

Profile of a Eighth Grade Student

Characteristics

The thirteenth year of life is one of complex transition involving body, mind, and personality. The transition often comes unexpectedly. Changes in body build and body chemistry affect posture, coordination, appearance, voice, facial expression as well as attitudes and tension. Body changes intensify awareness of growing up. Moods change quite regularly.

Thirteen-year-olds are not always open and communicative. At home they may lapse into spells of silence, musing, and reverie. At school they may be apathetic and uninterested in any class that does not challenge and stir their emerging conceptual power.

The young person is beset by interpersonal demands from family, peers, and teachers. Home, school and peers often conflict and aggravate confusion.

Yet in the midst of these pressures, adolescents usually preserve self-identity and achieve a measure of independence. They meet developmental problems with a heightened awareness of themselves and the world in which they live.

At thirteen years of age, young people long for and need security, sympathetic understanding, and supportive love in spite of their inability to respond openly and consistently. Through prayer and encouragement from respected adults, young people learn to accept themselves, their good characteristics together with their weaknesses.

Eighth-graders continue to seek approval from adults and peers, and are eager to have friends, although preferring one or two close friends of the same sex. They tend to form cliques and identify strongly with peer groups and interests. The all-important question to the reflective thirteen-year-old at this period of growth is WHO AM I?

Faith Development Needs

In general young people are developing the ability to think logically and abstractly. They begin at this age to question the logic and consistency of their beliefs. If adults give them knowledge, freedom, opportunity, and reassurance, they can then probe their previously unquestioned instruction so that they eventually experience faith as a personal relationship with God.

Junior High School students tend to fall into patterns of closely following a chosen hero, seeking models to follow and imitate. At the same time they are concerned about choices. They need to be provided with credible and attractive vocation and models of faith. The example of Jesus and Christian saints reinforces in their minds their vocation to the Christian life and to the special ministry to which God is calling them. This is a good time for contact with priests and religious as role models.

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 requires training. The way that we make good and holy choices is through the exercise of virtue. A virtue is a good habit. We develop the Cardinal Virtues (also called 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).

<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 teens use the telephone for twenty minutes rather than two hours.

The catechist can help the young people 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” (#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 Family Life, 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 training for religious educators or for recommendations on resources at (608) 791-2658.

Implications

Young people experience fluctuating moods and strong emotional stress at this stage. As a result, the catechist is to strive to deepen their awareness of the great and total love and acceptance Jesus has for each person, presenting Jesus as the One who saves, redeems, forgives, loves and leads them to the Father through His Spirit living in them. It is a time to emphasize the intrinsic goodness and dignity of each individual. Although teens are capable of logical and abstract thinking, the life of faith is still best presented through concrete experiences, which afford the opportunities to incorporate Christian virtue into their lives.

As the need for privacy and time to be alone becomes more important to the adolescent, ways of fostering and deepening their spiritual life should be developed.

Peer pressure is often the determining factor in the young person’s decision to experiment with drugs, alcohol and pre-marital relations. Catechists should provide strong and effective support groups involving the youth in home, parish, and community activities. Young persons seek to be themselves and to make their own decisions. It is the task of the catechist to assist them in proper conscience formation.

In adolescence, teens make the transition from dependence to independence. Among the serious questions facing them are several crucial ones: Who am I? What do I believe? What do I think is important? And most importantly, who is Jesus and what difference does He make for me? The effective catechist, by willingly sharing faith experiences - where one has been, where one presently is, and where one is going - will help the youth discover answers to these questions.

Note to catechist: In relating to your students your conversion story, or recent experiences of coming closer to Christ, it is prudence to simply say that you headed down the wrong path (if that was the case) but never speaking of past sins, especially against the sixth and ninth Commandments. Stories of this nature can easily put images into their minds, which can even lead to sin.

The teenager needs time to reflect on what it means to be called to a particular way of life. Being in a transitional stage, the adolescent needs guidance in the prayerful discovery of a vocation. It is essential that the teenager receive the wisdom and advice of adults, before he/she makes a decision to a particular vocation.

Participation in different apostolates of the local parish will establish a sense of viable membership in the parish family as well as nurture self-esteem, and introduce the young person to a peer group with similar beliefs.

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