

Profile of a Seventh Grade Student

Characteristics

One characteristic of the twelve-year-old is rapid growth: physical, mental, and emotional. As these changes occur, pre-teens feel awkward, uncertain, and self-conscious. Their interior turmoil and self-doubt are often expressed in symptoms associated with adolescence: boredom, frustration, sharp changes in mood, withdrawal, and apathy toward many things.

Twelve-year-olds may experience sudden, unexpected, sharp and short-lived pains in various parts of the body, localized most often in the head or in the abdomen; these probably portend puberty. While children develop at their own rates, girls generally advance more rapidly than boys do.

Junior High School students begin to question all authority and sometimes are rebellious, antagonistic, and negative toward adults.

At this age girls and boys consider peer prestige more important than adult approval. They are curious as to how their peers think and feel about them. Such thinking greatly influences their behavior.

Faith Development Needs

Twelve-year-olds need to come to terms with the influence of peers on responsible decision-making. They need to cultivate attitudes and habits that help them deal with such influences.

They need to realize that actions sometimes have serious consequences and that choices involve responsibility for the consequences.

They need to learn to deal positively with mistakes and failures in their lives, realizing and appreciating God's constant, unconditional, and unfailing love for them as well as their need to seek repentance.

Pre-teens need to develop self-discipline and a spirit of sacrifice, to express sensitivity to the needs of others, and respect for each person.

Young adolescents need to experience love, freedom, belonging, trust, support and acceptance. They need to be respected as persons. This speaks to them of their dignity, created in the image of God and as baptized Christians who are sons and daughters of the Father.

Young people need to understand sexuality as a treasured gift from God for which they have responsibility. Friendships should be fostered, especially with a group of people who share the same love for God and the desire to be faithful to Him.

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 young people 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 and sublimation. 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 strives to achieve three objectives:

1. to maintain in the family *a positive atmosphere of love, virtue and respect for the gifts of God*, in particular the gift of life
2. to help children to understand the value of sexuality and chastity in stages, sustaining their growth through enlightening words, example and prayer

3. to help them understand and discover *their own vocation 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 at (608) 791-2658.

Implications

At this age level a deeper explanation of the dignity of the human person and the three essential elements of the truth about our world should be continually referred to: 1) “that it comes from God and therefore, is good; 2) that the goodness of the world has been marred by man’s sins committed by us; and 3) that Christ’s Risen Life is given to us in the Church to overcome the evil of sin in our lives and to prepare day by day for the Final Coming of Christ when all things will be restored to the goodness with which God the Father called them into being” (Commentary on the *General Directory for Catechesis*, Archbishop Raymond Burke, p.11).

The pre-teen needs to understand and appreciate the operations of the various human powers of intellect, will, and the sense appetite. The catechist should explain to the students that the interior turmoil and self-doubt they are experiencing are typical of most maturing persons. They need to be patient with themselves while taking these inner struggles to prayer, seeking God’s grace to bring peace and confidence while moving forward to acquire skills enabling them to deal with these challenges. The catechist is charged with the task of helping the students to perceive how the Catholic Faith gives meaning and purpose to their changing and often confused lives. Further, opportunities and activities for exercising decision-making skills are to be provided.

Through example, by praying and worshipping with the students, by fostering in them a sense of reverence for the Sacred, especially the Presence of Jesus Christ in the tabernacle, catechists share their faith with the students. Thus all are enabled to grow in their faith.

The catechist is to lead young people to continued growth in the knowledge of their Faith, to a deeper prayer life mindful of the presence and action of God in their lives, to reflection on Christian living, and a proper tolerance, respect and compassion for all people.

Pre-teens want a practical knowledge of Catholic tradition and how to apply the teachings of the Church to their life. They need faith-filled adults who will suggest, encourage, and guide field trips, service projects, and experiences of prayer.

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