

preschool  
**BACKGROUND FOR CATECHISTS**

***Know Your Audience***

**Just like Jesus, every good catechist knows their audience.**

***“The catechist – must take into consideration all the human factors of a particular age level in order to present the Gospel message in a vital and compelling way.” (NDC #48)***

***Who Are Your Preschoolers?***

**FAITH DEVELOPMENT**

**Children at this age:**

- ❖ Need parents and family life as a ground for their faith.
- ❖ View size, power, and position as reasons for responding to God, parents, and rules.
- ❖ Need to share in common language and rituals of faith.
- ❖ Can begin to develop a personal relationship with God, especially through prayer.
- ❖ Form dispositions toward the world and attitudes toward worship that will last a lifetime.
- ❖ Need continuity and routine to provide order to their world.
- ❖ Focus on images rather than reality.
- ❖ Need help to distinguish imagination from reality.
- ❖ Need assurance that scary wishes do not make bad things come true.
- ❖ View events in isolation.



# Preschool Catechists

## Guiding Principles

### **Catechists should:**

- Change activities frequently to accommodate short attention spans. Repeat short and simple songs, poems, and stories often for and with the children. Do not present abstract religious concepts since these are beyond the mental capabilities of the preschool child.
- Be sensitive to children who cannot accomplish tasks requiring coordination. Praise attempts at the “process” rather than the “product.”
- Provide individual attention to be given to each child. Have small pupil-teacher ratio.
- Promote trust and helpfulness, spontaneity and caring, mutual respect and a sense of wonder through your attitude. Help children develop an appreciation for the simple ordinary things in life; nurture a sense of reverence through informal prayers of praise and thanksgiving.
- Employ a basic routine and use clear directions. Ensure a feeling of security within each child by keeping basically the same order of activities. Create an atmosphere where routine and acceptance are taken for granted—no matter how the children differ.
- Allow children to experience your love and care for them as a way to know a loving God—faith is more “caught” than “taught.” Help children to discover positive attributes of God through parents and a caring environment of Church.
- Provide climate and experiences allowing children’s self-worth to be raised: affirmation, acceptance, respect, freedom, activities allowing for success. Show sensitivity to children’s feelings.
- Allow opportunities for making choices as a basis for moral development; children need to make decisions. Provide the stable environment children need for emotional security by providing freedom within limits. Show patience toward children who do not want to participate in group activities. With patience and encouragement, children will eventually join in.
- Encourage natural curiosity by providing many sensory experiences. Foster growth in appreciation of use of the senses in addition to the magnificence of all creation.
- Help children discover their powers and capabilities as a way to appreciate themselves as unique and special.
- Listen patiently to children’s attempts to question and verbalize—do not rush through talking sessions.
- Help children learn to experience, and thus cope, with many small group situations. Encourage but do not force sharing. Affirm children’s friendliness and kindness as good. Encourage them to be thoughtful of others.

## **Preschool – Age 3**

### **PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Children at this age:**

- Gain control of large motor skills.
- Gain control of SOME fine motor skills, and over body processes. (competency important to self image)
- Need to stretch and move frequently.
- Increase use of hand skills for self care, eating, dressing, building and use of toys, simple household tasks.
- Alternate steps in climbing; begin to learn to jump.

### **SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Children at this age:**

- Need a strong parental influence.
- Need to be valued for who the individual is.
- Need freedom to achieve a measure of independence (“I can do it myself”).
- Are sensitive to others’ actions and feelings’ are easily hurt themselves.
- Are just beginning to learn to share, but prefer solitary activities and “parallel” play with others.
- Like one-on-one interaction with adults, want to please and need recognition.
- Enjoy routines which bring feelings of stability and security.
- Like to pretend; will use puppets to initiate conversation.
- Can identify with things that make them feel happy, sad, angry, or frightened.

### **COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Children at this age:**

- Show marked growth in language.
- Make and understand pertinent comments.
- Speak in short sentences.
- Practice conversational skills, although conversations are often one-sided.
- Have limited attention spans (4-6 minutes).
- Enjoy simple stories; want them to be retold with the same sequence and inflections.
- May have difficulty in understanding directions and require one brief direction at a time.
- Need to see, hear, and touch lesson related objects and pictures.
- Learn by experiencing and imitating.
- Delight in discovering self and world.
- Develop imaginations.
- Love to pretend.
- Believe all inanimate objects have human traits.

## **Preschool – Age 4**

### **PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Children at this age:**

- Are refining motor skills; large skills are developed and in balance; are developing their small muscle control.
- Change activities frequently; are incapable of sitting still for any length of time unless highly motivated, attention span is limited.
- Are full of energy and action.
- Are improving their physical coordination.
- Have interest in manipulative materials.
- Are developing good sense of rhythm.

### **SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Children at this age:**

- Need a strong parental influence.
- Are curious about surroundings—are eager to use senses to explore.
- May begin to share with a friend; undergo a period of testing “my” world against peers/siblings.
- Are nearly self-dependent in a routine; however, vacillate between dependence and independence.
- Appreciate having individuality recognized.
- Need to feel welcomed and wanted by family and friends.
- Like making choices; may begin to see wisdom of rules.
- Crave companionship of peers.
- Need to know “what comes next.”
- Like group work and planned experiences, especially parties and celebrations.

### **COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Children at this age:**

- Have a strong sense of wonder and awe about life.
- Have a strong desire to learn.
- Are eager for intellectual manipulation.
- Are becoming more acute in perceptual ability.
- Are imaginative and creative.
- Delight in long words.
- Delight in playful activity such as rhyming.
- Perceive analogies.
- Speak in sentences, but have limited linguistic expression of experience.
- Have fluent expression through play.
- Are not always able to judge adequately for their own safety.

- Are animistic (all objects have feelings).
- Are anthropomorphic (attribute human characteristics to inanimate objects and to God).
- Are in symbolic stage of drawing.
- Understand and can explain pictures with special characteristics which are exaggerated—even if the results are not often recognized by adults.

For more information regarding curriculum or the faith development of children, please visit the Catholic Diocese of Richmond, Christian Formation website  
<http://www2.richmonddiocese.org/ocf/> or email us at [cf@richmonddiocese.org](mailto:cf@richmonddiocese.org).

## NOTES

- ❖ Pope John Paul II in **On Catechesis in Our Time** encourages the use of advances in pedagogy; biology, sociology as they help us to model God's Divine Pedagogy (teaching us gradually in stages according to our level of development). The above noted information is consistent with such documents as the *General Directory for Catechesis*, the *National Directory for Catechesis*, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and other Catechetical Documents of the Church.
- ❖ The above sciences have limitations. While this information does provide references to typical age ranges, children continue to be viewed as individuals and individual differences need to be taken into account.

