

TWEEN-Stagers . . . Middle School Students

Ages 11 - 13

General Characteristics of TRANSESCENTS - (Years between puberty and adolescence)



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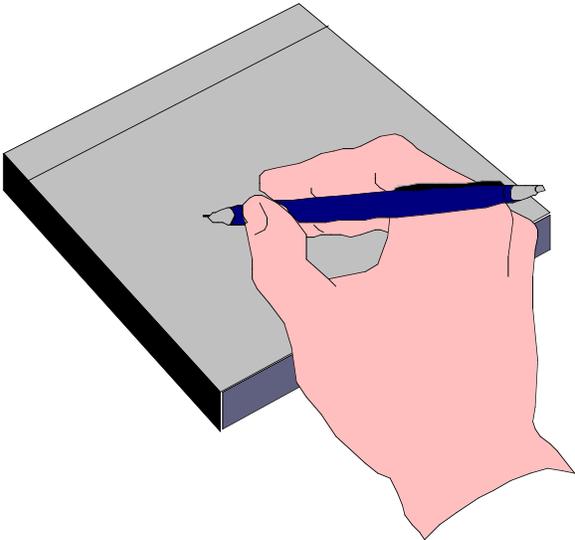
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Notes



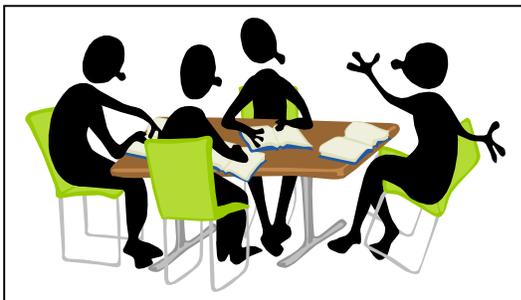
A Profile of 'TWEEN-Stagers . . . Middle School Students, Part 1 Ages 11-13

Dr. Patricia M. McCormack, IHM



Age 11

The Middle School Stage includes ages 11, 12, and 13, the ages typical of grades six, seven and eight. For **age 11 children**, awkwardness, restlessness, and laziness are common as a result of rapid and uneven physical growth. Their emotional responses (girls cry; boys swear and fight) are also closely related to physical and emotional growth. Teasing and antagonism between boys and girls is typical. Age 11's begin to think about the future. They enjoy daydreaming. They are concerned with their sex role. Though they can be careless about clothes and their personal room, they are growing in self-control. Their attention span is longer and more concentrated. Differing opinions and standards among friends and family disturb them. They are concerned about right and wrong, fairness, cheating, and lying. They willingly participate in discussions and they hold 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 summary combines **ages 12 and 13**.

Often early adolescents are overly critical, changeable, rebellious, and uncooperative. They value group opinion more than the opinions and wishes of adults. They are self-conscious about their physical changes. They are interested in earning money. They appreciate warm affection and a sense of humor in adults. They are motivated by a sense of belonging and acceptance by the peer group. They become shut down by nagging and condemnation. Young adolescents benefit from opportunities for increased independence and responsibility without pressure. Intellectually they are transitioning from concrete, literal thought to abstract thinking. They begin to explain things verbally and symbolically. They benefit from group problem solving and peer teaching. They demonstrate high-level critical thinking ability by summarizing, outlining, word mapping, and identifying parts of a whole.



A Profile of Middle School Students, Part 2

Ages 11-13

Dr. Patricia M. McCormack, IHM

THE EMOTIONAL-AFFECTIVE SELF

Middle School children, ages eleven through thirteen, have an “emerging sense of responsibility [that] can be a source of justifiable pride for these young people. They generally enjoy carrying out projects, sharing group experiences, role playing, and simply participating in discussion in which they can probe their values...”¹

THE SOCIAL SELF

Direct focus now to Stage 4 while you continue to strengthen:

