LEARN · EIGHT STAGES ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

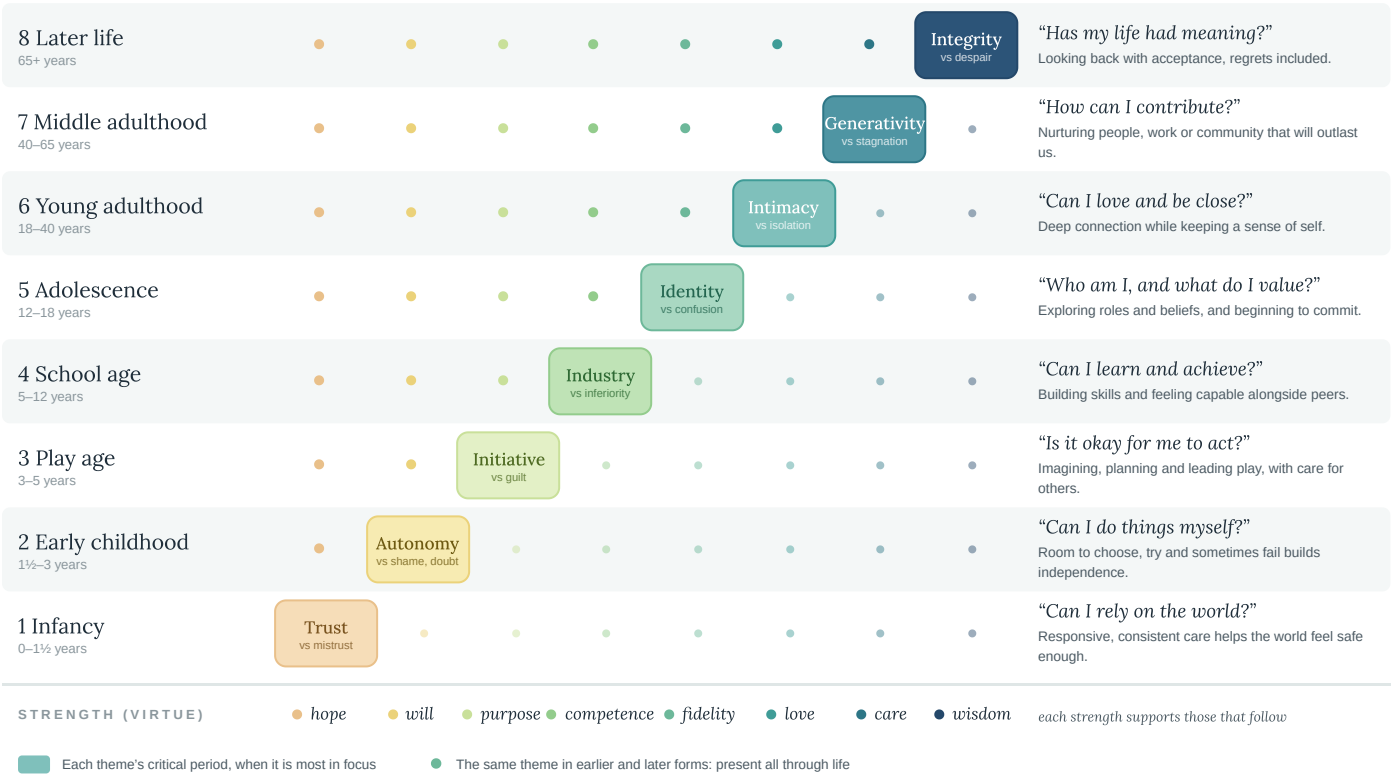
Erik Erikson: Psychosocial Development

Each season of life brings its own question, and its own possible strength

Erik Erikson (1902–1994) carried Freud's ideas beyond childhood. He described development as lifelong, and as shaped by relationships, culture and history, not only by what happens inside us. He drew his model as a chart, reimagined below (Erikson, 1950).

01 The epigenetic chart

read from the bottom up · ages are approximate



02 Reading the chart

and applying it to yourself

CRISIS
A turning point
Erikson used "crisis" for a period of heightened potential and vulnerability, not a catastrophe.

BALANCE
Not perfection
A healthy outcome leans towards one pole without erasing the other. A little mistrust, for example, keeps us safe.

LIFELONG
Never finished
The dots in every row show that each theme is present across life. What was missed early can be revisited and reworked later.

PSYCHOSOCIAL
Shaped by others
Each stage unfolds within relationships, culture and history. Development is never a solo project.

REFLECT

Which row am I living now?
and what question is it asking of me

A strength I carry from an earlier stage
hope, will, purpose, competence...

An earlier theme that still echoes
trust, shame, belonging, identity...

What might help me now?
people, roles, or experiences

WHAT THE RESEARCH SUGGESTS

Erikson's earlier work on identity development (Erikson, 1968) informed Marcia's (1966) influential identity-status model, which remains widely studied. Joan Erikson later described a ninth stage for very old age (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). The model is broad and descriptive rather than directly testable, and its age bands reflect a particular historical and cultural context.

SOURCES

Erikson, E. H. (1950). *Childhood and society.* W. W. Norton.

Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis.* W. W. Norton.

Erikson, E. H., & Erikson, J. M. (1997). *The life cycle completed* (Extended version). W. W. Norton.

Marcia, J. E. (1966). Development and validation of ego-identity status. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 3*(5), 551–558.

© 2026 B&F Clinical Psychology · Evidence-informed educational resource · For educational purposes only.