



Created and Loved by God

Topic 4

A Journey

Do not walk through time without leaving worthy evidence of your passage.

Pope John XXIII

A Journey

Have you ever been on a long journey on a train or bus that has a view of the horizon and look out the window at fields, forests, and small towns. Every once in a while you stop at a station. Our lives are something like a journey. Each person grows, develops, and changes over many, many years. You begin your journey as a tiny cell inside your mother. Later that time you have traveled a long way, and you still have a long way to go.

Here are some of the ways people change and develop during their lives.

Physical Development — After birth, there are two special times when we grow very quickly — infancy and adolescence. Babies grow so quickly that by the time they are two-and-a-half years old, they are about half as tall as they will be when they are adults. Some time after puberty, girls and boys have a growth spurt and reach their adult height.

We don't just get larger as we grow up. We also develop physical skills, like walking, running, hopping, skipping, throwing, and riding a bike. Our muscles grow larger and stronger, especially if we are physically active. We also develop skills that require fine co-ordination, like writing or making a model. Another special physical skill is eye-hand co-ordination. You need to develop this skill in order to be an artist or a scientist.

At all ages, we have to work a bit harder to keep our physical skills and strength. Many people in the later stage of their life choose to participate in activities that help them maintain strength, agility, and flexibility.

Theme 1 13

Emotional Development — In the early years of our life journey, we don't understand feelings, and we have trouble being in charge of them. Crying easily, having temper tantrums, being afraid of new situations, refusing to look at strangers — these are all ways in which babies and very young children express their emotions.

An important part of growing up is learning to become familiar with our feelings, to recognize that other people have similar feelings, and to express them in a way that is honest and respectful of others. By the time you were five or six years old, you began to do this.

The life stage of adolescence brings new feelings. Many teenagers become self-conscious and worried about what other people think about them. Sometimes they feel as if everyone is looking at them or talking about them. Because they want to be seen independently, they also have new feelings about their parents. They may be critical or angry when parents don't give them as much freedom as they want.

By the time people have reached adulthood, most of them have learned a lot about themselves and their emotions. That doesn't mean they don't get angry, upset, or sad. They do, but they are in charge of their feelings and try to express them in a way that respects others.

Feelings are part of being human, and they enrich our journey.

Theme 1 14

Social Development — Do you know what tiny babies really like to look at? The answer is human faces. It is us from the very beginning of our life journey, we know that other people will always be important to us. That is the way God created us.

In the first year of life, babies begin to make play peek-a-boo, and wave bye-bye. Their first relationships are with their family members, and these are the people they most want to be with. When they are a few years older, they enjoy playing with other children and are learning to share.

Real friendship starts to develop when you go to school. This is the time when you learn how to be a friend, not just have a friend. You begin to understand that you don't want your friends, and that you and your friend's views always agree with each other.

This process of learning about friendship continues during the life stage of adolescence. Teenagers depend a lot on their friends, and often confide in them, especially if they are upset or worried. It is also during this time that special friendships develop between girls and boys.

Relationships with other people are important throughout our entire lives. The people with whom we are the closest — family members and old friends — are our companions on our life journey.

Theme 1 15

Intellectual Development — Inside your skull is the most amazing organ in your body — your brain. From the day you were born, your brain has been helping you understand the world. You get information through your senses, and your brain organizes what you are seeing, hearing, or touching.

One of the most important tasks we have for making sense of the world is language. By the end of your first year most babies are saying a few words, and a year later they are making up small sentences like, "More milk!" or "Where Daddy?" Just like older people, babies use language to communicate with the people around them and to learn from them. As they grow older, your mind has been developing. Not only have you acquired a lot of knowledge, but you have also been learning how to learn. You know how to organize new information, and you have developed the skill of attacking a problem systematically instead of guessing. You have also learned to read, which allows you to gather new information about the world.

Intellectual development continues during adolescence. Teenagers begin to develop new ways of thinking that allow them to have more complex concepts in mathematics, and abstract subjects like philosophy.

Just as our bodies require good nourishment and exercise, so do our minds. People who study enjoy are learning that mental activity is very important for older people. Taking courses, participating in discussion groups, solving crossword puzzles, reading, and sharing ideas with friends are just some of the ways older people continue to nourish their minds.

