

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 myelination

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 “blanky” 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”

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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

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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

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AGES 6-7
AN OVERVIEW
DEVELOPMENT AND NEEDS

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

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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.

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**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 bicuspid 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

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**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

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