

Profile of a First-Grade Child

Characteristics

Children of this age are growing away from egocentric social behavior toward an awareness of other people. They are entering into peer-group activities with zest. Now they need guidance in learning to handle playtime conflicts and to exercise the social skills needed to establish and maintain friendships.

These skills include learning to give and take, and to share responsibility with peers; learning appropriate gender-sex identification; learning to read and to write, and other related intellectual skills.

They are capable of understanding a story and can retell it from beginning to end. Some are even capable at this stage of finding hidden meaning or discovering the moral in a story.

The children's sense of self-worth is quite fragile at this stage. It is imperative that the catechist be sensitive to this fragility. When a child fails, it is the behavior rather than the child that needs to be corrected. This correction should be handled in such a way that the child's emerging self-image is not damaged or hurt.

Faith Development Needs

Six-year-old children, in order to develop holistically (spiritually, emotionally, physically, intellectually, socially), need to be loved so as to love. Faith has its roots in love.

Six-year-olds need to be recognized, appreciated and praised for the unique person each one is, created in the image and likeness of God. They need the resulting sense of security and belonging which is essential to their growth.

These little children need to see and experience how to share. They need models from real-life, from Scripture, and from the lives of the saints. Especially from the most familiar adults in their lives, they should begin to see that faith lives.

Children at this age need to appreciate others as special persons who are good and loved by God, regardless of social strata, race, physical handicaps, etc. They are learning to value the children different from themselves.

They need to experience a climate, an atmosphere, in which self-discipline can be fostered by giving them real responsibilities, and gradually to learn that all actions have consequences, either positive or negative.

The catechist helps the child to choose the good for its own sake.

They need to be involved in group prayer and related religious activities. They should continue to experience brief moments of silence in which to communicate with God, to wonder, to reflect, to imagine, e.g., the story of Samuel.

Implications

Because children relate readily to the language of symbols and gestures and begin to acquire the spiritual attitudes which the gestures express, the catechist should provide frequent opportunities for them to engage in ritual: processions, offerings, praising and thanking God in prayer and song. (virtues of faith, love)

To help the children move from a moral stage known as self-interest, the catechist should endeavor to awaken in them an awareness of the needs and feelings of others, inviting them to reach out to others in love and concern. Even at this early age, children can tell others about Jesus and his family. (evangelization)

One way six-year-old children acquire their image of God is from the stories they hear. These images later become more mature concepts and feelings about God. Therefore, scripture stories which emphasize the love and providence of God and God's faithfulness should be used.

Because the little child tends to imitate, the catechist must be an exemplar, one who is conscious of God's presence in the world, in her or his life, one who is joyful, and one who is striving to follow Christ more closely.

Some children know at an early age what God calls them to be. Contact with a priest or religious as role models may encourage these vocations.

To become wholly oneself requires the development of both the natural and the supernatural virtues. The catechist is to be aware that genuine love always respects the other person in his/her integrity and should, therefore, recognize in the child the right to be himself/herself as called by God. (Vocations)