Theme 1 16

Spiritual Development — When children are very young, the first time they hear about God and Jesus is usually from their families. Sometimes they ask, "Who made the world?" and the answer is God. When they go to school they learn more about their faith and the Christian way of life.

Prayer is an important part of our spiritual lives. As we grow up, we realize that prayer is much more than asking for things. Most of all, prayer is listening to God. We listen, and we learn to answer by the way we live our lives, especially by the way we treat one another.

Gathering together to celebrate the Eucharist is the heart of our faith. When children are very young, they don't really understand what is happening during mass. But as they grow older, they learn to listen to the readings, to be in the presence with the community, and to receive the body of Christ in communion.

During adolescence, some young people begin to have questions about their faith. It is a time when they are trying to figure out who they are and what God is calling them to do with their lives. For some of them, getting involved in a project that serves others — the homeless, the poor, the hungry — helps them see that they can make a difference by putting the word of God into action.

Spiritual development involves our whole selves — body, mind, and heart in relationship with God. It is a lifelong process as we try to discover how we develop the unique gift of life that each one of us has been given.

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Since each person is unique, each journey is unique. Some people develop quickly, others more slowly. But no matter how fast or slow, infants become children, children become adolescents, and adolescents become adults. The milestones mark our progress, but what really matters is the journey — who we are and what we do with the gift of our lives.

From the moment we begin our journey God is with us. It's important to stop as we travel and ask God to guide us along the way.

Theme 1 17

Expectations

The students will:

- identify and describe some feature features of the physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual dimensions of human development.
- recognize and appreciate the gift of each human life.
- understand their role, and the limits of their role, in helping others who may need mental health support.
- demonstrate an understanding of how our attitudes about mental health affect those around us and how they might contribute to or prevent creating stigma.

Note to the Teacher

In Grade 4, the students were introduced to the stages of human development: pre-natal, infancy, early and later childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. In this topic, they explore the many facets of human development throughout these stages.

The metaphor used in this topic is that of a journey. All discussions of human growth and development highlight both our uniqueness as individuals and that which we share in common with others. We are all on a life journey, we all change and develop over the years, but we differ in the pattern and rate of our growth.

As the students discuss the ways in which each person develops, you will find opportunities to highlight some of the differences in human gifts and talents, particularly in the areas of physical and intellectual development. Some people have excellent physical coordination that allows them to excel at sports. Others have rich imaginations or a special facility for mathematics. Despite these differences, however, all people are challenged to develop in all of the areas highlighted in this topic, especially in their spiritual development.

Throughout these human development stages, we are also challenged to embrace differences in the mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual development without judgement. In Grades 3 and 4 in *Fully Alive*, students learned about mental health, feelings, stress, and strategies to help manage their stress. In this lesson, students will explore their role in helping others who may need mental health support, the limits to their role in helping others, and the promotion of dignity by reducing stigma around those struggling with their mental health. Clarify with students the meaning of stigma: opinions or judgements held by individuals or society that negatively reflect on a person or a group of individuals.

Using the model of creating safe, welcoming, inclusive classrooms, students are invited to identify the ways they can make someone comfortable in their classroom community.

Finally, students learn about the limits in helping others who may need mental health support. Beginning with an activity to help refresh students' understanding of the social, emotional, physical, and spiritual areas of mental health, we review what we can do to foster positive mental health. Students are then invited to identify factors that could pose a challenge to mental health in each of those areas, and what they can do if they, or someone they care about, is struggling and needs help.

Important Words

- *puberty, physical, emotional, social, intellectual, spiritual, stigma*
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Materials/Preparation

- You may want to have a look at the material on the stages of human development in the Grade 4 *Fully Alive* student book (pages 9 – 11, 60 – 61) before reviewing it with your students.
 - A wonderful addition to this topic would be a visit from middle-aged or senior adult who would be comfortable talking about his or her life journey, and the changes and growth the person has experienced in the five areas of human development. You will want to choose someone you know well, who will be open to answering questions, and whose attitude toward life is positive.
 - You may find it helpful to assign the reading on the five areas of human development (pages 13 – 17) to five groups of students. Ask the groups to prepare for the topic by reading the page on their area of development beforehand and presenting the information to the class. Depending on the amount of time available, they could make charts or posters to present information on the areas of human development
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Program Resources

- Human Development (Picture Chart, p. 4, student book pages 13 – 17)
 - Student Book, pages 13 – 17
 - BLM #6 — I am Growing
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We Experience

Begin the topic by reading together the introduction on page 13. Invite the students' response. Have any of them been on a long train or bus journey? What was it like?

