



OVERVIEW OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT CHARACTERISTICS RELATING TO FARM SAFETY RISK



It is easy to over-estimate the ability of children to prevent, assess and respond to unsafe situations.
Consider the above characteristics of growing children to help avoid overly high expectations and setting of inappropriate rules or jobs

	Toddlers and small children (1-4 yrs)	Young school age children (5-9 yrs)	Older children / young teenagers (10-14 yrs)
Physical growth rate	Rapid growth, beginning motor skills development. Fragile, growing bones.	Steady growth stage – learning to use small and large muscles.	Steady to rapid growth rate as puberty commences Small muscles rapidly developing.
Size, vision balance, Coordination	Small size - will tend to climb over or step out to see around things. Poor side vision Have balance problems and slow reaction times. Toddlers just learning to control body movement – are top heavy and easily fall over. Can't judge distances or speed properly (ie. moving objects).	Small size - will still tend to climb over or step out around things. Difficulty judging distances or speed properly (ie. moving objects). Developing better side vision. Poor eye-hand co-ordination. Slow reaction times.	Increasing size can be a misleading sign of maturity and strength. Similar coordination to adults, but lapses of awkwardness common.
Discovery, learning & thinking skills	Curious, mobile and want to explore the world around them through touching, feeling, tasting. Discovering new behaviours – how to pull climb on things to open a gate, imitating parents and following older children. Are able to climb, walk and disappear quickly and quietly. Thinks without logic – has 'magic' thinking. Attracted by moving objects, noise and water.	Continue to learn through play and exploring the world with increasing competence and independence. Developing concrete thinking processes – dealing in present observable facts. Not yet capable of abstract ideas/thinking.	Desire to learn and try out new skills without constant adult supervision. Thinks logically and capable of more abstract thinking processes. Can find solutions to own problems with some adult guidance.
Sense of self belonging & acceptance	Attachment and bonding to parent / familiar carer - may protest at parent leaving to work and may try to follow them.	Seeks parental approval and wants to be seen as competent. Tries to master more complex skills but may and take on tasks without adult supervision beyond their capability.	Success is important for self concept. May continue to seek parent acknowledgement / approval of independence. Increasingly seek to impress peers and may be easily influenced by the group.
Focus and priorities	Live in the present moment, and can only focus on one thing at a time (not safety). Wants something NOW and will try to breach any obstacle to get it . May run out into path of vehicles, animals, machines, water in pursuit of objects / toys. Self-focused play.	Continued tendency to act before thinking. Easily caught up in or distracted by play and playmates. Safety and rules forgotten about in these circumstances.	Easily distracted and caught up by peers. Often affords safety a low priority compared to group needs and sense of self-competency and invincibility.
Awareness & response to hazards	None to limited awareness of common hazards. Easily excited and confused if a situation changes	Can recognize common hazards, but are often unable to foresee serious consequences or recognize a changing danger quickly enough to react or avoid it	Can identify and assess hazards and foresee some unsafe consequences – but have unfounded confidence in their own ability and engage in risk taking behaviour (sense of immortality).
Awareness & response to rules	Either has no or very limited concept of 'rules' (0-2/3 yrs) or has limited ability to remember these at any one time.	May understand and follow simple rules, but can not be relied upon to remember or easily generalize / apply them across different situations.	Can follow rules and basic operating procedures, in 'normal' circumstances. May rationalize the need to adapt rules for own purposes, but may lack appropriate assessment of this.
Listening skills & compliance	Some difficulty in locating the direction of sounds or understanding verbal instructions.	Often doesn't hear what is said to them (not an active listener) May question authority and refuse cooperation. Is discovering that parents make mistakes.	Resists adult authority and may not listen to safe operating instructions.
Assisting with jobs	May be able to start participating in short, simple jobs of a token nature accompanied by an adult, but unable to take on meaningful responsibility.	May be able to accept some responsibility for short , simple, low risk jobs under supervision. Lack the attention span, lateral thinking, endurance and foresight to follow through to completion jobs requiring several steps or attention to multiple factors. Not ready for full responsibility. May want to be included in adult work without understanding job requirements and their own limits.	May be physically strong enough and able to complete some farm procedures under supervision and accept limited responsibility. Still developing focus, lateral thinking and foresight. Lack skills to think/ coordinate / react in an emergency required to safely engage in more complex tasks without close supervision. Tires in jobs which go for prolonged periods & is easily distracted from safe practice.

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