

## Erikson's Theory of Children's Social-Emotional Development

Stage	Age	Characteristics
Trust versus Mistrust	<p>Birth–2 Years (approximately)</p> <p>Children are developing a sense of trust in the world around them.</p>	<p><b>Sense of Trust</b></p> <p>Examples of when children will learn to trust include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• when the child is unhappy and a caring adult comes to comfort the child</li> <li>• when the child is hungry and a caring adult comes to feed the child</li> <li>• the child learns he or she can trust that the world is predictable</li> </ul> <p>When a child's needs are not responded to—if, for example, no one comforts the child or does so only some of the time—the child will find it much more difficult to learn to trust.</p> <p><b>Sense of Having “Power” to Affect Others</b></p> <p>Examples of when children will learn they can affect others include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• when the child smiles and gurgles and someone responds with a smile</li> <li>• when the child cries and someone comes to give comfort</li> </ul> <p>However, when a child acts and no one responds, it will be difficult for the child to develop a belief in her or his own power.</p>
Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt	<p>2–3 Years (approximately)</p> <p>Children at this stage become more and more independent, even though they may not yet have acquired the skill (e.g., they may want to dress themselves, pour their own milk, or push their own strollers rather than sit in them).</p>	<p><b>Sense of Independence</b></p> <p>Around the age of two years, children start to want to do everything by themselves and want control of their surroundings—this is the stage of independence, or <b>autonomy</b>, and it is perfectly normal.</p> <p>Examples of when children will learn independence include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the child receives positive guidance</li> <li>• the child is supported in his or her efforts to be independent</li> </ul> <p>Adults who set up activities that help children succeed encourage them to feel proud about their accomplishments (e.g., encouraging and supporting children to feed or dress themselves).</p> <p>During this stage, children are often not interested in sharing, taking turns, waiting, and so on. Caregivers need to remember that this is an important part of development when planning and arranging activities.</p> <p>Children who are ridiculed or are not supported may learn to feel <b>shame</b> and <b>doubt</b> about their own ability.</p>
Initiative versus Guilt	<p>4–5 Years (approximately)</p> <p>Children have developed new skills and their intellectual development has progressed to the stage where they can think ahead and want to plan and take <b>initiative</b>.</p>	<p><b>Ability to Take Initiative</b></p> <p>Children who are encouraged to take action will develop confidence in their ability and will build positive self-esteem. For example, a five-year-old can think of a goal and take the initiative to make it happen (“I want to build a rocket ship out of blocks.”)</p> <p>Children who are ridiculed or are not allowed to take action may learn to feel <b>guilty</b> about wanting to take initiative and be independent.</p>

**autonomy:** personal independence; the ability to make and act on decisions

**shame:** negative emotion that includes feelings of unworthiness, disgrace, embarrassment, and dishonour

**doubt:** feeling uncertain about something or someone; thinking that something is unlikely

**initiative:** ability to make and act on decisions without the advice or assistance of another person

**guilt:** feeling shame and regret as a result of knowing one has done wrong