Ages and Stages

From the time that babies are born, we understand that when we swaddle them, when we hold them just tightly and securely enough, they feel the most comfortable, the most able to regulate themselves. Somehow, as infants grow to children and children grow to adolescents, the “holding” falls by the wayside for many parents. In my years of experience with children and families, they have taught me that the “holding environment” really does remain crucial to mastery of developmental tasks and internalization of positive values and perspectives as well as to the attainment of self-confidence and self-esteem. A developmental perspective is important in the creation of an appropriate and supportive holding environment, and that perspective is most effective when looking at the child/adolescent from physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and contextual perspectives. Relying on all I have learned experientially and through professional literature, looking to leaders in my field including Bowlby, Winnicott, Ainsworth, Sroufe, Erickson, Piaget, Kohlberg, Kegan, and Adler among others, I have arrived at a developmental perspective that I am pleased and excited to share with you.
INFANCY - BIRTH TO AGE 2
AN OVERVIEW:
DEVELOPMENT AND NEEDS

Growth and Physical Changes
Growth occurs at an amazing rate; birth weight for many children is tripled; five to six pound increase in next year
Inches increase significantly- about 10 in first year and 5 in second
Infant physical characteristics are maintained through year one: face is large and round; legs and arms are plump
Developing and increasing mobility will contribute to muscle development and loss of "baby fat"
Limbs slowly lengthen
Chest grows larger than abdomen
A bit more angularity develops in face; jaw line becomes more defined
Primary teeth begin to emerge at 6-8 months; all 20 in place by toddlerhood
Skeleton becomes harder; bone growth continues with some racial and gender differences
Increase in muscle weight and density
Maturation of cortex of brain with increased myelinization

Developmental Tasks
Reflexes emerge and become integrated (disappear)
Increasing ability to move around, first by squirming; then rolling, crawling, creeping, or scooting; movement toward walking
Increasing ability to coordinate small muscles of hands and eyes
Increasing self-help in feeding
Newborns- most lift head a little while lying on their stomachs, watch objects for a short period of time, make gurgling sounds and move away from uncomfortable sensations like a tickle
Age two months- most hold head up (bob head when supported in a sitting position), mirror or respond to another person and roll on their sides
Age three months- most prop selves up when on stomach, recognize feeding source, smile at person, move hands and feet, follow moving objects with eyes
Age four months- most hold head up for a long time, laugh, roll from tummy to back, grab and grasp objects, make speech-like sounds
Six months- most able to move objects between their hands and to their mouth, sit without support, coo, roll around, turn towards sounds
Nine months- most sit alone, change position, say simple words like "mama" and "dada," crawl, respond to familiar faces and and to own name
One year- most pull selves to standing position, take a few steps, nod head, grasp and pick things up with their fingers, kiss and say simple words

Central Values
Understanding “me” and “not me” (separation and individuation)
Sensing and moving
Recognition of primary caretaker and acceptance of physical holding and closeness
**Cognition**
- Infants gain awareness of own actions and impact (cause and effect)
- Object permanence (an object seen still exists, even when not seen); e.g., Peek-a-boo
- Development of symbolic thoughts—use of words and pictures to represent objects
- Basic understanding of physical laws, i.e., things fall when dropped, move when pushed
- Language development
  - Six months—vocalization with intonation; recognition of and response to own name; recognition of emotional tone (angry and friendly)
  - 12 months—ability to use one or more words meaningfully and to understand simple instructions
  - 18 months—use of between five and 10 words, predominantly nouns
  - 24 months—combination of sentences, beginning use of pronouns and possessive pronouns; followed by geometric increase in language use and comprehension

**Social-Psychological**
- Establishes and maintains eye contact in developmentally appropriate manner
- Responds to caretaker and then to others
- Learns basic interaction
- Development of basic trust
- Reliance totally on others with movement toward some reliance on self, e.g., self-regulation
- Recognition that an object in different situations or different conditions continues to be the same object
- Recognition that objects continue to exist, even when we cannot see them
- Transitional object, like “blankey” or pacifier

