

Psychosocial Development: Developing a Sense of Trust (Erikson)

Erikson's phase I (birth to 1 year old) is concerned with **acquiring a sense of trust** while **overcoming a sense of mistrust**. The trust that develops is a trust of self, of others, and of the world. Infants “trust” that their feeding, comfort, stimulation, and caring needs will be met. The crucial element for the achievement of this task is the quality of both the parent (caregiver)–child relationship and the care the infant receives. The provision of food, warmth, and shelter by itself is inadequate for the development of a strong sense of self. The infant and parent must jointly learn to satisfactorily meet their needs for mutual regulation of frustration to occur. When this synchrony fails to develop, mistrust is the eventual outcome.

Failure to learn delayed gratification leads to mistrust. Mistrust can result from either too much or too little frustration. If parents always meet their children's needs before the children signal their readiness, infants will never learn to test their ability to control the environment. If the delay is prolonged, infants will experience constant frustration and eventually mistrust others in their efforts to satisfy them. Therefore, consistency of care is essential.

The trust acquired in infancy provides the foundation for all succeeding phases. Trust allows infants a feeling of physical comfort and security, which assists them in experiencing unfamiliar, unknown situations with a minimum of fear. Erikson has divided the first year of life into two oral–social stages. During the first 3 to 4 months, food intake is the most important social activity in which the infant engages. Newborns can tolerate little frustration or delay of gratification. Primary **narcissism** (total concern for oneself) is at its height. However, as bodily processes (such as vision, motor movements, and vocalization) become better controlled, infants use more advanced behaviors to interact with others. For example, rather than cry, infants may put their arms up to signify a desire to be held.

The next social modality involves a mode of reaching out to others through **grasping**. Grasping is initially reflexive, but even as a reflex, it has a powerful social meaning for the parents. The reciprocal response to the infant's grasping is the parents' holding on and touching. There is pleasurable tactile stimulation for both