<i>Stage 1 tasks</i>	<i>Trust vs. Mistrust</i>	<i>Security</i> <i>Self-Confidence</i>
<i>Stage 2 tasks</i>	<i>Autonomy vs. Shame/Doubt/Compulsion</i>	<i>Autonomy/Responsibility</i> <i>Self-Control</i>
<i>Stage 3 tasks</i>	<i>Initiative vs. Guilt/Inhibition</i>	<i>Initiative</i> <i>Self-Respect</i>

Psycho-social theory STAGE 4 is the major psycho-social task of the elementary school years, grades 1-8. The positive resolution of **Industry vs. Inferiority/Inertia** develops a sense of *method* and the ego-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.** It is probably not too strong a statement that if parents and teachers do not contribute to their child’s growth in industry, they are contributing to the development of inferiority!

Advice: Provide repeated, systematic instruction in the world of tools (i.e., house appliances, computer, screwdriver...) and skills (i.e., cooking, cleaning, reading, summarizing, study skills...). Engage children in tasks that require steady care over time, being productive, and accomplishing. 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, to name specific parts/objectives related to the goal and how to determine a reasonable time line and periodic means of evaluation. Re-structure when necessary.

¹ Bernardin, J. (1997). *Growing in Wisdom, Age and Grace*. New York: William H. Sadlier, Inc., p. 91.

A Profile of Middle School Students, Part 3A Ages 11-13

Dr. Patricia M. McCormack, IHM



THE *THINKING SELF* (Logical Stage)

Characteristics of Children Ages 11-13

- While reasoning out a situation, explaining it to others, or trying to comprehend a problem or performing the thought process, they combine conceptual thinking with a concrete image.
- They are able to perform reversible mental actions on real, concrete objects but not yet on abstract ideas.
- They are able to solve problems by generalizing from one situation to a similar situation.
- There is a gradual shift from inductive thinking (reasoning from specific to general) to the deductive mode of thinking (reasoning from general to specific).
- Because they are aware of social reciprocity and equality they develop concepts of fairness and justice.
- They begin to question and dispute. They like to argue. They wonder why, how, and how come?
- Most solve math and science problems haphazardly, using trial and error.



Suggested Parent/Teacher Practices

- Solve problems as a family, group, or team.
- Promote peer teaching. Ask a child to teach something to you or to another child.
- Use examples to support ideas. Require children to support opinions with examples.
- Engage children in discussing issues of justice and fairness.
- Establish a democratic climate in your home and/or classroom where children have input to rules and decisions.
- Help children to develop skills in outlining and word-mapping.
- Provide opportunities to demonstrate/illustrate parts of a whole.
- Give practice in value clarification: (1) choosing from alternatives with awareness of pros and cons, (2) prizing; being proud of owning the choice, and (3) acting with consistency.
- Debate issues within the family and/or class. Demonstrate how to speak on both sides of an issue.
- Give ample opportunity for children to explain their thoughts. (Explanation is not an excuse!)

A Profile of Middle School Students, Part 3B Ages 11-13



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THE *THINKING SELF* (Abstract Thinking Stage) (Continuation of Part 3A)

At about age 12 some children transition from logical thinking to abstract thinking. Logical thinking based on concrete, black and white information yields to the ability to think without needing to see or manipulate objects. Ages 12 through 18 is the focal time for developing abstract thinking.

Characteristics of Children Ages 12-14

- They develop *lattice-group structure*, that is, the ability to network ideas and recognize connective links.
- They combine hypothetical propositions to apply to future events.
- They enjoy *nesting*, that is, classifying relationships between smaller parts and their all-inclusive whole.
- They are able to deal with abstractions.
- They form hypotheses and test them in a mature, scientific manner.
- They solve problems systematically and engage in mental manipulations.
- They can think through new problems, moving forward and backward and taking into account as many or as few qualities as seem relevant.
- They begin futuristic thinking.
- They are able to understand and use complex language forms, i.e., metaphor, proverb, sarcasm, and satire.
- They can construct theories and make deductions without having had previous direct experience.
- Observation, comparison and comprehension of others becomes important.

