

Additional Lifespan Development Topics

Development During Adulthood

Early Adulthood

Chapter 1 of *The Developing Child* describes young adulthood and the thirties as two stages of the human life cycle. These stages are also sometimes known as early adulthood. Generally, each decade of life seems to be defined by a basic developmental task, according to Daniel Levinson, an adult development researcher.

The developmental task for people in their twenties is to create a life structure by establishing preferred roles and lifestyles. Young adults begin to select the roles they want in life, such as parent, spouse, or worker. They must begin making the choices necessary to achieve these roles. Part of this transition includes the emotional and social development that comes with building relationships with family members, friends, coworkers, and others. Erik Erikson, a human development researcher, believed that young adults must develop close relationships with other people. If this does not happen, Erikson stipulated, these individuals will be alone and isolated, and may not learn or experience love. Experiencing love is the positive end of young adulthood.

Early adulthood often includes more formal education and thus also involves intellectual development. Many people attend college or trade school in their twenties. Others may begin a career in their twenties and then return to school to further their career goals or to change careers.

A developmental task for early adults in their thirties is to establish roots and settle down. Some people focus on beginning a family and having children. Others might focus on their career or community. Each person handles developmental tasks in individual ways. According to psychiatrist Roger Gould, young adulthood is a time when people feel empowered to set personal goals.

Middle Adulthood

Middle adulthood, or middle age, is generally defined as the time period in which people are in their forties and fifties. During their forties, people often begin to re-evaluate their life, seizing new opportunities and developing new interests. In addition to learning new hobbies, middle-aged people are increasingly returning to school to learn a new career.

Most people try to find stability and peace in their fifties. This developmental task is accomplished by having freedom from child-rearing, more contact with friends, a happy marriage, and few money problems. This stage is sometimes referred to as the “empty nest” stage because children have left home. This stage usually encourages emotional development. People in middle adulthood generally start preparing for retirement.

Career changes in middle adulthood can often help fulfill a person’s social and intellectual development. Erik Erikson said that people in middle adulthood want to find

vocations where they can help others or in some way contribute to society. If this does not happen, Erikson said, people may become self-absorbed or stagnant. Stagnant means not moving ahead or developing. The positive end of this stage is caring.

Late Adulthood

Late adulthood can begin as early as 55 and generally lasts until the end of one's life. Daniel Levinson said the developmental task for this stage is to come to terms with life's end. Common goals include retirement and accepting how one has lived one's life. Levinson's study only included people up to age 65.

Erik Erikson said that people in this stage review their pasts to gain a sense of uniqueness, accomplishment, and fulfillment. If this does not happen, Erikson stated, people may become depressed or preoccupied with death. The positive end to late adulthood is wisdom.

Remember that learning is a lifelong process. Intellectual development can continue throughout a person's life. Many adults will continue to learn new skills or hobbies throughout their lives. Many older adults look forward to retirement and having more time for social opportunities and interacting with friends and family. Also, many are retiring later in life so they must continue to learn new skills and processes in their careers.

As people age, they must adjust to their varying needs. For example, spouses may die or financial needs may change. Older adults accept change and continue social development as they involve themselves in new activities and make new friends. While some older adults choose to remain home, many seek part-time employment or volunteer roles after they have retired.

Living Arrangements

As adults get older, they often require changes in their living arrangements. Many adults in late adulthood need help taking care of daily tasks, like bathing and eating. Others are physically able to care for themselves, but choose living arrangements that will offer more social opportunities. Adult children are often involved in helping older adults decide on living arrangements. Some older adults will move in with their adult children. This can be a beneficial arrangement to everyone involved. Often, the older adult is able to take care of their grandchildren or help with some of the household chores. In return, the adult child is able to see to the health and safety of the older adult.

There are several basic types of independent living arrangements for older adults who do not live with other family members or who may not be able to remain in their own home. These options include:

- Apartments for older adults
- Congregate housing
- Public housing
- Subsidized housing
- U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development homes with rental assistance

- Adult communities
- Naturally occurring retirement communities
- Shared housing
- Multiunit assisted housing with services

Each of these options allows the older adult to maintain a different level of independence. For some adults, a nursing home may be the only option. A nursing home offers skilled care for physically weak adults. Geriatrics is a field of medicine that focuses on preventing or managing common diseases for older adults. During the geriatric period of development, nursing homes are often required. Nursing homes vary greatly. In some, one or two residents share a small room and bathroom. Eating and entertainment take place in common rooms. Others consist of small cottages or apartments. Some are for people needing a great deal of care. Others are for those who are more self-reliant. The cost of a nursing home varies depending on the location and the options included. However, nursing homes can often be expensive.

