

The Seven-Year-Old Transformation

The child's first developmental period ends and the second begins around the child's seventh birthday. Many of the changes that were mentioned in connection with the six-year-old signal the shift from the first to the second cycle of seven years. In the second seven-year cycle development moves from the predominance of the will to the predominance of feelings, imagination and social life. It is also the beginning of learning about the world from a beloved authority rather than through imitation.

In Waldorf education we speak about the first seven years as the period of time during which the child "takes hold" of his or her physical body. This "taking hold of" gesture includes the change of teeth. The emphasis on teeth comes from the understanding of teeth as the hardest part of the physical body. While the baby teeth are a part of the child's inherited body, the six-year-old molars are the result of the child's own activity. The new permanent teeth indicate that the process of taking hold of the body nearing its completion.

With the eruption of the child's permanent teeth, some of the growth forces active in the first seven years, also called the life or etheric forces, are now available for creating on another level, in the area of imagination and mental images. These are the forces required for abstract learning and memory.

From physiology, we know that all of our cells are replaced every seven years. The birth of the child's life body is the result of the child's taking hold of his or her physical body during the first seven years of life. Once the child has taken hold of his or her physical body and some of the growth forces are freed up for other creative functions, the child has gained his or her own "protective garment," usually referred to as the life body or etheric body. Waldorf educators recognize this freeing of some of the creative forces from activities of growth and maintenance, at around seven years of age, as a sign of the birth of the child's own life body or etheric body. Prior to this subtle "birth," the child has lived in the "womb-like" protection of the family life.

One visible sign that seven-year-olds are undergoing significant change is their passion for skipping and jumping. While the child at the beginning of the first seven-year cycle conquered gravity by standing upright, now the child is using gravity to launch him or



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herself heavenward. We could say that the caterpillar is becoming a butterfly! During the seventh year, the child is trying out his or her transformed physical, social/emotional, and intellectual capacities.

Parents of the seven-year-old will notice their child's new capacity for learning and independence, even though they may occasionally see moments of hesitation and even regressive behaviors in their child. The seven-year-old change means change for parents, as well. It means being sensitive as to when to step forward and when to step back.



It means recognizing when we might be hanging on to our children, rather than letting them move forward. It means finding new ways to offer support now that our child has entered a new cycle of development.

The gift of life with a seven-year-old is learning to let go enough for your child to sense your confidence in him or her, and at the same time, staying in touch enough to know when more support is needed.

Links

[N. Blanning, "Seeing the Wholeness of the Child" in *You're Not The Boss of Me! Understanding the Six/Seven-Year-Old Transformation* \(WECAN 2007\)](#)

[J. Almon, "First Grade Readiness" in *First Grade Readiness* \(WECAN 2009\)](#)

[N. Foster, "Some Guidelines for First Grade Readiness," *ibid.*](#)

Books

[N. Blanning, ed., *First Grade Readiness* \(WECAN 2009\)](#)

[R. Ker, ed., *You're Not the Boss of Me! Understanding the Six/Seven-Year-Old Transformation* \(WECAN 2007\)](#)

[K.J. Payne and Lisa Ross, *Simplicity Parenting* \(Ballantine Books 2010\)](#)

[J. Petrash, *Navigating the Terrain of Childhood* \(Nova Institute Publishing 2004\)](#)