

**WHOLE-PERSON DEVELOPMENT, GRADES K – 8**  
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The following topics were the focus of six **Parent Partnership Handbook** newsletters that were published by *Today's Catholic Teacher*, August/September 2004.

1. Characteristics of AGE-STAGE BEHAVIORS (*Pre-School through High School*)
2. The THINKING Self (*Pre-School to High School*)
3. The EMOTIONAL-AFFECTIVE Self (*Birth through High School*)
4. The MORAL Self (*Pre-School through High School*)
5. The SPIRITUAL Self (*Pre-School through High School*)
6. A PROFILE of Elementary School-Aged Children (Grades K to 8)

Parent Partnership Handbook: **Characteristic Age-Stage Behaviors**  
*by Dr. Patricia M. McCormack, IHM*  
*The first of six articles in A Parent's Guide to Whole-Person Development.*  
*Source: Today's Catholic Teacher, August/September 2004*

Dear Parent,

Imagine an essay contest for parents that involved describing your child as he/she was two years ago. Though you would recall occasional or unusual characteristics, your contest paragraph would more likely represent patterns of behavior and focused wisdom that came with hindsight. If the contest judge compared the essays within an age group, commonalities would be noted and a typical profile would emerge. Probably one-of-a-kind characteristics that explain the uniqueness of some children would be excluded from the description to yield the common wisdom of the essays. Now imagine that you possessed that common wisdom before your child entered that stage of life! Would it have been helpful to you? Parents have expressed the desire to know what to expect so as to be more ready (if we ever can be) and, perhaps, to parent more effectively at each new stage in the life of a developing child.

This newsletter, the first in a series of six, offers **thumbnail sketches** of the developing child, pre-kindergarten through high school. Each of four successive newsletters will focus on one aspect of growth: cognitive, emotional, moral, or spiritual, and explain it according to age/stage development. The last newsletter will provide a comparison profile of the developing self and suggest parenting practices that can influence positive development. Throughout the series, the word **normal** refers to *the standard, average pattern of development for a child who is without physical or psychological challenge and who experiences a nurturing home*. Parent or caretaker presence in life-giving settings is marked by affection; patience; understanding; genuine interest; and regular assurances of love, encouragement, warmth, and friendliness. Daily household experiences include simple, clear routines; manageable choices; and a pattern of respectful parent interaction rather than imposition or interference.

Now, the thumbnail sketches:

### **EARLY CHILDHOOD (Grades Pre-K, K, 1, 2)**

**Age 4-5:** Speaks in lengthy conversations that often involve fantasy, boasting, or bragging; confuses fact with fiction; develops humor and enjoys silliness in entertainment, books, and stories; occasionally uses foul language; begins to identify good and bad; seeks approval from friends; may lie or steal; may lose control easily; prone to mood swings.

**Age 5:** Beginning to be capable of self-criticism, to balance self-sufficiency with sociability, and to learn how to give and receive; eager for responsibility; purposeful with activity but also noisy; interested in group activity; good verbal expression; enjoys dramatic play; can wash, dress, eat, and use the toilet independently; begins to display individuality; characterized by trust, openness, wonder, fantasy, and a short attention span; developing self-confidence, self-respect, and independence but still wants to please parents and teachers; may experience bedtime fears and nightmares.

**Age 6:** Exuberant, restless, spontaneous, overactive, easily fatigued, assertive, aggressive; wants to be first, less cooperative than earlier, keenly competitive and boastful; short attention span that requires concrete experiences and frequent activity change; loves to learn new words and definitions; has difficulty making decisions; evidences inconsistent maturity levels, regresses when tired and often less mature at home than with outsiders; group activity is popular; interest differences begin to surface between boys and girls.

**Age 7:** Sensitive to others' feelings and attitudes; especially dependent on approval of adults; unpredictable; full of energy but fidgety and often dreamy or absorbed; boy-girl activity interests become more divergent; seven-minute attention span; requires active participation in learning with concrete objects, has limited ability for abstract thought, requires specific, literal directions; cautious and self-critical, anxious to do things well; likes to use hands; talkative, prone to exaggerate; may fight verbally instead of physically, and is competitive; enjoys songs, rhythms, fairy tales, myths, nature stories, comics, television, movies; able to assume some responsibility; likely to be demanding and inflexible; concerned about right and wrong but may take small things (steal), lie, cheat, or complain a lot; beginning to understand cause-effect and situation-outcome.

### **MIDDLE CHILDHOOD (Grades 3, 4, 5)**

**Age 8:** Often careless, noisy, and argumentative, but also alert, friendly, and people-oriented; more dependent on mother than on teacher; sensitive to criticism; growing awareness of individual differences; eager and more enthusiastic than cautious; higher accident rate; seeks acceptance, forms groups or clubs, and seeks a best friend of same sex; hates to be left out; in case of conflict gives allegiance to peer instead of adult; fond of small group activity, team games, adventure stories, collections (rocks, stamps, etc.), and spontaneous dramatization; more able to grasp the meaning behind an event; bossy about rules.

**Age 9:** Reasserts independence; challenges adults; demands equal treatment; has an extreme sense of fairness ("eye for an eye" approach); easily troubled by conflicts with friends, teachers or tensions at home; nervous habits like fidgeting and nail biting may appear in response to sitting in class for long periods of time; invents imaginary playmate; competes with friends while still wanting their companionship; relies on friends for support; begins to see adults are capable of making mistakes; forms opinions and attitudes toward school; ability for logical thinking is fostered by solving puzzles, mysteries, and predicting endings to stories.

**Age 10:** Usually good-natured, decisive, responsible, dependable, reasonable, with strong sense of right and wrong; individual differences and abilities now apparent; capable of prolonged interest, making plans and pursuing them independent of others; group associations (clubs, gangs) of one sex only, of short duration and changing membership; best friends are important to girls; perfectionistic tendency—wants to

do well but loses interest if discouraged or pressured; absorbed in talk and discussion; often outspoken and critical of adults, although still dependent on adult approval; argues about fairness in games; influenced by values of peer group; interested in current events, people, world and community, biography and great deeds; able to engage in brainstorming alternative solutions and consequences associated with a given situation.