Suggested Parent Practices

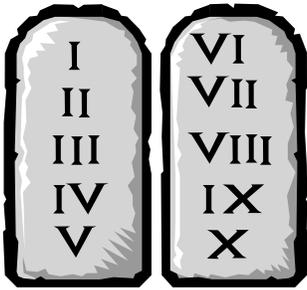
- Support *nesting* and *lattice* development through:
 1. value clarification types of scenarios where children rank choices, consider alternatives, weigh consequences, and brainstorm alternative

solutions and consequences associated with given situations.

2. outlining skills, a system of note-taking that organizes a group of ideas by using indentation to indicate the importance of an idea. Indicate the most important ideas by roman numerals, major details with capital letters, minor details by Arabic numerals and then lower case letters if further sub-division is needed. Express outline ideas in words, phrases, or sentences. Children require practice to translate an outline into a paragraph or essay, and to reduce a paragraph or essay into an outline.

3. word-mapping, a strategy of connecting main ideas and sub-divisions by making a graphic design. Indicate the most important ideas by a shape (perhaps small rectangles) with lines connecting to a larger master shape (perhaps a large rectangle). Indicate the major details of the important ideas by a second shape (perhaps an oval) connected to each rectangle. Connect the shapes with lines.

- Engage children 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 children in exercises that involve application, analysis and synthesis skills.



A Profile of Middle School Students, Part 4 Ages 11-13

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THE MORAL SELF

A Stage Three child is drawn to interpersonal conformity. He is oriented to being viewed as a good boy and she desires to be noticed as a nice girl by people who count or who are considered important. Good, to a stage three person, is whatever pleases and helps others who give approval. They conform to whatever is the popular majority behavior. At this stage a child begins to judge behavior by “intention.” “Because Stage 3 people have a self-image they want to live up to, they have for the first time, a true conscience.”²

A Stage Three person wants to please important others and desires to be considered as valuable to the social group, an essential team member. Motivated by approval and, in early adolescence, influenced by peer pressure, the Stage Three mind thinks:

- **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).
- My **internal law in middle childhood** is “I want to be nice;” “I want people to think well of me.”
- My **internal law in early adolescence** is “I want to be accepted by my peers.”

Parent/Teacher Practices that transition children from Stage 3 to Stage 4:

1. Help children develop an independent conscience based on self-respect and social responsibility.
2. Conscience shifts from rules to an inner standard. Therefore explore Gospel principles and the Ten Commandments as tools for relationship with self, God and others.
3. Discuss social and moral issues that focus on the relationship between the individual and society and our common responsibility to cooperate for the common good.
4. Teach children to apply to issues the standard “What if everybody did this?”
5. Encourage growth in initiative and industry—essential elements for acting and feeling like a responsible member of society, i.e., holding a job, serving the community, helping people outside the family and/or class.
6. Help children to develop goals, to imagine themselves as contributing members of society, and to view work as a way of contributing to the welfare of others.
7. “Parents should seek young adolescents’ opinions and listen carefully. They should also try to involve these young people in family discussions, planning, and problem-solving. Time for reflection, self-discovery, and dialogue with a parent is essential for the young adolescent. This period marks the beginning of a search for meaning that will last a lifetime.”³ Teachers share these same goals.

² Lickona, T. (1994). *Raising Good Children*. New York: Bantam Books, p. 165.

³ Bernardin, J. (1997). *Growing in Wisdom, Age and Grace*. New York: William H. Sadlier, Inc., p. 92.

A Profile of Middle School Students, Part 5 Ages 11-13

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THE SPIRITUAL SELF



During Middle School, children transition from Stage 2 (Mythic/Literal Faith) to Stage 3 (Synthetic/Conventional Faith). The natural progression during this age period is to move from emphasis on belonging to the stage of searching. A summary of both stages follows. Though examples are geared to parents, they also apply to teachers.

Stage 2:

Mythic/Literal Faith

Story Stage

“Around the age of eight, children start to distinguish between what is “real” and what is “pretend.” Because they become fascinated with stories—family stories, Bible stories, any stories—their stage is called *mythic*. They begin to tell stories about themselves and their experiences. All these stories are taken very literally, as children at this age are concrete thinkers. This explains the term *literal*. 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.”⁴

Stage appropriate ways to foster faith at this stage include the following 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.

