Toddler and Preschool Aged Children (2 to 4 year olds)

- Are proficient at most simple large muscle skills
- Are developing improved hand coordination
- Engage in physical testing with confidence — jumping from heights, climbing, hanging by arms, rolling, spinning, etc.
- Like to throw and retrieve objects
- Are very curious
- Are interested in nature, science, animals, and how things work
- Have short attention spans
- Have a strong desire for independence
- Begin to be purposeful and goal-directed by around age 4

What to Consider

- Limit activities to 5 to 15 minutes
- Include time for running, jumping and climbing
- Consider rhythmic activities, songs and dramatics
- Include games or activities that invite children to imitate animals, like “Animal Charades”

Kindergarten through Third Graders (5 to 8 year olds)

- Show slow but steady growth
- Demonstrate good large motor control
- Show inconsistent levels of maturity
- Can be eager, self-assertive, aggressive and competitive
- Are becoming independent and, given time, can do things for themselves
- Are learning to relate to people outside of their families
- Are learning concepts of right versus wrong
- Show an increasing attention span

What to Consider

- Limit activities to 15 to 20 minutes
- Include time for running, jumping and climbing
- Consider rhythmic activities, songs and dramatics
- Include concrete learning and active participation
- Teach and model how to share and work cooperatively in groups
- Give time to develop skills and abilities
- Include observation and journaling during activities, such as drawing the animals they see

Note that these lists indicate average development and give a general idea of what to expect. Children develop at uneven rates and their caregivers know them best. Also remember that each child is a unique individual. For information on infant development, please visit www.seek.state.mn.us/publications/naturalwonders.pdf.
Fourth through Sixth Graders
(9 to 11 year olds)
• Show steady growth, including growth spurts (girls about two years ahead of boys)
• Demonstrate energy, eagerness and enthusiasm
• Are often restless and fidgety
• Show fluctuating interest levels, from highly interested and curious to bored
• Can be noisy and argumentative
• Are often highly imaginative and affectionate
• Are continuing to learn about moral judgements and right versus wrong
• Are self-conscious, afraid to fail and sensitive to criticism

What to Consider
• Limit activities to 20 to 30 minutes
• Include time for running, climbing and other physical activity
• Give plenty of praise and encouragement
• Include individual and group responsibility and training without pressure
• Expand on the idea of fort-building with loose parts to try animal exhibit-building

Seventh through Eighth Graders
(12 to 13 year olds)
• Show rapid muscular growth
• Demonstrate a wide range of maturity levels
• Tend to be overcritical, rebellious, uncooperative and changeable
• Tend to be self-conscious of personal physical changes
• Show high need for group acceptance and opinion
• Often assert independence from adults, though they are strengthening relationships with specific adults

What to Consider
• Organize games specific to their age levels (co-ed recreation can be difficult)
• Give non-threatening, unobtrusive guidance for skill development
• Foster a feeling of security, being accepted by peer group
• Give opportunities to make decisions
• Ask teams to design animal-based scavenger hunts of the area, then trade lists and have the other team complete the challenge