



# **Encyclopedia of School Psychology**

## **Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development**

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Erik Erikson was born in Hamburg, Germany, in 1902 and died in 1994 in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Known as the father of psychosocial development, his perspective on psychological growth grew to be quite different than that of Sigmund Freud, his early teacher. Where Freud believed that the focus of growth and development was in changing sensitive zones of the body, Erikson placed the locus of importance on the social world surrounding the individual.

In addition to this distinction, another important difference was Erikson's concern for psychological development throughout the entire life span, rather than just the years from birth through adolescence. Erikson examined the consequences of early experiences on later life and described the nature of qualitative change during the middle and later years of life.

Erikson's most lasting contribution is his description of psychosocial development, with a psychosocial task or crisis associated with each stage. Here's a brief description of each stage and the social task at hand.

### **Stage 1: Oral–Sensory**

#### ***The Psychosocial Task: Trust versus Distrust***

It is during the oral–sensory stage that the infant experiences the first of many interactions with the immediate environment and needs these outside influences to help regulate basic behaviors. The trust–mistrust continuum reflects the value of the child's experiences during the first year of life and how the child feels about interactions with outside forces. Erikson emphasized that it is not just the quantity of trustfulness that is important but the quality as well.

### **Stage 2: Muscular–Anal**

#### ***The Psychosocial Task: Autonomy versus Doubt***

The muscular–anal stage deals with the child's ability to regulate or control his or her own physical behavior, including the functions associated with toilet training. Erikson notes that control of all the muscles becomes the focus of the child's surplus energy. Not only are children expected to develop control of the muscles that deal with elimination, they are also expected to develop some control of impulses in general. This change leads to a successful feeling of control over one's behavior, as opposed to feelings of less control.

### **Stage 3: Locomotor–Genital**

#### ***The Psychosocial Task: Initiative versus Guilt***

Erikson believed that the locomotor–genital stage is set by social expectations for independent movement and motivation as a result of new-found autonomy and control. The locomotor component of this stage represents the child's movement away from the dependency on parents and toward the ability to meet personal needs. Children become capable of initiating more complex actions on their own, resulting in more gratification than was possible earlier when they were more dependent on parents.

### **Stage 4: Latency**

#### ***The Psychosocial Task: Industry versus Inferiority***

Erikson believed that the latency time of development is crucial for the child's sense of industry, which is seen as the ability to master the social skills necessary to compete and function successfully in the society in which the child lives. At this stage of development, cultural expectations take precedence over other needs, and the ability to master certain skills and abilities becomes paramount. For children who are not even given the opportunity to master their own world or who have their efforts blocked, these unsuccessful experiences lead to a sense of inferiority, or lack of worthiness.

### **Stage 5: Puberty and Adolescence**

#### ***The Psychosocial Task: Identity versus Role Confusion***

Puberty is a time when some of the most drastic changes occur in all spheres of individual development. Up to this time, the child has not experienced such great changes in both physical and psychological capacities and needs. Adolescents are expected to begin defining their interests in terms of career choices, further education, trade skills, and raising a family. Both biologically and culturally, adolescence is considered the end of childhood and the entrance into adulthood. This time is one of great change and excitement, and it is also when the individual develops an identity, or a definition of self.

### **Stage 6: Young Adulthood**

#### ***The Psychosocial Task: Intimacy versus Isolation***

Because Erikson's theory of psychosocial development is based on the notion of stages and what he called the epigenetic process, development will be optimally successful if the crisis associated with each stage is successfully resolved. Stage 6 illustrates how important dependency on earlier stages is. For the first time, new goals and tasks that directly involve other people are placed before individuals, and they are expected not only to develop and meet career goals, but also to begin the developmental process of interacting with others of the same and opposite sex.

### **Stage 7: Adulthood**

#### ***The Psychosocial Task: Generativity versus Stagnation***

One of the important elements of Erikson's theory is that development is a continuous, ongoing process. For the young adult who is well on the way to a successful career and intimate personal relationships, the relevant task is to generate whatever is necessary to define a style or life role. A major component of stage 7 is emphasis on continuity with preceding stages. The sense of generativity that the adult feels comes from efforts to have some part in supporting and encouraging the development of the next generation. Those individuals who cannot lend this continuity to the next generation may become overly absorbed in personal needs, ignore the needs of others, and gradually become stagnated.

### **Stage 8: Maturity**

#### ***The Psychosocial Task: Ego Integrity versus Despair***

Erikson used the term *ego integrity* to describe older people who have come to recognize, after a life-time of successfully resolving conflicts, that they have led a meaningful, productive, and worthwhile life. Stage 8 has mystical elements, and Erikson stresses the importance of being "one with your past," and creating and feeling a new

love for the human ego and not necessarily for oneself. The older person can dispense wisdom to young children. This wisdom has traveled the hard and difficult road from basic trust–mistrust conflict experienced as an infant through this final stage of realization. If development has proceeded successfully through the years, Erikson considered that this stage consists in taking or gaining a perspective on what has occurred.

- psychosocial development
- ego
- children
- muscles
- adolescence
- dependency
- wisdom

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