

# Living the “Good” Life—Levels of Morality in Children and Adults

January 8—INTRODUCTION



Morality definition: 1. Accepted standard 2. Right vs. wrong 3. Virtuous behavior

Why morality? 1. Because God says so.  
2. To preserve social peace.  
3. To make and keep friends.  
4. To grow relationships (Confucius)  
4. Living by morals makes each life fulfilling and happy.

Morality example:

1. Cell phone use in a car: me call, me answer, others use?  
Does morality depend on the person? On the situation?

Piaget: 1. [judged by individual opinion--me] Rightness, Virtue  
2. [judged by social agreement--us] Conformity to standards of right conduct  
3. [judged by vision and consequences—the good] Ethical wisdom

Moral Phase Table—see table “Levels of Morality in Children and Adults”  
Moral levels: Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg, Fowler, Droege  
Disconnected domains: personal, interpersonal, and societal: Turiel

References: see back side of Table “Levels of Morality”

## Levels of Morality in Children and Adults

| <b>Moral Phase</b>          | <b>Jean Piaget</b>  | <b>Eric Erikson</b>  | <b>Lawrence Kohlberg</b>                                  | <b>James Fowler</b>  | <b>Sunday School Droege</b>                           |
|-----------------------------|---|--|---|--|---|
| <b>OBEDIENCE</b>            | 1. Preconventional<br>Physical needs<br><br>Sensorimotor<br>self 0-7 years  | 1. Trust vs.<br>Mistrust   | 1. Obedience<br>and<br>punishment                         | 0.Safe and<br>secure vs.<br>neglect and<br>abuse<br><br>0-2-6+ years                   | God is<br>like<br>Mommy<br>and<br>Daddy               |
| <b>FAIRNESS</b>             | 1. Preconventional<br>External rewards<br><br>Sensorimotor<br>concrete 0-7 years.<br><br>Symbolize<br>actions 7-11 years. | 2. Autonomy<br>Vs. Shame and<br>Doubt                            | 2. Self-interest,<br>paying for a<br>benefit              | 1. Impulse<br>control<br>3-7+ years<br><br>2. Justice and<br>Reciprocity<br>7-12 years | God is a<br>person.<br><br>What's<br>fair is<br>fair. |
| <b>NORMS</b>                | 2. Conventional<br>Correct role<br><br>Symbolize<br>norms 11+ years.  | 3. Initiative vs.<br>Guilt<br><br>4. Industry vs.<br>Inferiority | 3. Interpersonal<br>norms, one of<br>the 'good'<br>people | 3. Conformity to<br>custom<br><br>12-18+ years   | I believe<br>what the<br>church<br>believes.          |
| <b>PERSONAL BELIEF</b>      | 2. Conventional<br>Social Order   | 5. Identity vs.<br>Role confusion                                | 4. Authority,<br>law and order                            | 4. Angst/Struggle<br>Responsibility<br>for own belief<br>18-40+ years                  | As I see<br>it, God<br>is...                          |
| <b>DIALOGUE</b>             | 3. Post-<br>Conventional<br>Shared standards  | 6. Intimacy vs.<br>Isolation                                     | 5. Social<br>contract (20%)                               | 5. Mid-life crisis<br>Paradox and<br>Transcendence<br>behind symbols<br>40+ if ever    | More<br>than just<br>words                            |
| <b>UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES</b> | 3. Post-<br>conventional<br>Ideals, rights,<br>duties   | 7. Generativity<br>vs. Stagnation                                | 6. Universal<br>ethical<br>principles<br>(6%)             | 6. Universal<br>unity<br><br>Late life, Rare   | I have a<br>dream.                                    |
|                             |   | 8. Ego Integrity<br>vs. Despair                                  |   |  |   |

### **SEPARATE DOMAINS OF MORALITY:**

Turiel and others in the last 20 years have divided morality into 3 “domains”: Personal, Interpersonal, and Societal. They have validated that in many cultures the youth think of morality in these separate domains and have a different morality in each of these domains. Personal morality is seen as an individual choice with no outside requirements. Interpersonal morality and Societal morality may have different rules. Is it OK for you / your friends / society to use a cell phone while driving?

