

Human Development through the Life Span

The Life Span Perspective

- Life is a journey, with each developmental stage posing a new set of challenges and opportunities.
- As professional counselors, we are in the unique position of not only experiencing our own growth and development, but also facilitating our clients' journey.
- The **life-span perspective** not only includes the belief that development is lifelong, but also that it is multidimensional, multidisciplinary and contextual, multidirectional, and plastic.

The Life Span Perspective

- Life span developmental theory provides an organizational framework for understanding how the different stages of life are linked together and how the three adaptive processes of growth, maintenance, and regulation of loss are part of the developmental journey from infancy through old age.

Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development

■ Basic trust versus mistrust

- Birth to 1 year
- Infants gain trust from a warm, responsive environment, in contrast to mistrust if they are mistreated or ignored

■

■ Autonomy versus shame and doubt

- 1-3 years
- Autonomy is nurtured when children can use their skills to make their own decisions

■

■ Initiative versus guilt

- 3-6 years
- Children experiment with who they can become through imaginative play
- If parents don't support their ambition and experimentation and expect too much self-control, the child may feel guilty

■

■ Industry versus inferiority

- 6-11 years
- As they become more involved in school, children develop the ability to work with others
- If they have negative experiences with peers or in the home or school setting, they may experience feelings of inferiority

■

■ Identity versus role confusion

- Adolescence
- Developing an identity is a key issue during this stage of development, but can result in a negative outcome if there is confusion about future adult roles

■

■ Intimacy versus isolation

- Young adulthood
- Establishing intimate ties with others is a major task at this stage
- Those who are unable to do this remain isolated

■ **Generativity versus stagnation**

- Middle adulthood

- Giving to the next generation is the essence of this stage, and individuals who fail to do this feel stagnated without this meaningful sense of accomplishment

-

■ **Ego integrity versus despair**

- Old age

- During this time of self-reflection, people who have lived satisfying lives develop a feeling of integrity, while those who perceive they have not lived a satisfying life experience dissatisfaction and fear death

Infancy and Toddlerhood

- The first 24 months of life constitute **infancy**, when major changes in all areas of development occur at an astonishing pace.

- During **toddlerhood** (ages 2-3 years), remarkable changes, particularly in locomotion and language development, significantly contribute to the young child's growing autonomy.

Motor Development

- 3-4 months: Infants begin to roll over.

- 6 months: Infants can typically sit without support.

- 7-8 months: Infants can crawl and stand without support.

- 13 months: Infants can generally walk without assistance.

- There can be as much as a four month variation as to when these milestones occur, but the sequence of the accomplishments typically does not vary.

- Toddlers not only master the previously mentioned skills, but between ages 2 and 3 years, locomotion is a key factor:

- Leg muscles are stronger

- They are walking and running

- Toddlers can jump several inches from the floor

- They appear to be in constant motion and enjoy what their bodies can do

- **Fine motor skills**, which are almost non-existent at birth, include reaching and grasping.

- 3 months of age: Infants have more control over their head and shoulders, which increases their ability to reach and grasp.

- 6-12 months: Infants can focus on small objects and reach out to grasp them.

- 12-18 months: Infants can scribble and turn pages of a book.

- During toddlerhood, these fine motor skills continue to develop:

- They begin to build high block towers and put puzzles together

- Their drawings advance: Whereas an 18-month-old can scribble, these scribbles start to become pictures and they use lines to represent boundaries of objects by age three years

Emotional Development

- 3 months: Infants can smile and display rage or anger when they experience physical discomfort.
- 6-12 months: Infants are more aware of situations and their joy, anger, and fear are related to their environment.
- 6 months: Stranger anxiety emerges
- 9 months: Separation anxiety emerges
- 1 year: Infants not only display elation, but also anxiety, fear, and anger.
- 2 years: Toddlers begin to respond to others' emotions and can show love by giving hugs and kisses.

Cognitive/Language Development

- Piaget's cognitive-developmental theory** contributes in part to our knowledge about cognitive development.
- Piaget's theory is based on the premise that children discover or construct their knowledge through their own activity and that they move through four stages of development.
- The **sensorimotor stage** (birth to 2 years) is divided into six substages with a progression of development that results in some degree of mental representation.
- During the **preoperational stage** (ages 2-7 years) mental representation increases dramatically, along with make believe play.
-
- With regard to language development, infants cry and coo, then begin to babble.
- 10-15 months: Infants typically speak their first words, with rapid progression after that.
- 18 months: Infants have a 50 word vocabulary.
- 2 years: Toddlers have a 200 word vocabulary.
- 3 years: Toddlers typically have a vocabulary of 1000 words and their communication is generally well understood.

