



Getting to Know a First-Grade Child

As children mature, they become increasingly capable of comprehending more complex ideas and concepts. As catechists, we show our respect for God's creation by accepting all people for who they are and mentoring them as they grow in their personal relationship with God. *Finding God: Our Response to God's Gifts* links faith formation to a child's developmental level as a first grader by using language and activities appropriate to his or her age.

Profile of a First-Grade Child (Ages 6–7)

Ages six through seven can be considered, in many ways, the golden age of childhood. It is a time of many changes. Physically, children are growing rapidly and always seem to be losing teeth! They are enthusiastic, industrious, active, and curious. They are experiencing an increase in motor activity and may often appear restless and easily distracted. Friendships outside of the family allow them to begin to understand the feelings of others and to develop important social skills.

Psychological and Intellectual Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ experience a striking increase in cognitive development
- ★ begin to think logically and have vivid imaginations
- ★ learn best by doing and experiencing through activities and games that allow them to discover
- ★ have a short attention span and need structure and routine
- ★ enjoy having stories read to them, especially those centered on relationships, and also enjoy poems and songs
- ★ love to ask questions and have rapidly growing vocabularies

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*"They are enthusiastic,
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Moral Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ begin to experience feelings of guilt, shame, and embarrassment for wrongdoing, which is the beginning of the development of morality
- ★ consider the right course of action to be the one that allows them to avoid punishment
- ★ are easily influenced by significant adults
- ★ will sometimes engage in extreme behaviors such as playing roughly, lying, being overly aggressive—all of which must be understood but not tolerated beyond a minimal degree
- ★ need security, reassurance, discipline, and a sense of belonging

Social Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ begin to develop friendships outside of the family that compete in significance with those of family and teachers
- ★ tend to be noisy and quite vocal
- ★ can become self-conscious
- ★ are truly the center of their own worlds
- ★ like to spend significant amounts of time alone, engaged in their own thoughts and activities
- ★ tend to work better in pairs than in groups
- ★ are concerned about fairness
- ★ need a great deal of affirmation, security, and structure
- ★ rely heavily on parents, teachers, and significant adults

Spiritual Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ are open to spiritual realities and have a sense of the sacred
- ★ have a sense of awe and wonder and are comfortable with prayer
- ★ need an atmosphere of warmth and security
- ★ think of God as a provider and protector
- ★ enjoy being silent
- ★ are capable of taking simple prayers to heart

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Getting to Know a Second-Grade Child

As children mature, they become increasingly capable of comprehending more complex ideas and concepts. As catechists, we show our respect for God's creation by accepting all people for who they are and mentoring them as they grow in their personal relationship with God. *Finding God: Our Response to God's Gifts* links faith formation to a child's developmental level as a second grader by using language and activities appropriate to his or her age.

Profile of a Second-Grade Child (Ages 7–8)

The second grade, ages seven through eight, can be considered part of the golden age of childhood—a time of wonderful curiosity, changes, rapid growth, seemingly endless imagination, excitement, and enthusiasm. Though mostly positive and optimistic, some children occasionally can become moody and may prefer to spend time alone. Seven- and eight-year-olds love structure and order and work diligently at increasing skill in handwriting, computers, sports, and almost everything in which they are involved. This is also the time when many children prepare for First Penance and First Eucharist. With all the enthusiasm they have, these children are at a wonderful age for learning and faith development!

Psychological and Intellectual Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ love structure and routine
- ★ love to hear stories and to be read to
- ★ tend to learn best by doing
- ★ have vivid imaginations and short attention spans
- ★ like to work alone but, as the year goes on, increasingly will enjoy working in groups
- ★ are increasing their vocabularies rapidly and enjoy asking questions
- ★ have difficulty knowing the limits of their own abilities because these are expanding so quickly
- ★ begin to use logic
- ★ are interested in the natural world and in understanding how things work

"The second grade . . . can be considered part of the golden age of childhood."



"With all the enthusiasm they have, these children are at a wonderful age for learning and faith development!"



