

Getting to Know Your Third Grade Students

Who is the eight- to nine-year-old child, and how do you best develop in him or her a love of learning and the attitudes of faith? *Come, Follow Me 3* has been developed with the best knowledge of child development and psychology in mind, so that the lessons and activities are suited to the developmental level of the third grader. It's important for you to share this knowledge, too, so that you'll better understand your students.

Although every child is unique, there are some common characteristics generally shared by eight- to nine-year-olds. You may add to this list yourself, once you've had time with the children!

- The third grader *is eager to join groups* of peers. He or she *learns well in groups*. At this age, children are most comfortable in gender-separated groups, and they feel it's important to follow the group's expectations, no matter what the consequences. Children in this age group strongly dislike being publicly embarrassed.
- Third graders are at a *"doing" age and learn best through the concrete*. They learn through what they can see and hear and taste and touch. The child of this age is not a passive learner and *needs to be actively involved in the "who," "what," and "why"* of the lessons. Third graders are developing longer attention spans and are *beginning to master some study skills*.
- Third graders continue to *exhibit concrete rather than abstract thinking*. They learn best when new information can be connected or related to something they have already experienced. This age child *enjoys solving puzzles*, and likes to do simple cross-word puzzles and mazes.
- Third graders are at the *hero-worshiping stage* and need suitable models of Christian living to imitate. They are very *sensitive to praise and criticism*.
- The third grader *perceives the need for guidelines on behavior*. While realizing the need for these guidelines, third graders have problems controlling their tempers.
- Third graders generally *know right from wrong*, particularly with the help of advice from adults, or from rules and guidelines. They very much want to tell the truth, and will *sometimes avoid talking, rather than telling a lie*. Third graders don't like to be discovered in wrongdoing, and often try to cover up such behavior. At this age, children may want to, and sometimes do, talk back to adults, especially to members of their families.
- Third graders *continue to grow in independence*. They feel a need for increasing independence from the family, yet they perceive that they still need to belong. This age child *enjoys making plans* and being a part of decisions made in the classroom. Third graders enjoy activities and projects that call upon their *increasing ability to care for others*.
- A *sense of wonder characterizes the third grade child*. This age child recognizes and appreciates the special qualities found in seemingly ordinary people. The child's *capacity for faith* is growing and blossoming, as well as a sense of justice and fairness, based on reciprocity.
- The third grader *feels emotions deeply*, yet can't express them or identify them suitably. A *clearly developing sense of humor* is seen in this age child, which sometimes manifests itself in teasing or mocking others.
- The third grader *enjoys playing sports that have simple rules*. Hand to eye coordination, as well as other fine motor skills continue to develop. This age child is better able to do crafts, with less assistance than before, and is better able to cut and paste.

Ministering to Your Students

To teach third graders that God is loving, you have to show them this love by your actions and attitudes. In working with third graders, constantly build them up with praise, rewards, recognition, and appreciation. For the children to understand their own value, your message of self-worth must be repeated again and again.

In ministering to your students, you should concentrate on God's love rather than human weakness and sin. You can help third graders learn to appreciate themselves and their talents; to treasure their families, their friends and themselves; and to trust in God's abiding presence.