

INTRODUCTION



So often, we learn about the various stages of development—physical, social, psychological, and so on—in isolation from one another, as if one did not affect the others. This lack of integration does not serve our understanding of the human person who is, indeed, “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:14). It is difficult to fully understand people by exploring only one aspect of development, as each aspect influences the others. To know something about an adult, we need to know something about the child he or she was. To know something about adult levels of development, we need to know about levels of development at younger ages.

And so, this handbook will use a different approach by taking different ages and looking at their most common stages of development. The stages of development that will be highlighted will include physical, psychological (emotional), cognitive, social, moral, and spiritual. Some of these steps of development can be understood simply by observing many people over time. Other aspects of development have been observed by theorists who developed their own theories for development.

As a pediatrician with over twenty-nine years experience, I am familiar with and able to describe the major, normal,

physical developmental milestones at each age. To ensure that every major physical milestone at each age was included, I referred to one of the most consulted pediatric textbooks to verify my experience.

In terms of psychological development, we know much because of the work of Erik Erikson, a psychologist, who explored human development over the life span. Erikson was particularly interested in how people formed relationships with other people and the world. Each of his eight stages consists of something positive versus something negative. At the end of each stage, one has achieved predominantly the positive or the negative, for no one is ever entirely one or the other. In Erikson's view, anyone can remain "stuck" at a certain stage, depending on external circumstances. One can also revisit certain stages later in life, if one did not negotiate them successfully at an earlier age.

We better understand cognitive development in children and adolescents through the work of Jean Piaget, a psychologist who was interested in how children learn. Although Piaget first developed the four stages of his theory by observing his own children, his stages of cognitive development have certainly stood the test of time.

We better comprehend moral development through the work of Lawrence Kohlberg, also a psychologist who theorized six stages of moral development by observing middle-class white boys. His work has been criticized by feminists who believe that women use relational considerations in making moral judgments. It has also been criticized by some minority investigators who believe that their experience is different than that described by Kohlberg. That said, Kohlberg's stages still

have value. Although Kohlberg posited six stages, he believed that most people only reached the third or fourth stages.

Finally, we can better appreciate spiritual or faith development through the work of James Fowler, a psychologist and an ordained minister. By observing and interviewing many people, Fowler devised six stages and a “prestage” (for young children). Fowler borrowed heavily from Piaget and Erikson, although in certain stages, one clearly predominates over another.

A summary of the developmental stages posited by Piaget, Erikson, Kohlberg, and Fowler follow.

Piaget’s Stages of Learning

Sensorimotor: birth to two years

Preoperational: three to five years

Concrete operations: five to ten/twelve years

Formal operations: adolescence and adult

Erikson’s Stages of Relationships

Trust vs. mistrust: birth to one year

Autonomy vs. shame and doubt: one to three years

Initiative vs. guilt: three to five years

Industry vs. inferiority: five to ten years

Identity vs. role diffusion: adolescence

Intimacy vs. isolation: young adult

Generativity vs. stagnation: middle age

Integrity vs. despair: old age

Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development

Do the right thing (obey a rule) to avoid punishment: pre-schoolers.

Do the right thing (obey a rule) so that others will think well of one: elementary school-age children.

Do the right thing (obey a rule/law) if it meets one's needs or those of one's family/group, even if it means breaking an external law: adolescence.

Do the right thing (obey a rule/law) to maintain order in one's group or society.

Do the right thing (obey a rule/law) even if it is not one's own if breaking it would cause embarrassment or hard feelings.

Universal principles take precedence over any local rule; obey universal principle, even if it means losing one's life to do so.

Fowler's Stages of Faith

Undifferentiated faith: birth to two years

Intuitive-projective faith: three to five years

Mythic-literal faith: five to ten years

Synthetic-conventional faith: preteens and young adolescents

Individuative-reflective: older adolescents and young adults

Conjunctive faith: middle age (if ever)

Universalizing faith: middle age and beyond (if ever)

We will explore these stages, age by age. Also highlighted will be each age's "phases," those little quirks that human beings experience at one age more than at others. Although some of these phases seem completely irrational, knowledge of the other changes going on at the individual's age helps to make better sense of them.

Also included throughout each chapter are verses in the form of haiku, a Japanese style of poetry. These three-line poems consist of five syllables in the first line, seven in the second, and five in the third. The purpose of these haiku is to highlight the various stages or phases in a pithy, sometimes humorous, manner so that they might be better understood and remembered.

The goal of this handbook is to help all who use it better understand the development of children from birth through adolescence so that we can minister more effectively to them and, perhaps also, to their families. If we who work with children and adolescents understand their stages of development well, we can share that knowledge with parents and others who work with young people in a variety of settings.