**Vulnerabilities**
- Difficulty with self-soothing and emotional regulation
- Disruption in the development of basic trust
- Inconsistent caretaking; “chaotic” care environment
- Having every need met on demand or not having basic needs met in sufficient manner

**Holding Environment**
- Provides protection, nurture, and challenge at appropriate level
- Helps infant/toddler with development of identity
- Recognizes and promotes toddlers move to autonomy and promotes confidence
- Encourages child to take small, developmentally appropriate “risks”
- Welcomes infant/toddler into culture of the family
- Provides a foundation and base for child to move briefly “away” and “back”

Gay Rosenthal, M.A.
Licensed Psychologist
PRESCHOOLERS: AGES 2 - 4
AN OVERVIEW:
DEVELOPMENT AND NEEDS

Growth and Physical Changes
Motor skills unevenly developed
Marked development in large muscle coordination; small muscles and eye-hand coordination still not well developed
Full set of temporary teeth by three years
Gradually acquire ability to feed and dress themselves with greater skill
Change in sleep pattern - twelve hours typically needed at night with daytime naps gradually dropping from the schedule. However, rest periods are still needed, because children this age fatigue easily.
Toilet habits established
Children usually take care of own needs by end of preschool period.

Developmental Tasks
Exploring and learning about the environment
Learning to comply with increasing environmental demands; accepting necessary limits and restraints
Developing increasing closeness with parent of opposite gender or parent who is not primary caregiver
Moving from focus on self to inclusion of others
Increasing ability to engage in longer periods of quiet activity

Central Values
Delay of gratification
Curbing of impulsivity
Exploration in the context of developing respect for boundaries; learning meaning of "my own space" and "mine/not mine"
Appropriate and acceptable vs. inappropriate and unacceptable

Cognition
Rapid language development, from a few words to an average of 2000 "Why?"
Acquisition of most basic understanding of cause-effect or behavior-consequence relationships
Beginning understanding of safety

Social-Psychological
Moves from parallel play to cooperative play and interaction
Basic displays of empathy, e.g., when one young preschooler cries, another may join in; when one is sad or otherwise upset, another may offer comfort object such as "blankey."
 Begins to label basic emotions - happy, sad, mad, worried or scared
Often shows fatigue through irritability or restlessness
Beginning of this period is thrust for autonomy and independent functioning; the "drive" continues with greater ability to accept help and to work
cooperatively by the end of this period
Earlier in this period, children make up their own rules for games; toward the end, they demand that existing rules be carefully followed; strict sense of right and wrong is developing
Children work to please significant adults and to stay out of trouble

**Vulnerabilities**
Unrestrained impulsive behavior can lead them into unsafe situations, begin to affect social relationships
Aggressive behavior
Failure to learn boundaries and limits

**Holding Environment**
Love and affection from parents and special teachers or day-care providers
Provision of guidance and a pattern of behavior to follow
Setting of limits and defining boundaries
Calmness and consistency in parenting/teaching
Simple; clear routines and guidelines
Safe environment for exploration; limited freedom to move about and to move away from the immediate home environment by the end of this period
Nurturing of fantasy and curiosity
Reading and conversation
Holds children responsible for feelings and behavior, for "using words"
Recognizes children's increasing self-sufficiency Works to help children delay gratification and to think about others

Gay Rosenthal, M.A.
Licensed Psychologist
AGE 5
AN OVERVIEW:
DEVELOPMENT AND NEEDS

Growth and Physical Change
Period of slower growth
Body lengthens out; hands and feet grow larger
Girls are usually about one year ahead of boys in physical development
Good general motor control but large muscle control continues to be better than small muscle control
Eye-hand coordination improving but not well developed
Children this age are likely to be at least mildly farsighted; sensory-motor development still not quite at point for reading
Activity level continues to be high
Hand dominance is typically established
Articulation not fully developed