Moral Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ consider the right course of action to be the one that allows them to avoid punishment
- ★ begin to make moral decisions (although inconsistently) based on internal judgments
- ★ have a fairly well-developed sense of right and wrong and begin to form a conscience
- ★ need opportunities to develop a moral sense through their own experiences
- ★ need clear and direct instruction as well as the opportunity to observe sound moral behavior in the lives of significant adults (in their own lives and in the lives of saints and holy people)

Social Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ are truly the center of their own worlds
- ★ like to spend significant amounts of time alone, engaged in their own thoughts and activities
- ★ are sensitive, respond strongly to both encouragement and criticism, and need a great deal of affirmation
- ★ have a tendency to underestimate the limits of their abilities but are able to recover quickly from mistakes and failures
- ★ need a sense of security and structure
- ★ rely heavily on parents, teachers, and significant adults
- ★ have a well-developed sense of humor and enjoy riddles and puzzles
- ★ consider being a part of a group, primarily of the same sex, extremely important

Spiritual Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ love to celebrate and enjoy ritual
- ★ have a natural sense of wonder and are comfortable with prayer
- ★ enjoy quiet and are capable of reflecting for short periods of time
- ★ are capable of praying spontaneously in a conversational style
- ★ see nature as a reflection of God's love and greatness
- ★ view the Church as a community of friends who help one another
- ★ begin to appreciate the liturgical seasons, seasons of the year, and feast days
- ★ are capable of taking simple prayers to heart

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Getting to Know a Third-Grade Child

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Profile of a Third-Grade Child (Ages 8–9)

Children at this age work diligently at increasing their skills in handwriting, computers, sports, and almost everything in which they are involved. They enjoy any kind of joke, riddle, or puzzle. While still quite imaginative, they begin to move toward realism and can think logically. They may begin to worry about the world, their friends, their families, people they know who may die or have died, and moving or changing schools. For some, this may be a time of anxiety and of lots of complaining!

Psychological and Intellectual Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ are capable of handling increasingly complex concepts and of solving problems
- ★ can engage in a wide variety of learning activities, especially puzzles, crosswords, and games
- ★ begin to imagine what it would be like to be another person
- ★ have difficulty knowing the limits of their own abilities because these are expanding so rapidly
- ★ are interested in the natural world and in understanding how things work
- ★ have a great capacity to read and comprehend
- ★ have a rapidly growing vocabulary and are eager to apply their imaginations to learning
- ★ learn primarily through their senses, so stories, crafts, and activities continue to be effective

"Children at this age work diligently at increasing their skills."



"They enjoy any kind of joke, riddle, or puzzle."



Moral Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ judge the goodness of an act based on reward and punishment
- ★ begin to see that rules can be flexible
- ★ have a fairly accurate sense of right and wrong and begin to feel guilty about engaging in negative behavior even if no one sees it
- ★ begin to make moral decisions (although inconsistently) based on internal judgments
- ★ need clear and direct instruction as well as the opportunity to observe sound moral behavior in the lives of significant adults (in their own lives and the in lives of saints and holy people)
- ★ begin to consider the viewpoints of others

Social Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ are extremely curious and seem to want an explanation for almost everything
- ★ consider it extremely important to be a part of a group, generally of the same sex
- ★ begin to engage in gossip, which can actually help to establish group norms and values
- ★ have a well-developed sense of humor
- ★ have a great interest in stories about people from other cultures and areas of the world
- ★ are very outgoing and are defining what they need a friend to be
- ★ are beginning to learn desirable social behaviors such as cooperating, sharing, comforting, and forgiving, so they can make and keep friends

Spiritual Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ begin to see prayer as not entirely centered on the self and as more realistic
- ★ are capable of praying for broad concerns and begin to see connections between events
- ★ enjoy ceremonies, rituals, and symbolism
- ★ need a sense of belonging
- ★ enjoy quiet and are capable of reflecting for short periods of time
- ★ are capable of praying spontaneously in a conversational style
- ★ begin to appreciate the liturgical seasons, seasons of the year, and feast days
- ★ are capable of taking relatively complex prayers to heart

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Getting to Know a Fourth-Grade Child

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Profile of a Fourth-Grade Child (Ages 9–10)

For most children, ages 9 through 10 is a relatively calm period. Most children feel capable and in control as skills mastered at earlier stages grow stronger and are refined through practice. Fourth-grade children are ready for solid conscience formation and are beginning to understand more clearly the role of intention in determining whether an act is right or wrong. This is what makes the fourth grade an ideal time to introduce moral concepts such as the Ten Commandments, examination of conscience, and making good moral choices.

