

The Child of Three - source unknown

Conformity is the chief characteristic of the child of three. He is now becoming a more self-controlled, secure, and independent child. His greater motor control makes him more skillful; his greater vocabulary allows him to be more sociable; his desire to co-operate makes him more adjustable. This has been termed the "most delightful age" of the pre-school child. (Gesell, *The First Five Years of Life*, pp. 40-46)

His Physical Self

The three-year-old is beginning to have himself well in hand. He enjoys greater motor activity and better co-ordination. He is now "more sure and nimble on his feet," and maintains better balance and equilibrium as he tries to jump and run. (Gesell, op. cit., p. 41)

The three-year-old works and plays more vigorously, more boisterously, and more constructively than the two-year-old. He spends a longer period of time on one activity. He likes play equipment, such as large blocks, wagons, slides, steps to climb, that will provide the large muscle activity children of this age need.

He is also becoming more skillful with the use of his hands. He can draw a crude circle, pour out of a pitcher, make things out of clay. He likes to use crayons and handles them better than before.

His Emotional Self

Life seems to quiet down for the three-year-old. He now seems to love to conform. Whereas his most frequent word at two years was "no," he now uses "yes" much more readily. He likes to give; he likes to share. He now reveals a co-operative easy-going attitude toward life in general. He is now more sure of himself and goes forward positively to meet each new adventure. (Illg and Ames, *Child Behavior*, p. 27)

The three-year-old still has difficulties handling his emotions. Because he has not yet learned to direct his emotional energy into more useful channels, he still reacts with temper tantrums and crying; however, his outbursts are less frequent and will not last long. Anger, fear, crying, and laughter can follow each other in quick succession. He can experience prolonged anxiety and is capable of jealousy. He can be very jealous of his mother's attention when it is given to a baby brother or sister. His fears are personal, arising from some experience. Fear of death does not seem to disturb a three-year-old because death does not have much significance for him. (Gesell, *The First Five Years of Life*, p. 45)

Because he is curious and as yet has not developed sympathetic understanding, he can be destructive without meaning to be so. Curiosity will cause him to pull things apart - the lovely flower, the pretty doll.

His Intellectual Self

The three-year-old can be expected to understand simple questions, statements, and directions. In fact, one of the outstanding characteristics of the three-year-old is his readiness to respond to people speaking to him. He expands his acquaintance with the world by asking such questions as "Why?" "What is that?" His own vocabulary and ability to use language is increasing. (Gesell, op. cit., pp. 42-43) He understands more words than he uses. Because his experience is so limited, many adult explanations become meaningless and confusing to him. Abstract words are beyond his comprehension.

The three-year-old likes stories which are rich in sense impressions and actions. He likes stories about the sights he sees, the substances he touches, the activities in which he engages, the sounds which he hears. He is most responsive to stories about moving things - engines, boats, animals, children. He wants animals to make their characteristic noises. He is not interested in descriptive or explanatory passages. Rhythm and repetition as well as humor appeal to him. (Jenkins, *These Are your Children*, p. 69)

His sense of time is meager, but he is beginning to learn the meaning of "now it is time." (Gesell et al., *Infant and Child in the Culture of Today*, p. 204)

His Interpersonal Relationships

The child of three has a great desire to please and is eager for the approval of others, as indicated by such questions as,

"Is this the way?" "Was it right?" He still likes parallel play and has no real understanding of co-operation. He is, however, beginning to understand what it is to share and take turns. (Gesell, op. cit., pp. 70, 73)

A three-year-old is acquiring a feeling of personal identity - becoming "aware of himself as a person among persons... He notes emotional expressions of others" and tries to please and conform; however, resistance to authority does crop out. (Gesell, *The First Five Years of Life*, pp. 41, 44-45)

Mother is still the favored companion of the three-year-old. He needs her for security and recognition and to encourage his independence. (Ilg and Ames, op. cit., pp. 198-201)

His vocabulary still dwells on "I-me-mine" but is gradually shifting to "we-us-ours." He is beginning to sense his relationship with others. He enjoys brief social experiences as his first venture in co-operative play. (Gesell, op. cit., p. 45)

Implications for Christian Education

While the three-year-old may not have a very definite idea of God, certain concepts can be developed which affect his later religious understanding. Reassuring experiences with people and with nature are a basis on which a satisfying idea of God can be built.

Many a three-year-old is ready to attend church school. He can be taught to pray and may be very conscientious about bedtime prayers.

Because the three-year-old retains impressions rather than facts, Bible stories must be carefully selected. They must have elements of the familiar, and be constructed simply. Happy church school experiences in God's house and with God's people will greatly influence his later concept of God.

He should be encouraged to be helpful by putting away toys, watering plants, keeping a room neat. Through these little tasks he learns responsibility and gains self-confidence. He acquires a certain amount of independence and security by learning to help himself and others. (Jenkins et al., *These Are Your Children*, pp. 64-66)

Because of his curiosity about the world around him he needs to have attitudes of wonder and sympathy developed as he explores new things.