

this period of development.

Spiritual Development

Children generally learn about faith and religion from significant others in their environment, usually from parents and their religious beliefs and practices. However, young children's understanding of spirituality is influenced by their cognitive level. Preschoolers have a concrete concept of a God with physical characteristics, often similar to an imaginary friend. They understand simple Bible stories, memorize short prayers, and imitate the religious practices of their parents without fully understanding the significance of these rituals. Preschoolers benefit from concrete representations of religious practices, such as picture Bible books and small statues, such as those of the Nativity scene.

Development of the conscience is strongly linked to spiritual development. At this age, children are learning right from wrong and behaving correctly to avoid punishment. Wrongdoing provokes feelings of guilt, and preschoolers often misinterpret illness as a punishment for real or imagined transgressions. Observing religious traditions and participating in a religious community can help children and their families cope during stressful periods, such as illness and hospitalization ([Purow, Alisanski, Putnam, et al, 2011](#)).

Development of Body Image

The preschool years play a significant role in the development of body image. With increasing comprehension of language, preschoolers recognize that individuals have desirable and undesirable appearances. They recognize differences in skin color and racial identity and are vulnerable to learning prejudices and biases. They are aware of the meaning of words such as *pretty* or *ugly*, and they reflect the opinions of others regarding their own appearance. By 5 years old, children compare their size with that of their peers and can become conscious of being large or short, especially if others refer to them as “so big” or “so little” for their age. Research indicates that girls as young as preschool age already show concern about appearance and weight ([Skouteris, McCabe,](#)