

*“Thought becomes clear when it is spoken.”*

## **Introduction**

If a human has developed a **moral character**, the facility to act morally and ethically is in his/her hands. What are the stages of moral development that the human person as a moral agent undergoes?



The set of characteristics that guide a person’s behavior and decision-making.

The development of one’s moral character plays a vital role in the overall moral development of an individual. A person with a positively developed moral character would likely have a sound moral judgement and make good moral choices.

**Moral development** is the gradual development of an individual’s concept of right and wrong – conscience, values, social attitudes, and other moral behavior.

**Lawrence Kohlberg** wrote what is now known as the **Kohlberg’s stages of moral development**. He sought to describe the developmental stages of moral reasoning, the thinking process that occur when people consider something right or wrong. Kohlberg argued that people pass through six stages of moral thinking. He clustered these six stages into three basic levels: pre-conventional morality, conventional morality, and post-conventional morality

### **Level 1 – Pre-conventional Morality** (Below 9 years old)

This is the lowest of moral development in Kohlberg’s theory. At this level, children don’t have a personal code of morality. Instead, their moral code is controlled by the standards of adults and the consequences of breaking adult’s rules. Authority is outside the individual and reasoning is based on the physical consequences of actions. There is no internalization of moral values.

- **Stage 1. Obedience and Punishment Orientation**

In this stage, children see rules as fixed and absolute. They obey rules in order to avoid punishment. They determine a sense of right and wrong by what is punished and what is not punished. Moral decision is motivated by the fear of punishment. They obey superior authority and allow that authority to make the rules, especially if they perceive that this figure has the power to inflict pain. They are responsive to the rules that will affect their physical well-being.

- **Stage 2. Instrumental Orientation**

Furthermore, children account for individual points of view and judge actions based on how they serve individual needs. Reciprocity is possible, but only if it serves one’s interest. It is a matter of “you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours” philosophy. Children at this stage are motivated by vengeance or the “an eye for an eye” philosophy. They are self-absorbed while assuming that they are generous. They believe in equal sharing in that everyone gets the same, regardless of need. They believe that the end justifies the means. They will give favors only to get them back. They expect to be rewarded for every non-selfish deed that they do. In this stage, the right involves equal exchange.

## **Level 2 – Conventional Morality (10-15 years old)**

Throughout the conventional level, a child's sense of morality is tied to personal and societal relationships. Children continue to accept the rules of authority figures, but it is due to the belief that this is necessary to ensure positive relationships and societal order. Adherence to the rules and conventions is somewhat rigid during these stages and a rule's appropriateness or fairness is seldom questioned.

- **Stage 3. “Good Boy, Nice Girl” Orientation**

In stage 3, children want the approval of others and act in a way to avoid disapproval. Emphasis is placed on good behavior and people being “nice” to others. The individual is good in order to be seen as being a good person by others. Therefore, answers relate to the approval of others. The individual values caring and loyalty to others as a basis for moral judgement. (*e.g. a politician is around in times of calamities primarily because he wants to appear “good boy” or “nice girl” to electorates*).

- **Stage 4. Law and Order Orientation**

The child/individual becomes aware of the wider rules of society, so judgements concern obeying the rules in order to uphold the law and to avoid guilt. It is a matter of “I have to do this because the law says so.” It is still blind obedience to the law so morality still lacks internalization.

In this stage, one becomes conscious that he or she is living in a society with many people who have interests that may be similar or different from one's own. There is an emphasis on conformity, the consideration of how choices influence relationships. They find peer approval very important. Adolescents feel that intentions are as important as deeds and expects others to accept intentions or promises in place of deeds. The focus is on maintaining law and order by following the rules, doing one's duty, and respecting authority. In this stage, one does not only obey the laws out of fear but also out of respect.

## **Level 3 – Post-conventional Morality**

This is the level of full internalization. Morality is completely internalized and not based on external standards. Individual judgement is based on self-chosen principles and moral reasoning is based on individual rights and justice. According to Kohlberg this level of moral reasoning is as far as most people get.

In this level, people begin to account for the differing values, opinions, and beliefs of other people. One is conscious of the welfare of others, individually and collectively. Also, one recognizes that rules and laws are made to serve humans, not to enslave them. The level of moral reasoning in the post-conventional morality is based on universal ethical principles and abstract reasoning. They adhere as well to internalized principles. In this stage, people follow the universal ethical principles of justice, even if these principles conflict with laws and rules.

### **Examples:**

1. Women's right to vote – changed in 1937

2. Revised Penal Code – The law punished women more harshly than men.
  - a. Women can be imprisoned for a maximum of 6 years
  - b. Men can be imprisoned for a maximum of 4 years
3. The Family Code – the husband was considered “the head of the family”
  - a. Article 14 gives primary consent to the father. Meaning a mother’s consent is insufficient if the father objects.
  - b. Conjugal property
4. Anti-Rape Law of 1997 – rape was considered a crime against women only. Only men could commit rape, and only women can be victims. It was redefined as a crime against persons and men can now be recognized as victims.

- **Stage 5. Social Contract Orientation**

The child/individual becomes aware that while rules and laws might exist for the good of the greatest number, there are times when they will work against the interest of particular individuals. In this level, individuals reason out that values, rights, and principles transcend the law.

Laws are regarded as social contracts rather than rigid orders. Those that do not promote the general welfare should be changed when necessary to meet the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

- **Stage 6. Universal, Ethical, Principle Orientation**

Individuals at this stage have developed their own set of moral guidelines which may or may not fit the law. They have developed moral judgements that are based on universal human rights. The principles apply to everyone. Kohlberg doubted few people reached this stage.