1. Keep in mind that certain types of behaviors and relationships may be of special significance at different age levels.

2. With younger preschool children, allow plenty of opportunities for free play and experimentation to encourage the development of autonomy, but provide guidance to reduce the possibility that children will experience doubt. Also avoid shaming children for unacceptable behavior.

3. With older preschool children, encourage activities that permit the use of initiative and provide a sense of accomplishment. Avoid making children feel guilty about well-motivated but inconvenient (to you) questions or actions.

4. During the elementary and middle school years, help children experience a sense of industry by presenting tasks that they can complete successfully. Arrange such tasks so that students will know they have been successful. To limit feelings of inferiority, play down comparisons and encourage cooperation and self-competition. Also try to help jealous children gain satisfaction from their own behavior. (Specific ways to accomplish these goals will be described in several later chapters.)

5. At the secondary school level, keep in mind the significance of each student’s search for a sense of identity.

   The components of identity that Erikson stressed are acceptance of one’s appearance, recognition from those who count, and knowledge about where one is going. Role confusion is most frequently caused by failure to formulate clear ideas about gender roles and by indecision about occupational choice.

   The American school system, particularly at the high school level, has been described as a place where individual differences are either ignored or discouraged and where negative feedback greatly outweighs positive feedback (Johnson, Farkas, & Bers, 1997; Steinberg, 1996; Toch, 2003). Because you are important to your students, you can contribute to their sense of positive identity by recognizing them as individuals and praising them for their accomplishments. If you become aware that particular students lack recognition from peers because of abrasive qualities or ineptness and if you have the time and opportunity, you might also attempt to encourage social skills.

   You might be able to reduce identity problems resulting from indecisiveness about gender roles by having class discussions (for example, in social science courses) centering on changes in attitudes regarding masculinity, femininity, and family responsibilities. You can, for example, encourage boys to become more sensitive to the needs of others and girls to be more
achievement oriented. This approach to sex-role development that combines traditional “masculine” and “feminine” behaviors is called psychological androgyny (Karniol, Gabay, Ochion, & Harari, 1998; Steinberg, 2002).

Another forum for such discussion is an on-line bulletin board or class web site. On-line writing can be conducive to explorations of sensitive issues because it provides a slightly slower, more thoughtful pace and also allows an equal voice to male and female students, even those who feel shy about speaking out loud in class. An on-line discussion that is carefully moderated by an experienced teacher can both model and explore the territory of psychological androgyny.

Working with your school counselor, you may in some cases be able to help students make decisions about occupational choice by providing them with information (gleaned from classroom performance and standardized test results) about their intellectual capabilities, personality traits, interests, and values. Or you may be able to help students decide whether to apply for admission to college instead of entering the job market after high school graduation.

6 Remember that the aimlessness of some students may be evidence that they are engaging in a psychosocial moratorium. If possible, encourage such individuals to focus on short-term goals while they continue to search for long-term goals.

There are many ways to enable students to work toward short-term goals, particularly in your classroom. These will be described in detail in later chapters that deal with approaches to instruction and motivation.

7 Remain aware that adolescents may exhibit characteristics of different identity status types. Some may drift aimlessly; others may be distressed because they realize they lack goals and values. A few high school students may have arrived at self-chosen commitments; others may have accepted the goals and values of their parents.

If you become aware that certain students seem depressed or bothered because they are unable to develop a satisfactory set of personal values, consult your school psychologist or counselor. In addition, you might use the techniques just summarized to help these students experience at least a degree of identity achievement. Perhaps the main value of the identity status concept is that it calls attention to individual differences in the formation of identity. Because students in the foreclosure status will pose few, if any, classroom problems, you must keep in mind that foreclosure is not necessarily desirable for the individual student. Those experiencing identity diffusion or moratorium may be so bothered by role confusion that they are unwilling to carry out even simple assignments—unless you supply support and incentives.

