



## Child Psychology

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Child psychology, also called child development, the study of the psychological processes of children and, specifically, how these processes differ from those of adults, how they develop from birth to the end of adolescence, and how and why they differ from one child to the next. It is sometimes grouped with infancy, adulthood, and aging under the category of developmental psychology.

What is Development? It is a sequence of age-related changes that occur as a person progresses from conception to death. We go through different types of changes:

- Physical development - motor skills, bone structure, weight, etc.
- Cognitive development - thought patterns and skills, problem solving, etc.
- Social development - emotional changes, personality, etc.

The Developmental Psychologist does the following:

- Examines past experiences and influences in order to understand current behavior.
- Uses current behavior to predict future behavior. Who we are is assumed to be a function of past experiences.

Development begins long before the child is born. From conception, there are changes happening all of the time. In addition, many factors influence how the child develops before birth - in fact, I am often find myself thinking how amazing it is that ANY child is born healthy. One major influence is MATERNAL HEALTH.

### Background:

- Historically, children were often viewed simply as smaller versions of adults.
- When Jean Piaget suggested that children actually think differently than adults, Albert Einstein proclaimed that the discovery was "so simple that only a genius could have thought of it."
- Today, psychologists recognize that child psychology is unique and complex, but many differ in terms of the unique perspective they take when approaching development.
- Experts also differ in their responses to some of the bigger questions in child psychology, such as whether early experiences matter more than later ones or whether nature or nurture plays a greater role in certain aspects of development.

## **Child Psychologist:**

A child psychologist is a type of psychologist who studies the mental, social and emotional development of children. Child psychologists look at development from the prenatal period through adolescence. This field of psychology includes genetics, language development, personality, gender roles, cognitive development, sexual development and social growth. Child psychologists may work with a range of clients including infants, toddlers, children and teens, or they may specialize in working with a particular age group. No matter what population a child psychologist chooses, his or her focus will be on helping understand, prevent, diagnose and treat developmental, cognitive, social and emotional issues.

Child psychologist deal with following things:

- Diagnosing and treating learning or developmental disabilities
- Working with clients to manage behavioral issues
- Administering psychological tests
- Conducting scientific research on childhood development
- Working with a health care team to create a unique treatment plan for a client

## **Contexts of Child Psychology:**

Some of the major contexts that we need to consider in our analysis of child psychology include:

- **The Social Context:** Relationships with peers and adults have an effect on how children think, learn and develop. Families, schools and peer groups all make up an important part of the social context.
- **The Cultural Context:** The culture a child lives in contributes a set of values, customs, shared assumptions and ways of living that influence development throughout the lifespan. Culture may play a role in how children relate to their parents, the type of education they receive and the type of child care that is provided.
- **The Socioeconomic Context:** Social class can also play a major role in child development. Socioeconomic status (often abbreviated as SES), is based upon a number of different factors including how much education people have, how much money they earn, the job they hold and where they live.
- Children raised in households with a high socioeconomic status tend to have greater access to opportunities, while those from households with lower socioeconomic status may have less access to such things as health care, quality nutrition and education. Such factors can have a major impact on child psychology.

## **Importance of Child Psychology:**

- To understand the child better.

- To know that some problems have a psychological origin.
- To deliver dental care in a meaningful and effective manner.
- To establish effective communication between the child and the parent.
- To gain confidence of the child and of the parent.
- To teach parents and children the importance of primary and preventive care.
- To have better treatment planning and interaction with other medical disciplines.
- To produce a comfortable environment for a dental team to work on a child patient.

### **Psychoanalytic Child Development Theories:**

#### **1. Sigmund Freud Theory:**

The theories proposed by Sigmund Freud stressed the importance of childhood events and experiences, but almost exclusively focused on mental disorders rather than normal functioning.

According to Freud, child development is described as a series of 'psychosexual stages.' In "Three Essays on Sexuality" (1915), Freud outlined these stages as oral, anal, phallic, latency and genital. Each stage involves the satisfaction of a libidinal desire and can later play a role in adult personality.

#### **2. Erik Erikson Theory:**

Proposed a stage theory of development, but his theory encompassed human growth throughout the entire human lifespan. Erikson believed that each stage of development was focused on overcoming a conflict. For example, the primary conflict during the adolescent period involves establishing a sense of personal identity. Success or failure in dealing with the conflicts at each stage can impact overall functioning. During the adolescent stage, for example, failure to develop an identity results in role confusion.

