





# **The Developing Person Through the Life Span**

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**The Developing Person Through the Life Span**

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# Preface

Until recently, the study of human development was largely confined to the study of children. People assumed that once a person was physically grown, he or she was fully developed in most other ways as well.

Within the past ten years or so, that assumption has been challenged, reconsidered, and finally replaced with the view that, in fact, people develop throughout the entire life span, building on earlier competencies and developing new skills, patterns, and abilities as long as they live. This life-span perspective has opened up new vistas for researchers, scholars, teachers, and students alike. For one thing, textbooks such as this one not only “cover” adulthood as well as childhood, they also present childhood in a different light—as the opening act in the drama of development rather than the main body of the play. Furthermore, as this textbook reflects, a life-span perspective calls for an approach that takes into account the ways social interactions and cultural institutions shape the development of each individual. Finally, historical conditions become increasingly relevant, for life-span research reveals that *how* one experiences adolescence, or adulthood, or old age, depends on *when* one experiences each stage. Being a young adult in the 1950s, for instance, was in many ways quite different from being a young adult today.

The very newness of the life-span perspective—including its many discoveries and controversies—adds excitement to the study of human development, an excitement I have tried to convey in this book. The importance of parent-infant interaction, the potential of children's and adolescents' cognitive abilities, the variability of adult sexuality, the wide-ranging effects of divorce and remarriage, the complex interaction between work and self-esteem, the role of affiliation and achievement in old age, are only a few of the many critical topics into which we are increasingly gaining insight. The study of human development is a fascinating enterprise, for the unfoldings and transformations that mark the progression from embryo to elder citizen are truly awesome.

**Organization of  
this Book**

A major organizational problem confronts every teacher and writer when trying to lay out the essentials of human development: Should the material be organized chronologically, from conception onward, or topically, with separate sections on language, sex roles, and so forth? Since actual development is always both chronological and topical (an individual's moral development, for example, depends both on that person's previous moral development and on other events and experiences that are only tangentially related to morality), the solution to this organizational problem is always some form of compromise.

I have chosen to employ a topical treatment within a chronological framework. Instructors who have used my earlier childhood and adolescence textbook, *The Developing Person* (Worth, 1980), report that having a recurrent trio of physical, cognitive, and psychosocial chapters in each chronological period makes it easier for them to emphasize the whole person at each stage of development. Students also generally find that these consistent topical divisions within a chronological structure make comprehension easier. Thus, after four introductory chapters that set out the methodological and theoretical foundations of the study of development and the genetic and prenatal foundations of development itself, this topical framework is applied to infancy, early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and late adulthood. A chapter on death and dying concludes the book.

**The Book as a  
Teaching Tool**

To help students apply concepts rather than merely memorize them, I have used two special devices, the Research Report and the Closer Look. The Research Reports include details of relevant studies and explore the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology, as well as the conclusions of the research. Closer Looks provide a personal examination of some aspect of development and are intended to be thought-provoking. In addition, each chapter opens with a series of deceptively simple true-false questions intended to spark the reader's interest; and each closes with a numbered summary of the chapter's central concepts and a list of recommended paperbacks for the student's personal reading. (For students interested in serious research, the bibliography at the end of the book provides ample source material.)

**The Author**

A final note about this book should probably say something about the author, since any author's theoretical perspective, values, and assumptions will influence what is included in, or left out of, any text.

My theoretical roots are diverse: My mentors have included individuals who studied directly with Erik Erikson, B. F. Skinner, Carl Rogers, and Jean Piaget, and I continue to have great respect for these theorists, although I do not identify with any of them. Equally influential are my personal interests in the study of human development. I am a daughter, a sister, a friend, a wife, a mother (of four, ages 15, 13, 7, and 1), and a woman approaching midlife, as well as a teacher and a writer. My personal experiences in all these roles provide me a compelling reason to learn more about development; I hope you will find the same is true for you.

**Supplementary  
Materials**

A *Study Guide*, written by Rob Fry, is available to aid students in their understanding of the key concepts and terms in the text, as well as to help them review the material. Each chapter includes a list of learning objectives, a detailed summary, and an extensive battery of self-tests including matching, true-false, and multiple-choice questions and a final quiz.

For the instructor, Kathryn Quina and I have prepared a comprehensive *Instructor's Resource Book*, which includes ideas for lectures, class discussions, audio-visual programs, essay tests, and research papers. A *Test Bank* devised by Gary Ritchey with over a thousand four-choice multiple-choice questions is also available to instructors.

## Thanks

Every textbook is the work of many people. This is especially true for *The Developing Person Through the Life Span*, in part because the editorial and sales staff of Worth Publishers are devoted to excellence, and the company provides consistent help in meeting their high standards. I am particularly grateful to my editor, Peter Deane, for maintaining both his vision of perfection and his sense of humor throughout the many stages of writing, revision, and production of this book.

Many academic reviewers provided suggestions, criticism, references, and encouragement. Each of them made the book a better one, and I thank them all:

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Writing a book about human development has made me think about the two people I know best who have continued to develop and learn throughout each of life's stages—my parents, Esther Glewwe Stassen and Harold Edward Stassen. They are more proud of me than I merit; I am more proud of them than I usually admit. This book is dedicated to them.

Kathleen Stassen Berger  
New York City  
June, 1983

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