

Stage Theories for Children Ages 5 to 10

Boogers, Books and Behavior: The Elementary School Mind

Psychosocial Development: Erik Erikson

- A **5 or 6** year old may still be working on **Initiative vs. Guilt** with the goal of gaining a sense of **Purpose**. The Existential Question she faces is, **“Is it okay for me to do, move, and act?”**
 - Home example: Building a blanket fort.
 - Library example: Handing a library card to a librarian on one’s own.
 - Librarian’s role: Encourage the child to take initiative in trying new things.
 - Lovely aspects: The child learns to make plans, gets excited about new ideas, develops judgment about taking risks, and becomes more independent.
 - Challenges: If adults discourage the child from taking initiative, she may feel guilty about her desires and bad about herself. If she doesn’t succeed in her plans, she may throw a tantrum out of frustration.
- Often, **5 to 10** year olds are working on **Industry vs. Inferiority** with the goal of gaining a sense of **Competence**. The Existential Question she faces is, **“Can I make it in the world of people and things?”**
 - Home example: Competing on a soccer team.
 - Library example: Researching ants for an animal report.
 - Librarian’s role: Give the child the tools to complete projects and pursue interests on her own or with other children.
 - Lovely aspects: The child becomes more responsible and engaged in learning, is better at sharing and cooperating, gets cause and effect, and starts understanding cultural and personal differences.
 - Challenges: If not allowed to pursue her interests, the child may lose motivation and self-confidence. If she is unable to meet people’s expectations, she may feel inferior. In establishing her individuality and independence, she may act defiant.

Moral Development: Lawrence Kohlberg

- Some **5 to 6** year olds still have an **Obedience and Punishment Orientation** to morality. The question on their minds in making moral decisions is, **“How can I avoid punishment?”**
 - Home example: I will not kick the dog because I will get sent to my room.
 - Library example: I will not rip up a book because I will get kicked out of the library.

- Librarian's role: Have clear and consistent boundaries in the Children's Room.
 - Lovely aspects: The child will generally try to follow rules if they know the rules.
 - Challenges: Without consistent boundaries, the child may become confused as to what is acceptable. We have very little influence on the boundaries parents and caregivers set, and they may not agree with library rules.
- Some **5 to 10** year olds have a **Self-Interest Orientation**. The question on their minds in making moral decisions is, **"What's in it for me?"**
 - Home example: I will clear the dinner table so that I get to watch television.
 - Library example: I will do summer reading so that I can get tickets to Fairyland.
 - Librarian's role: Reward good choices with reasonable incentives, like telling them a joke or pulling out a board game.
 - Lovely aspects: The child may respond to small incentives with excellent behavior and choices. Adults and children can create reasonable incentives together.
 - Challenges: The child's pro-social behavior may become dependent on ever-bigger rewards. Parents, caregivers, or teachers may fall back on bribing children with food or toys to get them to cooperate.
- Some **7 to 10** year olds have a **Conformity Orientation**. The question on their minds in making moral decisions is, **"Will people think I am good and will they like me?"**
 - Home example: I will study for my spelling test by myself to impress my mom.
 - Library example: I will put the book I am done with on the reshelving cart so that the librarian likes me.
 - Librarian's role: Give high-fives, smiles, and verbal praise for specific good choices.
 - Lovely aspects: The child may start feeling proud of pro-social behavior and concrete incentives become less important.
 - Challenges: Some adults manipulate this stage to get children to not do certain behaviors by withholding love. This can cause low self-esteem, withdrawal, and/or anger. A child may become too dependent on the approval of others, or, realizing that this is unattainable, give up on pro-social behavior.

Humor Development: Frank Prerost

- At **5**, some children still find great joy in **potty talk**. They also like **incongruous humor**, such as animals wearing clothes.
- By **5 to 9**, humor is more along the lines of **riddles, puns, and knock-knock jokes**.
- Many **9 to 10** year olds find amusement in **dirty jokes and gross-out humor**, as well as **making fun** of people and groups.