

THE
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PLACE

Developing Children's Ministry



SESSION 4
Understanding the Development
of Children

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Understanding the Development of Children

SESSION OVERVIEW

Biblical Basis of Developmental Study

Cognitive Development

Moral Development

Psychosocial Development

Faith Development

Development Across the Lifespan

Application

Exam

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should:

- reference the biblical basis for a holistic understanding of human development.
- match the development areas to ministry considerations.
- discuss some age-appropriate expectations.
- apply the principles of development to practical applications.

Understanding the Development of Children

INTRODUCTION



An average four-year-old child asks more than 400 questions a day. As we mature, do we stop wondering, or do we just learn not to ask? Psychologist, Erik Erikson summarized the development of the child with these four perceptions of the self: “One might say that personality at the first stage crystallizes around the conviction, ‘I am what I am given,’ and that of the second, ‘I am what I will.’ The third can be characterized by ‘I am what I can imagine I will be.’ We must now approach the fourth: ‘I am what I learn.’” Our purpose in this lesson includes examining the different areas of childhood development as they relate to effective ministry to children.

BIBLICAL BASIS OF DEVELOPMENTAL STUDY

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In Luke 10:25-28, Jesus expresses the idea that an individual should be viewed as possessing several different developmental areas of growth. Jesus was asked a question concerning how to inherit eternal life. Jesus answered with a deeper probing question: "What is written in the Law? . . . How do you read it?" (v. 26). The lawyer gave the correct response: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind,' and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" Jesus answered, "Do this and you will live." Notice the Law doesn't say, "Love the Lord your God with everything." This would bring us to the same ultimate conclusion, but the Law is careful to be very specific about identifying the different areas of ourselves that we bring to God. Out of these areas flows our love for God and neighbor. Let's look at these five areas.

1. *Love the Lord your God with all your heart.* This statement implies loving God with all of our emotions. We will share our hurts and disappointments with Him. We must love Him enough to share with Him every area of our feelings—thereby allowing Him to be Lord of our emotions. The love we demonstrate to Him and the love we experience when He is the passion of our lives and Lord of our emotions—even beyond our understanding—brings us into the deepest levels of trust and intimacy. This is part of our psychosocial development.
2. *And with all your soul.* The soul is the essence of our eternal being. This assertion suggests the total surrender of spiritual life to God—all that is seen and unseen, all we are in the past, present, and future in communion with God. (This is all that will be said about spirituality today but we will discuss aspects of faith development that are closely associated.)
3. *And with all your strength.* Strength refers to our power, forces, and abilities. As humans, we have the power of will, choice, and bodily strength. Our physical bodies are the dwelling place of our strengths, and we are to direct and nourish our bodies toward loving God in the area of physical development.
4. *And with all your mind.* The mind is the home of all our understanding, imagination, and rationality. Its task is to pull together all the other elements of our lives into a purposeful, examined life grounded in loving relationship with God. Our minds work in patterns that are constantly being formed by information and experience. We are to love God enough to let Him give us the mind and thoughts of Christ as He works in us. This concept reflects our cognitive development.

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5. *And love your neighbor as yourself.* Our love for God is worked out in relationship with others. We are not alone. We are always connecting to others, responding to needs in the world around us. We cannot separate our love for others from our love for God. We are continually developing relationally, and God expects us to be as concerned about the good of others—our neighbors near and far—as we are about our own good. Jesus talks a lot about the kingdom of God. God's order for relationship is love, out of which flows justice and mercy in His image. This perspective reflects our moral development.

This passage provides a beautiful example of our different areas of development. We are challenged to understand each of these areas of development and to determine how to help children love God in an increasing way with sensitivity to each of these areas.

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT



NOTES

Jean Piaget, a European psychologist, has had a tremendous influence on our understanding of children's thinking ability. His work has influenced both schools and churches toward a better knowledge of what children can understand at different ages. The central idea behind Piaget's work is that as children interact with people and objects, they develop understandings that allow them to use higher levels of thinking.

Assimilation and Accommodation

As children interact with the environment, they are not passive. They are constantly trying to make sense of how the world works. When something they encounter does not fit with the mental model they have established, Piaget says they do one of two things: they assimilate or they accommodate.

