

Getting to Know Your Eighth Grade Students

Who is the thirteen- to fourteen-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 8* 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 eighth 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 thirteen- to fourteen-year-olds. Being aware of these could help you understand and teach your students better.

- The eighth grader is an *early adolescent*, experiencing the beginnings of the transition period between childhood and adulthood. Adolescence is a time of great development—physical, moral, emotional, social, psychological, and spiritual. Some of these changes are sudden. More often, progress is quite erratic. You will notice that the changes that occur in adolescents are highly individual and varied. You won't have a classroom full of students experiencing the same changes at the same pace!
- Eighth graders *value peer acceptance* and find it important to “belong.” There is a general tendency to want to look, act, and dress alike. Conformity brings about a certain feeling of “safety” and “comfort.” In spite of the great personal desire to belong, the eighth grader can be non-accepting and critical of others.
- Adolescence can be a time of profound *moral development*. Early adolescence is a time of questioning. The young people of this stage are aware of the moral conflicts within their society. The students need opportunities to talk through and think through these conflicts. They need to be certain of the Church's role in their moral development. Good adult role models are important.
- Eighth graders enjoy being trusted and are ready to take on *greater responsibilities*. Long-range assignments, personal involvement in the planning of liturgies, and interaction with younger students are some good ways to develop trust and responsibility.
- Children of this grade level are becoming *independent*. A strong sense of *self-identity* is an asset. A stress on uniqueness and creativity in all its forms help mold a strong sense of self.
- Eighth graders are *protective of their privacy*. While creating an atmosphere for sharing and self-expression, respect the desire to want to keep some information private.
- *Setting and attaining short-term and long-term goals* is a habit that eighth graders can achieve. With goal-setting and practice comes the ability to deal with successes and failures.
- Competing with the family for the attention of the eighth grader is the peer group. *There is a feeling of commitment to family and friends*. Which groups is more influential at a given time depends on the nature of the issue. Conflict between the authority figure and the eighth grader is common, even in the best of situations.
- *Physical changes vary*. Some eighth graders may become more adept at sports and games, while others may experience uneven growth of body parts and may find themselves to be awkward and uncoordinated. Personal hygiene is important at this age level.
- Eighth graders have a *growing interest in sexuality*. They are capable of learning about the roles that men and women have in God's plan for human reproduction. The students can also learn about the respect due members of the opposite sex.