

Profile of a Third Grade Child

Characteristics

Children at this level seek group identification; they have a special group of friends, usually all boy or all girlfriends. They define their roles and duties from the community in which they live. This is the “good boy” or “nice girl” period during which it is important to follow accepted expectations.

Eight-year-old children begin to take responsibilities seriously, but are very sensitive, at times moody, and easily disturbed by criticism from adults. They are developing a positive, though quite fragile, self-image. Strong adult support is still very much needed.

These children, because of their growing group consciousness, enjoy events in which they have a role in planning: planning prayer services, dramatizing stories from the Gospel and planning such events as an All Saints Day party.

Faith Development Needs

Children at this stage like time to be alone. Thus it is appropriate to introduce meditative and spontaneous prayer, as well as silent prayer. It is helpful for third-graders to be given the opportunity to reflect on what was presented in a teaching and to pray by themselves. This contemplative method of prayer does not in any way exclude public, spontaneous and formal prayer. The “Praying with Scripture” *Lectio Divina* prayer worksheet can be used verbally with third grade students, helping them to learn how to relate the Scriptures to their own life.

Eight-year-olds need stimulating personal and group relationships that foster feelings of belonging and being cared for and cared about. To feel good about their exposure to the Christian community, they need constant reassurance that adults, even when they punish, love them and will not turn away from them. Stories about the love of Jesus demonstrate that God always loves us, even though He does not approve of our wrong deeds.

Due to their need for group identification, children at this age begin to think they are not only different from others, but also better. They need to realize that each person is created by God and therefore, deserving of respect and love. They can be taught loving attitudes and behaviors by hearing stories about missionaries, saints, and including modern day saints such as Mother Teresa.

The child begins to learn that joy and peace come from knowing God, loving God, living by His Ten Commandments, following His guidance, growing in virtue and serving Him by serving others.

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).

Children are to be helped to grow in the Theological Virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity. Leading the children to a deeper friendship with Jesus will take place through learning Bible Stories, learning the teachings of the Church and taking time for daily prayer.

<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 slices of 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 that they 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* for both parents, Catholic school teachers and catechists in the religious education programs. Please call the Office of Catechesis and Evangelization for recommendations on resources or training for religious educators (608) 791-2658.

Implications

Because third-graders are in the “hero-worshipping” stage (even though we should worship God alone) they need models of Christian behavior to emulate. During this time of sex role identification, the catechist should make sure that stories from Scripture and from the lives of the saints include both heroes and heroines.

Eight-year-olds are developing socially and becoming more aware of the effect they have on a group. The teacher of the Faith can help the children to choose the good that God wills, begin to understand temptations, reject the wrong, and begin to accept greater responsibility for their actions.

Third-graders can be made aware of social ills and human needs resulting from injustice, greed, lack of mercy, violence and war. It is best if they see Christian witnesses who use their God-given gifts to respond to the needs of others.

The catechist must assume responsibility for involving the children in prayer and in Christian service according to God’s unique call of the individual. It is through the catechist’s example as well as his/her instruction that he/she will encourage the children in a life of prayer and response to the call of God. It is essential for the children to have a priest and a consecrated person speak with them.

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