

Profile of a Fifth-Grade Child

Characteristics

Fifth-graders, though no longer little children, are not yet adolescents. They are at a period in life commonly called pre-adolescence. During this stage physical changes often drain their energy. Great spurts of activity are frequently followed by periods of “laziness” which may have a physical basis in fatigue.

They have a greater desire to know the world around them. They are open to experimentation and investigation. They want to know more.

Pre-adolescents have a wide range of interests and urges: to talk, to look, to read, and to listen more than they want to work. They are amenable, cooperative, sincere, poised, and easy-going; they enjoy life.

Socially, ten-year-olds are open to close family companionship. They like to help in forming family plans, to be “in on things.” They may make friends easily and cooperate in group activities to which they are increasingly able to make worthwhile contributions. Peer acceptance becomes stronger.

Fifth-graders enjoy being of service to others, whether helping younger children, sharing in the various apostolates of the Church, or taking the initiative in noticing the needs of others.

Faith Development Needs

Pre-adolescents need the security that comes from being accepted by a group of their peers. From them they develop cooperation, a sense of personal worth, consideration for others, the ability to make and carry out plans without adult help, and a feeling of “finding oneself” through the group.

Symbols, signs and rituals have a natural place in life at this developmental age. Because children can be led to appreciate the symbolic and the poetic, this is an appropriate time in which to explore the chief symbols and celebration of Catholic life and worship, especially in the Sacraments.

Their orientation toward group activities makes group preparation for celebrations important. School games and other special events can include prayer and religious celebrations with ease and profit.

Ten-year-olds need the help of adults to understand themselves as changing and capable of developing the gifts God has given them. Related to this growth is the need to recognize their responsibility for self-development as cooperating with God in creation.

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, also called the natural or 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).

Prudence: Discovering our true good and choosing the right means of achieving it
(Simplified definition) making a right judgment

Justice: Giving the proper due to God and neighbor
Being fair

Fortitude/Courage: Firmness in the pursuit of good
The courage to do what is right

Temperance: 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)

Examples: The virtue of justice is exercised when children are fair in sharing their possessions.
The virtue of temperance is exercised when young people use the Internet for twenty minutes rather than two hours.

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 by the Pontifical Council for the Family – Rome (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. This temptation is a result of the effects of original sin. Therefore, the virtue of chastity 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.

Educating children for chastity involves three objectives:

- To maintain in the family *a positive atmosphere of love, virtue and respect for the gifts of God*, in particular the gift of life
- To help children to understand the value of sexuality and chastity in stages, sustaining their growth through enlightening words, example and prayer
- To help them understand and discover *their own vocation to the priesthood, to marriage or to consecrated virginity for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven* in harmony with and respecting their attitudes and inclinations and the gifts of the Holy Spirit (TM #22)

At the heart of this task of educating their children in chastity, parents are enlightened by “two fundamental truths:

- that man is called to live in truth and love
- that everyone finds fulfillment through the sincere gift of self (TM #37)

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

In accepting pre-adolescent restlessness, and awkwardness, the teacher of the Faith helps students to experience God's love for them as individuals. The message of self-worth (dignity) should be repeated again and again.

Inasmuch as peer pressure is a reality and pre-adolescents fear peer rejection, liturgical experience rooted in the group is appealing because community is an inviting concept. They begin to grasp their dignity and that of others as being united in the Body of Christ. Among the ways students can participate fully as a group are preparing the materials and the place for celebrations, playing musical instruments, reading the Scripture, presenting the gifts of bread and wine, making decorations, and delivering commentaries.

To ten-year-olds God becomes a partner, a Person they can talk to, a Person who affects them personally, a Person with whom they can enjoy periods of silence and reflection. At this point the catechist can establish a positive attitude toward prayer and its purposes. Among the suggestions for praying are the following: traditional prayers, silent prayer, spontaneous prayers and petitions, meditative prayer using "Praying with Scripture" (which can be downloaded from the Diocesan website / Catechesis main page), prayer services, faith sharing.

Ten-year olds can be helped to develop daily prayer times. Just as they make plans for time with peers, they can plan ahead for their times of prayer. A commitment to times of daily prayer will help them to know Jesus and to love Him as they understand His authentic love for us.

As the child matures he/she begins to understand that the end of life is not death but eternal life with God. The pre-teen needs to realize that the Sacramental Life opens eternal life.

The catechist is responsible for educating students in attitudes and behaviors concerning the dignity of the human person. This is to include the ways of service that we are able to offer to those in need, especially the gift of prayer. Current areas of concern are world peace, world hunger, the rights of the oppressed, the right to life, and a greater awareness of the dignity of the human person. Inasmuch as fifth-graders are service-oriented, they can be encouraged to become involved in these issues.

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