### **Stages of Development of child:**

- **Oral Stage: (Birth to 18 months)**

During the oral stage, the infant's primary source of interaction occurs through the mouth. The primary conflict at this stage is the weaning process--the child must become less dependent upon caretakers. If fixation occurs at this stage, Freud believed the individual would have issues with dependency or aggression. Oral fixation can result in problems with drinking, eating, smoking or nail biting.

- **Anal Stage: (18 months to three years)**

According to Freud, success at this stage is dependent upon the way in which parents approach toilet training. Parents who utilize praise and rewards for using the toilet at the appropriate time encourage positive outcomes and help children feel capable and

productive. Freud believed that positive experiences during this stage served as the basis for people to become competent, productive and creative adults.

- **The Phallic Stage: (ages three to six)**

Freud also believed that boys begin to view their fathers as a rival for the mother's affections.

- **The Latent Period: (age six to puberty)**

The development of the ego and superego contributes to this period of calm. The stage begins around the time that children enter into school and become more concerned with peer relationships, hobbies and other interests.

- **The Genital Stage: (puberty on)**

The focus was solely on individual needs; interest in the welfare of others grows during this stage. If the other stages have been completed successfully, the individual should now be well-balanced, warm and caring. The goal of this stage is to establish a balance between the various life areas.

### **Psychological effects in different stages of development:**

- **Trust vs. Mistrust** (this is the stage and the conflict) occurs from birth to 1 year. To resolve this conflict, the child must develop a sense of security
- **Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt** occurs from age 1 - 2. To resolve the conflict, the child must achieve a sense of independence
- **Initiative vs. Guilt** occurs from age 3 - 5. To resolve this conflict, the child must find a balance between restraint and being spontaneous (can't just do everything want whenever they want)
- **Industry vs. Inferiority** occurs from age 6, through puberty. To resolve this conflict, the child must develop a sense of self-confidence
- **Identity vs. Role Confusion** occurs through adolescence. To resolve the conflict, the adolescent experiences a unified sense of self
- **Intimacy vs. Isolation** occurs from puberty to young adulthood. To resolve the conflict, the young adult must form close personal relationships with others.
- **Generativity vs. Stagnation** occurs through middle adulthood. To resolve the conflict, the adult must learn to promote the well-being of others and not be focused completely on them.
- **Integrity vs. Despair** occurs through late adulthood. At this stage, the adult enjoys a sense of satisfaction with themselves and life by reflecting on a well-lived life.

## **Cognitive and Social Development**

- Neonates engage in simple learning tasks
  - Learn through classical conditioning
  - Head turning and sucking movements brought under control through operant conditioning
- Friedman demonstrated memory in neonates 1 to 4 days old - using habituation method.
- Robert Frantz -
  - Babies prefer look at more complex patterns
  - Neonates show preference for drawing of human face

## **Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development**

Suggested that children think differently than adults and proposed a stage theory of cognitive development. He was the first to note that children play an active role in gaining knowledge of the world. According to his theory, children can be thought of as "little scientists" who actively construct their knowledge and understanding of the world.

## **Stages of Cognitive Development**

- **Sensorimotor stage** (0 to 24 months) discover by sensing and doing.
  - Causality important schemas learned
  - Object permanence develops
  - Piaget's ideas surrounding the Sensory Motor Stage are centred on the basis of a 'schema'. Schemas are mental representations or ideas about what things are and how we deal with them.
  - A few weeks after birth, the baby begins to understand some of the information it is receiving from its senses, and learns to use some muscles and limbs for movement.
  - Babies are unable to consider anyone else's needs, wants or interests.
  - Babies act as though the object has ceased to exist.
- **Preoperational stage** (2 to 6 years) thinking is self-centered or egocentric.
  - During this stage, children's thought processes are developing, although they are still considered to be far from 'logical thought'.
  - Pre-operational children are usually 'ego centric', meaning that they are only able to consider things from their own point of view, and imagine that everyone shares this view, because it is the only one possible.
  - Animism' is also a characteristic of the Pre-operational stage. This is when a person has the belief that everything that exists has some kind of consciousness.
  - Another aspect of the Pre-operational stage in a child, is that of 'symbolism'.
  - Begin to use symbols - usually words
  - Do not understand how to manipulate symbols

