

treated.

Spiritual Development

Children at this age think in concrete terms but are avid learners and have a great desire to learn about their God or deity. They picture God as human and use adjectives such as “loving” and “helping” to describe their deity. They are fascinated by the concepts of hell and heaven, with a developing conscience and concern about rules, and they may fear going to hell for misbehavior. School-age children want and expect to be punished for misbehavior and, when given the option, tend to choose a punishment that “fits the crime.” Often they view illness or injury as a punishment for a real or imagined misdeed. The beliefs and ideals of family and religious persons are more influential than those of their peers in matters of faith.

School-age children begin to learn the difference between the natural and the supernatural but have difficulty understanding symbols. Consequently, religious concepts must be presented to them in concrete terms. Prayer or other religious rituals comfort them, and if these activities are a part of their daily lives, they can help them cope with threatening situations. Their petitions to their God in prayers tend to be for tangible rewards. Although younger children expect their prayers to be answered, as they get older, they begin to recognize that this does not always occur, and they become less concerned when their prayers are not answered. They are able to discuss their feelings about their faith and how it relates to their lives (see [Cultural Considerations](#) box).

Cultural Considerations

Religious Orientation

Many schools and communities have a Judeo-Christian orientation toward prayer, holidays, and values. This may result in conflict and discomfort for children of other religious or ethnic groups. Sensitivity must be exercised so as not to offend and confuse children from other religious backgrounds, such as the Buddhist, Hindu, and Muslim faiths, and those with no religious