their behavior, individuals establish and maintain equilibrium with the environment. Each stage of cognitive development is derived from and builds on the accomplishments of the previous stage in a continuous, orderly process. This course of development is both maturational and invariant and is divided into the following four stages (ages are approximate):

Sensorimotor (birth to 2 years old): The sensorimotor stage of intellectual development consists of six substages that are governed by sensations in which simple learning takes place (see Chapter 9 and Chapter 11). Children progress from reflex activity through simple repetitive behaviors to imitative behavior. They develop a sense of cause and effect as they direct behavior toward objects. Problem solving is primarily by trial and error. They display a high level of curiosity, experimentation, and enjoyment of novelty and begin to develop a sense of self as they are able to differentiate themselves from their environment. They become aware that objects have **permanence**—that an object exists even though it is no longer visible. Toward the end of the sensorimotor period, children begin to use language and representational thought.

Preoperational (2 to 7 years old): The predominant characteristic of the preoperational stage of intellectual development is **egocentrism**, which in this sense does not mean selfishness or self-centeredness but the inability to put oneself in the place of another. Children interpret objects and events not in terms of general properties but in terms of their relationships or their use to them. They are unable to see things from any perspective other than their own; they cannot see another's point of view, nor can they see any reason to do so (see Cognitive Development, Chapter 12). Preoperational thinking is concrete and tangible. Children cannot reason beyond the observable, and they lack the ability to make deductions or generalizations. Thought is dominated by what they see, hear, or otherwise experience. However, they are increasingly able to use language and symbols to represent objects in their environment. Through imaginative play, questioning, and other interactions, they begin to elaborate concepts and to make simple associations between ideas. In the