



Relationships

The Adlerian Team

Development – Understanding your child's life journey

By Marion Balla

Why does my four-year-old talk about death and dying?
Why is my six-year-old preoccupied with rules and fairness?
Why does my three-year-old fight me even on simple requests?
Why is my 12-year-old daughter so self-critical?

Are these some of the questions you are asking yourself without finding answers? Do you compare your child with other children of the same age in order to discover what is "normal?"

What is development?

According to Clarke and Dawson (specialists in child/adolescent development), "A developmental stage is a describable segment of growing up." During each segment of time the child is busy with age appropriate tasks that help answer the questions: Who am I? Who am I in relation to others? How do I acquire the skills that I need to move forward in my life? Generally, children pass through seven stages at their own rate and in their own unique way. Some children develop early in some areas and late in others. Most children develop within the normal range of tasks for each stage, which is why it is critical for parents and teachers to have up-to-date knowledge and understand the process of child development.

Ages and stages

Outlined below are the tasks of each stage and the questions, which need to be answered by the child as he or she moves forward to meet the challenges of growing and developing.

Stage 1 (Being) Birth to six months

Developing trust with significant adults and with self.

- Will my needs be met when I ask?
- Do I receive messages others are happy I'm here?

Stage 2 (Doing) six to 18 months

Developing sense of self and sense of safety with the world.

- Is it okay to explore and be curious?
- Is it okay to separate from others and feel in control of my life?
- Will they understand my need to say "no" and let me have choices?

Stage 4 (Identity and Power) three to six years

Managing the world beyond the family and learning one's own unique abilities, for example school, friends, expectations from others.

- Is it okay to find out who others are and learn how to build friendships?
- Can I test the limits and learn the consequences of my choices and behaviours?

Stage 5 (Structure) six -12 years

Learning about rules, values, gender and how to be competent and build an internal structure of morals and values.

- Is it okay to question, test out and make mistakes?
- Is it okay to go beyond family's messages and incorporate society's values?

- Can I get to know my own gender by forming clubs and cliques as girls or boys?

- Can I accept and learn about consequences of testing and making mistakes?

Stage 6 (Identity, Sexuality and Counter Dependence) 11-19 years

Developing an identity as a separate person, exploring and understanding one's sexuality and questioning parental values.

- Can I become a separate person with my own values and still belong?
- Is it okay for me to be independent, develop as a sexual being and be responsible for life choices?

Stage 7 (Interdependence) – Adult 19-30 years

Accepting more responsibility for movement towards leaving home, establishing a work plan and requiring less economic support and family guidance.

- How will I balance competence, intimacy and separateness as well as move towards a stronger sense of independence?

Parents have an important role to play at each one of these stages. Modeling faith, hope and courage that children will face the life tasks related with each age is our most important work. Being our children's guide means remaining fully in tune with the development work they experiences and cheering them along the path. Sharing information about development with your children may reduce their fears and worries and help them understand their own behaviours

If we accept that children develop at different rates and in different ways, the journey of raising families may become more enjoyable and less stressful. Enjoy the learning process within each age and stage. Read books on development, attend seminars on understanding children's different ages and stages. Reach out for professional help if you have concerns or questions as to how your child or children are moving through their developmental tasks.

References

Clarke, Jean I. & Dawson, Connie "Growing Up Again: Parenting Ourselves, Parenting Our Children," Harper & Row Publishers, San Francisco, 1989

Leach, Penelope "Your Growing Child: From Babyhood Through Adolescence," Knopf Press, 1986

Prato, Dianne, "Let's Talk About Parenting, A Self Guide Study Program, Nurturing" Meadow Press London, Ont., 1993.

A handout is available outlining specific ages and stages and specific strategies parents may utilize to enhance their child's development work. Send a self addressed envelope requesting the ages and stages you wish (0-6), (6-12), (12-19) or you may request all three.

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