

Growth and Development: A Mental Health Perspective

Kim A. Drury RN, MSN

Mental, as well as physical, health is necessary for a healthy life. According to many theories, normal growth and development occurs in sequential stages from birth through adulthood, but there are also some individual variations in children and adults that are still considered “normal”. No one theory is able to explain the complexity of human health. Some theories are more useful than others depending on their focus and reasons for using them. Mental health nursing uses several theories depending on which one is more useful for the individual we are working with.

Growth and development includes our personality. Our personality is thought to be a combination of what we inherit genetically from our parents and our environment (ex. Family psychosocial influences). Our personality is believed to appear around age 2 years and includes our interests as well as a consistent pattern of thoughts, behaviors or actions, motivation and feelings (Fontaine, 2009, 19-20).

The following information is categorized according to the person who developed the theory or explanation, psychosocial (psychological, developmental, sociological, cultural, spiritual) and biological age. Some theorists believe we continue to develop throughout our lifespan (ex. Erickson) while others believe we continue to develop only to the time we reach adulthood.

Erickson’s Psychosocial Developmental Stages

Trust vs. Mistrust (Infancy; 0 to 1 yr.)

- Development of basis trust as a critical building block.
- Trust develops from your being consistently nurturing and attending to your baby’s needs
- Mistrust can develop from you not being consistently nurturing and sometimes attending to your baby’s needs, but at other times ignoring your baby’s needs
- Positive outcomes at the end of this stage include trust, faith, hope, and optimism.

Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (Early childhood; 1 to 3 yrs.)

- In this stage your child learns to “hold on and let go”.
- Your child becomes independent comes from activities such as walking, climbing, and toilet training.
- Forced dependence (not allowing your child to become independent) or belittling, leads to your child feeling shame and doubt.
- Positive outcomes/resolution of this stage include self-control and willpower.

Initiative vs. Guilt (Preschool; 3 to 6 yrs.)

- In this stage your child explores his/her environment for all possible physical learning experiences.
- Your child engages in more physical activity and imagination in this stage.
- Your child also starts to develop an early sense of right and wrong (i.e. conscious), appropriate social behaviors, and guilt.
- Your child competes with his/her peers.
- Positive outcomes of this stage include direction and purpose.

Industry vs. Inferiority (School age; 8 to 12 years)

- In this stage your child works on completing purposeful activities/projects and learning new skills.
- He/she identifies with teachers and imagines themselves in different occupational roles.
- If your expectations are too high or your child perceives their inability to meet your or other adults’ standards, they may develop feelings of inferiority and inadequacy. They also may experience stifling of their creativity.
- Positive outcome of this stage includes competence.
- Ego Identity vs. Role Confusion (Adolescence; 12 to 18 yrs.)
- In this stage your adolescent deals with rapid physical, social, and emotional changes.
- They develop emotional stability.

- They are preoccupied with how they are perceived by others, especially peers, and how they perceive themselves.
- They test and “try on” adult roles in preparation for their future.
- Confusion can occur as a result of having problems integrating all these changes that are occurring for them (see above).
- Positive outcomes of this stage include fidelity and devotion.
- Intimacy vs. Isolation (Young adulthood; 18 to 30 yrs.)
- In this stage the adult learns to form significant loving, intimate relationships with peers, colleagues, lovers.
- Isolation can result if as an adolescent he/she is unable to trust that it is safe to share themselves in a mutually giving relationship.
- Positive outcomes of this stage include affiliation and love.
- Generativity vs. Stagnation (Middle adulthood; 30-65 yrs.; may vary depending on the reference centering around the 40’s and 50’s)
- In this stage the adult learns to nurture children, sacrifice for others, collaborate on work projects, parental/societal responsibilities or become involved in creative pursuits.
- Stagnation occurs when the adult becomes so self-absorbed that it interferes with creativity.
- Positive outcomes of this stage include caring and production.

Ego Integrity vs. Despair (Older adulthood; 65 yrs. to death)

- In this stage the adult is aware of time moving on, accepts themselves and their past including both what has occurred and what has not occurred; comfortable with previous life stages, feeling of satisfaction.
- Despair occurs when the focus is on what might have happened, but did not.
- Positive outcomes of this stage includes wisdom.

Piaget's Stages of Cognitive (Intellectual) Development

Sensorimotor (Birth to 2 years)

- Your baby/child gains refined ideas of space (internal & external).
- Use their physical senses to explore their environment.
- Learn to anticipate an experience by constructing a (mental) model of each experience.
- These new skills include object permanence (know mother/father still exist even though out of sight for a moment); internal challenge to fit old & new experiences into a universal uniform reality.
- While adjusting (accommodating) to new functions their thinking ability broadens.

Preoperational (2 to 7 years)

- Your child develops intuition and the ability to anticipate experiences with consequences.
- He/she is capable of symbolic thought, but "illogically and eccentrically are unable to perceive themselves as separate from others in their environment".
- He/she has an "inner world" with magical thinking.

Concrete Operational (7 to 11 years)

- Your child develops the ability to think logically/rationally and in an organized way.
- Magical thinking is replaced by more realistic worries about school, health, dying & social relationships.

Formal Operations (11 to 19 years)

- Your adolescent develops the ability of to think abstractly.
- "Imaginary audience phenomenon" causes them to think everyone is watching them.
- Language an important "tool" now and they are able to use hypothetical, deductive reasoning, and propositional thought.
- They develop the ability to think about the potential results of their own actions and other possible factors that could affect the outcome.
- They are able to think about possible solutions to a problem before trying them out.

Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Reasoning Preconventional/Preschool Period

- Your child makes decisions based on avoiding punishment or obtaining reward.
- Conventional Morality
- Your child develops an understanding of the meaning of authority and mutual benefit so their decisions or actions based on these.
- Principled Morality
- The adult develops general “internalized” moral principles.
- Their decisions or actions based on internal sense of right or wrong; because “it’s the right thing to do”.

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