Assimilation is the process of applying what you already know to new data. For example, a young child knows that boats go in the water. He sees a Jet Ski on the lake and shouts, "Look! Look! A boat!" He has assimilated the Jet Ski into his mental model of boats. Accommodation, on the other hand, is when the new data does not fit neatly into the existing mental model. The child feels the need to adjust the framework in response to the special characteristics of an object or event. Another child sees the Jet Ski racing across the lake recognizes that it is not like the other boats she has seen. It looks like a boat; it is in the water, but it has no sails. It is going much faster than the sailboats she has seen. The child then concludes, "This isn't a boat," and shouts, "Mommy, Mommy! What's that?" Once Mom answers, the child can form a new mental model: "Boats are not the only things that go in water. Boats AND Jet Skis go in the water." The child has accommodated the new information.

Assimilation and accommodation happen every day in the learning process at a tacit level. Our mental models occur mostly unconsciously as we act on them without realizing we have done so. The more cognitively mature we are, the better we are able to identify our models and modify them intentionally. Meanwhile, we try to guide children through this maturing process. This goal provides one of the major reasons for understanding developmental principles.

 NOTES*Stages of Cognitive Development*

Piaget said a child's cognitive development emerges in stages. As a child matures, higher levels of thinking begin to emerge. This seems to happen at roughly the same ages for all humans, even though thinking is influenced by interactions with the environment. Try to focus on what a child might be capable of at each of the different stages.

During the Sensorimotor stage (0–2 years of age), children use their senses and their bodies to understand and manipulate objects. They depend a lot on information they get through tasting and touching. In order to come to know something, they have to directly experience it. A picture of a ball is meaningless unless a child has touched a ball, held the ball, dropped the ball, rolled the ball, and thrown the ball. However, once a child has had experience with a ball, the child begins to form a mental model that generalizes the characteristics of one ball to recognize other balls. The child can become somewhat confused when a ball doesn't perform like balls "should." They learn how to touch, what to touch, what feels good, what doesn't feel good, what can be eaten, and what can't. All of this happens by direct physical experience and experimentation.

As children move through their second year of life, they enter into the Pre-operational stage (2–7 years of age). They begin to develop a system of symbolic representations. Language falls into this category. The word "milk" means something with a particular taste. If I say it, I will get a drink of it. Candy means something sweet. If I say it, I might get a bite of it, or I might not. (Incidentally, this makes little sense to two-year-olds and requires constant accommodation and assimilation. If the mental model is "I say the word, I get the thing," imagine how frustrating it is when the rule works so inconsistently!) These children are beginning to understand cause and effect, but only within the limits of their direct experience. For example, if I touch something hot, it burns. If I drop a pencil, it falls to the ground. I know this because I've experienced it. But if you ask a three-year-old child what will happen if you drop paint on a white shirt, he or she has no way of knowing until the child has personal experiences with paint and shirts.

Children are also dealing with "egocentrism." We discussed how this is not a matter of being selfish. Their minds don't understand that their perspective is not the only perspective. Children do know others feel differently than they do. They do not have any cognitive strategies to figure out why. Children in this stage are very literal thinkers. When the words they hear don't make sense to them, they **make** them make sense. Our songs and hymns are full of imagery that doesn't make sense if you interpret it literally. It's not uncommon for a child to think that if you climb high enough, you'll reach heaven.

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During the Concrete Operational stage (7–11 years of age), the child becomes a more flexible thinker. For example, there is now the ability to mentally reverse an event in the real world. External actions can now be represented as internal ones. For example, you may hear young children trying to figure out how many marbles they have by counting out loud. A child in the concrete operational stage can count the numbers in their head. This child now realizes two candy bars and three candy bars are going to be five candy bars no matter how you arrange them. They can classify by more than one characteristic; for example, color and size at the same time.

This stage is still dependent on concrete examples for understanding. This dependence does not mean they cannot understand some abstract ideas like “big and small,” but abstract application is still difficult for them. For example, “fairness” is an abstract term. Children at this stage still struggle identifying some consequence they don't like as being fair, whether they like it or not.

The final stage Piaget identifies is Formal Operational (11–older). In this stage, individuals can take multiple variables into account. They can think through how their conclusions will work out, whether or not they have any direct experience with the variables in a situation. They can propose alternative solutions, collect information to help them work through the options, and draw conclusions. Older children can begin to think outside the box with abstract thinking that is more flexible, logical, and scientific.

