

6 Socioemotional Development in Early Childhood

CHAPTER OUTLINE

EMOTIONAL AND PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

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Moral Development
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PEER RELATIONS, PLAY, AND MEDIA/SCREEN TIME

Peer Relations
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Stories of Life-Span Development: Nurturing Socioemotional Development

Like many children, Sarah Newland loves animals. During a trip to the zoo when she was 4 years old, Sarah learned about an animal that was a member of an endangered species, and she became motivated to help. With her mother's guidance, she baked lots of cakes and cookies, then sold them on the sidewalk outside her home. She was excited about making \$35 from the cake and cookie sales, and she mailed the money to the World Wildlife Fund. Several weeks later, the fund wrote back to Sarah requesting more money. Sarah was devastated because she thought she had taken care of the animal problem. Her mother consoled her and told her that the endangered animal problem and many others are so big that it takes ongoing help from many people to solve them. Her mother's guidance when Sarah was a young child must have worked because by the end of elementary school, Sarah had begun helping out at a child-care center and working with her mother to provide meals to the homeless.

Sensitive parents like Sarah's mother can encourage young children's sense of morality. Just as parents support and guide their children to become good readers, musicians, or athletes, they also play key roles in promoting young children's socioemotional development. (Source: Kantrowitz & Namuth, 1991). ■

Emotional and Personality Development

Many changes characterize young children's socioemotional development in early childhood. Children's developing minds and social experiences produce remarkable advances in the development of the self, emotional maturity, moral understanding, and gender awareness.

The Self

During the second year of life, children make considerable progress in self-recognition. In the early childhood years, young children develop in many ways that enable them to enhance their self-understanding.

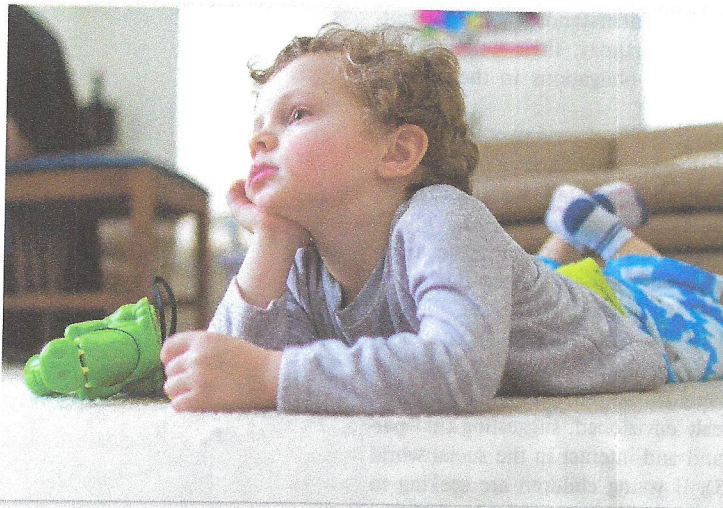
Initiative Versus Guilt

Erik Erikson's (1968) eight developmental stages are encountered during certain time periods in the human life span. Erikson's first stage, trust versus mistrust, describes what he regarded as the main developmental task of infancy. According to Erikson, the psychosocial stage associated with early childhood is *initiative versus guilt*. At this point in development, children have become convinced that they are persons of their own; during early childhood, they begin to discover what kind of person they will become. They identify intensely with their parents, who most of the time appear to them to be powerful and beautiful, though often unreasonable, disagreeable, and sometimes even dangerous. During early childhood, children use their perceptual, motor, cognitive, and language skills to make things happen. They have a surplus of energy that permits them to forget failures quickly and to approach new areas that seem desirable—even if dangerous—with undiminished zest and an increased sense of direction. On their own initiative, then, children at this stage exuberantly move out into a wider social world.

The great governor of initiative is conscience. Children's initiative and enthusiasm may bring them not only rewards but also guilt, which lowers self-esteem.

Self-Understanding and Understanding Others

Research studies have revealed that young children are more psychologically aware—of themselves and others—than was formerly thought (Thompson, 2015). This increased awareness reflects young children's expanding psychological sophistication.



What characterizes young children's self-understanding?
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4-year-old Sandra, "I'm different from Jennifer because I have brown hair and she has blond hair." Says 4-year-old Ralph, "I am different from Hank because I am taller, and I am different from my sister because I have a bicycle." Physical activities are also a central component of the self in

Self-Understanding In Erikson's portrait of early childhood, the young child clearly has begun to develop **self-understanding**, which is the representation of self, the substance and content of self-conceptions (Harter, 2012, 2016). Though not the whole of personal identity, self-understanding provides its rational underpinnings. Mainly through interviews, researchers have probed children's conceptions of many aspects of self-understanding (Harter, 2016).

Early self-understanding involves self-recognition. In early childhood, young children think the self can be described by material characteristics such as size, shape, and color. They distinguish themselves from others through physical and material attributes. Says

self-understanding The child's cognitive representation of self, the substance and content of the child's self-conceptions.