**Applying Piaget’s Theory of Cognitive Development**

1 Focus on what children at each stage can do and avoid what they cannot meaningfully understand.

This implication must be interpreted carefully, as recent research has shown that children at the preoperational and concrete operational levels can do more than Piaget believed. In general,
however, it is safe to say that since preoperational stage children (preschoolers, kindergartners, most first and some second graders) can use language and other symbols to stand for objects, they should be given many opportunities to describe and explain things through the use of speech, artwork, body movement, role play, and musical performance. Although the concepts of conservation, seriation, class inclusion, time, space, and number can be introduced, attempts at mastering them should probably be postponed until children are in the concrete operational stage.

Concrete operational stage children (grades 3–6) can be given opportunities to master such mental processes as ordering, seriating, classifying, reversing, multiplying, dividing, subtracting, and adding by manipulating concrete objects or symbols. Although a few fifth and sixth graders may be capable of dealing with abstractions, most exercises that involve theorizing, hypothesizing, or generalizing should be done with concrete objects or symbols.

Formal operational stage children (grades 7 through high school) can be given activities that require hypothetical-deductive reasoning, reflective thinking, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

2 Because individuals differ in their rates of intellectual growth, gear instructional materials and activities to each student’s developmental level.

3 Because intellectual growth occurs when individuals attempt to eliminate a disequilibrium, instructional lessons and materials that introduce new concepts should provoke interest and curiosity and be moderately challenging in order to maximize assimilation and accommodation.

4 Although information (facts, concepts, procedures) can be efficiently transmitted from teacher to student through direct instruction, knowledge (rules and hypotheses) is best created by each student through the mental and physical manipulation of information.

Accordingly, lesson plans should include opportunities for activity, manipulation, exploration, discussion, and application of information. Small-group science projects are one example of how to implement this goal.

5 Because students’ schemes at any given time are an outgrowth of earlier schemes, point out to them how new ideas relate to their old ideas and extend their understanding. Memorization of information for its own sake should be avoided.

6 Begin lessons with concrete objects or ideas, and gradually shift explanations to a more abstract and general level.

Preschool, Elementary, and Middle School Grades
These guidelines are adapted from Elkind (1989); Ginsburg and Opper (1988); Kamii (2000); Singer and Revenson (1996); and Wadsworth (1996).

1 Become thoroughly familiar with Piaget’s theory so that you will be aware of how your students organize and synthesize ideas. You may gain extra insight if you analyze your own thinking, since you are likely to discover that in some situations, you operate at a concrete, rather than an abstract, level.
2 If possible, assess the level and the type of thinking of each child in your class. Ask individual children to perform some of Piaget’s experiments, and spend most of your time listening to each child explain her reactions.

3 Remember that learning through activity and direct experience is essential. Provide plenty of materials and opportunities for children to learn on their own.

4 Arrange situations to permit social interaction, so that children can learn from one another. Hearing others explain their views is a natural way for students to learn that not everyone sees things the same way. The placement of a few advanced thinkers with less mature thinkers is more likely to facilitate this process than is homogeneous grouping.

5 Plan learning experiences to take into account the level of thinking attained by an individual or group.

   Encourage children to classify things on the basis of a single attribute before you expose them to problems that involve relationships among two or more attributes. Ask many questions, and give your students many opportunities to explain their interpretations of experiences so that you can remain aware of their level of thinking.

6 Keep in mind the possibility that students may be influenced by egocentric speech and thought.

   Allow for the possibility that each child may assume that everyone else has the same conception of a word that he has. If confusion becomes apparent or if a child becomes impatient about failure to communicate, request an explanation in different terms. Or ask several children to explain their conception of an object or a situation.

**Middle School and Secondary Grades**
Many of these suggestions are derived from points made in Chapter 2 of Adolescence (Steinberg, 2003).

1 Become well acquainted with the nature of concrete operational thinking and formal thought so that you can recognize when your students are resorting to either type or to a combination of the two.

2 To become aware of the type of thinking that individual students use, ask them to explain how they arrived at solutions to problems. Do this either as part of your classroom curriculum or in response to experimental situations similar to those devised by Piaget.

3 Teach students how to solve problems more systematically (suggestions for doing this will be provided in later chapters) and provide opportunities for hands-on science experiments.

