Erik Erikson developed his 8 stages of social development

In 1956, a psychiatrist named Erik Erikson developed his 8 stages of social development (“8 Stages of Man). Erikson defined the socialisation process through wide-ranging experiences in psychotherapy which included extensive experience with children and adolescents from the full range of social classes.

Erikson regards each stage as a ‘psychosocial crisis’, which arises and demands resolution before the next stage can be satisfactorily reached.

These stages are constructed almost architecturally as satisfactory learning and resolution of each crisis is needed if the child is to handle the next and subsequent stages well (just as the foundation of a building is essential to the first floor, which in turn must be structurally sound to support the second storey, and so on).

Erikson’s theory about a child's psychosocial development is similar to several others but has distinct differences. Like Freud, Erikson believed that development could be identified in specific stages, however Erikson focussed on the social aspect of evolvement, whereas Freud believed that development was sexually driven. Erikson's theory was also similar to Piaget’s in that he believed that advancement occurs in a predetermined order, but the socialisation aspect was the focus, rather than Piaget's cognitive focus.
Erikson’s 8 Stages of Man

1. Learning Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust (HOPE) This is the period from birth through to the first one or two years of life. Erikson theorised that the child who is well-handled, nurtured and loved develops trust and security and a basic optimism, whereas a child who is badly handled becomes insecure and mistrustful. Erikson believes that during the first year of age a baby forms their first feelings about the world and whether or not it is a safe place based on the level of consistent care that was provided by their parents/carers. When the child’s trust develops successfully, the child gains a sense of security but if this sense is not developed successfully, a fear and inner mistrust of the world forms. Anxiety and security are an indication of an unsuccessful beginning.

2. Learning Autonomy vs. Shame (WILL) Erikson’s second psychosocial crisis occurs during early childhood from around 18 months to 4 years of age. In this stage Erikson believes that a ‘well-parented’ child emerges from this stage sure of himself, elated with his new found control, and proud rather than ashamed. Autonomy is not entirely synonymous with assured self-possession, initiative and independence, but at least for a child in the early part of this ‘crisis’ it includes stormy self-will, tantrums, stubbornness, and negativity. Erikson believes that as a child becomes increasingly independent, they try to assert their opinions and do things independently. These first attempts at decision making are vital milestones developmentally. If a child’s effort at independent thinking are supported and encouraged, self-confidence increases preparing the child to survive in the real world. Erikson found that parents who criticised or did not allow their child to make simple decisions, set the child up to feel inadequate and doubtful about their own abilities. Low self-esteem and a tendency to be overly dependent on others can have their roots in an unsuccessful transition at this age.

3. Learning Initiative vs. Guilt (PURPOSE) The third psychosocial crisis occurs during what Erikson calls the ‘play age’ (from about 3½ - 6 years of age). Its during this stage that a healthily developing child learns to:
   - Imagine, broaden his skills through active play of all sorts
   - Cooperate with others
   - Lead as well as follow

However, if a child is immobilised by guilt, they are:
   - Fearful
   - Hangs on the fringe of groups
   - Continues to be unduly dependent on adults
   - Restricted both in development of play skills and imagination

Erikson believed that during these years children enjoy expressing their assertiveness by choosing their own activities, inventing their own solutions to problems and approaching others for social interaction. When the child’s efforts are recognised and rewarded, they flourish, but if they are made to feel foolish or not allowed to even try, they may go through their lives preferring to follow, rather than to lead.

4. Industry vs. Inferiority (COMPETENCE) This stage occurs during what Erikson calls the ‘school age’ (6 years – puberty). In this stage, the child learns to master the more formal skills of life:
   - Relating to peers according to rules
   - Progressing from free play to play that is more complex, structured by rules and teamwork
Mastering social studies, literacy and numeracy

A child who has successfully progressed through Erikson's psychosocial crises is trusting, autonomous and full of initiative and will learn easily enough to be industrious. However, the mistrusting child will doubt the future. The shame and guilt filled child will experience defeat and inferiority.

Erikson believes that the school years provide children with opportunities to take the initiative in planning and following through on a variety of projects. Parents and educators who provide the child with positive feedback can help the child to feel confident and capable, important characteristics for happiness and future success. If however, important adults in the child’s life fail to encourage the child’s efforts, the child may fail to reach their full potential.

5. Learning Identity vs. Identity Diffusion (FIDELITY) During this stage (13 – 14 years of age) the adolescent learns how to answer satisfactorily and happily the question of "who I am?". However, even the most well-adjusted adolescent experiences some role identity diffusion. Most boys and probably most girls experiment with minor delinquency; rebellion flourishes; self-doubts flood the adolescent and so on.

6. The teen years can be turbulent. The adolescent is trapped – no longer a child, but not yet an adult. However, they are making strides to cross the bridge into adulthood. This transition requires that the adolescent begin to investigate their futures and explore their possibilities. Career options, romantic relationships, family plans – their choices are numerous and they are in the position of needing to figure out just who it is they are and who they want to be. An inability to figure out these questions may render the adolescent confused and directionless.

7. Learning Intimacy vs. Isolation (LOVE) After successfully negotiating the preceding stages, the successful young adult, for the first time, can experience true intimacy. This is usually the stage where the young adult makes their first real commitment to someone, other than a family member. Success in this stage provides the young adult with great satisfaction, while those who avoid intimacy maybe setting themselves up to feel lonely, isolated and even depressed.

8. Learning Generativity vs. Stagnation (CARE) It is generally in this stage where the adult tends to settle into marriage and parenthood. These are the years when careers flourish, families are raised and people find their comfort zones – being productive and responsible members of society. However, those who fail to meet their goals may stagnate and feel a sense of disappointment about their lack of productivity.

9. Integrity vs. Despair (WISDOM) In this final stage of Erikson’s theory seniors with their working years behind them are able to slow down and reflect on their lives. Those who feel good about the lives they have led up until that point can take well deserved pride in their accomplishments, however, for those who feel that they haven't reached their full potential, that they have been unproductive throughout their lives and failed to achieve their goals, may feel dissatisfied and despair which may lead to depression.

Although Erikson’s theory relies on successful progression through the 8 stages and that failing to successfully complete one stage will have a negative impact on one’s ability to manoeuvre well through the remaining stages, Erikson believes that at any time, issues with uncompleted stages can be resolved, enabling people to progress successfully through their lives.

“Stages of Social-emotional Development in Children and Teenagers”
http://www.childdevelopmentinfo.com/development/erikson_point.shtml

“Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development” 24/7/2010
http://www.kidsdevelopment.co.uk/EriksonsPsychosocialDevelopmentTheory.html