

Profile of a Fourth-Grade Child

Characteristics

Enthusiasm, self-confidence, and activity characterize this year. This is a period of steady growth in both physical and mental ability. Athletic skill is very important in the development of nine-year-olds, for it affects their concept of success in winning and maintaining a coveted place among peers. Intellectually, nine-year-olds are sharpening study skills and becoming capable of a longer attention span. They continue to be interested in living creatures and how they are made.

Fourth-graders are more concerned about right- and wrong-doing at this stage. They want to live by rules, and they want others to live by them, too. They want to be accepted and to be a part of a community. They experience conflict and need to know how to deal with or resolve conflict.

Faith Development Needs

Because children at this level are in transition beyond childhood, they may exhibit behavior that is inconsistent and disorganized. They are prone to quick emotional shifts. They may cry when emotions are overtaxed. They need guidance, understanding, patience, and encouragement from adults.

Older persons grow in importance to nine-year-olds who are inclined toward hero-heroine worship, especially people of action. They need to hear stories about missionaries, saints, and contemporary persons involved in living out the call of God in their lives. This is a good age to introduce the idea of vocations to the priesthood and/or religious life.

Related to their need for freedom to make personal choices is the awareness that this freedom carries the personal responsibility for acting in a Christian way. The understanding and formation of conscience begins to take on a more significant role. Conscience becomes the call or invitation of Jesus to follow him.

Their interest in law and rule keeping lays the foundation for studying Christ's Law of Love and the Ten Commandments. They need to understand that disobedience weakens the entire community, and that Christians need to forgive and seek forgiveness. They can gradually realize that each person is to be respected and loved because of his/her inherent goodness and dignity as a child of God.

Implications

Music, art, drama, and related activities stimulate the children's creativity and provide opportunities for them to express and appreciate religious concepts.

Fourth-graders desire social approval to such a degree that they are becoming conformists. It is the task of the catechist to encourage them to do what is right because it is Jesus' way whether it pleases the group or not. The catechist should stress the reasons and the values underlying the rules, as well as the importance of right motives. Moral development includes the desire of the heart to love God and to do God's will.

Children can be made aware of social ills and human need by becoming involved in social justice activities in various ways—recycling bottles and aluminum, learning not to waste natural resources. They are receptive to the fact that all are called to give of their time, talents, and earthly goods.

Nine-year-olds seek and enjoy short periods of time when they can be alone. The catechist can support and nurture this desire by leading the children to prayer and by praying with them.