Developmental Tasks
More fully attain balance between self-sufficiency and sociability
Begin to demonstrate ability to accept constructive criticism and to monitor themselves, i.e., to engage in self-criticism
Show increasing responsibility and active participation in learning
Activity becomes purposeful and constructive

Central Values
Learning is fun
Teamwork
Understanding of and respect for community "living"
Sharing
Offering and accepting help
It's OK to make mistakes
Mistakes are followed by correction, restitution, reparation

Cognition
Verbal mediation helps development of self-control
Attention span increases, as do language usage and listening comprehension
Understanding of basic quantitative concepts; understanding of item/number correlation increases
Beginning recognition of reading as a form of communication, as language on paper
Continued development of ability to perceive cause-effect relationships and to be able to anticipate outcomes
Increased ability to determine "real" and "not real"; increasing ability to recognize truth and not-truth, though still a long way to go for some children
Social-Psychological
Interested in group activity
Individuality and lasting traits become more apparent
Enjoyment of dramatic play, especially in small groups
Sharing and cooperation are becoming imperative

Vulnerabilities
Slow development affecting academic learning
Difficulty "reading" social cues
Behavior which is blaming, bossy, or bullying
Reluctance to accept/communicate the "truth"
Difficulty establishing and maintaining social relationships

Holding Environment
Provides "wise guidance," love and nurturance; assurance of being loved and valued; provides ongoing opportunity for physical movement, environmental exploration, intellectual stimulation, and social activities; provides freedom to use and further develop own abilities; experience in cooperating, sharing, owning and discussing feelings; continued work on limits and boundaries, impulse control, and delay of gratification

Gay Rosenthal, M.A.
Licensed Psychologist
Growth and Physical Changes
Physical growth is slow and steady; heart enters a period of rapid growth
Annual expected growth in height - 2-3 inches; in weight, 3-6 pounds
Eye hand coordination continues to develop significantly
Permanent teeth begin to appear
11-12 hours of sleep still needed for most children; full of energy but still tire easily

Development
Self-sufficiency
Competence in self-care and concrete learning
Role differentiation
Continued and increasing demonstration of mutuality
Trustworthiness
Responsibility, including task initiation and completion
Increased ability to make simple decisions and choices

Central Values
Trusting; showing trustworthiness
Cooperation and collaboration
"Mine"-"Not Mine"
Truthfulness vs. exaggeration, fantasy, wishful thinking
Flexibility (in the interest of group and self)

Cognition
Expansion of vocabulary through discussion, experience, and reading
Concrete with beginning understanding that meaning is related to perception
Most basic understanding of time and money values
Enjoyment of rhythm, songs, fairy tales, myths, nature stories, comics, humor, media

Social-Psychological
Diverging interests of boys and girls; less play together; sensitive to feelings and attitudes of both children and adults; especially dependent on adult approval; cautious and self-critical; may be simultaneously critical of other children but strongly desirous of having them for friends
Vulnerabilities
Social skill deficits
Perfectionism
Learning Difficulties

Holding Environment
Adults provide help in adjusting to the "rougher ways" of the playground; provide warm, encouraging, and friendly relationships in non-parent figures; provide a balance of independence and support; help children accept themselves with all their strengths and weaknesses; help children learn to make simple decisions, set goals, monitor progress; model appropriate social and emotional behavior; continue to hold children responsible for feelings and actions; begin to teach conflict resolution and compromise

Gay Rosenthal, M.A.
Licensed Psychologist
AGE 8
AN OVERVIEW:
DEVELOPMENT AND NEEDS

Growth and Physical Changes
- Growth still slow and steady; arms lengthen and hands grow
- Eyes are better for near-point work
- Permanent teeth continue to appear
- Large and small muscles continue to develop better; manipulative skills increase
- Poor posture may develop

Developmental Tasks
- Continued from ages 6-7
- Gain a more firm position in peer group
- Make and be a "best friend"

Central Values
- Further clarification of own role in family, peer group, classroom community
- Continuation of responsibility, active involvement, truthfulness, ownership, mutuality, collaboration
- Interpersonal competence

