

Stages 1 and 2 of Piaget's 4 Stages of Cognitive Development

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WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial covers cognitive development. Our discussion breaks down as follows:

1. Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development
2. The Sensorimotor Stage
 - a. Sensorimotor Sub-Stages
3. The Preoperational Stage

1. Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development

Jean Piaget was a Swiss psychologist in the 1920s who developed a theory about cognitive growth and development. He's one of the most important figures to know in cognitive theory and the field of psychology in general.

Piaget's studies of children and his interviews with parents were based on questioning the children and having them perform different problem-solving tasks. This research led to Piaget's idea of the four stages of growth, which are essentially supposed to be steps. They are meant to be followed in order: each child goes through each of these four steps in succession.

This lesson will cover Piaget's first two stages of growth.

2. The Sensorimotor Stage

The first stage in cognitive growth is the **sensorimotor stage**. The sensorimotor stage occurs from birth up to two years of age. During this period, children are trying to make sense of the world. They don't yet have all of the internal mental constructs, or schemas, needed to help them to sort information about it.

Everything that they know of the world is physical, based on their senses, touching and manipulating things, and their motor skills. This stage is identified by a lack of **object permanence**.

➦ **EXAMPLE** At this stage, when you play a game of peekaboo, the child doesn't actually know if you're there anymore when you put the blanket up. He or she thinks you've disappeared completely because you're not in sight!



TERMS TO KNOW

Sensorimotor Stage

Understanding of the world is dependent on sensory and motor interactions (grasping, touching, looking, etc.)

Object Permanence

Around 8 months, infants begin to understand that objects continue to exist even if hidden

2a. Sensorimotor Sub-Stages

The sensorimotor stage is divided into six sub-stages that illustrate important aspects of this stage:

1. Simple reflexes: Where a child is only able to use the innate skills and abilities that they were born with, things like sucking, or curling fingers or toes.

2. Primary circular reactions: When a child starts to form ideas and focus on what they can do with their bodies, or their bodily reactions. This is when a child tends to repeat actions.

➦ **EXAMPLE** For example, a child might pass their hand over their face over and over to get an idea of what that action is like.

3. Secondary circular reactions: When children are more outwardly focused on the environment and they start to manipulate toys more.

4. Coordination of reactions: When they start to intentionally do things and to combine those reactions, building on the previous stages.

5. Tertiary circular reactions: Where they start to experiment with new actions to see what the results are.

➦ **EXAMPLE** For example, children may start yelling to get attention, to see if that behavior will get the parent to look over at them.

6. Internalization of thoughts: Where children start to create permanent ideas and schemas, and start to use and react to symbols and language.

3. The Preoperational Stage

Piaget's next stage is the **preoperational stage**. The preoperational stage occurs between two and seven years of age. During this time, children start to make their first mental representations of things. These mental representations are very simple in the beginning.

There are several important aspects of this stage:

- **Transformation:** A child at this stage isn't able to transform objects, which is to say that they can't mentally change the shape or form of something. This means that when children in this stage see something, it's very concrete. They can't imagine what it would look like if you were to move that object around.

- **Intuitive Thought:** Children at this age are very intuitive in their thoughts. This means that children at this stage don't use logic or reasoning when they're trying to figure something out.

➦ **EXAMPLE** For example, children are not able to understand conservation, which means that they aren't able to tell that there is the same amount of something regardless of what's holding it. This is an experiment Piaget did: he took the same amount of liquid and put it in a tall, narrow glass and a wide, shallow glass. The same amount of liquid in both glasses was seen as being different amounts by children.

- **Egocentric Thought:** Children at this age are very egocentric in their thoughts. At this stage, children are very centered on their individual thoughts and they can't think about others or what others might be thinking at the same time.

➦ **EXAMPLE** This means that, for example, children can't draw a picture from someone else's point of view. If you were to ask them, "What do you think mommy sees?", they wouldn't be able to imagine their mother's perspective; they would only show you what they see themselves.



TERMS TO KNOW

Preoperational Stage

Children begin to make very simple mental operations

Transformation

Mentally changing an object's shape or form

Intuitive Thought

Primitive reasoning with logic

Egocentric Thought

Difficulty perceiving things from another's point of view



SUMMARY

Piaget's theory of cognitive development contains four stages that children progress through. Today we learned about the first two stages, the **sensorimotor stage** and the **preoperational stage**. In each stage, there are particular important aspects of cognitive development that children progress to.

Good luck!

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Erick Taggart.



TERMS TO KNOW

Egocentric Thought

Difficulty perceiving things from another's point of view.

Intuitive Thought

Primitive reasoning with logic.

Object Permanence

Around 8 months, infants begin to understand that objects continue to exist even if hidden.

Preoperational Stage

Children begin to make very simple mental operations.

Sensorimotor Stage

Understanding of the world is dependent on sensory and motor interactions (grasping, touching, looking, etc.)

Transformation

Mentally changing an object's shape or form.