Past research into Piaget's theories has found that Piaget was basically correct in his conclusions. However, he underestimated the younger children and overestimated those in the later stage. The first three stages are the most important to understand as we work with infants to preadolescents. We will come back and consolidate this information at the end of the lesson. Children do not always think according to the same rules as adults. Keep these stages in mind as we look at stages of moral development.

MORAL DEVELOPMENT



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Lawrence Kohlberg developed a cognitive-developmental theory of moral development based upon Piaget's basic theory. Kohlberg believed a child's thinking about moral issues must be determined by cognitive abilities. Kohlberg did not measure actual behavior but the ability to reason. Kohlberg looked only at moral reasoning and not the definition of morality versus immorality. In other words, if we do the right thing because we want to please someone, we are not making a moral judgment or behaving morally. It is only when we are able to evaluate the situation and examine the outcomes and come to a reasoned moral judgment that morality is involved. Kohlberg used the individual's responses to hypothetical situations to determine at what level and stage a person is able to reason morally.

Kohlberg looked for moral reasoning behind decisions, not the decision itself. How do people perceive the law as it relates to the value of life? Is there a principle that people follow? If so, what is it, and what is the motive behind it? Do people decide based on the fear of not wanting to be punished for doing something wrong? Do people make decisions based on what the law says? Do they operate from a social principle that says the value of life supersedes all laws? Based on each response, Kohlberg would place people at a certain level and stage. Each stage deals with an issue of justice. Kohlberg described the basic moral responses to justice at each stage:

- At Stage 1, justice is punishing the bad in terms of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.”
- At Stage 2, justice defines exchanging favors and goods in an equal manner.
- At Stages 3 and 4, justice demands treating people as they desire in terms of the conventional rules; so, a child might choose based on social convention (Stage 3 any good boy or girl should act this way) or an explicit sense of “law and order” (Stage 4 children follow the rules regardless).
- At Stage 5, justice recognizes that all rules and laws from a social contract between the governors and the governed are often designed to protect the equal rights of all as long as all “agree” to those laws.
- At Stage 6, personally-chosen moral principles are also principles of justice: the principles any member of a society would choose for that society if he or she did not know what his or her position would be in the society and in which he or she might be the least advantaged.

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In other words, those in the upper levels of Kohlberg's stages would not see rules or laws as supreme. It would be unjust to lose a human life due to greed or bad laws. In the example, the justice of preservation of life in comparison to money or law is the ultimate moral value. There may be different ways to accomplish this, but the highest moral response values life over law.

Kohlberg suggested that higher levels and stages within his theory are associated with higher-ordered reasoning skills. Some critics argue that Stages 5 and 6 really are more idealistic than psychological. Based on this type of system, it is possible to label different responses and even societies as morally better than others.

The main challenges to Kohlberg's theory revolve around his tendency to focus on male test subjects. He prescribed logic and justice as the measures of moral judgment. Some people ask, "What makes justice a higher value than love or grace?" What makes logic a superior approach to cooperation?

From a Christian perspective, there may be other considerations that limit this theory of cognitive moral decision-making. First, experience demonstrates that moral reasoning does not always lead to moral behavior. In other words, many people know certain things are wrong, and can reason they are wrong, but will still choose to do them. A theory that does not take into consideration an individual's moral character will be found lacking in usefulness. Second, it should be noted that Kohlberg does not seem to make room for decisions based on a faith in divine intervention.

Nevertheless, Kohlberg's insights can help us establish discipline policies that are consistent with the reasoning stages of the child. At Stage 1, the very earliest stage of development, children are not really reasoning but responding to consequences. Punishment is one consequence to be avoided, but so are naturally occurring "punishments" or negative consequences. It would be pointless to try to reason with young children to help them understand with words what they don't have the vocabulary to understand. In other words, a negative consequence of biting one's mother is seeing mom's face wrinkle and hearing her voice harshly saying, "Biting hurts!"

We shape children's moral development as we respond appropriately to the reasoning that motivates them. We need to help children follow rules both because of the consequences and because the rules (or the application of the rules to others) benefit them. We shape children's moral development when we show approval for their good behavior. We shape children's moral development when we help them apply established rules to challenges and when we help them learn to develop rules for themselves to which they are then held accountable.