### **EARLY ADOLESCENCE (Grades 6, 7, 8)**

**Age 11:** Awkwardness, restlessness, and laziness common as result of rapid and uneven growth; emotional responses (girls cry; boys swear and fight) closely related to physical and emotional growth; teasing and antagonism between boys and girls; begins to think about the future; concerned with sex role; enjoys daydreaming; grows in self-control; can be careless about clothes, room; attention span longer and concentrated; disturbed by differing opinions and standards among friends and family; concerned about right and wrong, fairness, cheating, and lying; willing to participate in discussions; searching questions about God, life, and death.

**Ages 12-13:** (Due to the wide range of individual differences in maturity levels during the pre-teen stage, *this article combines ages 12 and 13.*) Often overly critical, changeable, rebellious, uncooperative; values group opinion more than that of adults; self-conscious about physical changes; interested in earning money; transitioning from concrete, literal thought to abstract thinking; begins to explain things verbally and symbolically; benefits from group problem solving and peer teaching; demonstrates high-level critical thinking ability by summarizing, outlining, word mapping, and identifying parts of a whole; appreciates warm affection and sense of humor in adults; motivated by sense of belonging and acceptance by peer group; shut down by nagging and condemnation; benefits from opportunities for increased independence and responsibility without pressure.

### **ADOLESCENCE (High School)**

Adolescence is the transition stage from childhood to adulthood. Originally considered the teen years from 12 to 20, psychologists now extend the period to age 25 because it takes some individuals longer to integrate security, autonomy, initiative, and industry into an identity that is capable of facing the challenges of the adult community. Adolescence is a time of rapid change physically, emotionally, relationally, and socially. Adolescent life is like riding a rollercoaster. If you think it a hard time for parents, imagine the stress for the teen! It is an intense time marked by growth spurts, the appearance of secondary sex characteristics, sex glands, and acne; mood swings, sexual feelings, impulsive behavior, and general anxiety about growing up and facing the future; a new sense of self that defines—and is defined by—attitudes and values as well as relationships with parents and peers; the ability to think abstractly, theorize, hypothesize, analyze, and synthesize; establishing a sexual and social identity through friendships, crushes, and love; replacing emotional and financial dependence on parents with personal responsibility; establishing a pattern of short-term goals and follow-through behaviors; contributing to society through vocational choice and exercising citizenship.

Parent Partnership Handbook: **The Thinking Self**

by Dr. Patricia M. McCormack, IHM

*The second of six articles in A Parent's Guide to Whole-Person Development.*

*Source: Today's Catholic Teacher, October 2004*

Dear Parent,

It is an understatement to say that whole-person parenting is complex! Complicated, mysterious, and overwhelming are adjectives that some parents use and understandably so! Physical development basically

occurs on its own schedule with minimal parent care; but other areas of growth are far more dependent upon parent knowledge, intervention, and attention. Intellectual, emotional, affective, moral, spiritual, and social development is affected by parenting practices, home environment, and the influences of other significant adults or situations.

This newsletter is the second in a series of six devoted to explaining normal child development. Stage theories of development attempt to identify **normal trends**, in other words, *the standard, average pattern of development for a child who is without physical or psychological challenge and who experiences a nurturing home environment*. Though each stage is necessary to the development of subsequent stages, the stages are more fluid than rigid, and the age correlations suggested are merely guidelines. A variety of conditions influence maturity. And even though a child exhibits one particular stage, he/she may move in and out of the stage. This is true of many areas of growth including intellectual or cognitive development—the subject of this newsletter. Intellectual growth is measured by reasoning ability. No amount of urging, drilling, rote memory, or demanding can force intelligence; but an enriched environment—one that is stimulating, encouraging, and non-threatening and provides opportunities for new experiences—primes the pump of readiness and interest. Parents who understand their child’s cognitive stage can provide repeated opportunities for the child to function in that stage while gently introducing tasks that are proper to the next stage.

**Jean Piaget (1896-1980)** explained how **the Thinking Self** evolves. His fascination with child responses led him to explore the concept of reasoning. His experimentations led to his theory of four progressive stages of intellect that children master on their journey from instinctual reactions and basic motor skills at birth to formal, highly reasoned thought at adolescence and beyond. These include **sensorimotor stage** (birth- 2), **pre-operational stage** (2-7), **concrete operational stage** (7-12), and **formal operational stage** (12+). Piaget believed that motor abilities like lifting one’s head without assistance, rolling over, walking, and manipulating objects were genetically preprogrammed in children, but that an enriched home environment might reduce the learning time. Each stage requires the ability to reason through and understand increasingly complex relationships at increased levels of complexity.

## STAGE 1: SENSORY-MOTOR INTELLIGENCE

### **Birth—Age 2**

(Not described in this article.)

## STAGE 2: PREOPERATIONAL THOUGHT (Pre-Logical Thinking)

**Ages 2-5:** (Not described in this article.)

**Ages 5-6:** The child begins intuitive thought and primitive reasoning. Reduces egocentricity and increases social participation. Begins to separate mental from physical reality. Notices multiple properties such as form, color, and utility. Thinks in absolutes and “black and white.” Asks limitless questions. Judges by a single clue, usually spatial. Thinks in one idea at a time. Preoccupied with parts. Poor conservation skills (recognizing that quantity does not change merely because a container shape changes). Gets stuck on appearances; does not comprehend arrangements by size, number, and spatial classification. No notion of valuation (i.e., money), rank, or relativity.

**Suggestions:** Be patient with questions. Expose child to recognize other points of view. Play conservation games, i.e., equal amounts of liquid, beads, or clay filling two differently shaped containers.

**Ages 6-7:** Begins to understand multiple points of view and relational concepts. Gradually able to conserve but not capable of operations (number, cause-effect, time, space). Still unable to reverse actions mentally. Mutual responsibility and group solidarity are beyond comprehension. A lie is judged by the degree of

disobedience involved and its size; motives, intended purpose, and underlying circumstances are not considered.

