

Theories of Development

In addition to theories of psychosocial development, other developmental theories have been put forward. It is important to remember that whilst these theories have validity, like all models of human development, behaviour or motivation they are indicative rather than definitive. The theories have their critics as well as supporters.

Cognitive

Jean Piaget (1896-1980), a Swiss developmental psychologist, proposed that humans acquire knowledge in a staged way:

Age 0 – 2 years	Sensorimotor	Children learn through the movements they make and the sensations that result. They learn: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they exist separately from the objects and people around them • they can cause things to happen • things continue to exist even when they can't see them
Age 2 – 7 years	Preoperational	When children acquire language, they are able to use words and pictures to represent objects. Their thinking is still very egocentric, they assume that everyone else sees things from the same viewpoint as they do. They are able to understand concepts like counting, classifying according to similarity, and past-present-future but generally they are still focused primarily on the present and on the concrete, rather than the abstract.
Age 7 – 11 years	Concrete Operational	Children are able to see things from different points of view and imagine events that occur outside their own lives. Some organized, logical thought processes are now evident, and they are able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • order objects by size, colour gradient, etc. understand that if $3 + 4 = 7$ then $7 - 4 = 3$; • understand that a red square can belong to both the 'red' category and the 'square' category; • understand that a short wide cup can hold the same amount of liquid as a tall narrow cup. However, thinking still tends to be tied to concrete reality.
Age 11 years +	Formal Operational	Around the onset of puberty, children are able to reason in much more abstract ways and to test hypotheses using systematic logic. There is a much greater focus on possibilities and on ideological issues.

To think about:

How does the above impact your interactions with the different age groups in terms of:

- Worship
- Activities during a service
- Social gatherings
- General conversation

Moral

Lawrence Kohlberg (1927-1987) an American psychologist, adapted Piaget’s developmental stages to propose a theory of moral development:

Pre-Conventional Morality		
Stage 1	Obedience or Punishment Orientation	This is the stage that all young children start at (and a few adults remain in). Rules are seen as being fixed and absolute. Obeying the rules is important because it means avoiding punishment.
Stage 2	Self-Interest Orientation	As children grow older, they begin to see that other people have their own goals and preferences and there can be room for negotiation. Decisions are made on the principle of "What's in it for me?" E.g. an older child might reason: "If I do what mum or dad wants me to do, they will reward me, so I will do it."
Conventional Morality		
Stage 3	Social Conformity Orientation	By adolescence, most individuals have developed to this stage. There is a sense that “this is what should we do” and the emphasis is on living up to social expectations and norms because of how they impact day-to-day relationships.
Stage 4	Law and Order Orientation	By the time individuals reach adulthood, they usually consider society as a whole when making judgments. The focus is on maintaining law and order by following the rules, doing one's duty and respecting authority.
Post-Conventional Morality		
Stage 5	Social Contract Orientation	At this stage, people understand that there are differing opinions in society as to what is right and wrong and that laws are really just a social contract based on majority decision and inevitable compromise. People at this stage sometimes disobey rules if they find them to be inconsistent with their personal values and will also argue for certain laws to be changed if they are no longer "working". Our modern democracies are based on the reasoning of Stage 5.
Stage 6	Universal Ethics Orientation	Few people operate at this stage all the time. It is based on abstract reasoning and the ability to put oneself in other people's shoes. At this stage, people have a principled conscience and will follow universal ethical principles regardless of what the official laws and rules are.

To think about:

Although this is presented as a ‘staged’ model the process is not necessarily entirely linear, and the boundaries can be blurred at different ages and according to the situation. Again, take time to reflect on how these insights may affect your interactions with people across the ages and stages of life.

Faith

James Fowler (1940-2015) used the work of Erikson, Piaget and Kohlberg to propose a staged basis for faith development and published this in *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* 1981, New York, Harper Collins Pub.

Pre-stage	Undifferentiated faith	From birth to about 2 years of age. Children have the potential for faith but lack the ability to act on that potential. Through loving care from parents and other adults in their life young children start to build a lived experience of trust, courage, hope and love. At this stage, children experience faith as a connection between themselves and their caregiver.
Stage 1	Intuitive-projective faith	This is the stage of preschool children in which fantasy and reality often get mixed together. However, during this stage, our most basic ideas about God are usually picked up from our parents and/or society.
Stage 2	Mythic-literal faith	When children become school-age, they start understanding the world in more logical ways. They generally accept the stories told to them by their faith community but tend to understand them in very literal ways. (Some people remain in this stage through adulthood.)
Stage 3	Synthetic-conventional faith	Most people move on to this stage as teenagers. At this point, their life has grown to include several different social circles and there is a need to pull it all together. When this happens, a person usually adopts some sort of all-encompassing belief system. However, at this stage, people tend to have a hard time seeing outside their box and don't recognize that they are "inside" a belief system. At this stage, authority is usually placed in individuals or groups that represent one's beliefs. (This is the stage in which many people remain.)
Stage 4	Individuative-reflective faith	This is the tough stage, often begun in young adulthood, when people start seeing outside the box and realizing that there are other "boxes". They begin to critically examine their beliefs on their own and often become disillusioned with their former faith. Stage 3 people can think that Stage 4 people have become "backsliders" when in reality they have actually moved forward.
Stage 5	Conjunctive faith	It is rare for people to reach this stage before mid-life. This is the point when people begin to realize the limits of logic and start to accept the paradoxes in life. They begin to see life as a mystery and often return to sacred stories and symbols but this time without being stuck in a theological box.
Stage 6	Universalising faith	Few people reach this stage. Those who do, live their lives to the full in service of others without any real worries or doubts.

To think about:

Fowler did not conduct any research to test the validity of his theory, it was largely based on observations linked to other developmental theories. It has had its critics but it also has some appeal as it appears to 'make sense'; what are your thoughts and how does this theory help or hinder us in our interactions with others?

If you wish to read further about this the following resources may be of interest:

Moore, Alison *The Puzzle of Pastoral Care*.(Stowmarket: Kevin Mayhew Ltd, 2019) Part 3.5

Sugarman, Léonie *Life-Span Development: Frameworks, Accounts and Strategies* 2nd edn (Hove: Psychology Press, 2001) (This is written from an academic psychology perspective.)