

Major Theorists of Child Development

Theorist	Findings or Ideas	Significance
Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)	Freud believed that personality develops through a series of stages. Emotional experiences in childhood have profound effects on a person as an adult.	The idea that early experiences affect adult life has profound importance for anyone caring for a child.
Maria Montessori (1870-1952)	Montessori stressed that children learn by using their senses and that they learn best by pursuing their interests.	Children need to be given objects to manipulate so they can exercise their sensory learning.
Arnold Gesell (1880-1962)	Gesell developed basic information about an order in which children master various skills and the typical rate of this development.	Parents and other caregivers need to be aware of the standard course of development.
Jean Piaget (1896-1980)	Piaget, the first to study children in a scientific way, focused on how children learned. He said that children go through four stages of thinking that shape how they see and learn about the world.	Children should be given learning tasks that are suitable for their stage of thinking.
Lev Vygotsky (1898-1934)	Vygotsky believed that both biological development and cultural experiences influenced children's ability to think and learn. He said social contact was essential for intellectual development.	Children should have many opportunities for social interaction to develop intellectually.
Erik Erikson (1902-1994)	Erikson, like Freud, said personality develops through stages. He thought that each stage includes a unique psychological crisis. If that crisis is met in a positive way, the individual develops maturity.	Parents and other caregivers must be aware of a child's needs at a particular stage and be sensitive to the child's needs at that stage.
B. F. Skinner (1904-1990)	Skinner argued that when a child's action repeatedly brings positive effects, it will be repeated and learned. When negative results repeatedly occur, the child will eventually stop the action.	Parents and other caregivers can use rewards and punishments to try to influence a child's behavior.
Albert Bandura (1925-)	Bandura said that children learn by modeling. He disagreed with Skinner. He pointed out that although the environment shapes behavior, behavior also affects the environment.	Since children learn by modeling, parent and caregivers must provide good examples.
Robert Coles (1929-)	Coles has studied children's moral development. He stresses the important role that parents and other caregivers play by the examples they set.	For children to adopt moral learning, parents must show moral behavior.