

6 Year Change

“I am struck by the fact that the more slowly trees grow at first, the sounder they are at the core, and I think that the same is true of human beings. We do not wish to see children precocious, making great strides in their early years like sprouts, producing a soft and perishable timber, but better if they expand slowly at first, as if contending with difficulties, and so are solidified and perfected. Such trees continue to expand with nearly equal rapidity to extreme old age.”

- Henry David Thoreau

Waldorf Early Years

- no early academics
- early childhood has many unique tasks to complete

- strong physical body
- strengthening of the foundational senses

--> supported by rhythm, seasonal celebrations, play, work, child like exploration and protection from inappropriate and excessive sensory stimulation

6 year change

- First **puberty**, first adolescence
- **chaotic behaviour** manifesting
- many **changes: physical, emotional, cognitive**, in body and soul of children

Changes

- **uniquely** experienced with each child
- like “ **a caterpillar spinning a cocoon and emerging as quite a new creature, a butterfly**” - not simply a linear growth cycle happening on a continuum, but rather the child goes through a transformation on many different levels
- confusing time for children, they don't feel in control
- 5-.5-7 yrs - Stepping away from/resisting **imitation**, they are looking for something else, looking at a **loving authority figure**
- **pushing away from parents, caregivers, pushing boundaries** - we have to stand as loving, firm authority - it is the child's job to push, our job to reestablish boundaries, for them to realize we are still in charge, this makes them feel secure and calm
- silliness and opposition
- they are **longing for form while in the midst of demanding freedom**
- many **physical changes**
- for the first time since birth **thinking and feeling become a stronger presence - not experienced the same way as in adults – it is still not time to launch into more complicated responses.**
- their **body is changing, their consciousness is changing and their connection to their world is changing**
- **sexual curiosity** awakens, but then subsides – what is acceptable – time and place – boundaries

Physical Changes

- the child is trying to **make his body his own and to break away from the ties of heredity**
- **limbs** and torso **stretching, waistline, wrists, neck more apparent, baby fat disappears,**

- *dimples on the hand and and face disappear - physical sensations --> irritability*
- **children integrate their sensory-motor system through body movements (*obstacle courses, adventure walks, skipping, working with tools, purposeful work activities and running games, jump rope - levity*)**
- Physical movements such as **skipping, hopping, rolling down hills, playing catch with a ball, jumping rope, running, walking, clapping games and circle games and doing lots of fine motor activities (cutting with scissors, digging in the garden, kneading bread dough, pulling weeds, painting, beading, drawing, sewing, finger knitting) build and strengthen neural pathways** – in contrast watching TV or videos and playing computer games are extremely poor sources of stimulation for their sensory-motor development, and actually prevent the integration of their nervous systems by keeping children in a state of stress, activating their sympathetic nervous systems of fight or flight.
- **tummy aches and joint pains**
- **change of teeth** – jaws/mouth cavity very sensitive – they chew on things – teething
- **6-year-old molars** appear
- **appetite increases**
- working on **establishing their dominant side**, and to be able to **comfortably cross over the vertical and horizontal mid-lines**
- **fever** can accompany 6 year transformation time
- **Heartbeat changes** to short, short, long (iambic rhythm) – earlier two long beats

Emotional and Social Changes

- most **individual differences (inward/outward response)**
- **social circle widens**
- they *correct parents* and teachers: *"you are not the boss of me"*
- **play at being different – social rules are challenged**
- new kinds of **feelings awakening**
- **teasing rhymes, giggling, being silly** , playing **dogs on leashes** (master and servant), restaurant themes, **store, hospital, airport, bathroom words, what they hate, tendency to pair off with a special friend, getting married, playing at excluding each other !**
- **whispering naughty things to others**
- older children love to sit together and plan their play

Thinking

- **enlivening of thinking not indicative of intellectual curiosity but rather of forces of fantasy** – give children flexible ideas that can grow in the soul - *"Snowflakes fall from heaven, a gift from Mother Earth"*
- **awakening of ideas, pictures and imaginations**
- Their **play is changing**:
 - the stimulus for play no longer comes so much from external objects, but from **inside**
 - **Crisis** – for a while children will not have so many imaginative ideas, their will appears to be paralysed and they ask – **"What shall I do, I am bored"**
 - some are overwhelmed by this capacity, they say **"I'm bored"** = **There is something new happening and I don't know how to relate to it, yet**
 - **forget how to play** – do **adult to work** with us, until they have an idea and are able to

- go back into play
- **get stuck in play**
- **fingerknitting tied into all sorts of cobwebs or telephone wires – a signal of the presence of the new thinking**
- the arrival of the **picture imagination compels children to experience their ideas being played out**
- **infinity and God conversations**
- no longer bound to the **present**, the **future** comes to them, **past** also more retrievable in their **memories**

How can we be there for them in this tumultuous time:

- stand uprightly and firmly, carry inner attitude that you know what's going on
- if you ask child to do something, make sure the he follows through
- Inner attitude: “I see you are undergoing transformations. I love you and these new changes and I will help you find your way.”
- “this, too, shall pass”
- patience
- opportunity to work with impulse control - “oh, you forgot”
- respond with empathy
- clapping and skipping games helpful – can help children rhythmically and brings balance and regularity to their movement as well
- the right of the world will still be upheld, we'll still remember our kindergarten ways - despite all this upheaval, the child needs to rest in the security that the world is a safe and moral place
- meet pushing the boundaries with loving firmness
- we can help guide moral foundations at this time
- clear, firm expectations
- playing at exclusion: *“we play together in kindergarten, if you would like to play alone with one friend, you can organize a play-date after school”*
- honour them as valuable helpers
- The limits we bring to our children now provide the inner voices that they will hear inside themselves later on. Think about what you will want your adolescent child to know – this is your opportunity to use this power wisely.

Other ways we can help

- consistent rhythms
- adequate sleep
- time spent in nature
- healthy nutritious foods
- don't rush
- warmth
- harmonious, non-competitive rhythmic movement
- with love
- work on daily rhythmic activities – living skills