Cognition
- Greater capacity for self-evaluation
- Increased understanding of time and money
- Longer attention span
- Increased ability to predict outcomes, understand causation
- Greater understanding of and appreciation for truthfulness, ownership, boundaries
- Rules are still generally black-and-white issues

Social-Psychological
- Increased ability to use phone for communication
- Extending and accepting invitations graciously
- Often careless, loud, argumentative, but also alert, friendly, interested in people
- New awareness of individual differences
- Eager, more enthusiastic than cautious
- Allegiance to other children instead of adult in cases of conflict
- Responsive to group activities
- Fond of team games, collections

Vulnerabilities
- Continued from ages 6-7

Holding Environment
- Provides praise and encouragement; reminds children of their responsibilities; provide guidance and channeling of interests; continues to support increase in delay of gratification, impulse control, responsibility, active participation in groups
and learning; provides supervision for group activities and after-school options; continues to model, teach, and reinforce social skills; provides setting for and helps to structure homework; helps children with organization and getting things back and forth between home and school.

Gay Rosenthal, M.A.  
Licensed Psychologist
AGEs 9-10
AN OVERVIEW:
DEVELOPMENT AND NEEDS

Growth and Physical Changes
Slow, steady growth continues, with girls typically forging further ahead; some children reach the plateau preceding the preadolescent growth spurt.

Eye-hand coordination is improved.

Physically, eyes are almost adult size and are ready for close work with less strain.
While lungs, digestive, and circulatory systems are almost mature, the heart is especially subject to strain; teeth may need straightening; first and second bicuspids appear.

Developmental Tasks
To build social skill repertoire, develop stronger peer relations and more consistent group of friends; assume increasing responsibility in tasks and relationships.

Academic progress - steady, with increasing focus on subtleties of reading comprehension and more extensive writing; organization can be challenging for many students and focus on those skills in addition to study skills becomes increasingly important, along with increasing independence in task initiation and satisfactory completion.

Central Values
Right and wrong
Loyalty to and pride in country, ethnic group
Responsibility, dependability

Cognition
Capable of prolonged interest
Able to make plans and proceed independently
Interested less in fairy tales and fantasy
Increasing awareness of diversity
More interest in community and country and other countries and peoples
Increasing sense of sameness/difference between self and others
Spends a great deal of time in talk and discussion; often outspoken and critical of adults, though still dependent on adult approval
Wide discrepancies in reading performance

Social-Psychological
Need for supportive peer group, feelings of acceptance and inclusion
Increasing awareness of group behavior, peer perceptions and values
Increasing awareness of diversity and inter-individual differences lead to increased recognition of personal strengths and weaknesses, e.g., learning differences, disabilities; height, weight, temperament
Desire for mastery and some perfectionism, though frustration tolerance and persistence are still developing and children this
age may quickly lose interest if pressured or discouraged

Vulnerabilities
Learning problems
Peer rejection or isolation
Behavioral disruption
Failure to learn cooperation, organization, responsibility, dependability, beginning self-sufficiency

Holding Environment
Parents and school staff acknowledge and promote self-sufficiency, competence, and role definition; they hold children responsible for their own feelings and for their own behavior; authority of parents and others is appropriately reinforced

Gay Rosenthal, M.A.
Licensed Psychologist
ADOLESCENCE-AN OVERVIEW
DEVELOPMENT AND NEEDS:
EARLY ADOLESCENCE TO MID-ADOLESCENCE (11-13, MERGING AT 14-15)*

Growth and Physical Changes
  Body changes
  Cognitive Development
  Sexual activities

Developmental Tasks
  Establish firm sense of identity ("Me" - "Not Me" differentiation resurfaces, i.e. "I
  know who I am.")
  Establish sex role
  Gain independence from family (emancipation)
  Integrate personality

Central Values
  Devotion and fidelity
  Justice
  Revolution, reformation
  Utopia
  "To be" and "Not to be"

Defense Mechanisms
  Intellectualization
  Asceticism
  Regression?