Early Childhood

- Curiosity, questioning, and new socialization experiences through exposure to preschool and kindergarten characterize this stage of **early childhood** development.

Social Development

- Play serves an important role for children, both in their own skill development and also in relation to others.
- Associative play**, where children interact and share but do not actually seem to be playing the same game, characterizes 4-year-olds
- By age five years, children engage in more **cooperative play**, take turns, and create games
- Children at this age prefer **same-gender playmates**, not only in the United States, but also in other cultures.
- Boys tend to be more involved in rough and tumble play and are more aggressive.
- Girls are more inclined to engage in nurturing activities and are more cooperative.

Emotional Development

- Children are not only able to talk about their feelings, but they can also incorporate feelings into pretend play, which gives them a better understanding of their feelings and how to express them in acceptable ways.

- Because children often lack the ability to accurately verbalize their feelings, they tend to express them directly through action.

Cognitive Development

- **Preoperational thought** patterns characterize the cognitive development of 4-, 5-, and 6-year-olds.

- Because children are able to represent objects and events mentally, they can think and act more flexibly than during the sensorimotor stage.

- However, children at this age have:

- **Egocentrism:** The inability to see things from another perspective

- **Centration:** The tendency to focus on one aspect of a situation rather than on a broader view

- By age five years, children can understand almost anything explained to them in context if the examples are specific, but they may have difficulty with concepts such as time and space.

- Imaginative play and vivid fantasies characterize this period of development, particularly for preschoolers.

Middle Childhood

- “Rich years filled with growth and change” is how Cobb (2001, p. 448) characterized **middle childhood**.

- Although their physical rate of growth has stabilized, 6-11 year-olds mature remarkably during these school-age years.

- **Socialization** in the context of a peer group becomes a central issue for the middle-aged child.

- Acceptance in a group and a “best friend” contribute significantly to a child’s sense of competence

- **Friendships** serve important functions: Children learn to cooperate and compromise, negotiate, and assume roles as leaders and followers. They also learn how to deal with peer group pressure and rejection.

- School-aged children’s understanding of emotions is more complex than preschoolers and in general they are more sensitive, empathic, and better able to recognize and communicate their feelings to others.

- Fears and anxieties are related to real-life, as opposed to imaginary issues.

- A transitional period between preoperational and **concrete operational** thought occurs between the ages of five and seven years, but by age seven or eight years, the vast majority of children are definitely concrete operational thinkers.

- Concrete operational thinkers are able to understand logical operations, such as identity, reversibility, reciprocity, and classification and can apply them in different contexts, such as friendships, rules in games, or team play

Adolescence

- The relative stability of middle childhood can vanish over night as children enter puberty, thus signifying the beginning of early adolescence (ages 11-14 years), which is followed by mid adolescence (ages 15-18 years), and later adolescence (ages 18-24 years), oftentimes referred to as the beginning of young adulthood.

- The first few years of early **adolescence** can be difficult because of the rapid physical changes and significant cognitive and emotional maturation.

Social Development in Early Adolescence

- As early adolescents become more socially distant from their families, peers play a dominant role and are a vital part of the growing up process, although in some cultures, this is not as pronounced.

- Because they have a strong need to belong and be accepted, but since they fear being judged or put down, young adolescents tend to conform to peer norms and expectations.

Emotional Development in Early Adolescence

- Heightened emotionality and rapid mood fluctuations characterize this period, with the adolescent shifting from intense sadness to anger to excitement to depression in a brief time.

- Although their more advanced cognitive abilities help them interpret unpleasant emotional experiences, this often results in an increase in self-consciousness and self-criticism

Cognitive Development in Early Adolescence

- **Formal operational stage** thinking begins at about age 11 years, but is not consistently attained until at least age 15–20 years.

- As early adolescents move into this realm, they begin to think more abstractly and hypothetically, often engaging in idealization and then comparing themselves and others to these ideal standards

- Although adolescents are better able to predict consequences of actions, they inconsistently apply these skills to themselves

Social Development in Mid-Adolescence

- The importance of peer relationships continues into mid-adolescence, and the increased time spent with peers serves a variety of functions for the teenager:

- To try out various roles

- To learn to tolerate individual differences as they come in contact with people who have different values and life-styles

- To prepare themselves for adult interactions as they begin to form more intimate relationships

- Sexual experimentation generally increases during this period.

Emotional Development in Mid-Adolescence

- More emotional stability comes in mid-adolescence because teens are not as vulnerable and are not as likely to be overwhelmed by their emotions.

- Those who are more emotionally mature have better coping skills, are less likely to behave impulsively or act out behaviorally.

Cognitive Development in Mid-Adolescence

- During mid-adolescence, **formal operational thinking** continues to develop, although many adolescents and even adults still have not reached this level of thinking.

