# Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development

## Stages

### PRECONVENTIONAL LEVEL

Good or bad, right or wrong, labels are interpreted in terms of physical power. The basic frame of reference or moral decisions is the self.

### CONVENTIONAL LEVEL

Maintaining expectations of others is valued regardless of consequences. Loyalty to and support of the established order. The concern with self is incorporated into an awareness of groupness.

### POSTCONVENTIONAL LEVEL

Individual reaches a personal definition of moral values and principles that are valid and applicable apart from authority. Groups and their laws are important, but principles underlie them.

## Characteristics

1. **Punishment and obedience.** Physical consequences of an action determine if it’s good or bad. Avoidance of punishment is valued.

2. **Satisfy one’s own needs and sometimes others.** “You scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours,” instead of loyalty, gratitude, and justice. If fairness and sharing are present, they are viewed in terms of one’s personal needs.

3. **“Good boy—nice girl.”** Good behavior is that which pleases or helps others and therefore is approved by them. Much conformity to stereotypical images.

4. **Law and order.** Authority, fixed rules, and maintaining the social order are valued. Right behavior is doing one’s “duty” and showing respect for authority.

5. **Individual rights.** Utilitarian overtones. Awareness of personal values and openness. Other than that which is constitutionally and democratically agreed upon, right is a matter of personal value and opinion.

6. **Universal ethics.** Abstract and ethical principles (Golden Rule) not concrete moral codes like the Ten Commandments. Justice, human rights, respect for the dignity of human beings as individuals are valued.