

## ***Profile of a First Grade Child***

### **Characteristics**

Children of this age are growing away from egocentric social behavior toward an awareness of other people. They are entering into peer-group activities with zeal. Now they need guidance in learning to handle playtime conflicts and to exercise the social skills needed to establish and maintain friendships.

These skills include learning to give and take and to share responsibility with peers, learning boundaries, learning to read and to write, and other related intellectual skills.

They are capable of understanding a story and can retell it from beginning to end. Some are even capable at this stage of finding hidden meaning or discovering the moral in a story.

The children's sense of self-worth is quite fragile at this stage. It is imperative that the catechist be sensitive to this fragility. When a child misbehaves, the correction in behavior should be handled in such a way that the child's emerging self-image is not damaged or hurt.

### **Faith Development Needs**

Six-year-old children, in order to develop spiritually, emotionally, physically, intellectually, and socially, need to be loved so as to love. Faith has its roots in love.

First graders need to be involved in group prayer and related religious activities. They should continue to experience times of silence in which to listen to and talk with God, to wonder, to reflect, to imagine. e.g., see the Story of Samuel (1 Samuel 3:1-10).

Six-year-olds need to be recognized, appreciated and praised as a unique individual, created in the image and likeness of God, and precious in the eyes of God. They need to experience a sense of security and belonging, which is essential to their growth.

Little children need to be taught how to share. They need to see role models from Scripture, the lives of the saints, and especially from the most familiar adults in their lives. In these models, they will begin to see that faith is to be lived out through prayer and action.

Children at this age need to appreciate others and recognize that each person is special. The value of each person comes from being created and loved by God, regardless of social status, race, physical handicaps, etc. It is important to help children learn to value others different from themselves.

Young children need to experience an atmosphere in which self-discipline can be fostered by giving them real responsibilities. Gradually, they will learn that all actions have consequences, either positive or negative.

Learning to live as Jesus wants us to will require training. The way that we make good and holy choices is through the exercise of virtue. A virtue is a good moral habit. We develop the Cardinal Virtues (moral virtues) of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance through education, deliberate acts and perseverance in struggle. These efforts are purified and elevated by God's grace (CCC 1810).

<u>Prudence:</u>	Discovering our true good and choosing the right means of achieving it (Simplified definition) making a right judgment
<u>Justice:</u>	Giving the proper due to God and neighbor Being fair
<u>Fortitude/Courage:</u>	Firmness in the pursuit of good The courage to do what is right
<u>Temperance:</u>	Moderating the attraction of the pleasures of the senses that provides balance in the use of created goods Acting with self discipline or self control (CCC 1803-1809)

Example: The virtue of justice is exercised when children are fair in playing sports.  
The virtue of temperance is exercised when children take two pizza instead of five.

The catechist can help the children to choose to be good out of love for God by loving and respecting others. This will require that children be helped to develop the virtues so as to become habits in order to guide their conduct (CCC 1805-1809). According to *the Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality, Guidelines for Education within the Family* (hereafter TM), from the age of innocence until the time of puberty, children are to be trained in friendship skills and virtuous living. Developing the virtue of temperance involves formation in self-discipline and self-control. The virtue of temperance is the foundation of the virtue of chastity, which allows us to overcome the temptation to look upon or use another person as an object for pleasure and sexual satisfaction rather than a person to be loved. The virtue of chastity also needs to be developed.

The document notes that for children in the years of innocence, “this period of tranquility and serenity must never be disturbed by unnecessary information about sex” (TM #78). Chastity is training in the “gift of the person” (CCC 2346). “Chastity is not to be understood as a repressive attitude. On the contrary, chastity should be understood rather as the purity and temporary stewardship of a precious and rich gift of love, in view of the self-giving realized in each person’s specific vocation...Chastity means the successful integration of sexuality within the person and thus the inner unity of man in his bodily and spiritual being”(TM #4). The integration of sexuality means self-mastery, in controlling desires and submitting them to love and respect as ordered to the gift of self. “The virtue of chastity blossoms in friendship” (CCC 2347).

“As in the first years of life also during childhood, parents [and teachers] should encourage a spirit of collaboration, obedience, generosity and self-denial in their children, as well as a capacity for self-reflection. In fact, a characteristic of this period of development is an attraction toward intellectual activities. Using the intellect makes it possible to acquire the strength and ability to control the surrounding situation and, before long, to control bodily instincts, so as to transform them into intellectual and rational activities” (TM #86).

“An undisciplined or spoiled child is inclined toward certain immaturity and moral weakness in future years because chastity is difficult to maintain if a person develops selfish or disordered habits and cannot behave with proper concern and respect for others. Parents [and teachers] should present objective standards of what is right and wrong, thereby creating a sure moral framework for life” (TM #86).

It is the understanding of the Catholic Church that parents are the primary educators of their children. In the Catholic Schools and Religious Education Programs, formation in chastity will be taught in the context of the moral life with a focus on the dignity of the human person. Human sexuality, which is to include formation in chastity, is the responsibility of the parents.

It is the duty of the parish to help and support parents “in fulfilling their fundamental right and duty to educate their children for love.” (TM #41-47) The Diocese of La Crosse, through the Office of Natural Family Planning, offers training and support for parents and parents/young people in matters of human sexuality and formation for chastity. For information call (608) 791-2658. The Diocese also offers resources such as *Taking A Stand, Helping our Kids Win the Battle for Sexual Purity* and *Theology of the Body for Teens* for both parents, Catholic school teachers and catechists in the religious education programs. Please call the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization (608) 791-2658 for training for religious educators or for recommendations on resources.

**Implications**

To help the children move from a moral stage known as self-interest, the catechist should endeavor to awaken in them an awareness of the needs and feelings of others, inviting them to reach out to others in love and concern. Even at this early age children can tell others about Jesus and His Family. (Evangelization)

Children also require the development of the supernatural virtues of Faith, Hope and Love. Because children relate readily to the language of symbols and gestures and begin to acquire the spiritual attitudes which the gestures express, the catechist should provide frequent opportunities for them to engage in ritual: processions, offerings, praising and thanking God in prayer and song, worship of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. (Virtues of Faith, Love)

One way six-year-old children begin to understand who God is and what He wants is from the stories they hear. These images later become more mature concepts and feelings about God. Therefore Scripture stories which emphasize the love and providence of God and God's faithfulness should be used.

Little child tends to imitate others. Therefore, a catechist must be an exemplar, one who is conscious of God's presence in the world, in her or his life, one who is joyful, and one who is striving to follow Christ more closely.

Some children know at an early age what God calls them to be. Contact with a priest or religious as role models may encourage these vocations.

Note: The Profile of a First Grade Child, including Characteristics, Faith Development Needs and Implications was adapted from the Diocesan Curriculum, Office for Catechesis, Diocese of Sioux Falls.