

Environmental Influences

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss the importance of the environment in the realm of developmental psychology. You will also reflect on how enrichment at work can impact your self and social awareness skill. The specific areas of focus include:

1. Categories of Environment

Environmental influences are another aspect of developmental psychology. These can have a large impact on development over time. In fact, people have certain **sensitive or critical periods** during development when they are more affected by their environment.

➔ **EXAMPLE** The prenatal period is a stage when children are especially susceptible to drugs or chemicals in their environment.

Environment can thus be defined as any external conditions that can affect development. This can include a wide variety of different conditions, but they can be broken down into three categories to make them easier to remember:

- **Physical:** The physical environment is composed of the physical objects and resources around us. This includes everything from food and water to dangerous objects or substances.
- **Social:** The social environment includes the effect that others can have on development. This is an important area for children since they mimic the behaviors and language of others in their social environment as they grow and learn.
- **Cognitive:** The cognitive environment is the stimulating intellectual environment surrounding a person. This includes all the factors that can help a person to grow cognitively, and that influence the way he or she thinks or feels.



TERMS TO KNOW

Sensitive/Critical Period

Period of neuronal/physical growth that facilitates learning skills and abilities.

Environment

External environment and experiences (cultural influences, maternal/paternal influences, parenting styles, school, etc.).

2. Effects of Environment

There are many ways in which an environment can affect development, including having a lack of influence.

2a. Deprivation

Deprivation is when an environment doesn't have something normal or essential for growth, which can, in turn, affect the development of an individual.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Feral children are children raised outside of human interactions. These cases usually involve extreme abuse or neglect and cause a child to grow without any cognitive or linguistic stimulation. This leaves the child with little to no language skills, as well as cognitive defects.



TERM TO KNOW

Deprivation

Under-stimulating and unhealthy environment.

2b. Enrichment

Enrichment falls on the opposite end of the spectrum, and is when an environment is deliberately made more stimulating, nutritional, comforting, etc.

This has a biological effect as well—enrichment encourages a brain to develop and create more neural connections, which in turn contributes to intelligence, social development, and cognitive development later in life.



Self and Social Awareness: Why Employers Care

Employers who provide stimulating work environments help to enrich the lives of their employees—potentially, then, helping them grow more neural connections and become smarter and more productive. If there are things you think your workplace could do to provide enrichment, speak up, it could benefit everyone.

There are certain factors that go into making an enriching environment for a developing child:

- **Engaging all of the senses:** Toys that are tactile, auditory, and visual are more cognitively stimulating.
- **Social interactions:** Interactions with parents and others help a child to develop and enrich his or her environment further.
- **Adapting to temperament:** A person's environment can also interact with his or her inherited or biological predispositions.



TERM TO KNOW

Enrichment

Stimulating environment with emotional support.

2c. Temperament

Temperament refers to the natural part of a person's personality that's inherited and generally unchanged throughout that person's life.

This can include aspects like energy level or how moody or temperamental a person might be. Babies in particular exhibit different types of temperaments.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Fifty percent—the majority of children—are easy-going; 10% are difficult, and 15% are slow to warm up.

Additionally, the effect of environment on temperament is reciprocal.

➞ **EXAMPLE** Say a child displays a certain kind of temperament, and then a parent responds to that in kind. The environment (the parent) adapts to the child, while the child's temperament can also change as a result of parental influence.



TERM TO KNOW

Temperament

Refers to infant differences in attention, activity levels, emotional sensitivity, arousal, and reactivity to new novel situations.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned how environmental influences play a role in human development. An environment is any variety of external conditions that can affect development. There are three **categories of environment: physical, social, and cognitive.**

You now understand that the **effects of the environment** on development can be significant. **Deprivation** of environmental stimulation can inhibit development, while **enrichment** of the environment can ensure that a person develops normally. Conversely, **temperament** is the part of human personality that is inherited and can have a reciprocal effect on the environment. You examined how employers who provide enrichment can help employees strengthen their self and social awareness skill.

Good luck!

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