The decision to place a family member in a nursing home is not an easy one for most families. Older adults may not want to go. Adult children may feel guilty that they cannot care for the older adult at home. It is a decision that everyone in the family should discuss.

Emotional Security

Because a person's emotions influence the quality of life, caregivers will need to consider the emotional needs of older adults as well as their basic functional needs. Emotional security comes from feeling good about oneself and being with people who share those feelings.

Older people continue to need interpersonal connections with family and friends. They generally want to maintain loving relationships. They usually thrive on their family's displays of appreciation and respect. Older adults want to feel that they still contribute to family decision making.

Unlike babies and children, who depend on their parents for their emotional needs, older adults rely primarily on themselves and their loved ones. Their self-perception, or how they see themselves, is very important to their emotional well-being and is based on personal insights, what other people have told them, and how they think others view them. Self-respect and respect from peers greatly affect an older adult's self-perception. For some older adults, their standing in their community may contribute to their self-perception. For example, older adults serving as neighborhood watch volunteers may think of themselves as part of community law enforcement.

Coping with Death

As discussed in Chapter 21, grief for the death of a loved one involves a complex set of emotions. People who suffer the loss of a loved one are referred to as bereaved. There are

many different theories about death and dying. Although everyone will react and cope in their own way, there are some basic steps that generally hold true.

Process of Grieving

Losing a special person to death results in emotions and physical feelings that can be very painful. The grief process, also called mourning, includes three stages.

Stage one is shock and numbness, coupled with denial. Denial is refusing to believe the facts. A person in denial thinks and acts as if those facts do not exist. The bereaved may busy themselves with a flurry of activity. This helps them block out the painful truth that a death has occurred. They may want to bargain in this stage. For example, people in mourning might wish they had the opportunity to make the bargain that if their loved one could still be alive, they would promise to lead a reformed life.

Stage two is when the reality of the situation sinks in. People feel an almost unbearable sense of loss. Anger, depression, and anxiety are common in this phase.

Stage three is the final step in the grief process. This is recovery. In recovery, people face and accept the loss as final. The bereaved person makes the adjustments necessary to go on with life.

The time for grieving varies, but it is often a lengthy process. The age of the person who dies, the cause of death, and the closeness of the relationship to the person can affect the time needed. Grieving may last up to two years after the death of a parent and from four to six years after the death of a spouse. A parent may grieve for eight to ten years after the death of a child.

Grieving cannot be rushed. By working with the process instead of against it, however, a person can begin recovery sooner. Working through grief can help people learn to accept the loss. Mourners need time to heal and should seek whatever help they need to recover. Eventually, the pain fades and the mourner is left with the good memories.

Theories on Death and Dying

Fear and anxiety are among the words most often used to describe feelings toward death. There are many theories about death and death anxiety. Three of the leading theories about death and death anxiety were developed by Sigmund Freud, Ernest Becker, and Mohammad Samir Hossain.

Sigmund Freud stated that most people have a fear of death. However, he believed that it is not actually death that people fear because nobody believes in the reality of their own death. Freud felt that people who express death-related fears are really trying to deal with unresolved childhood conflicts that they cannot openly admit and discuss.

Ernest Becker presented a different death anxiety theory. He believed that death anxiety is very real and people's deepest source of concern. He described this anxiety as so intense that it can result in many of our everyday fears. For example, he stated that the

fear of being in a confined space is caused by the fear of death. According to Becker, many daily behaviors are people's attempts to ward off death or deny its reality.

Mohammad Samir Hossain is a mental health researcher and physician who developed a death and adjustment hypothesis. He believes that death is not the end of existence and that we should abandon the focus of death as an endpoint, and instead think of death as a part of an ongoing process.

There are more recent theories on death, developed in the late 20th century. One of these is called the terror management theory. It states that people who feel better about themselves have less death-related anxiety. Another popular theory is called the regret theory. This theory states that the prospect of death is likely to make people more anxious if they feel that they have not or cannot accomplish something good in life.

After You Read

1. **Recall** what stage of life people are generally considered to be in when they are in their forties and fifties.
2. **Identify** nine different living arrangement options for independent adults in late adulthood.
3. **Describe** the three stages of grieving.