until you tell Michelle what the problem is." Often, children set tougher consequences than adults, and you may need to soften their choices.

**Manage Homework** – Some youngsters have homework, and others don't. Some are able to do it on their own and others need help. Work with parents to decide whether homework is best done during child care or at home. If children need help with homework while at child care, consider what help you can realistically provide. Maybe an older child could help a younger one.

**Relationship to Parents** – To build positive relationships with parents, regularly report something their child has done well that day. If you have a concern about the child's behavior, try saying, for example, "I've noticed Diamond seems to have trouble with her homework. Do you notice the same thing at home? What can I do to help?" Find out about community resources so that you can show parents who share your concerns where they can get help. (Our handout, "*Northern Alameda County Family Resource Guide*," lists local resources.)

Often, parents want to discuss their concerns right away, while you need to attend to the children in your care. You might say, "I'm sorry that I can't talk right now. Can we schedule a time when we can talk without being interrupted? Perhaps you could call me in the evening?"

## Suggestions for Activities

**Individual Interests** – Some children have strong interests and need time outside school to pursue them. Some continue the same activities for years, while others quickly switch from one possibility to another. Personal interests can be the starting point for group projects. Encourage children to move beyond gender stereotypes; boys may enjoy cooking and playing with dolls while girls may enjoy wrestling and racing cars.

**Planned Group Activities** – Somewhere around age seven, most children develop more impulse control and sense of responsibility. However, six- and seven-

year olds may show very different levels of cooperation and be ready for very different kinds of activities. Keep in mind that the average attention span for six- to eight-year olds is about 20 minutes. Plan frequent breaks and changes in activities. Children can gain a great sense of pride and ownership when they plan and carry out a long-term project they are interested in, such as making and taking gifts to a nursing home or planning how to spend the profits from their lemonade stand.

**Note:** Be aware of the pull that video games, computers and cell phones have on school-age children. Limit screen time. Instead, encourage exercise and face-to-face socializing. See examples below.

Activity	Needs Addressed	Examples
<b>Time Alone</b>	Provides a break from the challenges of cooperation. Children can think and move at their own pace and skill level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• puzzles and mazes</li> <li>• draw, stencil, stitch or bead, paint by number</li> <li>• play jacks, play with playdough</li> <li>• look at books or listen to music</li> </ul>
<b>Free-Play Group Activities</b>	Children practice free-flowing cooperation. Encourages creativity and skill building. Provides a break from classroom structure.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• play ball (4 square, softball, soccer, etc.), hopscotch, hunting games, jump rope, dance</li> <li>• tape recorder interviews, dress up</li> <li>• trade with collections of trading cards, shells, stickers (encourage discussions about fair trading)</li> <li>• build houses, forts with building blocks, pillows</li> <li>• word games, riddles, guessing games</li> </ul>
<b>Planned Group Activities</b>	<p>Group projects expose children to new activities and ideas and teach them how to jointly plan and work on a project.</p> <p>Children will be more interested and cooperative if they have a say in selecting themes and activities related to the chosen theme.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cooking projects, bake sale, lemonade stand</li> <li>• projects about transportation (including space travel), famous people (including presidents), sports and sporting events, culture, history and art</li> <li>• nature stuff: weather, birds, wildflowers, plants, gardening, how our bodies work; capturing and observing insects, lizards, etc.</li> <li>• science with magnifying glasses, magnets and codes using invisible ink circle games with music (musical chairs)</li> <li>• arts and crafts: make murals, collages, make and fly kites, draw and follow maps</li> </ul>

### Related BANANAS Resources:

BANANAS has many handouts – available by mail, at our office or from our website – and videos for child care providers and parents. For a complete listing, see our publication and video lists.

#### Handouts:

- A Closer Look at Large Family Child Care Homes
- Can I Care for a School-Age Child?
- Choosing a Child Care Center
- Choosing School-Age Child Care
- Choosing Child Care for a Child With Special Needs
- How Many Children Can Be Cared For in Licensed Family Child Care Homes?
- Kindergarten Blues
- The Uphill Struggle – Getting Children to Clean Up their Rooms

#### Videos:

- Kids' Time: Planning School-Age Child Care Activities
- Fun, Safe Field Trips for School-Age Children

#### Books That May Help:

- Click, Phyllis; Jennifer Parker. *Caring for School-Age Children*, 5th ed. Delmar Cengage Learning, 2008
- Bumgarner, Marlene. *Working With School-Age Children*. Mayfield Publishing, 1999.
- Schor, Edward L. *Caring for your School-Age Child: Ages 5-12*. Bantam, 1999
- Golinkoff, Roberta Michni. *Einstein Never Used Flashcards: How Our Children Really Learn—And Why They Need to Play More and Memorize Less*. Rodale Books, 2004.
- Kutner, Lawrence. *Your School-Age Child*. William Morrow, 1996.