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As children mature, they become ready to handle moral decisions according to the application of different principles. Interestingly, a strong sense of moral order in childhood seems to help children become **more** able to deal with inconsistencies and gray areas later in life. A harsh and inconsistent application of moral order in childhood leads to an inability to deal with inconsistencies effectively throughout life.

Piaget suggests that strategies for dealing with misbehavior should be called “sanctions” rather than punishment. Reciprocity sanctions seem to differ from ideas of punishment because the consequences used in these sanctions are directly related to the decisions the child is currently making. They are proportional to the seriousness of the misbehavior. Piaget suggests four “sanctions” that are appropriate for shaping moral understanding in children:

- **Require Restitution.** When children make an error, they must make the error right. For example if a child spills paint, restitution is not accomplished until the child has cleaned up the mess.
- **Call the children’s attention to the consequences of the behavior.** If children are breaking their crayons, the teacher might say, “If you break all of the crayons, you will not have crayons for coloring.” Of course, the parent or teacher must be willing to follow through and allow a child to live with the actual consequences.
- **Deprive the child of what he or she has misused.** If the child continues to misuse the crayons, the crayons will be removed.
- **Exclude the child from the group.** This sanction can be used when a child is purposely disrupting a group. The child is asked to leave and may return only when he or she is ready to participate with the group according to the conditions the leader sets.

If attention is directed at the action, children can begin to understand the consequences attaching to their actions and begin to make different choices.

PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT



NOTES

Psychologist Erik Erikson spent his life studying the emotional lives of individuals. Erikson believed we all pass through eight stages or crises in our lives. Depending on how we resolve each of these conflicts will determine how we enter into the next stage and resolve that crisis. While the eight stages are listed, we will only focus on the first four that deal with childhood:

- Trust vs. Mistrust
- Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt
- Initiative vs. Guilt
- Industry vs. Inferiority
- Identity vs. Role Diffusion (not knowing who one is or what one is to do)
- Intimacy vs. Isolation
- Generativity vs. Stagnation (making a difference for others, such as having children)
- Integrity vs. Despair

Stage 1 (Trust vs. Mistrust), happens very early in life and serves as the most important stage. It sets the foundation for all later building. John Bowlby, a developmental psychologist famous for his work on the concept of attachment, speaks of developing an internal working model that will be established in the first two years of life. At this stage, children are very dependent. They have limited resources for getting what they need: mostly crying, screaming, and reaching within the limits of their mobility. So, it is the caregiver who actually gets or gives what the child needs, based on the cues of the child. How the caregiver responds determines what the child comes to believe about him or herself. Bowlby states that all individuals will come to one of two conclusions: Either “I can trust others; I have what it takes to obtain from others what I need,” or “I can’t trust others; I do not have what it takes to obtain from others what I need.” Bowlby believed that this conclusion would determine how a child approaches all later challenges. Will the child have trust in others and self-confidence? Bowlby implies that the two questions are inseparably linked.

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This insight means it is important to respond to an infant's signals promptly and accurately. In other words, if a child is crying because of a wet diaper, you should not let the child continue to cry. However, you must change the diaper—not play with or feed the baby. Promptness of response, accuracy of interpretation of a child's signals, and consistency of emotionally-warm care are the keys to effectively establishing trust for a young child.

Stage 2 (Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt) deals with self-control. Erikson believed the way a parent deals with toilet training can play a big role at this point of life. Of course, toilet training is not the only activity in which children establish their independent control. During this stage, children often say, "I can do it," "Let me try," and "I want to do it by myself." It is important for parents and caregivers to be patient and encourage the child. It is tempting to want to accomplish a task faster and better than the child can, but this interferes with the growth process.

At this stage, children want to prove to themselves they can participate in the important (at least to them) things of life. They want to prove to themselves and others that they have what it takes to participate in their world, they are competent, and they can figure things out. If they don't have the opportunity to explore their capabilities and are discouraged from trying or are made fun of for not accomplishing what they set out to do, they may feel they have let others down as well as themselves.

Stage 3 (Initiative vs. Guilt) is the delightful era of "I'll try anything!" Having mastered their physical self-control and established their separateness as an individual, children are ready to get things done and conquer the world. These are the great pretending years when nothing is impossible. Children learn as much from their failures as from their successes at this point. Parents and caregivers should be careful to help them create a sense of self-competence about their ability to handle whatever comes their way and support them as needed.