**Suggestions:** Give concrete examples and specific, literal directions. Encourage artistic expression. Speak of intrinsic values in external realities, i.e., patience needed to produce a cake. Introduce child to the concepts of motives, intentions, cooperative learning, and team activities. Value effort more than result.

### **STAGE 3: CONCRETE OPERATIONAL THOUGHT (Logical Thinking)**

**Age 7-8:** Thought becomes less intuitive and egocentric and more logical, reversible, flexible, and complex. The child begins to theorize. Develops mental structure of grouping, the ability to manipulate categories, classification systems, and hierarchies into groups. Makes logical inference—conclusions reached through “unseen” evidence.

**Suggestions:** Provide exercises in cause-effect, situation-outcome. Actively explore physical environment. Encourage questions.

**Age 8-10:** Needs concrete experiences to solve problems; lacks ability to hypothesize about abstract concepts. Able to reverse actions mentally, to be interrupted and return to an earlier part of the story. Can explore several options without immediately adopting any one. Descriptive body movement accompanies speech. Able to state a preview summary before detailing a story.

**Suggestions:** Provide practice in summarizing. Engage in solving puzzles, mysteries, predicting endings to stories. Brainstorm alternative solutions and consequences associated with scenarios.

**Ages 11-13:** Demonstrates the ability for conceptual thinking in combination with a concrete image or performance of the thought process while reasoning out, explaining to others, or trying to comprehend a problem; gradual shift from inductive (reasoning from specific to general) to deductive mode of thinking (general to specific); aware of social reciprocity and equality; develops concepts of fairness and justice; able to solve problems by generalizing from one situation to a similar situation; solve problems haphazardly, using trial and error.

**Suggestions:** Group problem solving; peer teaching; justice issues; democratic climate in home and school where child has input to rules; use examples to support ideas; teach outlining skills, word maps; demonstrate/illustrate parts of the whole; give practice in clarifying values; debate, give ample opportunity for child to explain thoughts.

### **STAGE 4: FORMAL OPERATIONAL THOUGHT (Abstract Thinking)**

**Ages 12-14:** Develops lattice-group structure, the ability to network ideas, recognize connective links, combine hypothetical propositions to apply to future events. Enjoys nesting, classifying relationships between smaller parts and their all-inclusive whole. Able to deal with abstractions, form hypotheses, solve problems systematically, engage in mental manipulations. Begins futuristic thinking. Able to understand and use complex language forms, i.e., metaphor, proverb, sarcasm, satire. Can construct theories and make deductions without having had previous direct experience. Can think through new problems, moving forward and backward and taking into account as many or as few qualities as seem relevant. Observation, comparison, and comprehension of others becomes important.

**Suggestions:** Support nesting and lattice development through (1) value clarification types of scenarios where child ranks choices, considers alternatives, weighs consequences, and brainstorms alternative solutions and consequences associated with given situations; (2) outlining skills; (3) word-maps; (4)

classifying ideas according to kind, form, and utility. Engage child in deductive reasoning, i.e., solving mysteries, predicting endings to stories, solving puzzles. Work with properties of space (length, weight, volume), time, and speed. Engage child in exercises that involve application, analysis and synthesis skills.

This newsletter summarized cognitive theory and the stage-growth characteristics of elementary school-aged children. Contact [DrPatMcCormack@aol.com](mailto:DrPatMcCormack@aol.com) for parallel information related to ages birth through 5 and 14-18. May this digest report support your efforts in the whole-person development of your child.

Parent Partnership Handbook: **The Emotional-Affective Self**  
by Dr. Patricia M. McCormack, IHM  
*The third of six articles in A Parent's Guide to Whole-Person Development.*  
Source: *Today's Catholic Teacher*, November/December 2004

Dear Parent,

How we feel about ourselves shapes how we perceive and respond to other people, events, and situations. Self-concept affects relationships, and it aids or hinders both interactions with others and personal peace. For instance, can you think of an occasion when you spoke to another person who did not acknowledge you? If you were in “good space,” you took no offense. If, however, you were feeling poorly about yourself, you felt hurt, angry, humiliated, or indignant. The difference was not in the event but in your evaluation of yourself. Self-esteem, like happiness, is a by-product or result of choices, behaviors, and consequences. Emotional maturity or psychosocial development grows in ages, through stages, and it is affected by parenting practices, home environment, and the influences of other significant people and situations.

This newsletter is the third in a series of six issues devoted to explaining typical child development. Stage theories of development attempt to identify **normal trends**, in other words, *the standard, average pattern of development for a child who is without physical or psychological challenge and who experiences a nurturing home environment*. Though stages represent a rank-order direction or movement towards adulthood, they are more fluid than rigid, and the age correlations that they suggest are merely guidelines. A variety of conditions influence movement from one stage to the next. Additionally, at every developmental stage, the child juggles the tensions present in the (1) present growth, (2) anticipation of future growth, and (3) re-experiences of unresolved past stages. The focus of this newsletter is the emotional-affective self—an exploration of the psycho-social theory of Erik Erikson that explains how self-concept and a sense of positive identity develop.

Like Piaget (discussed in the previous article), Erik Erikson (1902-1994) believed that people develop in a predetermined order. Erikson, however, focused on the interaction of physical growth, psychological development, and social relationships. He examined how people connect with their world and how that connection affects a person’s sense of self. Erikson proposed eight stages that occur between birth and death, following the epigenetic principle that growth occurs according to a biological plan that allows each function to emerge systematically until the person becomes fully developed. Each stage offers two possible outcomes. If the outcome is positive, the child transitions into the next stage and thinks well of himself/herself. The child who fails to complete a stage successfully experiences a reduced ability to negotiate further stages and more easily spirals into negative self-esteem. The good news is that it is never too late to remedy the situation. The stages include: **trust vs. mistrust** (birth-18 months); **autonomy vs. shame, self-doubt** (18 months-3); **initiative vs. guilt** (3-6); **industry vs. inferiority** (6-12); **identity vs. role confusion** (adolescence); **intimacy vs. isolation** (young adulthood); **generativity vs. stagnation** (middle adulthood); **ego integrity vs. despair** (old age). Healthy personality develops through experiences, choices, and practices that produce a pattern of positive outcomes.