Psychological and Intellectual Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ are looking for explanations for just about everything and like to discover their own answers
- ★ learn best when starting from their own experiences and by using project-oriented activities, including games
- ★ can be industrious and are often self-critical
- ★ often express themselves in negatives: "I hate it!" "This is boring!" "I can't do this!"
- ★ need a sense of humor and lightness to give balance to the seriousness of this age
- ★ love vocabulary and possess a dramatically increased capacity for memorization
- ★ have a lengthy attention span, are insatiable readers, and are extremely receptive as learners of factual information
- ★ are usually highly productive and conscientious about their work
- ★ have a strong ability to work in groups but require clear directions

*"Fourth-grade children
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Moral Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ are idealistic
- ★ are becoming increasingly competent in making moral judgments and solving social issues
- ★ are concerned with and need rules but still are concerned with reward and punishment
- ★ are highly competitive but tend to be legalistic, want others to behave properly, and are concerned with fairness and justice
- ★ are ready for solid conscience formation
- ★ understand the role of the intention of an act in determining whether it is right or wrong; for example, the difference between a lie and a mistake
- ★ begin to consider other points of view when making moral decisions
- ★ begin to notice the feelings they have after engaging in acts that are right or wrong

Social Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ often become overly serious and worried about issues and need laughter and humor
- ★ often feel singled out unfairly and respond with frustration and impatience
- ★ become highly competitive and critical, and often complain about issues of fairness
- ★ may be quick to anger but are also usually quick to forgive
- ★ enjoy their families and their peers and are intensely aware of how they fit into peer groups
- ★ base their sense of identity on their perceived achievement or lack thereof
- ★ want to be independent but, at the same time, are afraid
- ★ like to work with partners they choose, usually of the same gender

Spiritual Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ engage in hero worship and enjoy stories of saints and model Christians
- ★ have a realistic image of Jesus as a human being
- ★ enjoy the rituals of liturgy and have a great sense of God's presence
- ★ tend to trust that things will work out since God is in charge
- ★ see God as faithful, just, and fair
- ★ are comfortable thanking God for positive things and asking him for help
- ★ enjoy quiet and are capable of reflecting for short periods of time
- ★ are capable of taking complex prayers to heart

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Getting to Know a Fifth-Grade Child

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Profile of a Fifth-Grade Child (Ages 10–11)

Children at this age love to learn factual information. They have mastered the rules of most games, school, and family and are in love with order. Fifth grade is a time of significant cognitive growth, marked by the beginning of abstract thought. They are developing a sense of community and enjoy participating in planning. It is also a time of physical changes with the onset of puberty, especially for girls whose physical development is normally ahead of boys'. With the excitement and confusion that are occurring at this age, it is a critical time for faith formation.

Psychological and Intellectual Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ usually experience a period of relative calm before the storms and upsets of adolescence
- ★ are on the verge of becoming more emotional because of the onset of puberty
- ★ have an abundance of energy and love to engage in activities, especially in cooperative groups that feel grown-up and that allow them to display developed competencies
- ★ are insatiable readers with an increased attention span and capacity for memorizing, understanding chronology, and learning factual information
- ★ have awareness of adult issues that allows them to participate more in discussions
- ★ are expressive and talkative, like to explain, and begin to demand explanations of issues and relationships they find confusing or inconsistent
- ★ like rules (and to challenge them!) and logic



"Fifth grade is a time of significant cognitive growth, marked by the beginning of abstract thought."



"With the excitement and confusion that are occurring at this age, it is a critical time for faith formation."

Moral Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ are idealistic and are becoming increasingly competent in making moral judgments
- ★ rely to a large degree on the viewpoints of others when making moral decisions
- ★ are focused on the intention of acts in determining right from wrong
- ★ are concerned with fairness issues (justice) and are drawn to service
- ★ experience conflict between a developing internal moral compass and strong peer group norms
- ★ experience both strong positive and negative feelings after engaging in acts they consider right or wrong
- ★ are eager to understand the WHY of Church moral teachings

“Children at this age enjoy being noticed and rewarded for their accomplishments.”