At Stage 4 (Industry vs. Inferiority), a child is production-oriented. Children begin to compare themselves to their peers and seek concrete evidence that they are competent in their skills. They are measuring themselves to see how they stack up in their different assets. How many friends do they have? How many trophies have they earned? How does their family compare to others? They want concrete evidence that they are as good as or better than others.

Children who don't feel they measure up can become self-defensive on the one hand or withdrawn on the other. The defensive child struggles with receiving feedback, may take to bullying, or be unable to learn from mistakes. The withdrawn child avoids opportunities, shies away from others, and blames



him or herself for almost everything. Caregivers should be very careful about comparisons with other children, even siblings, during this time. Comments like these can be very dangerous to their developing self-worth: “Why can’t you be more like your sister?” or “All the other boys can do this, why can’t you?”

Erikson’s insights help us anticipate basic personal challenges in children that go a long way to determining their emotional make-up during the rest of their lives. Erikson is clear that any stage that is not resolved adequately will interfere with the development of tasks that are encountered later in life. We see this concept in action every day. We see how people who have not developed a proper sense of autonomy have trouble establishing love relationships. Those who have not established initiative struggle with the tasks of school and giving back that come much later in life. However, Erikson also believed that each new “age” or stage provides an opportunity to rethink the issues of the past and possibly resolve them.

FAITH DEVELOPMENT



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James Fowler is a developmental psychologist, a United Methodist layperson, and former Director of the Center for Faith Development at Emory University. His work in faith research paved the way for today's serious study in understanding how faith is born, grows, and matures. For Fowler, faith is not limited to Christianity or to religion. Faith defines the orientation of the whole person toward life. Like other developmental theorists, Fowler believes faith is universally present in human beings, and every person progresses through a series of stages, with each stage building on those before it, though people may never pass through all six stages.

Fowler did consider that young children, from birth through infancy, lived a kind of pre-stage, primal faith. Fowler recognized that he could not empirically explore this faith, but assumed it to be a time where the "seeds of faith" emerge through the child's experience and trust in parents (similar to Erikson). Blevins and Maddix (2010) describe these two stages that summarize much of the journey of childhood:

Stage One: Intuitive/Projective Faith (Early Childhood): Imagination develops through stories, and symbols coupled with imagination create faith. Children learn from their parents about God. These are formulated by watching and observing parents. This is an intuitive and highly imaginative stage, usually ages four to eight years old. They are controlled by stories, symbols, and images, and are not yet controlled by logical thinking. Children either develop a positive or negative view of God from their parents.

Stage Two: Mythical-Literal Faith (Childhood and Beyond): Emerging concrete operations allow the person to think logically and order the world by means of categories of causality, space, and time, usually around age seven to eleven. This stage is characterized by the emergence of mutual interpersonal perspective taking: "I see you seeing me; I see me as you see me; I see you seeing me seeing you" (Fowler 1981, 150). These children understand faith in literal terms. They are learning to sort out reality from make believe. For example, they may believe in Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy. Children tend to have a sense of faithfulness and lawfulness in their view of God. As their faith maturity grows, this view of God will be challenged (135-36.)

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Fowler's approach to faith development provides a perspective that relies on the early theories of Piaget, Kohlberg, and Erikson but places them in a question for meaning and the pursuit of transcendence (which we discuss in the lesson on spirituality). While we may acknowledge that saving faith is a gracious gift from God, we can also see how the human capacity for faith can also be a part of God's gracious gift at creation. Fowler really seeks to help us understand how children "make sense" of the things they have faith in as children.

DEVELOPMENT ACROSS THE LIFESPAN



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Even though individuals seem complex and the world we live in is complex, there remain patterns that emerge that bring some continuity. That is not to say that the uniqueness and individuality of each person is diminished or left out of the equation. What it does say is that we can operate our ministries from certain foundational understandings that bring the greatest probability of meeting the needs of those with whom we work. Some guiding principles include:

- There are patterns of development which offer predictability.
- Even though there will always be genetic influences, much of development is shaped by direct interaction with significant individuals in our lives.
- We must have a basic understanding of development and be intentional in order to produce the outcomes that we desire.
- Even though not directly stated but by necessity implied, God is the creator of humanity and is thereby the source of understanding and direction in working with His favorite creation.

