

Profile of a Fourth-Grade Child

Characteristics

Enthusiasm, self-confidence and activity characterize this year. This is a period of steady growth in both physical and mental ability. Athletic skill is very important in the development of nine-year-olds for it affects their concept of success in winning and maintaining a coveted place among peers. Intellectually, nine-year-olds are sharpening study skills and becoming capable of a longer attention span. They continue to be interested in living creatures and how they are made.

Fourth-graders are more concerned about right and wrongdoing at this stage. They want to live by rules, and they want others to live by them too. They want to be accepted and to be part of a community. They experience conflict and need to know how to deal with or resolve conflict.

Faith Development Needs

Children at this level are in transition beyond childhood, therefore, they may exhibit behavior that is inconsistent and disorganized. They are prone to quick emotional shifts. They may cry when emotions are overtaxed. They need guidance, understanding, patience and encouragement from adults.

Older persons grow in importance to nine-year-olds, who are inclined toward hero-heroine worship, especially people of action. They need to hear stories about missionaries, saints and contemporary persons involved in living out the call of God in their lives. This is a good age to introduce the idea of vocations to the priesthood and/or religious life.

Related to their need for freedom to make personal choices is the awareness that this freedom carries the personal responsibility for acting in a Christian way. The understanding and formation of conscience begins to take on a more significant role. Conscience becomes the call or invitation of Jesus to follow Him.

Their interest in law and rule keeping lays the foundation for studying Christ's Law of Love and the Ten Commandments. They need to understand that disobedience weakens the entire community and that Christians need to forgive and seek forgiveness. They can gradually realize that each person is to be respected and loved because of his/her inherent goodness and dignity as a child of God.

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).

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| <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 sharing their toys.
The virtue of temperance is exercised when children take one cookie instead of five.

The teacher of the Faith 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. Therefore, 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

Music, art, drama and related activities stimulate the children’s creativity and provide an opportunity for them to express and appreciate religious concepts.

Fourth-graders desire social approval to such a degree that they are becoming conformists. It is the task of the catechist to encourage them to do what is right because it is Jesus’ way, whether it pleases the group or not. The catechist should stress the reasons and the values underlying the rules, as well as the importance of right motives. Moral development includes the desire of the heart to love God and to do God’s will.

Children can be made aware of social ills and human need by becoming involved, in various ways, in social justice activities: helping those in need through a parish activity, being a friend with someone who is not part of the accepted group, sharing the Faith with friends, learning not to waste natural resources. Children of this age level are receptive to the fact that all are called to give of their time, talents and earthly goods.

Nine-year-olds seek and enjoy short periods of time when they can be alone. The catechist can support and nurture this desire by leading the children to quiet, personal prayer and by praying with them.