

believe that thoughts are all-powerful. Such thinking places them in the vulnerable position of feeling guilty and responsible for bad thoughts, which may coincide with the occurrence of a wished event. Their inability to logically reason the cause and effect of illness or an injury makes it especially difficult for them to understand such events.

### Nursing Alert

Counseling children whose parents are going through a separation or divorce should involve a discussion with the child about his or her role. Because of magical thinking, the child may believe he or she wished the other parent away. The child should be reassured that this is not the case.

Preschoolers believe in the power of words and accept their meaning literally. An example of this type of thinking is calling children “bad” because they did something wrong. In the preschooler's mind, calling them “bad” means they are a bad person; thus, it is better to say that their actions were bad by saying, for example, “That was a bad thing to do.”

## Moral Development

### Preconventional or Premoral Level (Kohlberg)

Young children's development of moral judgment is at the most basic level. They have little, if any, concern about why something is wrong. They behave because of the freedom or restriction that is placed on actions. In the punishment and obedience orientation, children (about 2 to 4 years old) judge whether an action is good or bad depending on whether it results in a reward or a punishment. If children are punished for it, the action is bad. If they are not punished, the action is good regardless of the meaning of the act. For example, if parents allow hitting, the child will perceive that hitting is good because it is not associated with punishment.

From approximately 4 to 7 years old, children are in the stage of **naïve instrumental orientation** in which actions are directed toward satisfying their needs and, less frequently, the needs of others. They have a concrete sense of justice and fairness during