While it is true that at each life stage the focus is on a particular psychological conflict, the tension is never experienced in isolation. At every age and at every stage people need to continually cultivate the positive resolution of previous life stages. For example, consider identity formation, the stage five task, developed during adolescence. Pre-requisite to developing identity is the positive resolution of stages 1-4: trust, autonomy, initiative, and industry. Identity formation is the most serious crisis a person faces occurs during development. A person with well-formed identity is comfortable with who he is, does not try to be like others, and recognizes his pluses and minuses. She chooses what qualities of others and environments are most beneficial for self-growth, knows what psychological defenses are most appropriate for her in the face of threat and anxiety, and has a sense of being at home with herself. People with positive identity can function in a variety of roles that bring consistent reactions from different people, and they learn what instincts, needs, and roles are most valuable to their well-being. A person without a well-formed identity will encounter one problem after another during adult life.

The remainder of this newsletter presents mini-descriptions of Erikson's eight stages and parenting suggestions for stages 1-5. May this digest report on psychosocial development support your efforts in the whole-person development of your child.

### **STAGE 1: Infant (Birth-18 months)**

Positive resolution of **Trust vs. Mistrust/Withdrawal** develops a sense of drive and the quality of hope. Security is the sense of trust, emotional safety, and confidence that the child's needs will receive predictable responses from significant people. With this assurance, energies are available to deal with unpredictable stresses.

**Advice:** Provide routine, procedure, and system. Organize the environment. Initiate safety precautions, both physical and emotional. Practice attentiveness, inclusion, consistency, continuity, and predictability. Keep promises. Anticipate needs and schedules. Say what you mean and mean what you say! No double standards.

### **STAGE 2: Toddler (18 months-3 years)**

Positive resolution of **Autonomy vs. Shame/Doubt/Compulsion** develops a sense of self-control and the quality of willpower. Autonomy is the sense of respectful independence, inner authority, responsibility, and self-reliance that permits a child to make appropriate decisions without the need of supervision.

**Advice:** Arrange for age-appropriate charges, responsibilities, and tasks. Prioritize assignments. Practice prudent supervision, not intrusion. Give encouragement rather than empty praise. Provide for limited choices and responsible independence. Teach and model respectful assertiveness and self-control. Expect accountability for choices and consequences. Demonstrate that you value effort more than results. Do not assume responsibility for tasks that your child is capable of accomplishing independently.

### **STAGE 3: Pre-School Play Age (3-6 years)**

Positive resolution of **Initiative vs. Guilt/Inhibition** develops a sense of direction and the quality of purpose. Initiative is the motivation to originate plans and the capacity to conquer tasks as a self-starter without requiring the coaxing of another person.

**Advice:** Expose children to varied experiences so that they find personal strengths, weaknesses, preferences, and abilities. Provide materials/tools/resources that support varied interests and expectations. Give patient, respectful answers to questions. Establish reasonable standards and deadlines. Use natural or logical consequences as teaching tools, not punishment or rewards. Demonstrate freedom balanced with responsibility and contribution to the common good. Encourage prudent risk-taking. Intervene only when

your child infringes on the rights of others or when bodily or moral harm is threatened. Model how to recover after making a mistake. Demonstrate that you value ideas and process more than product.

#### **STAGE 4: Elementary School (6-12 years)**

Positive resolution of **Industry vs. Inferiority/Inertia** develops a sense of method and the quality of competence. Industry is the capacity to be persistent and diligent, to follow-through on a task, and to create a systematic approach for problem-solving and accomplishing responsibilities. If we do not contribute to growth in industry, we are contributing to the development of inferiority!

**Advice:** Provide repeated, systematic instruction in the world of tools (i.e. appliances, computer, screwdriver) and skills (i.e. cooking, cleaning, reading, summarizing, study skills). Engage child in tasks that require steady care over time, productivity, and accomplishment. Cultivate deadlines, completed tasks, time management, and organizational skills. Create long-range projects with periodic check-in points. Work side-by-side on a difficult task. Model and teach how to set a goal, name specific parts/objectives, determine reasonable time line and periodic means of evaluation; re-structure when necessary.

#### **STAGE 5: Adolescence (Ages 13-22)**

Positive resolution of **Identity vs. Role Confusion/Isolation** develops a sense of devotion and the quality of fidelity. Identity is who I think I am at my deepest core. (Objectively we are precious, unrepeatable gifts of God made in God's image. But subjectively we are capable of thinking of ourselves in negative terms. Thinking affects acting!) Identity is the integration of life experiences into a unity and persistence in personality; it gives the person a basic confidence of inner continuity/sameness even in the midst of confusion or change.

**Advice:** Identity tasks include: (1) setting and achieving goals, (2) facing the challenges of the adult community, (3) mature relations with age mates of both sexes, (4) emotional independence of parents and adults, (5) accepting personal appearance, and (6) recognizing personal worth and competence. Present reflection opportunities to trace personality/character choices in several instances and to recognize patterns. Encourage short-term goals and organize to aid follow-through behaviors. Demonstrate recognition of personal worth and contribution. Expect accountable participation and contribution to family, teams, groups, friends, and responsibilities. Support occupational choices and efforts to clarify sex role. Be sensitive and helpful to adolescent's desire to accept/improve personal appearance.

#### **STAGE 6: Young Adulthood (Ages 22-34)**

Positive resolution of **Intimacy vs. Isolation/Exclusivity** develops a sense of affiliation and the quality of love. Intimacy is the capacity for mutuality, the ability to lose and find yourself in another; it is quite different from childhood dependency.

#### **STAGE 7: Adulthood (Ages 34-60)**

Positive resolution of **Generativity vs. Stagnation/Self-Absorption** develops a sense of production and the quality of care. Generativity is a commitment to stewardship and concern for what has been generated (brought into existence).