We use these guiding principles to develop practical applications in faith development since that is our major calling. The beginning of faith is rooted in our experiences in the world around us. As children begin to explore the world around them, they develop a foundation on which to understand their faith, based on the response of the adults around them. The emotion experienced when they interact with others may have a stronger impact than the words spoken. For example, if a child hears the word “love” that is surrounded by the experience of abuse, the child will grow up with a distorted view of the meaning of love. This will have a powerful impact on this child’s life as well as future relationships.

Infants

A child needs to learn to trust. The foundational aspect of faith is a “trust” in God. Infants are totally dependent on the care of those around them. Therefore, if caregivers can offer consistent, on-going, prompt, and accurate responses to the children in their care, the children can begin to trust others, can learn that the world is a good place, that church is a good place, that they can trust themselves and their abilities, and, in the long run, trust in God. The long-term outcomes are dependable adults with a healthy trust in God, others, and themselves. Infants require care to address key needs: attention, warmth, touch, interest in what they are doing, and empathy.

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Infants who do not receive these basic responses can have various outcomes. One outcome might be a lack of empathy—an inability to feel or experience what someone else is feeling or experiencing. Another outcome is difficulty trusting God. Even if they find the saving grace of Jesus, they find it difficult to offer the love that Jesus desires for us to give. One quick easy measure for caregivers to see if a child is experiencing healthy attachments at home is the response of a 1-2 1/2-year-old when the parent attempts to leave. If the child is not bothered at all, or if the child becomes very upset, these are both signs of an insecure attachment. The child should resist separation from the parent and even get a little upset—this is healthy. However, the child should quickly settle down with the knowledge that the parent will return. Children during this age who have healthy attachments or bonding with their parents should experience some levels of “separation anxiety” and “stranger anxiety.” This concern requires consistency with caregivers in congregations. Routine and a specific individual who meets them each Sunday will help children develop trust and alleviate separation and stranger anxiety.

Toddlers

As noted, this life stage represents a time of trial and error. Children learn basic language development, boundaries, appropriate responses, rules, and expectations. They strive to prove themselves to others and to themselves. Children learn self-regulation of emotions (being able to calm themselves down when upset), as well as self-control. Toilet training remains a major challenge. Children's workers must remember to let children attempt things on their own without being shamed. Workers must take care to not simply take over the task that a child struggles with, leaving an impression that the child is not capable. A worker might offer assistance. Say to the child, “Would you like me to help you with that?” This gives the child the option to determine when and if they need help and also to be seen as a partner in the process.

Children at this age are still attempting to regulate their emotions. In other words, a child can go from happy to rage in a matter of seconds. Constancy remains one of the most important aspects of relating during this time. Children see a parent as both the good parent, when the child gets what he or she desires, and the bad parent, when the child is sent to bed. This internal struggle will be resolved in a healthy way when the child has developed trust to consistent responses. Parents and caregivers who remain firm yet loving when the child is either upset or happy provides the child the needed confidence and resiliency when the world does not respond the way the child had hoped. This approach gives children realistic expectations so they will not blame God later when it appears they are not getting from God what they want or think they need.

 **NOTES***Preschool Years*

During this time of life, language development explodes and muscle control increases; children confidently run and jump, while, as social beings, carrying on conversations and moving into a wonderful world of wonder and discovery. Children at this time want to be “big helpers.” They have confidence that they can do anything and want to prove it. They are quick learners and excited about learning. Adults must give children room to acquire a sense of their own abilities and competence; although they can be ready to offer experience and resources when needed. Children will make mistakes, so it should be expected, and the response should be gentle.

It is easy to expect too much from children at this stage. If we put on them expectations they cannot live up to, they will experience feelings of incompetence. A child can also begin to experience guilt if they sense that their curiosity and energy has become intrusive. Teachers can use stories to help children deal with the ideas of God and Christian traditions. Stories have the capacity to carry children beyond the concrete ideas. Conflict stories allow children to sort out sides and chose positions. The Bible is full of such stories. Teachers should not be surprised if children focus on only one aspect of the story and then make a connection consistent with their age level. When a child at this stage hears the story of Jonah, he or she may only focus on the fish and think of when their Grandfather took them fishing. Teachers should embrace the child's perspective and still bring them full circle to the main point.

Pretend play proves critical during this time. Caregivers often worry whether playing is a waste of time. However children are most active at this time of their lives. Through play, children develop four skill sets: cognitive skills, motor skills, social skills, and language skills. Pretend play can go beyond even these four skills to give the child the opportunity to play out roles and make decisions with pretend consequences to see outcomes. It allows the opportunity to play out the “what ifs.” Playing out the Bible lesson will increase their chances of remembering, using words of the faith, and playing the roles of the faithful.

