

& Kirst-Ashman, 2016). In addition, skills of coordination, such as locomotor and sensorimotor skills, are being developed. Language development begins as babbling sounds turn into more purposeful patterns and eventually into recognizable words. Problems can occur at this stage when a child lacks a healthy attachment to a caregiver, when there is no recognizable progression in language development, and when physical development is not progressing (Allen-Meares, 1995).

Preschool Years From ages 3 to 5, children continue physical development as seen in gains in height and weight. Language becomes more complex, sentences become longer, and there is increased questioning and desire for understanding. Peer relations are being formed, and issues related to asserting self and resolving conflict are of increased significance. Problems can involve a lack of social reaction, failure to imitate others, refusal to eat, refusal to talk, withdrawn behavior, poor muscle control, or failure to follow simple instructions (Allen-Meares, 1995).

Middle Childhood Middle childhood extends from ages 6 to 12 and includes a child's years in primary school. During this time, cognitive abilities are increasing rapidly—that is, skills in memory, conceptual thinking, deductive reasoning, and problem solving are developing (Allen-Meares, 1995). Significant relationships expand to include not only parents and family, but also peers, teachers, and extended family. Some of the problems seen during this development stage include psychosomatic complaints, anxiety disorders such as obsessive-compulsive reactions and phobias, mood issues including depression, behavior problems such as noncompliance, and educational issues such as learning disabilities (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2016).

Adolescence Children ages 13 to 18 are adolescents. They typically attend junior high school and high school. In general, adolescence is assessed in terms of physical, social, cognitive, emotional, and moral development. Physical development is marked by growth spurts, hormone changes due to the increased activity of the pituitary gland, and maturation of the reproductive system. Cognitive changes include the ability to master complex processes, such as abstract thinking and complex problem solving. Socially, teens seek acceptance from a peer group and begin to separate from their parents and families. Emotionally, they are learning to express and to manage emotions more effectively, and moral development is evidenced by the ability to recognize standards and behave in ways that comply with them (Allen-Meares, 1995).

Problems during this stage can include anxious reactions to the changes and pressures of adolescence, and experimentation, including drug abuse, alcohol abuse, at-risk sexual behaviors, and delinquency. Other common problems may include eating disorders, problems in school, dropping out of school, running away, depression, pregnancy, conflict with the family, noncompliance with authority, and violent reactions (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2016).

Other Theories LO1

In addition to the ecological approach and the stages of childhood development, other theories related to children and families inform social work practice. For example, Jean Piaget presented a theory of **cognitive development** that described the stages that children must go through in order to progress to higher levels of thinking. His basic premise was that cognitive processes start out basic and concrete in infancy and become more abstract and complicated with moral development (Piaget, 1965).

Social learning theory is based on the idea that behavior is learned through socialization (Bandura, 1977). Within this context, the theory derives a variety of behavioral methods, such as modeling and positive reinforcement, for bringing about learned behaviors. Parent training programs and residential and group-home settings for children make use of the methods of social learning theory.

Erik Erikson's **psychosocial theory** states that children progress through clear stages of development. In this theory, human development is presented as a series of psychosocial crises. Ideally, people prepare themselves for the next stage of development by resolving each crisis. Failing to resolve a crisis can lead to problems in later stages (Erikson, 1968).

Theories of development and human behavior, coupled with the person-in-environment framework of social work, are the basis for practice with children and families. These theories serve as the context for determining which intervention strategies are appropriate in a given situation.

The Child Welfare System

The child welfare system is a loosely formed network of federal and state mandates that promote the welfare of all children and facilitate permanency by providing services to prevent the unnecessary separation of children from their families, restore children to their families if they have been separated, and place children in adoptive homes when reunification is not possible. The child welfare system includes social work services, such as child protection, foster care, and adoption. Child welfare services are part of a larger interactive system that includes juvenile justice and family court services, mental and public health services, schools, and income maintenance programs.

Historical Background

Though what we now consider to be child abuse and neglect have been present since the founding of the United States, formal child welfare policy is a relatively recent addition. For most of US history, parents have had almost complete control over every aspect of their children's lives (Jimenez, Pasztor, Chambers, & Fujii, 2014). Parents could discipline their children in any way they saw fit and were the only ones to determine whether or not their children attended school. Children had few rights, and government intervention into family life was rare.