

The Stages of Moral Reasoning

| stages | Stage 0: Egocentric Reasoning (preschool years – around age 4) | Stage 1: Unquestioning Obedience (around kindergarten age) | Stage 2: “What’s-in-it-for-me” Reasoning (early elementary grades) | Stage 3: Interpersonal Conformity (middle-to-upper ele- mentary grades and early-to-mid teens) | Stage 4: Responsibility to “The System” (high school years or late teens) | Stage 5: Principled Conscience (young adulthood) |
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| what’s right | I should get my own way. | I should do what I’m told. | I should look out for myself but be fair to those who are fair to me. | I should be a nice per- son and live up to the expectations of people I know and care about. | I should fulfill my respon- sibilities to the social or value system I feel part of. | I should show the greatest possible respect for the rights and dignity of every person and should support a system that protects human rights. |
| reason to be good | To get rewards and avoid punishments | To stay out of trouble. | Self-interest. What’s in it for me? | So others will think well of me. | To keep the system from falling apart and to main- tain self-respect...(to) meet obligations . | The obligation of con- science to act in accor- dance with the principle of respect for all human beings. |

Lickona, Thomas. Raising Good Children: From Birth Through the Teenage Years. New York: Bantam Books, 1985.