NO PREP

Erikson's Stages

Identity and Development Across the Lifespan

Includes: Student reading, case study, differentiated questions, teacher key

Name: Period: Date:

Erikson's Stages: Identity and Development Across the Lifespan

Eight Psychosocial Stages from Infancy to Late Adulthood

Erik Erikson expanded Freud's psychosexual focus into a lifespan model emphasizing social and cultural influences. Each stage presents a central crisis whose resolution yields a core virtue: Trust vs. Mistrust (0–1 year): Infants learn whether caregivers reliably meet needs, developing hope or distrust. Autonomy vs. Shame (1–3 years): Toddlers test independence (toilet training, feeding), fostering will or self-doubt. Initiative vs. Guilt (3–6 years): Preschoolers assert control through play and planning, cultivating purpose or guilt over misbehavior. Industry vs. Inferiority (6–12 years): School-age children compare performance with peers, developing competence or feelings of inferiority. Identity vs. Role Confusion (12–18 years):

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Identity vs. Role Confusion in Adolescence

During adolescence, individuals explore career, ideology, and relationships. Success yields fidelity, the ability to commit to values despite contradictions, while failure leads to role confusion and vulnerability to peer pressure. Supportive environments (mentorship, extracurriculars, open dialogue) facilitate healthy identity formation.

Resolution and Virtue Development

Erikson stressed that virtues are not fixed; they strengthen through practice and reflection. For example, an adolescent experiment with leadership roles (e.g., student council) can bolster competence and fidelity. In adulthood, generative acts (mentoring interns, volunteering) reinforce care, whereas isolation hinders emotional growth.

Relevance for Counseling, Career Exploration, and Life Transitions

Counselors use Erikson's stages to contextualize clients' struggles: a young adult facing relationship anxieties may revisit unresolved intimacy vs. isolation issues. Career advisors guide teens through identity exploration exercises—values inventories, narrative writing—to support fidelity development. Retirement planning programs address integrity vs. despair, encouraging older adults to document life stories, celebrate achievements, and find purpose in mentorship roles.

Cultural and Individual Variations

While Erikson's ages are approximate, cultural norms and individual differences can shift timings. In collectivist societies, autonomy vs. shame may manifest differently, emphasizing family interdependence over individual will. Life events—immigration, trauma, late parenthood—can trigger re-engagement with earlier crises. Practitioners adapt the model flexibly, attending to personal and cultural contexts rather than rigid age brackets.

Key Information

Stage (Age)	Crisis	Virtue
Trust vs. Mistrust (0–1)	Dependence vs. deprivation	Hope
Autonomy vs. Shame (1–3)	Self-control vs. doubt	Will
Initiative vs. Guilt (3–6)	Purposeful action vs. guilt	Purpose

Stage (Age)	Crisis	Virtue
Industry vs. Inferiority (6–12)	Skill vs. inadequacy	Competence
Identity vs. Role Confusion (12–18)	Self-definition vs. confusion	Fidelity
Intimacy vs. Isolation (18–40)	Close relationships vs. loneliness	Love
Generativity vs. Stagnation (40–65)	Care for next generation vs. self-absorption	Care
Integrity vs. Despair (65+)	Reflection vs. regret	Wisdom

Case Study Excerpt: Navigating Identity in Senior Year

Jamila, an 18-year-old high school senior, felt torn between her passion for visual arts and her family's expectations to pursue engineering. In counseling sessions, she explored different roles: joining the art club (fostering creative expression) and shadowing an engineer at her father's firm (gaining technical insight). Through journaling exercises on personal values and future aspirations, Jamila articulated two identity options. When she shared these "possible selves" with peers and mentors, she received feedback that clarified her priorities. Ultimately, Jamila designed a hybrid major in industrial design—combining art and engineering—demonstrating commitment to a synthesized identity and achieving fidelity.

1. What aspect of Erikson's model did Jamila address by exploring both art and engineering roles?

2. How did feedback from peers and mentors support Jamila's identity development?

Multiple Choice

1. In Erikson's initiative vs. guilt stage, children learn to:
    a) Reflect on their life accomplishments
    b) Form deep romantic relationships
    c) Trust caregivers for basic needs
    d) Assert control and plan activities

2. Generativity involves:
    a) Mentoring and guiding younger generations
    b) Seeking peer acceptance during adolescence
    c) Avoiding regrets in old age
    d) Developing self-reliance in toddlerhood

3. A failure to resolve trust vs. mistrust may lead to:
    a) Overcommitment to work
    b) Distrust in relationships
    c) Strong sense of initiative
    d) Excessive self-confidence

Matching

Write the letter of the correct definition on the line next to each term.

Term	Definition
1. ___ Trust vs. Mistrust	A) Fidelity
2. ___ Autonomy vs. Shame	B) Care
3. ___ Industry vs. Inferiority	C) Will
4. ___ Identity vs. Role Confusion	D) Competence
5. ___ Generativity vs. Stagnation	E) Hope

Fill-in-the-Blank

1. Successfully resolving intimacy vs. isolation yields the virtue of _____.

2. Erikson expanded Freud's psychosexual focus into a lifespan model emphasizing _____ and cultural influences.

3. Erikson wrote that elders reflect on their lives with either wisdom or _____.

Short Answer

Answer each question in 2-4 complete sentences.

1. Explain how cultural context might shift the timing of Erikson's stages.

_____

_____

_____

2. Describe one counseling strategy to support someone in the identity vs. role confusion stage.

3. Discuss how revisiting earlier stages can benefit adults facing new life challenges.