

Notes: Morals Development Birth Through Adolescence

The framework for this study is built on Erik Erikson's model of developmental stages. This is a general framework. Children grow at different rates. Some may be ahead of the curve, some may be taking their time moving into the next stage. That's all right. They go through these stages in this order.

Newcomers: Infants to Two Years

The Struggle: Trust vs. Mistrust

The Strength: Hope

Mental Development

- Learn through five senses (sensorimotor)
- Learn to connect cause and effect, a key component of moral understanding
- Begin to imitate others

Moral Development

- Live in a "pre-moral" stage, not yet making conscious moral choices
- Are self-focused
- Respond to non-verbal and verbal communication of significant people
- Feel rejection/acceptance: the foundation of morality and another key component of moral understanding

Directors: Two and Three Year Olds

The Struggle: Autonomy vs. Shame

Autonomy = self-rule

The Strength: Will

Mental Development

- Get fantasy and reality mixed up
- Are impressionable and trusting
- Think with childlike logic and reasoning
- Don't understand the flow of time

Moral Development

- Have a newfound sense of deliberate choice
- Struggle with independence vs. cooperation

- Engage in “parallel play”
- Begin “perspective-taking” at about 2 1/2 years old, a key to moral understanding
- Imitate the actions of significant people
- "Racial innocence," seeing individuals, not groups (Dr. Marguerite Wright)
- Rely on external cues: approval/disapproval; reward/punishment
- Believe that what's right is "to get my own way" (Dr. Thomas Lickona)

Explorers: Four and Five Year Olds

The Struggle: Initiative vs. Guilt

The Strength: Purpose

Mental Development

- Explore and discover
- Starting to sort out fantasy from reality
- Are impressionable and trusting
- Think with childlike logic and reasoning
- Have a strong imagination
- Don't understand the flow of time

Moral Development

- Engage in “associative play”
- Are rule dependent
- Begin to be influenced by conscience
- No moral nuances
- Identify with the values of significant people
- Aware, without prejudice, that people have different skin color
- Believe that what's right is "doing what I'm told" (Dr. Thomas Lickona)

Collectors: Six through Nine

The Struggle: Industry vs. Inferiority

Industrious = busy doing productive things

The Strength: Competence

Mental Development

- Begin to understand the symbolic, abstract, flow of time
- Think best by seeing and doing concrete things
- Are discovering abilities they didn't have before; want to know what they do well

Moral Development

- Want to be part of a group

- Are competitive, want to know what they do well
- Are rule-oriented and quick to point out rule-breakers
- Focus on fairness, an eye-for-an-eye
- Double-standard: Justice for all. Mercy for me, please.
- Toward the end of this stage, begin to transition from a tit-for-tat view of morality to a more altruistic view (being kind simply for the sake of being kind)
- Aware of racial differences and usually able to correctly identify most races
- Believe that what's right is to "look out for myself but be fair to those who are fair to me" (Dr. Thomas Lickona) (This is concrete moral reciprocity.)

Targets: 'Tweens (10-12 year-olds)

(Targets because marketers are eager to sell to them and to become part of their identity.)

The Struggle: Industry vs. Inferiority and Identity vs. Confusion

- They have one foot in childhood, one in adolescence

The Strength: Competence and Self-Awareness

Mental Development

- Brain capacity is in its second fastest period of growth (first is infant - five years)
- Are body-image conscious, self-conscious
- Are insecure, but act like they have life under control; think they are grown up
- Have a distorted view of reality; still have a hard time separating "wishful thinking" fantasy from reality (girls until 16 or 17, boys until 20+)
 - I can take this risk and not experience negative consequences (whether bullying, smoking, cheating)
 - Romanticizing adulthood and even young adulthood
- Peer and gender sensitive, forming groups

Moral Development

- Rule-oriented, fairness-focused, double-standard
- Tend to reason with payback logic – getting even or balancing the score
- Measure their beliefs against others' beliefs
 - and may question beliefs previously taken for granted; some are starting to personalize their faith, while others are still totally buying in to what they're told they should believe.
- Become aware of moral nuances
- Challenge boundaries that seem arbitrary to them
- Believe what's right is to be nice so others will think well of them, and they can think well of themselves (Dr. Thomas Lickona)

Becomers: Adolescence (13-20)

The Struggle: Identity vs. Confusion

The Strength: Faithfulness

Mental Development

- Reason like adults:
 - That is, they're *able* to reason like adults. They don't always. Why not? Kevin Huggins, in his book *Parenting Adolescents*, gives us three reasons for why teens might not reason maturely:
 1. they're stressed out
 2. they are trying to avoid pain and problems
 3. they have few mature role models
- Often fantasize about the future (wishful thinking vs. reality)
 - risk-taking (I can drink and drive; I can have sex and not get pregnant/STD)
 - romanticizing normal adult experiences like having their own apartment, working their dream job, shopping and traveling like an adult, even romanticizing marriage and family
- Are often overwhelmed by the variety of choices they have
- Can be impulsive

Moral Development

- Question beliefs previously taken for granted (my parents' beliefs or my beliefs?)
 - They begin personalizing their faith. How does faith work in relation to my friends, my job, my schoolwork, my extracurricular activities, my dreams for the future?
- Wrestle with the expectations of others
- Tend to conform to significant people's wishes
- Want someone to want and love them
- Want something significant to accomplish
- Are in the stage of Ideal Reciprocity (the Golden Rule), but
- Are able to evaluate intentions, motives, social conditions, or life influences

Toward the end of this stage, some become Type A, some become Type B.

Type A: My Social Network

- make moral judgments embedded in existing social arrangements

Type B: Global Network

- center judgments on "what ought to be" and develop a personal moral identity

As kids grow through the teen years, our role shifts at some point to being more of a life coach. Alanna Shaikh, a writer and coach in the TED Fellows program, says, "A good coach is a thinking partner, a source of outside perspective and a reality check. A coach can help you refine vague aspirations into actual plans. Your coach isn't a guide. They're a partner in figuring out your own stuff."

I think that's a valuable way of looking at your role if you work with teens. A thinking partner. A source of outside perspective. A reality check. A partner for teens in figuring out their stuff.

If you work with teens, enjoy them. Celebrate them. Educator Amy Fast says of teenagers: "they have this perfect balance of unapologetic and fiery strength and unfiltered raw vulnerability. They are beautiful examples of aliveness."

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What if the negative developed at any of these stages instead of the positive? They'll go to the next stage and the next . . . but they'll carry a weakness instead of a strength. We carry the baggage of previous stages with us. We can help by being for them the positive of what they experienced as a negative. But it's harder to repair than to build it right in the first place.

"On Children" by *Kahlil Gibran* (You can easily find this poem in an online search.)

Antoine De Saint-Exupéry: "If you want to build a ship, don't recruit men to gather the wood, divide the work and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea."

Let's teach our children to yearn for a world full of kindness and peace,
Full of grace and respect,
Full of God's vast and endless Love.