- As formal operational thinking develops, teens can hypothesize, think about the future, be introspective, and detect inconsistency in statements.

- However, 15- to 18-year-olds are still likely to be inconsistent in their thinking and behaving

Social Development in Late Adolescence

- During this emerging adulthood period, young people are beginning to see themselves as adults and contributing members of society.

- They become less dependent on parents, gradually achieving a psychological sense of autonomy in which they still are connected to their parents but they accept each others' individuality

- For many young adults, choosing a life-long partner is a major task at this stage of development.

Cognitive Development in Late Adolescence

- Because thinking is more flexible, interpretation and understanding subtleties are more prevalent.

- Some individuals enter **postformal thought**, which includes dialectical thinking (arguing, debating, and realizing that issues are not always absolutely right or clear) and the realization that problem resolution involves drawing on past experiences.

Self-development in Late Adolescence

- Several important tasks must be addressed by young adults:

- Formulating their gender identity

- Analyzing beliefs and values they assumed as children

- Clarifying their sexual identity within the context of intimate relationships

The Worker in Early Adulthood

- In the **early career stage**, the worker questions his competence and degree of commitment.

- As the role of a worker evolves, challenges emerge, including:

- Dealing with the demands and expectations of the job and negotiating the hierarchy of authority

- Anxiety, coupled with the worry, about being financially self-sufficient

The Partner in Early Adulthood

- With the average age of marriage being delayed, it is likely that committing to an intimate relationship that may involve marriage may not occur until early adulthood, depending on culture.

- Compromise and flexibility are crucial as couples come to agreement about such issues as spending and saving money, work schedules and habits, relationships with friends and in-laws, alone time versus couple time, eating and sleeping patterns, and other daily living matters

The Parent in Early Adulthood

- Although not all couples choose to or are able to have children, those who become parents typically do so during this stage of life.
- Having children led to greater marital satisfaction for couples who already were satisfied with their relationship
- Couples who had significant conflict prior to becoming parents had increased difficulty after the birth of the baby

Middle Adulthood

- Most people make the transition to midlife with little difficulty.
- Aging is different for every individual and varies according to culture, but there are general trends that occur at some point during this developmental stage.

Physical Changes in Middle Adulthood

- Most people experience some change in physical appearance:
 - Skin begins to wrinkle and sag
 - Hair becomes thinner or grayer
 - Muscle strength decreases
 - Bone loss increases
 - Vision and hearing may start to decline
 - Arthritis and hypertension increase
 - Women go through menopause in their late 40s or early 50s
 - Men experience some hormonal changes, including a decrease in testosterone and sperm count

Cognitive Changes in Middle Adulthood

- Sensory and short-term memory do not decline during this period, although there is some long-term memory loss for some people.
- A gradual decline starting at age 25 years is noted in inductive reasoning, spatial orientation, verbal memory, and perceptual speed.
- Verbal ability increases until about age 40 years and then remains steady throughout the remainder of life.

Later Adulthood

- During the final 30 years of life, from age 60 years on, a period of reinvention occurs.
- This period of reinvention is tempered by the degree to which individuals are able to minimize loss and successfully confront challenges during the later years
- In contrast to the negative stereotypical views about older adulthood, this period of development is characterized by a search for personal meaning.

Accepting Life in Later Adulthood

- Older adults face two tasks:
 - They need to reflect on the past and accept the reality of their life, incorporating disappointment, failure, achievement, and successes into an integrated view of self
 - They also need to establish new goals and challenges in order to maintain optimal functioning

Redirecting Energy to New Roles and Activities

- Later adulthood is characterized by many **role changes** brought about by retirement, death of a spouse, parent, or friends, birth of grandchildren, or assuming new positions as community leaders or volunteers.
- Older adults cope successfully with these role changes by becoming involved with new activities and developing new interests

Physical Changes in Later Adulthood

- Physical changes may include:
 - Decreased sensory abilities
 - Arthritis and osteoarthritis
 - Chronic illnesses
- As health declines, dependence on others increases, which can be a difficult role adjustment for the caretaker as well as the person receiving the care.

Cognitive Changes in Later Adulthood

- Cognitive changes include:
 - Changes in attention
 - Decline in speed of information processing
 - Memory changes
- Although cognitive functioning declines in old age, the negative effects of memory loss can be somewhat mitigated if older adults read, do crossword puzzles, and attend lectures since it is disuse that may cause the atrophy of cognitive skills.

Dealing With Loss in Later Adulthood

- Aging adults must adapt to and cope with increasing losses in multiple areas: loss of relationships as people close to them die or suffer from a debilitating illness, loss of abilities (physical, cognitive), and loss of income.
- Successful coping relates to how well older adults are able to maintain some degree of competence and connectedness to others.