- Animistic thinking - imagining inanimate objects having life and mental processes
- Centration - too focused on single perceptual quality to notice or understand event.
- **Concrete operations stage** (7 to 12 years) begin develop many concepts and show they can manipulate concepts
  - Conservation develops
  - Begin operate - use and manipulate - on concepts and ideas
  - During this stage, the thought process becomes more rational, mature and 'adult like', or more 'operational', although this process most often continues well into the teenage years.
  - The process is divided by Piaget into two stages, the Concrete Operations, and the Formal Operations stage, which is normally undergone by adolescents.
  - Concrete Operational stage, the child has the ability to develop logical thought about an object, if they are able to manipulate it.
  - Formal Operations stage, the thoughts are able to be manipulated and the presence of the object is not necessary for the thought to take place.
  - Piaget claims that before the beginning of this stage, children's ideas about different objects, are formed and dominated by the appearance of the object. For example, there appears to be more blocks when they are spread out, than when they are in a small pile.
  - Once children have learnt to conserve, they learn about 'reversibility'. This means that they learn that if things are changed, they will still be the same as they used to be. For example, they learn that if they spread out the pile of blocks
- **Formal operations stage** (over 12 years) abstract, symbolic reasoning and ability deal with hypothetical problems develop.
  - There are 2 major characteristics of formal operational thought.
  - The first is 'hypothetic-deductive reasoning'. When faced with a problem, adolescents come up with a general theory of all possible factors that might affect the outcome.
  - The second important characteristic of this stage is that it is 'propositional' in nature. Adolescents can focus on verbal assertions and evaluate their logical validity without making reference to real-world circumstances.

### **Behavioral Child Development Theories:**

Behavioral theories of child development focus on how environmental interaction influences behavior and are based upon the theories of theorists such as John B. Watson, Ivan Pavlov and B. F. Skinner. These theories deal only with observable behaviors. Development is considered a

reaction to rewards, punishments, stimuli and reinforcement. This theory differs considerably from other child development theories because it gives no consideration to internal thoughts or feelings.

### **Social Child Development Theories:**

**Albert Bandura:** Proposed what is known as social learning theory. According to this theory of child development, children learn new behaviors from observing other people. Bandura believed that external reinforcement was not the only way that people learned new things. Intrinsic reinforcements such as a sense of pride, satisfaction and accomplishment could also lead to learning. By observing the actions of others, including parents and peers, children develop new skills and acquire new information.

**John Bowlby:** Proposed one of the earliest theories of social development. Bowlby believed that early relationships with caregivers play a major role in child development and continue to influence social relationships throughout life.

### **Parenting Styles:**

- Authoritarian parenting styles generally lead to children who are obedient and proficient, but they rank lower in happiness, social competence and self-esteem.
- Authoritative parenting styles tend to result in children who are happy, capable and successful.
- Permissive parenting often results in children who rank low in happiness and self-regulation. These children are more likely to experience problems with authority and tend to perform poorly in school.
- Uninvolved parenting styles rank lowest across all life domains. These children tend to lack self-control, have low self-esteem and are less competent than their peers.

#### **1. Authoritarian Parenting**

- Children are expected to follow the strict rules established by the parents.
- Failure to follow such rules usually results in punishment. Authoritarian parents fail to explain the reasoning behind these rules. If asked to explain, the parent might simply reply, "Because I said so." These parents have high demands, but are not responsive to their children.
- According to Baumrind, these parents "are obedience- and status-oriented, and expect their orders to be obeyed without explanation".

#### **2. Equalitarian Parenting**

- This parenting style is much more democratic.
- Equalitarian parents are responsive to their children and willing to listen to questions. When children fail to meet the expectations, these parents are more nurturing and forgiving rather than punishing.

- Baumrind suggests that these parents monitor and impart clear standards for their children's conduct.

### **3. Permissive Parenting**

- Permissive parents, sometimes referred to as indulgent parents, have very few demands to make of their children.
- These parents rarely discipline their children because they have relatively low expectations of maturity and self-control.
- According to Baumrind, permissive parents are more responsive than they are demanding.
- Permissive parents are generally nurturing and communicative with their children, often taking on the status of a friend more than that of a parent.

### **4. Uninvolved Parenting**

- An uninvolved parenting style is characterized by few demands, low responsiveness and little communication.
- While these parents fulfill the child's basic needs, they are generally detached from their child's life.
- In extreme cases, these parents may even reject or neglect the needs of their children.

### **The Impact of Parenting Styles**

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