### **REFERENCES:**

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2. *Identity and the Life Cycle*, Eric Erikson, page 129
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4. *Moral Stages: A current formulation and response to critics*, Lawrence Kohlberg
5. *Stages of Faith*, James Fowler
6. *Faith Passages and Patterns*, T. A. Droege
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8. *To Have or to Be*, Erich Fromm
8. Justice with Michael Sandel at [www.JusticeHarvard.org](http://www.JusticeHarvard.org), episodes 11 and 12
9. Oxytocin: [http://www.cnn.com/2011/12/27/opinion/zak-moral-molecule/index.html?hpt=hp\\_t2](http://www.cnn.com/2011/12/27/opinion/zak-moral-molecule/index.html?hpt=hp_t2)
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# Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

## Stages of Moral Development

By [Kendra Cherry](#), About.com Guide

Moral development is a topic of interest in both psychology and education. Psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg modified and expanded upon [Jean Piaget's](#) work to form a theory that explained the development of moral reasoning. Piaget described a two-stage process of moral development, while Kohlberg theory of moral development outlined six stages within three different levels. Kohlberg extended Piaget's theory, proposing that moral development is a continual process that occurs throughout the lifespan.

### "The Heinz Dilemma"

Kohlberg based his theory upon research and interviews with groups of young children. A series of moral dilemmas were presented to children, who were then interviewed to determine the reasoning behind their judgments of each scenario. The following is one example of the dilemmas Kohlberg presented.

#### **Heinz Steals the Drug**

*In Europe, a woman was near death from a special kind of cancer. There was one drug that the doctors thought might save her. It was a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had recently discovered. The drug was expensive to make, but the druggist was charging ten times what the drug cost him to make. He paid \$200 for the radium and charged \$2,000 for a small dose of the drug.*

*The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could only get together about \$ 1,000 which is half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said: "No, I discovered the drug and I'm going to make money from it." So Heinz got desperate and broke into the man's store to steal the drug-for his wife. Should the husband have done that? (Kohlberg, 1963)."*

Kohlberg was not interested so much in the answer to the question of whether Heinz was wrong or right, but in the *reasoning* for each participant's decision. The responses were then classified into various stages of reasoning in his theory of moral development.

#### **Level 1. Preconventional Morality**

- **Stage 1 - Obedience and Punishment**

The earliest stage of moral development is especially common in young children, but adults are also capable of expressing this type of reasoning. At this stage, children see rules as fixed and absolute. Obeying the rules is important because it is a means to avoid punishment.

- **Stage 2 - Individualism and Exchange**  
At this stage of moral development, children account for individual points of view and judge actions based on how they serve individual needs. In the Heinz dilemma, children argued that the best course of action was the choice that best-served Heinz's needs. Reciprocity is possible, but only if it serves one's own interests.

## **Level 2. Conventional Morality**

- **Stage 3 - Interpersonal Relationships**  
Often referred to as the "good boy-good girl" orientation, this stage of moral development is focused on living up to social expectations and roles. There is an emphasis on conformity, being "nice," and consideration of how choices influence relationships.
- **Stage 4 - Maintaining Social Order**  
At this stage of moral development, people begin to consider society as a whole when making judgments. The focus is on maintaining law and order by following the rules, doing one's duty and respecting authority.

## **Level 3. Postconventional Morality**

- **Stage 5 - Social Contract and Individual Rights**  
At this stage, people begin to account for the differing values, opinions and beliefs of other people. Rules of law are important for maintaining a society, but members of the society should agree upon these standards.
- **Stage 6 - Universal Principles**  
Kohlberg's final level of moral reasoning is based upon universal ethical principles and abstract reasoning. At this stage, people follow these internalized principles of justice, even if they conflict with laws and rules.

## **Criticisms of Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development:**

- Does moral reasoning necessarily lead to moral behavior? Kohlberg's theory is concerned with moral thinking, but there is a big difference between knowing what we *ought* to do versus our actual actions.
- Is justice the only aspect of moral reasoning we should consider? Critics have pointed out that Kohlberg's theory of moral development overemphasizes the concept as justice when making moral choices. Factors such as compassion, caring and other interpersonal feelings may play an important part in moral reasoning
- Does Kohlberg's theory overemphasize Western philosophy? Individualistic cultures emphasize personal rights while collectivist cultures stress the importance of society and community. Eastern cultures may have different moral outlooks that Kohlberg's theory does not account for.