Elementary School

Elementary age children practice their faith by affiliation. The faith community provides the major focus for these children. They look for a place where they know what to expect, a place they can fit in, and a place where they can contribute. This is a great time to begin the process of incorporation into the main body of the church. Children are learning to work in groups, to find their place, to follow the rules, and to find significance. There is much comparison that

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goes on, where they will evaluate their abilities as compared to others. If we are not careful in our interactions with children, they can begin to feel inferior or less than others, even in the kingdom of God.

Children at this time are more interested in facts than anything else. They love to know the details of the story. Elementary-age children can offer accurate details to specific questions after reading a story. You can invite the children into the stories, teaching them how to read, understand, and apply God's word. In summary, include the children in the process: tell them stories, give them details, and invite them into the story. We should also give them places to serve, help them discover their giftings and an identity in the faith community, and celebrate their participation in the community while also encouraging their uniqueness. Eventually, we should step back, watch them, and be amazed!

Understanding developmental theory helps leaders work within the different areas of children's lives, helping them to mature and attain the fullness of Christ. The process unfolds gradually. We cannot merely skip stages and jump to the top. This pilgrimage with children requires patience, diligence, a purposeful plan, and those who will walk with kids. One of the most promising ideas from this theoretical overview remains that even if some have resolved certain stages inappropriately, all is not lost. Thanks to the challenges of each new stage, alongside the power of God, there is hope of restoration and fullness in faith. Children with difficult pasts may struggle, so children's workers must provide for them at each step, training and encouraging caregivers to do the same. When we cooperate within the various stages, providing challenges equal to the tasks, we can make the journey of faith a much smoother path.

APPLICATION



NOTES

1. Identify and interview children from two different stages of life, at least four years apart. How does each child represent the different developmental theories expressed in this lesson?
2. Talk with parents and church leaders about their early childhood, particularly in school. Use any of the following questions that are appropriate: What do you remember most about elementary school? What were the highlights? What were the low points? What was the most meaningful? What was the least meaningful? Was there a particular teacher you remember? What was it about that teacher that you remember? Was there a particular favorite teacher and why? Was there a particular teacher you really learned from? If so what was it about that teacher's lessons that you remember so well?
3. Discuss with children's leaders how limitations in cognitive and faith development change the way lessons are discussed and understood at different age levels with children.

EXAM



NOTES

1. Development is a biblical idea.
 - A. True
 - B. False

2. Matching: Match the person with the appropriate idea.
 - _____ Living between the tensions of trust and mistrust.
 - _____ Law and Order mentality.
 - _____ Dealing with data through either assimilation or accommodation.
 - _____ Newborns use senses to understand and manipulate objects.
 - _____ Decisions are based on social conventions (good boy or good girl).
 - _____ Our ability to resolve challenges deeply influences our
_____ future growth.
 - _____ Not limited to religion but an orientation toward life.
 - A. Piaget
 - B. Kohlburg
 - C. Erikson
 - D. Fowler

3. Egocentric children are sinful by nature.
 - A. True
 - B. False

4. Elementary children practice their faith by affiliation, so community is crucial for their deepening in faith.
 - A. True
 - B. False

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor.

1. If children have such radically different cognitive abilities, how do we prepare adults to respond appropriately in ministry?
2. Thinking about the moral development of children, how do we institute discipline policies that seem consistent with their level of thinking and decision making? Who needs to be involved and how do we structure actions and consequences that seem appropriate (Note: We are discussing classroom conduct, not punishing misbehavior.)
3. As we consider the social and emotional tasks children face, how can the church provide both a supportive but also challenging environment for children?
4. If Fowler's view of faith (how children "make sense" of faith) is correct, how can we use these principles to help adults guide children appropriately on their spiritual journey?

Review your answers with your mentor, then respond to the following:

How many responses focus on supporting children (particularly in areas where they are not yet fully self-reliant), and how many answers focus on empowering children?

Which of these answers support the goal of living Christlike relationships? Why?

What do we need to add to our list to make our approach more comprehensive, more faithful? Which do we need to incorporate into the role of the children's leader as one who both supports and empowers Christlike relationships with children?