## STAGE 8: Maturity (Ages 60-death)

Positive resolution of **Ego Integrity vs. Despair/Distain** develops a sense of renunciation (detachment) and the quality of wisdom. Ego Integrity is the ability to make peace with the pieces of one's life; a detached and conscious trust in self and assurance about the meaningfulness of life.

### Parent Partnership Handbook: **The Moral Self**

by Dr. Patricia M. McCormack, IHM

*The fourth of six articles in A Parent's Guide to Whole-Person Development.*

*Source: Today's Catholic Teacher, January/February 2005*

Dear Parent,

Consider the maxim: "Right is still right if nobody does it; and wrong is still wrong if everybody does it." How does a person grow to know right from wrong and good from bad? How is it that a teenager may have a more highly developed standard of moral behavior than a person twice his/her age? Morality is a personal code of habits or principles of good and bad, right and wrong. Morality influences a person's ethics—social standards for right conduct or practices. Together they shape personal holiness and the common good. Moral growth is rooted in the home. The foundation for moral readiness occurs in the first three years of life. At that stage parents are the moral voice or compass when they say such things as, "Good boy!" "Tell Grandma that you are sorry," or "Thank you for sharing your toy." As children grow, moral development is influenced and encouraged by parenting practices; home environment; and the influences of other significant adults, peers, education, and situations.

This newsletter is the fourth in a series of six devoted to explaining normal child development stages. Stage theories of development attempt to identify **normal trends**, in other words, *the standard, average pattern of development for a child who is without physical or psychological challenge and who experiences a nurturing home environment*. Though stages represent a rank-order direction or movement towards adulthood they are more fluid than rigid, and the age correlations that they suggest are merely guidelines. A variety of conditions influence movement from one stage to the next. Additionally, even though a child exhibits one particular stage, he/she may move in and out of the stage in a given circumstance. The focus of this newsletter is the moral self—an exploration of the moral reasoning theory of Lawrence Kohlberg who suggested that motivational thinking prompts codes of conduct.

### THE MORAL SELF

Lawrence Kohlberg (1927-1987) applied the developmental approach of Piaget to the study of moral reasoning. He explored how people develop **moral codes**, that is, *principles or habits of right and wrong conduct*. He proposed **moral dilemmas**, *stories of struggle that caused children to experience cognitive dissonance (lack of harmony in thought) and disequilibrium (moral discomfort)*. Then he observed how children reasoned their solutions. He found that children based their decisions upon (1) what they considered to be right and (2) what they considered a reason to be good. From the pattern of responses that he observed during his research, Kohlberg determined that there were three basic levels of moral reasoning, each consisting of two stages.

1. The **Preconventional Level**, a *self-focused* morality, includes stage one (kindergarten) and stage two (grades 1-3).
2. The **Conventional Level**, *other-focused* morality, includes stage three (grades 4-6 and early mid-teens in grades 7-8-9) and stage four (high school and late teens).
3. The **Postconventional Level**, *principle-focused* morality, includes stages five and six.

How does growth occur from one stage to the next? Dr. Doreen Ferreira Jones, assistant professor at the Institute for Catholic Educational Leadership of the University of San Francisco and frequent presenter on topics of moral education, speaks of the “Plus One Theory,” a term coined by researcher Elliot Turiel. Jones explains that individuals are attracted to moral thinking that is one stage higher than their own, but they cannot comprehend the reasoning of stages beyond that interval. Dr. Jones advises parents and teachers to meet children where they are and advance their thinking, one stage at a time. Parents and teachers do that through moral dialogue that introduces disequilibrium (mental discomfort) and, in turn, challenges the moral reasoning of a child.

An abbreviated version of moral development follows. It reflects primarily the work of developmental psychologist Dr. Thomas Lickona by summarizing each stage of moral reasoning according to: (1) characteristics, (2) motivation, (3) what a child considers right and (4) a child’s reason to be good. Additionally a sampling of parenting suggestions are offered for stages one through four (pre-school to high school). Lickona’s book, *Raising Good Children* (1994), is a ‘must read’ for parents and educators. In it he explains the foundation of moral development, devoting one chapter to each stage of moral reasoning, and offers practical advice for stage growth and concerns like communication, fairness, TV, sex, and drugs. May this newsletter support your efforts toward the moral development of your child.

**PRE-LEVEL**  
**Stage 0 (Pre-School Years)**

Characterized by egocentric reasoning. Motivated by self-satisfaction. Right is getting my own way. Good is getting rewards and avoiding punishment. Motto: “Me, Myself, and I.”

**Advice:** Focus children on being kind to others, saying “please” and “thank you,” showing empathy, moving towards team work, living the Golden Rule, and taking care of things.

**LEVEL I: PRE-CONVENTIONAL REASONING**  
**Stage 1 (Kindergarten)**

Characterized by unquestioning obedience; respect for power and punishment. Motivated by reward and punishment. Right is what I can do without getting into trouble. Good is being obedient to the people in power so as to avoid punishment. Motto: “Might makes right.”

**Advice:** Set standards for acceptable behavior and provide reasons why a behavior is appropriate or inappropriate (inductive method of discipline). Avoid saying, “Don’t let me catch you doing that again.” That will translate into becoming sneaky or lying. Teach that lying is wrong because it breaks trust and, therefore, weakens relationships.

**Stage 2 (Grades 1-2-3)**

Characterized by fairness and “looking out for #1.” Motivated by a “me first,” self-serving, and pleasure-seeking attitude. Right is looking out for myself and being fair to those who are fair to me; “you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours.” Good is self-interest. Motto: “What’s in it for me?”

**Advice:** Employ tit-for-tat reciprocity. Appeal to love instead of fairness as a motivation. Practice kind, caring actions beyond the family. Exact responsibility for actions. Using the inductive method of discipline (explaining reason behind rules) promotes empathy, compassion, and cooperation.