## **The Stages of Moral Reasoning: Preschool to Adulthood**

*By Dr. Thomas Lickona*

*(Excerpt from Raising Good Children, by Dr. Thomas Lickona, pp. 11-15, A Bantam Book, Sept. 1983, Feb. 1985, Oct. 1994, New York). Used by permission for one year from Random House. For on-line information about other Random House, Inc. books and authors, see Internet Web Site at <http://www.randomhouse.com> . )*

The second part of the story of moral development raises the curtain on the six stages of moral reasoning.

These stages of moral reasoning begin in the preschool years and may still be developing during adulthood. The chart (below) gives a thumbnail sketch of these stages; later I'll devote a chapter to each of them. Think of these stages as theories of right and wrong that we carry around in our heads as children, teenagers, or adults. Each stage or theory has a different idea of what's right and a different idea of the reason why a person should be good. Each new stage of moral reasoning brings a person a step closer to a fully developed morality of respect.

For each stage, the chart also indicates what I think are reasonable developmental goals: that is, the approximate age period when I think kids of normal intelligence, growing up in a supportive and stimulating moral environment, have a good chance of attaining a particular stage. Take a minute to look at this chart. You are a big part of your child's moral environment, but you're not the only influence on your child's progress through these stages of moral reasoning. Your child's general intelligence and amount and variety of social interaction (friendships, participation in groups) are also important. As kids get older, social and the intellectual experiences beyond the family are especially important in developing the society-wide "big picture" that's part of Stages 4 and 5.

What do these stages of moral reasoning tell us? They tell us, first of all, that kids are not short adults. They think differently from us. They don't see the world the way we do.

### **The Stages of Moral Reasoning\***

*(Ages indicate reasonable developmental expectations for a child of normal intelligence growing up in a supportive moral environment.)*

|  |                    |  |
|--|--------------------|--|
| <b>STAGE 0: EGOCENTRIC REASONING</b><br>(preschool years - around age 4)                               | What's Right:      | I should get my own way.   |
|  | Reason to be good: | To get rewards and avoid punishments.  |
| <b>STAGE 1: UNQUESTIONED OBEDIENCE</b><br>(around kindergarten age)                                    | What's Right:      | I should do what I'm told.   |
|  | Reason to be good: | To stay out of trouble.  |
| <b>STAGE 2: WHAT'S-IN-IT-FOR ME FAIRNESS</b><br>(early elementary grades)                              | What's Right:      | I should look out for myself but be fair to those who are fair to me.                          |
|  | Reason to be good: | Self-interest: What's in it for me?  |
| <b>STAGE 3: INTERPERSONAL CONFORMITY</b><br>(middle-to-upper elementary grades and early-to-mid teens) | What's Right:      | I should be a nice person and live up to the expectations of people I know and care about.     |
|  | Reason to be good: | So others will think well of me (social approval) and I can think well of myself (self-esteem) |
| <b>STAGE 4:</b>  | What's Right:      | I should fulfill my responsibilities to  |

|  |                    |   |
|--|--------------------|---|
| <b>RESPONSIBILITY TO "THE SYSTEM"</b><br>(high-school years or late teens) |                    | the social or value system I feel part of.  |
|  | Reason to be good: | To keep the system from falling apart and to maintain self-respect as somebody who meets my obligations.  |
| <b>STAGE 5: PRINCIPLED CONSCIENCE</b><br>(young adulthood)                 | What's Right:      | I should show the greatest possible respect for the rights and dignity of every individual person and should support a system that protects human rights. |
|  | Reason to be good: | <b>The obligation of conscience to act in accordance with the principle of respect for all human beings.</b>  |

*\*Stages 1 through 5 are adapted from Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral reasoning as described in Kohlberg (1975, 1978, 1981); Stage 0 is adapted from William Damon (1977) and Robert Selman (1980). Parents are often surprised to learn that kids' moral reasoning is so different from their own and goes through such swings as they move through the stages. At Stage 0 (Egocentric Reasoning), which usually rules the roost at age 4 (but may start to show up even sooner), kids' moral logic is almost laughably self-centered. "Not fair! Not fair!" they say, meaning, "I'm not getting what I want!" Their moral indignation comes from a real belief that whatever they want is fair, just because they want it!*

At **Stage 1** (Unquestioning Obedience), often dominant at around age 5, kids do an about-face and reason, "Grown-ups have a right to be boss, and I should do what they say!" At **Stage 2** (What's-in-It-for-Me Fairness), which usually breaks through between 5 1/2 and 7, kids do another flip-flop and think, "We kids have got our rights! Parents shouldn't order us around!" Stage 2 thinkers also develop a fierce but narrow sense of fairness and look at being good as kind of a tit-for-tat deal ("I'll help with the dishes, but what'll you do for me?").

