

Erik Erickson's Psychosocial Stages

Erikson's stages of psychosocial development, as articulated by Erik Erikson, developmental psychologist, is a psychoanalytic theory which identifies eight stages through which a healthily developing human should pass from infancy to late adulthood. In each stage, the person confronts, and hopefully masters, new challenges. Each stage builds upon the successful completion of earlier stages. The challenges of stages not successfully completed may be expected to reappear as problems in the future.

However, mastery of a stage is not required to advance to the next stage. Erikson's stage theory characterizes an individual advancing through the eight life stages as a function of negotiating his or her biological forces and sociocultural forces. Each stage is characterized by a psychosocial crisis of these two conflicting forces (as shown in the table below). If an individual does indeed successfully reconcile these forces (favoring the first mentioned attribute in the crisis), he or she emerges from the stage with the corresponding virtue. For example, if an infant enters into the toddler stage (autonomy vs. shame and doubt) with more trust than mistrust, he or she carries the virtue of hope into the remaining life stages.^[1]

Approximate Age	Virtues	Psychosocial crisis ^[2]	Significant relationship ^[3]	Existential question ^[4]	Examples ^[3]
0-2 years	Hope	Basic trust vs. mistrust	Mother	Can I trust the world?	Feeding, abandonment
2-4 years	Will	Autonomy vs. shame and doubt	Parents	Is it okay to be me?	Toilet training, clothing themselves
4-5 years	Purpose	Initiative vs. guilt	Family	Is it okay for me to do, move, and act?	Exploring, using tools or making art
5-12 years	Competence	Industry vs. inferiority	Neighbors, school	Can I make it in the world of people and things?	School, sports
13-19 years	Fidelity	Identity vs. role confusion	Peers, role model	Who am I? Who can I be?	Social relationships
20-39 years	Love	Intimacy vs. isolation	Friends, partners	Can I love?	Romantic relationships
40-64 years	Care	Generativity vs. stagnation	Household, workmates	Can I make my life count?	Work, parenthood
65-death	Wisdom	Ego integrity vs. despair	Mankind, my kind	Is it okay to have been me?	Reflection on life