## **LEVEL II: CONVENTIONAL REASONING**

### **Stage 3** (Grades 4-5-6) and (Grades 7-8-9)

Characterized by interpersonal conformity to please important others; desiring to be thought of as a “good boy,” “nice girl,” or “valuable team member.” Motivated by approval. Right is thinking that I should be a nice person and live up to the expectations of people I know and care about. Good is having others think well of me (social approval) so that I think well of myself (self-esteem). Motto: “I want to be nice.”

**Advice:** Conscience shifts from rules to an inner standard. Explore Gospel principles and the Ten Commandments as tools for relationship with self, God, and others. Help child to establish individual identity within the family. Foster positive self-concept. Don’t make comparisons to others. Strive to decrease parental control and increase child independence and self-reliance. Strengthen family life and responsibility to family, and display affection.

### **Stage 4** (High School-Late Teens)

Characterized by responsibility to the system; law-and-order thinking. Motivated by a “duty first” attitude. Right is fulfilling responsibility to the social system to which I belong. Good is keeping the system from falling apart and maintaining self-respect through keeping commitments and fulfilling obligations to society’s rules. Motto: “I’ll do my duty.”

**Advice:** Encourage independent conscience based on self-respect and social responsibility. Develop a sense of the common good. Foster initiative and industry with emphasis on service to the human family. Openly discuss ethical issues, controversial topics, and moral dilemmas. Practice the principles of Catholic social teaching.

## **LEVEL III: POST-CONVENTIONAL REASONING**

### **Stage 5** (Young Adulthood; 20% of adult population reach this stage)

Characterized by social contract, individual rights, and democratically decided laws. Motivated by a genuine interest in the welfare of others; justice through democracy. Right is showing respect for the rights and dignity of every individual person and supporting a system that protects human rights. Good is upholding the values of the group or culture. Motto: “I’ll live by the rules or try to change them.”

### **Stage 6** (Self-Actualized Adults; 5-10% of adult population reach this stage)

Characterized by freely chosen, personal commitment to ethical principles that are applied universally, i.e., justice, reciprocity, human dignity and equality for all people in all circumstances. Universal principles prevail if social law or custom conflicts with them. Motivated by unconditional love that transcends all boundaries. Right is standing behind decisions that foster human dignity. Good is acting with integrity according to the principles of my conscience. Motto: “I’m true to my values.”

Parent Partnership Handbook: **The Spiritual Self**

by Dr. Patricia M. McCormack, IHM

*The fifth of six articles in A Parent's Guide to Whole-Person Development.*

*Source: Today's Catholic Teacher, March 2005*

Dear Parent,

What gives meaning and purpose to your life? Fr. Alfred Delp once remarked, “When through one man a little more love and goodness, a little more light and truth come into the world, then that man’s life has had meaning.” Another Jesuit priest, Pedro Arrupe, advised, “Nothing is more practical than finding God, that is, than falling in love in a quiet and absolute and final way. What you are in love with, what seizes your imagination, will affect everything. It will decide what will get you out of bed in the morning, what you will do with your evenings, how you spend your weekends, what you read, who you know, what breaks your heart, and what amazes you with joy and gratitude. Fall in love; stay in love, and it will decide everything.” Both quotations speak of personal conviction that overflows into life choices—in other words, a spirituality that informs one’s daily living. The search for meaning is a perennial quest of humankind; the theme of classic books, movies, and music; and an integral characteristic of the spiritual self.

This newsletter is the fifth in a series of six issues devoted to explaining normal child development. Stage theories of development attempt to identify **normal trends**: in other words, *the standard, average pattern of development for a child who is without physical or psychological challenge and who experiences a nurturing home environment*. Though each stage is necessary to the development of subsequent stages, they are more fluid than rigid, and the age correlations suggested are merely guidelines. A variety of conditions influence maturity. Additionally, even though a child exhibits one particular stage, he/she may move in and out of the stage in a given circumstance. This is true of many areas of growth including spiritual development—the subject of this newsletter. No amount of urging, study, or demanding can force faith development, but **an enriched environment** that is stimulating, encouraging, non-threatening, and provides opportunities for new experiences primes the pump of readiness and interest. When parents understand their child’s faith stage, it is wise to provide repeated opportunities for the child to function in that stage while gently introducing tasks that are proper to the next stage of development.

Early in his life James W. Fowler (1940-) became interested in how people differed from each other and how their faith developed throughout their lifetime from childhood into adulthood. He combined theological insights with extensive interviews, asking people to describe their faith. He also drew on psychological theories of human development, including Piaget’s description of how children develop the capacity to think and reason; Erikson’s eight stages of physical, psychological, and social development; and Kohlberg’s observations on developing moral reasoning. Pulling together these perspectives, Fowler was able to describe six stages of faith. In the more than twenty years since he first wrote about them in his book *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1981), Fowler has continued to research faith development at Emory University, where he is director of the Center for Research on Faith and Moral Development.

D. Andrew Kille, Ph. D., ([revdak@revdak.com](mailto:revdak@revdak.com)) teaches, lectures and writes on psychology, spirituality and the Bible. **The following descriptions of stages of faith as well as the suggestions for cultivating spiritual development were written by Dr. Kille:**

It is in the special relationship between an infant and caregivers that the earliest foundations of faith are established. She is fed and warmed; he is carried and cuddled. Children who are deprived of loving touch and reliable care become withdrawn and find it difficult to connect with others as they grow. Our first experiences of God are linked to our parents, and we form our first images of God as infants. During this first year or so, the most important thing a parent can offer is a sense of safety, dependability and love,

providing an environment in which the child can develop the capacity for caring and attachment to others. Fowler calls these vital first years of development the time of primal or undifferentiated faith. Although it is foundational to later faith development, it does not have structure or content. The first real steps toward faith development begin as the child begins to develop language and thinking.