Review the stages of human development (infancy, childhood, adolescence, adulthood) with the students. Create a timeline of the life journey on the chalkboard, with the first stop being birth. Ask the students to identify the main stages after birth, and some of the characteristics of people in these stages:

- infancy (birth to 2 years) — grow very quickly, learn to walk and begin to talk, be curious about everything, cry easily
- childhood (2 to 12 years) — develop new skills, begin school, learn to read, and write, learn to understand and manage feelings, play sports, make friends

- adolescence (puberty – 19) — big growth spurt, want to be more independent, sometimes moody, learn to manage stress, friendship becomes very important, begin to think about the future
- adulthood (young, middle-aged, seniors) — become self-supporting and independent, complete education, start to work, make important decisions like marriage, continue to learn and develop, continue to learn how to care for their physical, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being

You may want to explain the word *puberty*. It comes from a Latin word that means “young adult.” It is a time of change when the bodies of girls and boys begin to look more like those of women and men.

At what stage are they in their life journey? (near the end of childhood)
What is their next stage? (adolescence)

These changes happen at a different rate and time for all children, meaning that students might be at very different stages, though at the same age. This can be very stressful for children, as they can feel different from each other. By accepting these differences with respect and compassion, we can support each other and ensure everyone feels cared for and included.

We Discover

Display the Picture Chart, “Human Development,” and invite the students’ response. What kinds of activities are these people involved in? Are any of these activities that you do?

If you assigned the five areas of human development (see Materials/Preparation) to groups of students, ask the groups to make their presentations. If not, read the material on each area, and invite the students’ response. Some questions you might ask for each of the areas are:

Physical Development (page 13)

- How do we develop physically? (grow larger, stronger, develop special skills)
- What activities do you do that require special physical skills? (sports; biking; writing; gymnastics)
- Why is it important for older adults to maintain their physicals skills and strength? (they feel better; it helps their general health; they can enjoy life more)

Emotional Development (page 14)

- How do we develop emotionally? (learning about our feelings; realizing that other people also have feelings; learning to express our feelings in a way that respects others; learning how to manage our feelings with

positive coping strategies; learning how to recognize when someone needs help to manage their feelings, but also our own limits in what we can do to help)

- Do you think emotional development is easy or hard? Why?

Social Development (page 15)

- What does *social* mean? (has to do with the way we relate to other people, like friends, family members, groups of people)
- How do we develop socially? (being interested in other people; learning to play with others; learning how to be a friend; learning to confide in and depend on our friends)
- Why is social development so important? (we all need other people in our lives; we would be very lonely without people who care about us and whom we care about; social connections are important for health and well-being)

Intellectual development (page 16)

- What does *intellectual* mean? (related to the activities of our minds — thinking, solving problems, understanding, learning)
- How do we develop intellectually? (using our senses; learning how to communicate with language; acquiring knowledge; using our minds to solve problems)
- Why is intellectual activity important for everyone? (our minds are made to work, not to be idle; we get bored and boring if we don't use our minds; we can continue to learn new things all our lives)

Spiritual Development (page 17)

- What does *spiritual* mean? (related to our spirits or souls and our faith life)
- How do we develop spiritually? (learning about our faith; learning to pray; participating with others in the Eucharist; trying to live according to the teaching of Jesus; helping others, especially people in need)
- Why is spiritual development so important? (because it involves our whole selves — body, mind, and heart — in relationship with God; as we grow up we try to develop spiritually and understand what God wants us to do with our lives)

Review the images on page 2 of the student text. Invite the students to respond to the following questions:

- What stages of human development are shown in these photographs? (infancy, childhood, etc.)
- In what ways has each person developed? (physically, emotionally, socially, etc.)

Bring the topic to an end by reading together the closing section on page 17, then expand the conversation to self-care during periods of transition, specifically, in caring for one's mental health.

Continue with exploring the stages of development and discuss how each one can be stressful. Remind the students that they have learned about the body's stress responses and how to manage feelings of stress. It is not unusual to sometimes feel emotions such as anger, frustration, worry, and sadness to the point that it starts to affect our mental health.