“Continue family use of seasonal prayer and ritual. Have children plan these. Offer prayers for the dead, especially family members. Encourage your child to assume the leadership in moments of family prayer. Pray for family problems. Pray for vocations. Use the Bible for prayer especially the psalms. Teach and pray the rosary. Teach, discuss, and pray the Apostles' Creed. Incorporate silence in family prayer as well as provide guidance and opportunity for individual meditation. Teach the Prayer of St. Francis.”⁵

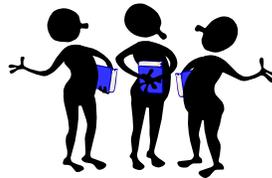
⁴ Kille, D. A. (2004). *Stages of Faith and Suggestions for Cultivating Spiritual Development*. Unpublished manuscript.

⁵ Office of Religious Education. (1994). *Keepers of the promise – A Parent's Guide to Handing on the Faith*. (Intermediate & Early Adolescent Years). Wilmington, DE: diocese of Wilmington, pp. 11-14.

Stage 3: Synthetic/Conventional Faith

Belonging Stage

“During adolescence, children become aware of others. 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. It is *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.”⁶



Stage appropriate ways to foster faith at this stage include the following 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.
- Understand that younger adolescents (12-14) “build their faith identity upon the beliefs, attitudes, and values of the Christian community.”⁷
- “Continue the prominence of Scripture in the home. Encourage the use of Sunday readings for family scriptural sharing. Teach the ‘Come, Holy Spirit’ prayer.”⁸ Encourage spontaneous prayer, journaling, guided meditation exercises and active participation in the Mass.

⁶ Kille, D. A. (2004). *Stages of Faith and Suggestions for Cultivating Spiritual Development*. Unpublished manuscript.

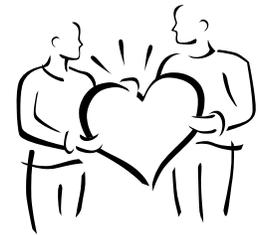
⁷ National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry. (1986). *The Challenge of Adolescent Catechesis: Maturing in Faith*. Washington, DC: National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, Inc., p. 6.

⁸ Office of Religious Education. (1994). *Keepers of the Promise – A Parent’s Guide to Handing on the Faith*. (Intermediate & Early Adolescent Years). Wilmington, DE: Diocese of Wilmington, pp. 27-28.

A Profile of Middle School Students, Part 6 Ages 11-13

Dr. Patricia M. McCormack, IHM

THE RELATIONAL-SEXUAL SELF



Elements of our culture cause confusion regarding psycho-sexual development and the appropriate expression of adolescent sexuality. Too many TV shows, soap operas, movies, and MTV-style of music advertise promiscuity, disregard for human dignity, glorification of "party animal behavior," permissiveness, immodest dress, sexual body-language, the use of crude, vulgar conversation, and such. In this atmosphere it is no wonder that questions arise about what is acceptable behavior for adolescents who are in the process of sexual development. And on top of that, adolescence is a time when youth focuses on being accepted and wanting to be included with the "in crowd." A teen hates to be singled out as weird, a "goody-goody," a nerd, or unpopular. **BUT** parents and teens need not be led astray or pressured to buckle under and to "go with the flow" if the flow is leading to dead-end choices.

Teen age years are the time for developing a personal identity that will carry us through adulthood.

