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Erik Erikson: Stages of Growth



Erik Erikson (1902-1994) was a German-born psychologist who developed the idea of Lifespan Psychology as a way of showing how each of the major life changes is accompanied by a quality that can promote personal growth and also one that can leave us stagnating. These conditions are not only valuable for helping us throughout our lives; they are the formulae for helping us handle any change during our lives. When used in any helping

relationship, such as training, mentoring, coaching, and counselling, they are the keys to successful outcomes and personal growth.

Erik Erikson's Stages of Growth

There are 8 stages in Erikson's theory of personal development. You can view them as stages in your own lifespan or you can view them as the stages in any cycle of personal development. At each stage there is a positive growth theme and a negative stagnation theme. If you as nurturer, helper, or leader allow the positive conditions to predominate, then people will grow to their fullest potential. The stages are:

Stage 1: Trust vs Mistrust. This is the theme of the first year of life and deals with the question, "Is my world safe and supportive?"

Stage 2: Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt. This is the theme of the second and third years of life and deals with the question, "Can I do things myself or must I always rely on others?"

Stage 3: Initiative vs Guilt. This is the theme of the 4th to 6th years of life and deals with the question, "Am I good or bad?"

Stage 4: Industry vs Inferiority. This is the theme of the 6th year of life to puberty and deals with the question, "Am I competent or worthless?"

Stage 5: Identity vs Role Confusion. This is the theme of adolescence and deals with the question, "Who am I and where am I going?"

Stage 6: Intimacy vs Isolation. This is the theme of early adulthood and deals with the question, "Shall I share my life with another or live alone?"

Stage 7: Generativity vs Self-Absorption. This is the theme of middle adulthood and deals with the question, "Will I produce something of real value?"

Stage 8: Integrity vs Despair. This is the theme of late adulthood and deals with the question, "Have I lived a full life?"

How to Apply the Developmental Themes in a Helping Relationship

You don't have to wait a whole lifetime to develop the 8 themes in Erikson's theory. You can do it in any helping relationship such as a coaching plan or a counselling session to resolve a personal problem. Here's how:

- create a safe trusting environment
- help others work things out for themselves
- never make people feel bad about things they've done or not done
- value people for who they are
- create a clear goal and plan of action
- get others onside to help and support
- put the focus on service to others
- iron out the incongruences so that all things fit with the new goals and plans.

Further Resources on Erik Erikson's Stages of Growth

Using Erikson's theory, [this article](#) provides insight into the personalities of fictional characters and examines how they develop and are nurtured.

[Here](#) 's a refreshing YouTube video outlining Erikson's stages of development.

Click [here](#) for an MTL SkillBooster summarising Erik Erikson's Stages of Growth.

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