Growth and Physical Changes
  Secondary sexual characteristics have begun to appear
  Growth rapidly accelerates, reaches peak velocity
  Former body image is disrupted; preoccupation with rapid body changes
  Secondary sexual characteristics are well advanced
  Stature reaches 95% of adult height, growth deceleration
  Body image is reestablished as growth decelerates and stabilizes

Cognition
  Concrete thought is dominant. Either/or thinking is prominent, e.g., good/bad,
  right/wrong, in-group or not-in-group, for/against, single perspective only,
  though having learned formal problem-solving process earlier may mitigate
  this occurrence.
  There is an existential orientation.
  Teens at this stage cannot perceive long-range implications of current
  decisions and actions.

*Generalities do not apply to all individuals. There are always exceptions.
Cognition, continued

There is rapid gaining of competence in abstract thought (formal operations), with insight, generalization, individuation, and intuition. Perspective-taking can occur, with several perspectives considered simultaneously. Having learned formal problem-solving processes earlier facilitates and speeds this change.

Capability of perceiving future implications of current acts and decisions increases but application of knowledge and ability is sporadic.

Under stress, teens revert to concrete operations and become very literal.

Social-Psychological

Teens seek peer affiliation to help balance instability generated by rapid change. They tend to compare their own normalcy and acceptance with same-sex age-mates. Social relationships begin to include broadened interpretation of sexuality, with self-exploration and evaluation. Limited dating and intimacy may occur.

Within the family, conflicts over parental control are typically not major, though they may become so in some instances. The process between parents and teens begins to define independence-dependence, "my business-your business" boundaries.

Later, there is a strong need for identification to confirm self-image. There is heightened sexual activity with testing of ability to attract others as potential partners for intimacy. Parameters of masculinity and femininity are explored. Gender or sexual identity issues may become prominent if questions or issues exist.

Teens look to peer groups to define behavioral limits as they begin to emancipate. Major conflicts over control occur in the family and the struggle for emancipation intensifies.

Vulnerabilities

Delinquency
Chemical abuse, dependency
Eating disorders
Sexual promiscuity
Depression, suicide
Acute confusion
Identity confusion

Holding Environment

In early adolescence, the school and family need to continue to serve in role as institutions of authority and role differentiation. Peer group helps provide for role-taking behaviors. A culture of mutuality evolves, with mutually reciprocal one-to-one relationships. The Holding Environment must simultaneously hold on or confirm, begin to let go or contradict, and provide for continuity and stability so changes and stabilization can occur. The role for those in the Holding Environment includes acknowledging and nurturing displays of self-sufficiency, competence, and role differentiation, recognizing and promoting the adolescent's emergence into increasing independence and autonomy. The role also includes
expectations for mutuality and denies the validity of only taking one's own interests into account. It recognizes but limits normal adolescent narcissism or self-focus. To maintain continuity, family and school allow themselves to become secondary to peer groups. The Holding Environment and normal development are compromised if the family needs to relocate during these transitional years. Another person of major importance serves as a transitional object, a facilitator of progress to a higher developmental level.

In mid-adolescence, the Holding Environment recognizes mutually reciprocal relationships which have developed and acknowledges and promotes the capacity for collaborative self-sacrifice in mutually attuned and balanced interpersonal relationships. It helps the adolescent orient to internal states, shared subjective experience, feelings, and mood. It promotes the definition of self that will cooperatively join but not become one with others or group. It asserts independence and demands responsibility for actions and thoughts, placing relationships in the context of society at large. The Holding Environment and normal development are compromised if the major interpersonal partners leave during emergence from self-focus and dependence. Going away to college or taking on a new job with increased responsibility and demands provides the transitional context.

Given the developmental task of emancipation, the process between the adolescent and the Holding Environment determines if emancipation will occur or not and how.
- Leave
- Out and back
- Stay
- Ejection

Gay Rosenthal, M.A.
Licensed Psychologist