I want to stress that even in the early stages of moral reasoning development, you can't be sure of a child's moral stage just from knowing his or her chronological age. One 5-year-old may be mainly Stage 0, another Stage 1. One 7-year-old may be predominantly Stage 1, another Stage 2. And the higher the moral stage, the more variation there is in when kids reach it. Many teenagers, for example, are still stuck in Stage 2 and are responsible for a lot of the me-centered behavior that we looked at earlier in the chapter. Other kids, especially if their social environment has demanded more than a what's-in-it-for-me morality, may begin to develop Stage 3 (Interpersonal Conformity) as early as the middle-to-upper elementary grades and continue to develop it through their early teens.

**At Stage 3**, kids are very much concerned about what people think of them. They figure, "If I want people to like me, I'd better be a nice person." By living up to other people's expectations, Stage 3 kids can also feel good about themselves. This kind of thinking can be the source of a lot of cooperative and caring behavior.

But Stage 3 has an obvious weakness: it confuses what's right with what other people want you to do. That's okay as long as the other people are presenting positive moral values (be kind, honest, respectful of others). The challenge for parents of Stage 3 teenagers is to keep them tuned into positive values and strong enough to resist the peer-group seduction to get into things like sex, drugs, and drinking because "everybody's doing it. "

Many teenagers, some during high school, some later, come to realize the shortcomings of Stage 3 reasoning and go on to develop the more independent, society-wide perspective of **Stage 4** (Responsibility to the System). They keep the best of Stage 3 -- they still care about people they know personally -- but they look farther and see more. Stage 4 reasons: "There's more to being a good person than pleasing my family and friends. There's a bigger society out there, and I'm part of it. I've got certain responsibilities and obligations to think of."

The particular social system that a Stage 4 thinker feels obligated to may not be the one that most people support. A Stage 4 socialist living in a capitalistic society, for example, would be opposed to the values of the prevailing system. But regardless of their particular beliefs or values, Stage 4 thinkers share a sense of commitment and duty to some kind of a larger system beyond themselves. Most of the time, that system includes familiar social institutions: church, school, family, and country.

When Stage 4 considers irresponsible behavior, it thinks, "What if everybody did it? What if everybody shoplifted? What if everybody did as they pleased? The whole system would collapse." The great majority of Stage 4 thinkers believe that people should obey the law, pay their taxes, vote in elections, take care of their children, help their community, and serve their country. They believe in being a good and conscientious citizen. They're the backbone of any society. Teenagers and young adults who don't develop Stage 4 moral reasoning -- and, sadly, a great many do not -- lack the understanding of civic responsibilities required for good citizenship.

The major drawback of Stage 4 is that it sometimes gets carried away with the system it believes in and rides roughshod over the rights of individual people. A Stage 4 reasoner might say, for example, that people shouldn't be allowed to assemble to protest government policy if it's going to "stir up trouble" or cause problems for the government. Some societies and some individuals use Stage 4 reasoning to suppress individual freedom in the name of "law and order" or for the sake of a "cause." When Stage 4 sees a conflict between the system and individual rights, it comes down on the side of the system.

**Stage 5**, the stage of principled conscience, reorders the moral priorities. It says, "Look, any social system exists to benefit its individual members, not the other way around. No system should ever violate the rights of the people it was founded to protect." The founding fathers were thinking Stage 5 when they told us that if the government doesn't protect our inalienable individual rights, we should throw it out and get a new one! And yet Stage 5 has the highest respect for law, because it knows that law is the chief instrument for securing human rights. But it also knows that there's something even more basic than law which is the reason for law in the first place. And that's morality. Respect for persons.

Stage 5 also has a strong social conscience, based on the moral principle of respect for individual persons. That principle enables Stage 5 thinkers to mentally "stand outside" their social system and ask, "Are things as good as they ought to be? Is justice being served? Are individual human rights being fully protected? Is there the greatest good for the greatest number? And as I go about my personal life, do I show respect for the rights and dignity of all the individuals I deal with?"

At present, the research shows, only a minority of adults attain Stage 5. How many would attain it if homes and schools made a systematic effort to foster moral reasoning, starting in the earliest years, nobody knows.