- It is the time to learn our own personalities by relating with others.
- It is a time to learn how to name, claim, and tame our emotions.
- It is a time to develop self-respect, and that implies giving respect to others and becoming responsible and accountable for choices and the results of our actions.
- It is a time to apply what the Ten Commandments teach about relating with other people. The bottom line of Commandments 4 through 10 is that **people are precious gifts of God who are made in God's image. People are expressions of God -- not objects to be used, misused, abused, or discarded.**

Adolescence is a time to discover and develop the "I." Only a healthy "I" is capable of a mature relationship. A marriage requires two individual healthy "I's" in order to be a healthy "We." When adolescents jump into a serious relationship they stunt the growth of the "I." Once the relationship becomes sexual, it grabs most of the energy and it puts a freeze on development. Sexual relationships are intended for people who have already matured past their adolescence and who see that sex is but one facet of a permanent relationship. Mature people know that LOVE is far more than a feeling. It is a choice to do what is best for another person, even at the cost of personal sacrifice. A musician friend of mine expressed it this way: "Sex is just one high note in an opera. It is the hundreds of other notes that make the opera memorable or enjoyable." Adolescence is the time to develop all the hundreds of OTHER notes so that when the time is right, sex will take its healthy, holy, proper place.

Everything in creation has a GOOD, LIFE-GIVING purpose. When we use our gifts as they were designed, goodness follows. We are able to look others in the eye, be proud of our choices, experience joy, lightness, and have no need for secrecy. SEX is a part of God's design. Therefore sex is a gift, too. When used as it was intended -- **within marriage** -- it is freeing, a celebration, and private but not secret. Within marriage sex carries no sense of shame. It brings joy, well-being, hope, and all good things. It creates life. SEX includes foreplay, that is, activity that causes sexual arousal and readies the body for intercourse. For that reason, foreplay is reserved to married couples so that the God-given gift of

intercourse can be enjoyed, bond the couple more closely into a unity, and possibly lead to new life. In a truly loving relationship, human dignity is safeguarded.

Age 11-15 is a time to develop MANY -- not exclusive -- relationships with people of the opposite sex. Adolescents benefit from joining group activities like dancing, bowling, swimming, and games that involve intellectual and social skills. Early adolescence is a time to be learning what qualities you like in people of the opposite sex. It is a time for self-reflection to identify what gifts you bring to a relationship and what qualities you still need to develop in yourself in order to maintain a healthy relationship.

Around age 16 or 17 adolescents benefit more from double-dates than private single dates. Teens who are mature are probably capable of keeping single-dating in a healthy, respectful level but it still diverts their energy and focus from the tasks of adolescence. *[Refer to the footnote for the Tasks of Adolescence.]* Single-dating invites temptation. It may take self-control to avoid "occasions of lust" but love does such things! Holding hands and goodnight kisses and walking arm in arm can be healthy, holy expressions. BUT "making out," that is, prolonged kissing with arousal as the goal, is in the "foreplay category." That's another reason for double-dating. It is a safeguard and natural support for abstinence.

ADVICE:

Often, sex has a different meaning for boys than for girls. Frequently, hormones motivate sexual drive in boys while girls view sex as a way to experience intimacy, closeness, preference, and belonging.

Help boys to understand the dignity of women. Discuss how love protects the reputation of the girl, does not put pressure on her, wants her to be able to hold her head up high, to be honest with her parents, etc. Discuss with the boy that if he is not able to provide a home, steady income, health care, education for a child, and the intention of fidelity for a lifetime, he is not ready to father a child and, therefore, he is not ready for a sexual relationship with a girl.

Help girls to recognize that abstinence (self-control) eliminates the possibility of unwanted pregnancy, venereal disease, ruined reputation, "freezing" her emotional development, and the choice between adoption, abortion, and motherhood while still being a child herself. Discuss that "intimacy" and "sex" are not synonyms.

Suggest to both boys and girls that a good rule of thumb is "Make choices that you would do in front of your parents or grandparents, or someone whose opinion you respect deeply." Parents help adolescents by establishing mutual respect, responsibility, and self-control as the standard for social engagement. These qualities differentiate love from lust, the topic of a concluding poem:

**Love vs. Lust
(by Sebastian Temple)**

**Love is a silence; lust is a roar.
Love is satisfied; lust wants more.
Love is a giving; lust only takes.
Love is a mending of hearts; lust break.**

Developmental Tasks of Adolescence:

(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, (6) recognizing personal worth and competence.