### **Stage 1: Intuitive/Projective Faith**

As he or she begins to learn and tries to make sense of the world, the child may construct fanciful explanations or imaginative connections between experiences. Faith is immediate—not always filtered through thoughts or language—and it can look strange and wonderful. Columnist Dave Barry described a conversation between his four-year-old daughter and her Jewish friend. “What’s ‘Jewish’?” she asked. Her friend wasn’t sure, except she knew that all her family was Jewish and they all lived in Miami. The girls concluded that “Jewish” meant “from Miami,” which led Barry’s daughter to wonder if she, too, was Jewish. They had taken two small pieces of information and connected them as best they could. This is why children of this age often make adults say “Aw, how cute!”

This first stage is called **intuitive** because it is based *not on reason or logic, but on immediate experience and leaps of intuition*. It is **projective** because the child is self-centered and *projects his or her viewpoint on the outside world*. The development of imagination is the strength of this stage, as well as the danger. Children engage in magical thinking—they may believe that their thoughts control events around them, leading to feelings of guilt. Fantasies of danger or threat can be so real as to cause terror.

**Suggestions:** Encourage imaginative play. Gently correct their misconceptions, but don’t overreact to their mistakes. Don’t single them out for blame—they take it very seriously. Be aware that they can become seriously frightened or guilty about things that seem trivial.

### **Stage 2: Mythic/Literal Faith**

Around the age of eight, the child starts to distinguish between what is “real” and what is “pretend.” He or she becomes fascinated with **stories**—family stories, Bible stories, any stories. She begins to tell stories about herself and her experiences. All these stories are taken very **literally**, as children at this age are concrete thinkers. They tend to be rigid in their thinking and strict in their understanding of rules and customs. They are not yet able to stand aside and reflect or critique. The strength of this stage is the gift for storytelling; the danger is perfectionism or a desire for control.

**Suggestions:** Encourage them to tell about their experiences—what they did at school, what they heard at Sunday School. Read to them and tell stories about the family, about their own early childhood, and about the world. Let them know they are loved even when they aren’t perfect.

### **Stage 3: Synthetic/Conventional Faith**

During adolescence, children become aware of others and peers become very important. They find that other people have different ways of understanding themselves and the world, and that even their own self-understandings may conflict with each other. They must decide which values will guide their lives. They also become very sensitive to the opinions of their peers. Faith at this stage, then, is **synthetic** because it involves *piecing together a coherent sense of one’s self and commitments* and **conventional** because *community values and attitudes are highly influential* in shaping that faith. Faith at this stage is deeply held but is not very self-reflective. People know clearly what they believe, but may have difficulty saying why. The strength of this stage is the development of a personal sense of faith. The danger is that desire to please others can keep the child from seeking his or her own integrity.

**Suggestions:** Recognize that the young person is forming his or her own faith and that it will most likely be different from the parent's own faith. Talk with your child about your own faith journey, how your own faith has grown or changed.

### Adult Stages of Faith

Many adults stabilize at stage three. It is not necessary for everyone to move through all the stages; for many, stage-three faith is entirely adequate. Others, because of their experiences, personalities or relationships, do not find stage three faith to be adequate. Fowler describes three more stages that may develop in adulthood. **Individuative/Projective Faith** is characterized by *critical reflection on one's own values and commitments apart from community attitudes* and leads to a more personalized (and sometimes contentious) outlook. In the fifth stage, **Conjunctive Faith**, the individual acknowledges unconscious depths and *integrates all that has gone on before*. The person may re-engage a faith community they had left during stage four, but at a deeper and more flexible level.

**Universalizing Faith**, the final stage, describes people whose *faith permeates every dimension of their lives and serves to link them fundamentally with the whole human family*. Fowler considers this stage to be very rare and points to such examples as Martin Luther King, Jr. or Mother Teresa. Others suggest that it may be more common, seen in those quiet "saints" whose profound faith enables them to open their hearts to all.

Parent Partnership Handbook: **Profile of Elementary School-Aged Children**

by Dr. Patricia M. McCormack, IHM

*The last of six articles in A Parent's Guide to Whole-Person Development.*

*Source: Today's Catholic Teacher, April 2005*

Dear Parent,

Family photo albums or video histories illustrate how quickly and imperceptibly physical changes occur in children. In the absence of biological challenge, nutritional deficiency, or abuse, physical maturation occurs on its own time schedule regardless of parent intervention. Development of the cognitive, emotional, affective, moral, spiritual and social aspects of personality, however, are affected by parenting practices, home environment, and the influences of other significant adults, peers, or situations. Conversely, lack of positive interaction and intervention during the formation stages can limit, delay, or even block the positive development of a child.

This newsletter is the last in a series of six issues devoted to explaining how a child of elementary school age develops a thinking self, an emotional-affective self, a moral self and a spiritual self. Stage theories of development attempt to identify **normal trends**, in other words, *the standard, average pattern of development for a child who is without physical or psychological challenge and who experiences a nurturing home environment*. Though stages represent a rank-order direction or movement towards adulthood they are more fluid than rigid and the age correlations that they suggest are merely guidelines. A variety of conditions influence movement from one stage to the next. Additionally, even though a child exhibits one particular stage, he/she may move in and out of the stage in a given circumstance. The focus of this newsletter is to summarize highlights of each school-age group and to offer suggestions of ways that parents can influence the maturing process. May this newsletter support your efforts in the whole-person development of your child.

## Primary School

(Grades K, 1, 2 or ages 5, 6, 7)

Early childhood is a time of developmental transition in all four areas of growth: cognitive, emotional-affective, moral, and spiritual. During primary school, preoperational (pre-logical) thinking predominates; that is, thought is intuitive, capable of only one idea at a time, and very much black-and-white. Near age 7 children begin to demonstrate the ability for concrete operational thinking; that is, able to understand multiple viewpoints but in need of literal, tangible actions. Though needing consistent reinforcement in early stages of emotional-affective development, initiative and industry emerge as the essential elements to be integrated into the life of primary school-aged children. Initiative means becoming a self-starter, confidently originating plans without requiring coaxing from others. Industry is the ability to give steady care over time to a task and to finish what one starts. Industry is the major work of the elementary school student; the focus of self-esteem development between the ages of 6 and 12. The moral reasoning of kindergarten children, based on unquestioning obedience, typically gives way to a moral attitude of “What’s in it for me?” around age 7. At the same time, 7-year-olds experience a shift in faith development from a long stage of self-centered, magical thinking, and imagination to fascination with stories, literal interpretations, and a desire for certainties.

