

Overview of Developmental Psychology

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Key concepts, major theories, research methods, and areas of study

1. What Is Developmental Psychology?

Aspect	Description
Definition	Scientific study of how people change and grow across the lifespan—from conception to death.
Scope	Physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development.
Goal	Explain <i>why</i> development occurs, identify <i>how</i> it unfolds, and predict <i>what</i> influences it.
Applied Fields	Education, clinical practice, pediatrics, gerontology, public policy, human-computer interaction, etc.

2. Core Principles

Principle	Meaning
Development is Lifelong	Change continues throughout adulthood, not just in childhood.
Multidimensional	Physical, cognitive, emotional, and social domains interact.
Multidirectional	Some abilities increase while others decline (e.g., vocabulary expands while processing speed slows).
Plasticity	Potential for change varies with age and context; can be enhanced by experience or intervention.
Contextual Influences	Development is shaped by microsystems (family, school), mesosystems (interactions among microsystems), exosystems (parents' workplaces), macrosystems (culture, laws), and chronosystems (historical time, life-course events).

3. Major Theoretical Perspectives

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Theory	Proponents	Core Ideas	Typical Age Focus
Psychoanalytic / Psychodynamic	Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson	Stages driven by internal conflicts; Erikson added psychosocial crises.	Freud: infancy? adolescence; Erikson: birth?old age (8 stages).
Cognitive Development	Jean Piaget	Four stages (sensorimotor ? formal operational) based on how children construct knowledge.	Birth?adolescence.
Sociocultural	Lev Vygotsky	Learning mediated by language, tools, and cultural “scaffolding.” Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).	All ages; strong emphasis on early childhood and schooling.
Ecological Systems	Urie Bronfenbrenner	Nested environmental systems shape development; emphasizes interaction between person and context.	Lifespan.
Information? Processing	Various (e.g., Siegler)	Mind as a computer: attention, memory, executive functions develop incrementally.	Childhood ? adulthood.
Attachment Theory	John Bowlby, Mary Ainsworth	Early caregiver bonds create internal working models influencing later relationships.	Infancy ? early childhood (but long? term impact).
Life?Course / Developmental Psychopathology	Glen Elder, Dante Cicchetti	Emphasizes trajectories, turning points, and risk? protective factors across time.	Lifespan, especially adolescence and aging.

4. Research Methods

Method	Description	Strengths	Limitations
Cross?Sectional	Compare different age groups at one point in time.	Quick, inexpensive.	Cohort effects; cannot infer change.

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Longitudinal	Follow the same participants over months/years.	Direct observation of change; individual trajectories.	Time-consuming, attrition, practice effects.
Sequential (Cross-Sequential)	Combines cross-sectional and longitudinal designs.	Controls cohort effects, tracks change.	Still resource-intensive.
Experimental	Manipulate variables (e.g., training programs).	C	