- How might you know that a friend, or someone you know, might be struggling with their mental health and may need help? (different behaviours or mood changes; classmates not joining groups; feeling sad)
- What could you do to help a friend? (encourage them to remember what worked in the past, e.g., taking a break, having fun together outside, taking some deep breaths; tell a trusted adult)

Discuss with students why it is important to understand the limits of how you can help. Inform students that the situation may be beyond their ability to help and that they may need to reach out to a trusted adult. Getting help is important, especially if they are worried that the person might hurt themselves and/or others or be in danger. While it is important to be trusted to keep secrets entrusted to us, we must recognize when keeping those secrets can cause harm to others. Talk with students about who they could turn to for help. Help them identify who the trusted adults are in their lives (parent or caregiver, Elder, family member, teacher, parish priest, Kids Help Phone, etc.).

Discuss with students the importance of our language and attitudes about mental health. Review the meaning of *stigma*: opinions or judgments held by individuals or society that negatively reflect on a person or a group of individuals. Prompt students with the following scenario:

We know that from time to time we all feel challenging emotions that make it difficult for us to feel like we fit in or belong. Everyone experiences these ups and downs at different points. It's important for all of us to think about the ways we can make it easier for ourselves and others to recognize, accept, and manage these feelings. For example, let's think about language. Sometimes we make statements that we think are funny but that can cause stigma and make others feel badly, uncomfortable, or hurt their feelings. When we talk about mental health in a positive way, it makes it safe for us to be open and honest about our feelings. When someone is having a bad day, we could put ourselves in their shoes and

think about how they might feel. We could ask them if they want to talk and respect their need for space if that is what they want. Remind students to reach out to a trusted adult if they are concerned about the person's safety or their actions toward others.

- When it comes to supporting one another's mental health, what are some of the things we can do at school and in the classroom to make everyone feel safe to talk about their mental health and ask for help? (choose our words carefully; think before we act; put yourself in the other person's shoes (practice empathy); ask if that person needs help)

Discuss with students the different kinds of help and support staff available in the school, as well as support services in the community.

We Respond

Give the students copies of BLM #6, I Am Growing, and ask them to complete it, and keep it in their family life folder. Let them know that they don't have to share it with anyone. As an alternative, you may want to have them write about their present development in the five areas and their goals in their journals.

You may find it helpful to have the students brainstorm ideas for realistic goals in the five areas, for example:

- Physical — learn to play a new sport; practise batting and catching skills; learn a new skill like keyboarding, doing magic tricks, or cartooning
- Emotional — praying and practicing Christian meditation as a form of managing stress; learning and practicing other calm-down strategies; find better ways to settle disagreements with brothers, sisters, or friends; trying not to carry a grudge when someone upsets you
- Social — try to be a better friend; find ways to settle disagreements with others; talk to someone in your class whom you don't know very well; listen with empathy to the experiences of others so we can understand them better and decrease stigma of those struggling with mental health
- Intellectual — read more; research subjects that interest you; stop leaving your homework until the last minute
- Spiritual — find time for prayer every day; ask God for help when you're upset or worried; choose a saint whom you admire and learn more about this person's life

Encourage them to review their goals in the five areas of development in a few months to see how they are doing.

We Explore (related activities)

- **Posters** — Organize the class into five groups, one for each area of human development. Ask each group to use software to create a flyer or poster that includes drawings and pictures related to the area of development and a statement about the importance of the area. When the posters are completed, the groups can present them to the class with a brief explanation. (**Curriculum Connection:** Language, Media Literacy, see Appendix B, p. 244.)
- **Classroom Visitor** — (see Materials/Preparation) Invite an older adult to visit your class and talk to the students about his or her life journey. Prepare the person by explaining what the students have been learning about the five areas of human development. Have the students discuss some questions they might ask before the visit, and send a letter of thanks after the visit.
- **Fictional Life Journeys** — Stories and novels are an important source of information and inspiration in relation to the human life journey. Invite the students to choose a book they read and particularly enjoyed, and prepare a brief oral presentation on the ways in which the main character changed and developed during the book.
- **Slide Show** — Invite the students to create a slide show about their development over time, using pictures of themselves at different stages of their lives. They could choose pictures that represent the five areas of development and the ways they have changed.