**Suggestions:** Since primary grade children are motivated by a “What’s in it for me?” attitude, use “tit-for-tat” reasoning to teach reciprocity. Appeal to love instead of fairness as a motivation. Practice kind, caring actions as a family for folks outside of the family. Explain the reason behind rules. Promote empathy, compassion, and cooperation. Encourage imaginative play. Gently correct misconceptions and do not overreact to mistakes. Avoid labeling or assigning guilt. Pre-school: Be patient with questions. Expose child to recognize other points of view. Play conservation games that demonstrate equal amounts of liquid, beads, etc. filling two differently shaped containers. Organize the environment with routine, procedure, and system. Practice consistency, continuity, predictability. Keep promises. Say what you mean and mean what you say. Avoid double standards. By kindergarten: Give concrete examples and specific, literal directions. Encourage artistic expression. Talk about intrinsic values involved in external realities, like the patience needed to make a cake. Introduce child to the concepts of motive, intention, cooperation, and teamwork. Value effort more than result. Arrange age-appropriate responsibilities. Practice prudent supervision; not intrusion. Give skill-related encouragement; not empty praise. Allow for choice; but limited to two or three options. Expect accountability; calmly exact pre-determined consequences. Do not assume responsibility for tasks that your child is capable of accomplishing independently. About age 6: Expose children to varied experiences so that they intuit personal strengths, weaknesses, preferences and abilities. Establish reasonable standards and deadlines. Use natural and logical consequences as teaching tools. Balance personal freedom with contribution to the common good (that begins with family). Model how to use mistakes as stepping stones rather than obstacles.

## Intermediate School

(Grades 3, 4, 5 or ages 8, 9, 10)

Compared to early childhood, middle childhood is a season of stability. Three of the four areas of development (cognitive, psychosocial, and spiritual) remain the same. Logical thinking, initiative and industry, and faith story-telling remain the focus of whole-person growth, though the maturing process draws children more deeply into mastery of the stages and increases readiness for future growth. It is kind of like being in the same church but changing pews! Middle childhood is characterized by the need for concrete experiences; interest in theorizing; systematic approach for problem solving; rigidity; the fascination with categorizing, story-telling, and collecting (stamps, dolls, books, etc.). The major transition in middle childhood is in the area of moral development. For many 9-year-old youngsters, their moral reasoning shifts from a motivation of “me first” to interpersonal conformity. They want to please important others in order to be thought of as a “good boy” or “nice girl” or “valuable team member.”

**Suggestions:** Foster industry by teaching your child about household tools (house appliances, screwdriver, air pumps, etc.) and skills (cooking, cleaning, gardening, etc.). Involve the child in tasks that require steady care over time (watering plants, pet care, etc.). Present Gospel principles and the Ten Commandments as tools for relationship with God, self, and others. Avoid comparisons with others. Encourage self-control and self-reliance. At this stage, faith development is rooted in storytelling. Invite your children to tell about their experiences—what they did at school, what they heard at Sunday School. Read to them and tell stories about family, about their own early childhood, and about the world. Let them know they are loved even when they aren't perfect. By age 7: Provide exercises in cause-effect. Actively explore the physical environment. Encourage questions. About age 8: Provide practice in summarizing. Engage in solving puzzles, mysteries, predicting endings to stories. Brainstorm alternative solutions and consequences associated with scenarios.

## **Middle School**

**(Grades 6, 7, 8 or ages 11, 12, 13)**

Middle schoolers continue to develop the capacity for concrete, logical thinking, the intellectual mode begun around age 7. They still need a concrete image to aid their reasoning process, explain something to others, or to comprehend a problem. They make a gradual shift from inductive reasoning (specific to generalizations) to deductive modes of thinking (general to the specific). They become attracted to concepts of fairness, justice, social reciprocity, and equality. Around age 12 early adolescents begin to make connective links among ideas and think abstractly, no longer needing concrete images. They can hypothesize and understand complex language forms like metaphors and sarcasm. The opinions of others become important. During middle school both moral and spiritual development are “conventional,” meaning that conformity to community influences grows at this age. The foundations of conscience were established in the first three years of life by absorbing parental conclusions of good and bad. Throughout early childhood the desire for reward and avoidance of punishment continued to shape behavior, but it is not until early adolescence that personal conscience begins to develop. Conscience shifts from imposed rules to owning an inner standard. Around age 13 middle school students transition from the story stage of faith development into the belonging stage, blending together a sense of self, values, and commitments. At this stage community attitudes are highly influential in shaping faith. Faith is deeply held but it is not yet very self-reflective. Industry remains the foundation for self-esteem development at the middle-school level, i.e., goal setting, meeting deadlines, finishing tasks, organizational skills, time management, long-range projects, planning work and working the plan. A positive foundation of security, autonomy, initiative and industry is essential to identity formation, the next stage in emotional-affective development. Forming identity is the major task of adolescence, ages 13-25.

**Suggestions:** Give opportunities for adolescents to explain their thoughts, discuss justice issues, do group problem solving, debate, and teach others. Establish a democratic climate at home where the child has input to rules and where you balance parent control with adolescent self-reliance. Encourage independent conscience based on self-respect and social responsibility. Involve your adolescent in service to the human family (attentiveness to an elderly neighbor, visiting a nursing home, collecting food for a soup kitchen, etc.). Give practice in clarifying values, i.e., naming issues, brainstorming pros and cons, consequences, alternatives, and the associated Gospel values). Require examples to support ideas or opinions. Teach analysis skills (recognize parts of a whole), how to outline, and to use word maps. Cultivate industry through deadlines, time management, and organizational skills. Create long-range projects with periodic check-in points. Work side-by-side on difficult tasks. Model how to goal-set. Recognize that your child is forming his or her own faith and that it will most likely be different from our own. Talk with your child about your own faith journey and how your faith has grown or changed.