

ERIKSON'S STAGES OF PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Stage 1: Trust vs. Mistrust (Infant)

Ages: birth to 12 months of age

Question: "Am I safe?"

Psychosocial Crisis: Trust vs. Mistrust

Babies need to know that grown-ups can be trusted. This happens when adults take care of a baby's basic needs, like feeding and looking after them. Since babies rely on their caregivers, those who respond and pay attention to the baby's needs help the baby feel safe and think the world is a secure and predictable place. When caregivers always provide food, comfort, and love, a baby learns that others can be counted on. This early connection forms the base for how babies will relate to others in the future. On the other hand, if caregivers aren't responsive and don't take care of the baby's needs, it can make the baby feel anxious, scared, and not sure about the world. If babies are treated badly or if their needs aren't met properly, they might grow up not trusting people around them.

Stage 2: Autonomy vs. Shame & Doubt (Toddler)

Ages: 1–3 years

Question: "Can I do things myself or must I always rely on others?"

Psychosocial Crisis: Autonomy vs. Shame & Doubt

As little kids start getting better at moving their bodies, they begin to explore the world around them. They figure out that they can control what they do and make things happen in their environment. They start to like certain things, like specific foods, toys, and clothes. If the people taking care of them encourage them to do things on their own, like picking out their own clothes, they start feeling like they can handle things by themselves. This is like the "me do it" stage, where a 2-year-old might want to choose her own outfits and dress herself, even if they're not always the best choice for the situation. But making these little choices helps her feel independent. If she's not allowed to do things on her own, she might start doubting her abilities, and that can lead to feeling not so good about herself. Caregivers who push a kid too much, don't let them do things they can do, or make fun of them for trying to be independent can make them feel ashamed and doubtful. For little kids, the big task is figuring out how to be independent without feeling bad about it. This stage sets the foundation for them to feel good about who they are and believe in what they can do.

Stage 3: Initiative vs. Guilt (Preschooler)

Ages: 3–6 years

Question: “Am I good or am I bad?”

Psychosocial Crisis: Initiative vs. Guilt

When kids reach preschool, they can start doing things and taking charge of their world by playing and hanging out with others. What makes preschoolers different from younger kids is that they start feeling brave and wanting to do things on their own. This is called initiative, and it happens when adults let kids explore within certain rules and then support the choices they make. While trying to be more independent, kids might do some not-so-great stuff, like throwing things, hitting, or yelling. But even if they do that, they can still grow up to be confident and feel like they have a purpose. According to Erikson, preschoolers need to figure out how to balance taking initiative with not feeling guilty about it. It's important for parents and caregivers to encourage kids to explore and do things on their own, but also give them the right guidance. By planning and achieving things while playing with others, preschoolers can get really good at this and feel proud of what they can do.

Stage 4: Industry vs. Inferiority (School-Age Child)

Ages: 7–12

Question: “Am I successful or worthless?”

Psychosocial Crisis: Industry vs. Inferiority

When you're in elementary school, it's all about getting good at school and making friends. At this age, the big challenge is feeling good about yourself. It's like a battle between feeling capable and feeling like you're not measuring up. This struggle, called the crisis of industry versus inferiority, happens when kids start comparing themselves to others to see how well they're doing. Some kids end up feeling proud and accomplished in things like schoolwork, sports, hanging out with friends, and family stuff. But on the flip side, some feel like they're not good enough and start to doubt themselves. Erikson thought that the elementary school years are super important for building up confidence. Going to school gives you chances to be recognized by teachers, friends, and family for doing cool stuff. But if you have trouble getting along with others or if things at home or with friends aren't great, Erikson called it an "inferiority complex," and it might stick around into your teenage years and even adulthood.

Stage 5: Identity vs. Role Confusion (Adolescent)

Ages: 13–19

Question: “Who am I and where am I going?”

Psychosocial Crisis : Identity vs. Role Confusion

Being a teenager is like standing at a big intersection between being a kid and becoming an adult. At this point, you've got a major job on your hands: figuring out who you really are. According to Erikson, the main thing to do during adolescence is to build a solid sense of yourself. Teens grapple with questions like "Who am I?" and "What do I want to do with my life?" Most teens try out different versions of themselves, testing out various roles, setting goals, and trying to figure out what kind of grown-up they want to be. The ones who succeed in this stage end up with a strong sense of identity. They know who they are and stick to their beliefs and values, even when things get tough, or people have different opinions. But if teens don't really care about finding their identity, don't actively search for it, or feel pressured to be someone they're not, they might end up with a shaky sense of self and a lot of confusion about the future. Those who struggle to find a positive role during adolescence might have a hard time figuring out who they are as adults.

Stage 6: Intimacy vs. Isolation (Young-Adult)

Ages: 20-34

Question: “Am I loved or wanted?”

Psychosocial Crisis: Intimacy vs. Isolation

When you're in your early adult years, the big deal is all about relationships. The main challenge during this time is forming close and loving connections with others. If you succeed, you end up with fulfilling relationships. But if it's a bit of a struggle, it might leave you feeling lonely and isolated. After figuring out who you are in your teenage years, you're ready to share your life with others. But if you haven't really worked through earlier stages well, it can make it tough for young adults to build and keep good relationships. According to Erikson, having a strong sense of who you are is super important for having successful and close relationships. The big issue at this stage is called intimacy versus isolation. If you didn't develop a positive self-concept when you were a teenager, you might end up feeling lonely and emotionally isolated in your adult years. Learning how to be close to others means finding a balance between being open and vulnerable while dealing with the fear of rejection.

Stage 7: Generativity vs. Stagnation (Middle-Aged Adult)

Ages: 35-65

Question: "Will I produce something of real value?"

Psychosocial Crisis: Generativity vs. Stagnation

In your 40s and up to your mid-60s, you're in what's called middle adulthood. At this point, the big deal is figuring out how you want to contribute to the world. The challenge is called generativity versus stagnation. Generativity means finding what you're passionate about and doing things that help others, like volunteering, mentoring, or raising kids. During this time, people in their middle years start doing things that make a positive impact on the next generation, often by taking care of others and having jobs that contribute to society. But if they don't really get the hang of this, they might feel stagnate or stuck and like they're not making a meaningful mark on the world. They might feel disconnected from others and not really interested in being productive or improving themselves.

Stage 8: Integrity vs. Despair (Older Adults)

Ages: 65 and above

Question: "Have I lived a full life?"

Psychosocial Crisis: Integrity vs. Despair

Once we hit our mid-60s and keep going until the end of our lives, we're in a stage called late adulthood. At this point, the big thing is looking back on our lives and what we've achieved. Erikson called this task integrity versus despair. It's all about how we feel when we reflect on our lives. If we're proud of what we've done, we feel a sense of integrity and can look back without too many regrets. But if we haven't really succeeded in this stage, we might feel like our life was a bit of a waste. We'd be stuck thinking about what could have been. That can lead to bitter feelings, sadness, and despair as we approach the end of our lives. This stage is all about looking back, reviewing our lives, and coming to terms with the way things have turned out.

"Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development." (n.d.) Parenting: A Guide to Parenting Skills for Life, 2-18.

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