

Erik Erikson’s Theory of personality development

Erik Erikson (1902 – 1994) was a German born psychoanalyst, a pioneer in a life span perspective. Erikson viewed that ego development occurs through one’s life time. Erikson’s (1950, 1982) theory of psychosocial development covers eight stages across the life span. According to Erikson each stage involves a “crisis” in personality – that is important at that time and will remain an issue to some degree throughout the rest of life. In each stage there is the balancing of a positive tendency and a corresponding negative one. Initiative vs. guilt is a conflict children face between their urge to form and carry out goals. When they fail to reach their goals, they feel guilty. The sense of right and wrong morality emerges as a result of identification with the parents. Children can resolve this crisis to acquire the virtue of purpose. Erikson defines it as the courage to envisage and pursue valued goals. Children can then develop into adults who combine spontaneous enjoyment of life with a sense of responsibility. Those who cannot resolve this crisis may become repressed. If initiative dominates, they must continue to believe. Erikson’s last stage is ego-integrity. The virtue of this stage is wisdom.

Psychosocial theory on the stages of child development was proposed by Erikson. He stresses upon Epigenetic principle, according to which the development of new properties which are not contained in the original situation develop as result of environmental influences and the interaction between the former (original situation) and the latter (environment factors).

According to Erikson the stages of development are categorized into eight phases marked by specific development characteristics. The stages are as follows.

Stages of life	Psychological Crisis
Birth to 1 year	Trust vs. Mistrust
1 to 2 years	Autonomy vs. shame, doubt
3 to 5/6 years	Initiative vs. Guilt
End of 6 to 12 years	Industry vs. Inferiority
Adolescence	Identity vs. Identity diffusion or Role Confusion
Early adult	Intimacy vs. Isolation
Young and middle adult	Generativity vs. Stagnation
Late adult	Integrity vs. Despair

Stage I: A sense of trust vs. mistrust

This stage begins from birth and is continued to twelve months of age. The first and formal task of an infant is to develop the basic sense of trust in himself and his environment. For the fulfilment of his basic needs he completely depends on others. Due to dissatisfaction of his needs he gradually loses his sense of faith in the world around him. The sense of faith may laid down during this period.

Stage II: A sense of autonomy versus a sense of shame

In this stage, child develops a sense of autonomy. He does not want help from others. He likes to do things in his own way. Parents should be careful about their autonomy. There should have balance between firmness and permissiveness to make a healthy sense of autonomy.

Stage III: A sense of initiative versus guilt

The third stage of psycho-social development between three to six years of age is characterized by the crisis of initiative versus guilt. Equipped with the sense of trust and autonomy the child now begins to take initiative in interacting with his environment. Therefore, there is need to resolve the crisis of initiative vs. guilt at this stage of psycho-social development and it can be properly done if we allow the child to experiment with his initiative by properly supervising and guiding his activities and encouraging him to develop a habit of self-evaluation of the results of his initiative.

Stage IV: Period of industry vs. inferiority

Generally, by this age children begin to attend to school where they are made to learn various skills and the teachers as well as the school environment generate pressures on them to work hard in order to perform well. Parents also now begin to make demands upon the children to lend their hand with household duties or some cases put them with occupational responsibilities. Therefore, the teachers and the school environment thus play a very significant role in helping the child out of the industry versus inferiority crisis.

Stage V: The period of identity vs. role confusion

This stage, beginning with the advent of puberty, is marked with the crisis of identity vs. role confusion. Adolescents begin to search for their own personal identity equipped with the sense of trust, initiative and industry. The sudden changes in their bodies and mental functioning and the altered demands of society compel them to ask questions of themselves like, who am I? What have I become? Am I the same person I used to be? What am I supposed to do and in which manner am I to behave? There is return of heterosexual interests. Adolescents are concerned about their future role and status.

Stage VI: Intimacy vs. isolation

This is the stage of early adulthood. Erikson considers social interaction has fundamental and unavoidable influence on personality development. So, during this stage the individual tends to develop a sense of intimacy or commitment to another person. The opposite of intimacy is isolation. When one fails to develop an adequate sense of intimacy by using one's identity with that of another person or when relation deteriorates for one reason or another, one tends to develop a sense of isolation—a pulling away from relationships and breaking off of ties.

Stage VII: The period of creativity vs. stagnation

This stage is called middle adulthood. In this stage, he tries to establish in a professional career. He wants to satisfy his needs for generativity, a concern to establish and guide the

next generation. This is realized through nurturing his own children, guiding and directing other young people and by engaging in some kind of creative, productive or fruitful activity that may prove beneficial to society. Opposed to the sense of generativity, there is a tendency on the part of the individual to become egoistic and selfish. This leads to stagnation and personal impoverishment.

Stage VIII: Integrity vs. despair.

This is old age. The person reflects upon the life lived and sometimes integrates even death into the pattern. During this last stage of psycho-social development one is confronted with the final crisis of one's life span, termed ego-integrity vs. despair. Ego-integrity refers to the integration or culmination of the successful resolution of all seven previous crises in the course of one's life.

Educational Implication

The theory of Erikson's psychosocial development is very important to know the personality pattern of a child. If we want to reshape the behaviours of a child it is important to know the personality pattern which may be understood from this theory. It also helps as to deal with our learner and to understand their immediate behaviour. Psycho-social development theory gives us information about the entire life span of an individual and negative aspects of life may arise. These negative aspects of life can be channelized through education.