

# Erikson's Eight Stages of Development

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will cover psychologist Erik Erikson's eight stages of development, through the definition and discussion of:

1. Erik Erikson
2. Erikson's Eight Stages of Development

## 1. ERIK ERIKSON

Erik Erikson was a psychologist who theorized **eight stages of human development** in the life course. Erikson theorized that each of these eight stages in the life course has its own conflict, its own problem to solve, in which people either succeed or fail. Presumably, there are cascading effects--if you fail at one challenge, you might not be set up very well to pass the next life course challenge.



## THINK ABOUT IT

Do the psychology-based theories seem to be concerned solely with stages, and even making stages for the sake of stages? It's true, but remember that the social world and social life is very convoluted. In order for sociologists to truly understand and work, they need to break down the social world into manageable parts that they can analyze and study scientifically. This is why stages are valuable.



## TERM TO KNOW

### Erik Erikson's Eight Stages of Development

Erik Erikson, a psychologist, developed an extended life-course theory of development that had eight stages, each with its own central challenge: 1) Infancy; 2) Toddlerhood; 3) Preschool; 4) Preadolescence; 5) Adolescence; 6) Young Adulthood; 7) Middle Adulthood; 8) Old Age.

## 2. ERIKSON'S EIGHT STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

### Stage 1: Infancy

In this stage, you're heavily reliant on your parents and paternal investment. Your parents, through adequate care, nurturing and love, can instill a foundation of trust in your life that will last for your lifetime. Conversely,

they can neglect or abuse you, and make you perceive, as an infant, that the environment is hostile, which might cause you to be scared and hostile, to not trust people. The central challenge of the infancy stage is to establish trust or to fail at this and establish mistrust.

### **Stage 2: Toddlerhood**

Toddlerhood lasts until about age three. In this stage, children begin to come into their own and learn the skills necessary to cope in the world autonomously, by themselves. Failure to do so can result in doubt or shame about their abilities.

### **Stage 3: Preschool**

Children leave the home more and meet broader circles of people. They must learn to negotiate their surroundings and understand the expectations of their parents, otherwise they might have feelings of guilt. The central challenge of the preschool stage is to avoid guilt and to learn to meet the expectations of parents.

### **Stage 4: Preadolescence**

Preadolescence lasts from about ages 6 to 13. In this stage, children sense that they need to go out and do something positive in the world; they need to do something with their lives. They want their pursuits encouraged and their industriousness rewarded. In this stage, the central challenge is that of industriousness versus failure or inferiority.

➦ **EXAMPLE** Think of the stereotype of the couch potato, who simply sits on the couch in this stage of life and doesn't do anything. His parents are always encouraging him and wanting to keep him busy, saying, "You can't just sit on the couch all day. Go do something!" This is a recognition of the central challenge of preadolescence, industriousness versus inferiority.

### **Stage 5: Adolescence**

Adolescence is typically associated with the teen years, approximately ages 13 to 19. In adolescence, the challenge is to define who you are and what you can do in the world and in life. The goal is to establish a unique identity and have goals for your life, rather than to fail at this and stay confused about who you are and what you can do in the world--in essence, to not pin down any kind of identity.

### **Stage 6: Young adulthood**

In this stage, the central challenge is to develop and maintain intimate relationships with other people, relationships of friendship and most importantly, a relationship of love where you show you can give and take within this context of love. If you fail at this, you might become isolated, so you want to establish relationships in young adulthood.

### **Stage 7: Middle adulthood**

In this stage, you're caught up in making sure you've contributed something or made a difference in the world. In middle adulthood, you want to make sure you've passed something on to the next generation. You want to answer the call that life means something and that you've established some sort of meaning in life that goes beyond just your own existence.

➦ **EXAMPLE** Often, people decide to have children in order to establish meaning in life that extends beyond their own existence.

The central challenge in this stage is to avoid turning inwards and becoming completely self-absorbed because you haven't extended yourself and created some sense of meaning that goes beyond just your own existence.

## Stage 8: Old age

In this final stage of development, near the end of people's lives, they're concerned with the challenge of integrity versus despair. They want to look on what they've accomplished with a sense of pride and integrity--their lives mattered, they did something positive and the person they became was a good person. If they fail at this, they might feel despair, which is a powerful word. They might feel that they missed chances and made some bad decisions, and these in turn caused them to become a person that they didn't necessarily want to become. All people want to know that they lived a decent, viable life, made good decisions and became a good person, and thus avoid despair.



### SUMMARY

Today you learned about psychologist **Erik Erikson's eight stages of human development** and the central challenges within each stage.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Zach Lamb.



### TERMS TO KNOW

#### **Erik Erikson's Eight Stages of Development**

Erik Erikson, a psychologist, developed an extended life-course theory of development that had eight stages, each with its own central challenge: 1) Infancy; 2) Toddlerhood; 3) Preschool; 4) Preadolescence; 5) Adolescence; 6) Young Adulthood; 7) Middle Adulthood; 8) Old Age.