Social Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ find comfort in a wide variety of people (friends, family, teachers, coaches, and so on)
- ★ enjoy cooperative learning activities as boys and girls gradually begin to work well together
- ★ begin to challenge previously accepted adult norms, love to argue and test the limits of rules and norms, and are genuinely surprised that these challenges appear rude to adults
- ★ are keenly aware of being included and excluded from peer groups
- ★ enjoy being noticed and rewarded for their accomplishments
- ★ enjoy helping others, such as tutoring younger children
- ★ can become moody and sensitive and act silly, due to the hormonal changes that are characteristic of the onset of puberty



Spiritual Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ are interested in preparing for and participating in meaningful liturgy and prayer
- ★ love symbols and ritual
- ★ enjoy Bible stories, especially about Jesus, and the lives of the saints
- ★ have a need for acceptance by the Church community
- ★ are beginning to recognize how they can use their gifts to serve the community
- ★ enjoy quiet and are capable of reflecting for long periods of time
- ★ are capable of taking complex prayers to heart
- ★ desire to experience prayer that is focused on emotionally confusing issues and conflicts





Getting to Know a Sixth-Grade Child

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Profile of a Sixth-Grade Child (Ages 11–12)

Sixth grade is a time of significant cognitive growth, marked by the beginning of truly abstract thinking. Children are able to consider the meaning of God's love and his call to love each other. With the onset of puberty, boys and girls find physical changes are taking place. They notice these changes in themselves and each other, especially girls, whose physical development often happens much earlier. Boys and girls gradually begin to separate along gender lines as they become increasingly self-conscious about their own bodies. Sixth graders demonstrate their search for identity by experimenting with roles and behaviors. Because of the changes and confusion in this time of life, children of this age look to adults who relate to them in an honest, direct, and loving manner.

Psychological and Intellectual Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ are highly conscious of their individual achievements
- ★ have a heightened social interest in peers
- ★ enjoy ceremonies and rituals, particularly those that reflect their own "coming of age"
- ★ can see the world from a variety of perspectives—and love to debate their viewpoints
- ★ have a longer attention span than younger children
- ★ experience a deep curiosity that demands an explanation for everything
- ★ are often avid readers who can relate fiction to reality
- ★ can understand chronology, and enjoy learning factual information
- ★ like to know the rules (and to challenge them!)
- ★ are interested in logic and problem solving
- ★ easily alternate between being playful and being serious
- ★ work well in cooperative groups
- ★ like work that is challenging and is perceived as "grown-up"



"Sixth grade is a time of significant cognitive growth, marked by the beginning of truly abstract thinking."



"Children of this age look to adults who relate to them in an honest, direct, and loving manner."

Moral Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ are highly idealistic
- ★ are learning competence in making moral judgments
- ★ rely on the viewpoints of others when making moral decisions
- ★ want rules but also need flexibility and understanding
- ★ want to be good and to feel good about themselves
- ★ experience very positive feelings when they do something right or very negative feelings when they do something wrong
- ★ feel conflict between a developing internal moral compass and peer-group norms
- ★ insist on understanding the WHY of the Church's moral teachings
- ★ are concerned with issues of fairness and justice
- ★ are drawn to service

"Children at this age are capable of understanding God, community, and faith in a deep way."

Social Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ experience dramatic peer pressure, want to spend their time with friends their own age
- ★ tend to relegate most adults to a position of less importance
- ★ enjoy and need involvement in cooperative learning activities
- ★ experience confusion as they cross between being a child and not being a child
- ★ can be moody, shy, and sensitive, due to the hormonal changes characteristic of the onset of puberty
- ★ love to test the limits of rules and norms
- ★ often use sarcasm
- ★ experience an increase in tolerance, acceptance, and reasonableness



Spiritual Development

Children at this age . . .

- ★ can appropriately relate messages in Scripture to their own life experiences
- ★ respond well to participating in liturgical celebrations
- ★ can relate to God in a variety of prayer forms
- ★ are capable of understanding God, community, and faith in a deep way
- ★ can recognize Jesus as an example to follow
- ★ enjoy quiet reflection and sustain it for long periods of time
- ★ are capable of taking complex prayers to heart
- ★ desire to experience prayer that is focused on emotionally confusing issues

