**Developmental psychology**

**Developmental definition:** the relatively permanent changes that occur in a person, that begin at conception and continue throughout the life span

## Stages and characteristics of developmental theories

**What are stage theories?**

* Describe development in terms of age-related, discrete, qualitatively distinct steps or stages
* Stages are invariant – all individuals pass through all stages in the same set order
* Some explain only one area of development, whereas others are wider-reaching and attempt to show how various aspects of development relate to each other

# PIAGET’S THEORY OF COGNITIVE DEVLOPMENT

**Piaget’s goal:** to explain the mechanisms and processes by which the infant, and then the child, develops into an individual who can reason and think using hypotheses

* Believed children’s thinking changed with age
* Cognitive development is a progressive reorganisation of mental processes as a result of biological maturation and environmental experience
* Children construct an understanding of the world around them, and then experience discrepancies between what they already know and what they discover in their environment

**Key terminology:**

* **Schema:** an idea about what something is and how to deal with it. As adults, we have thousands of schemas
* **Assimilation:** fitting new experiences and information into our current understanding. e.g. "the lemon is a ball"
* **Accommodation:** adjusting a schema to include new information as we encounter it. e.g. "the lemon is a fruit"
* **Equilibrium:** when a child’s existing schemas are capable of explaining what it can perceive around it – it is a state of cognitive (mental) balance
* **Disequilibrium:** an unpleasant mental state when new information cannot be fitted into existing schemas
* **Conservation**: understanding an object does not change its weight, mass volume or area simply because it changes shape
* **Egocentric:** only being able to perceive the world from your own perspective (antonym = decentre)
* **Object permanence:** understanding that an object continues to exist even when removed from the field of vision
* **Seriation**: the ability to put things in order based on quantity or magnitude. e.g. a child puts their stuffed animals in order from shortest to tallest
* **Abstract thinking:** the ability to think about and understand concepts that only exist in the theoretical world

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Stage 2 - pre-operational

Age: 2-7 years

Characteristics: egocentric, intuitive thinking (cannot yet think logically), language unsophisticated

Stage 4: formal operational

Age 11+ or 12+

Characteristics: capable of abstract and logical thinking

# KHOLBERG’S THEORY OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT

* Levels and stages in Kohlberg’s theory are not interchangeable, 3 levels and 6 stages
* Morality refers to a body of standards or principles derived from s code of conduct from a particular philosophy, religion or culture that defines what is ‘good’ and what is ‘bad’
  + code, what is right or wrong
  + Applies to entire group of people
  + Moral reasoning: Ability to reason what constitutes what is right or wrong
* Ethics, set of guiding principles a person develops regarding ‘what should I do’
  + Presents the moral code that guides a person’s choices and behaviours throughout their life
  + Applying your morality as best you can in a tough situation
  + Practical ways a person applies their morals in specific situations

**Research and use of dilemmas**

* Sample too narrow (10, 16-year-old boys)
* Longitudinal research 3-4-year interval for 20 years
* About the reasons not the decisions

**Three levels:**

* **PRE-CONVENTIONAL**
* **CONVENTIONAL**
* **POST-CONVENTIONAL**

LEVEL ONE: Pre-conventional

Childs sense of morality is externally controlled. Accept and believe rules of authority figures e.g. parents and teachers. Has not learned/internalized societies conventions regarding what is right or wrong, focuses largely on external consequences that certain actions may bring.

**Stage one – obedience and punishment orientation:**

Focuses on child’ s desire to obey rules and avoid being punished, e.g. the action is perceived as morally wrong because the perpetrator is punished, the punishment can be perceived at ‘worse’ than the action itself.

Fear of authority

Features

* A child at this stage, while recognising that many others have different thoughts and feelings, stills finds it difficult to consider two points of view in a moral dilemma (Is egocentric, only understand from their own perspective)
* Child tends to overlook people’s intentions
* Child focus on fear of authority and avoidance of punishment as reasons for behaving morally

**Stage two – instrumental purpose orientation:**

Expresses “what’s in it for me?”. In which right behaviour is defined by whatever the individual believes to be in their best interest. Shows limited interest in the needs of others, only when it might further the individual’s interest.

Features

* Child at this stage realises that people can have different perspectives in a moral dilemma, but at first this understanding is very concrete
* They view right action as flowing from self-interest and understand reciprocity as equal exchange of favours: “you do this for me, and I’ll do this for you”

LEVEL TWO: Conventional

**Stage three – mutual interpersonal expectations, conformity and relationships**

Conforming to what’s expected of your relationships

* Want to be seen as a good person, sometimes called ‘good girl/boy orientation’
* No longer egocentric
* The amount of concern you put for your own welfare you put for other people ‘how would I fell if they did that to me’
* What’s expected of relationships, in terms of a relationship

Features

**Stage four- law and social order orientation**

What is right based on the law? Laws are not flexible, laws are ridged.

* Goes by the law, must obey, no matter what something someone has done and why
* Individual takes into account a larger perspective – that of societal laws
* Rules must be enforced the same way for everyone
* Laws are vital for ensuring societal order

LEVEL THREE: Post-conventional

A person’s sense of morality is defined In terms of more abstract principles and values. People now believe that some laws are unjust and should be changed or eliminated. They realise that individuals are separate entities from society and that individuals may disobey rules inconsistent with their own principles. Live by their own ethical principles – which typically include basic human rights such as life, liberty, and justice – and view rules as useful but changeable mechanisms, rather than absolute dictates that must be obeyed without question.

**Stage five – rights and social contact orientation**

The world is viewed as holding different opinions, rights and values.

Features

* Laws and rules are flexible
* Imagine alternatives to their own social order
* Social contract 🡪 our actions should harm watch other

**Stage six – universal ethical principles**

Imbedded a high-level code of ethics (highly developed) the person will only act morally

Features

* Human rights are most important

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# ERICKSON’S THEORY OF IDENTITY

Sense of identity: an understanding of the nature of the self as distinct from others in terms of enduring personality characteristics

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