4 Keep in mind that some high school students may be more interested in possibilities than in realities.
If class discussions become unrealistically theoretical and hypothetical, call attention to facts and practical difficulties. If students are contemptuous of unsuccessful attempts by adults to solve school, local, national, and international problems, point out the complexity of many situations involving conflicts of interest, perhaps by summarizing arguments from both sides.

5 Allow for the possibility that younger adolescents may go through a period of egocentrism that will cause them to act as if they are always on stage and to be extremely concerned about the reactions of peers.

Encouraging Moral Development

1 Recognize that younger children respond to moral conflicts differently from older children.

2 Try to take the perspective of students, and stimulate their perspective-taking abilities.

3 Develop an awareness of moral issues by discussing a variety of real and hypothetical moral dilemmas and by using daily opportunities in the classroom to heighten moral awareness. (Moral education should be an integral part of the curriculum; it should not take place during a “moral education period.”)

Here is a hypothetical moral dilemma that a first-grade teacher presented to her class:
Mark was going to the movies when he met his friend Steven. Although Steven wanted to go to the movie with Mark, he had spent all of his allowance and wouldn’t be getting any more until after the movie left town. Both boys were 12 years old but looked much younger. If they lied about their ages, they could both see the movie for the amount of money that Mark had. Mark was unsure if he should lie about his age. Steven said, “It’s your money, so it’s your decision.” What should Mark do?

The responses of the students illustrate both the punishment-obedience orientation (stage 1) and the instrumental relativist orientation (stage 2) of Kohlberg’s preconventional level of morality:

Ms. Kittle: Okay, what do you think Mark should do?

John: Him and Steven should tell them how old they are.

Emily: They shouldn’t lie about their age.

Ms. Kittle: Why do you think they shouldn’t lie?

Tina: Because if they did lie, they’d get a spanking.

John: Mark shouldn’t lie about his age because it leads to a mess.

Ms. Kittle: What kind of mess?
John: His mother might find out.

Sara: The father too.

Erin: They’d get punished.

Ms. Kittle: So you all think Mark and Steven shouldn’t lie because they might get caught and be punished. What if no one catches them—would it be right to lie then?

Most: Yes!

Billy: No, it’s not. The manager of the show might catch them.

Ms. Kittle: But what if no one catches them?

Billy: Then it’s all right.

Ms. Kittle: Who thinks it would still be wrong to lie, even if Mark and Steven wouldn’t get caught? (Five children raised their hands.)

Troy: They’d still get in a mixed-up mess.

Ms. Kittle: How?

Troy: Somebody might tell somebody that they lied.

Ms. Kittle: He might, that’s true. But would it still be wrong even if Steven didn’t tell anybody?

Troy: Yes.

Ms. Kittle: Why, Troy?

Troy: I don’t know—but it is.

Emily: It’s not nice to lie.

Troy (in a rush): Yeah, and it’s not fair to other people, either!

Ms. Kittle: Who wouldn’t it be fair to?

Troy: The others in the show. They had to pay full price.

Ms. Kittle: You mean if other 12-year-old kids had to pay the full price for their tickets, then it’s not fair for Mark and Steven to get in cheaper?

Troy: Right. (Lickona, 1998)
Create a classroom atmosphere that will enhance open discussion. For example, arrange face-to-face groupings, be an accepting model, foster listening and communication skills, and encourage student-to-student interaction.

Richard Hersh, Diana Paolitto, and Joseph Reimer (1979) offer the following specific suggestions for supervising classroom discussions:

• Highlight the moral issue to be discussed. Example: Describe a specific real or hypothetical moral dilemma.
• Ask “why?” questions. Example: After asking students what they would do if they were faced with the moral dilemma under discussion, ask them to explain why they would act that way.
• Complicate the circumstances. Example: After students have responded to the original dilemma, mention a factor that might complicate matters—for example, the involvement of a best friend in the dilemma.
• Use personal and naturalistic examples. Example: Invite students to put themselves in the position of individuals who are confronted by moral dilemmas described in newspapers or depicted on television.