

A Psychosocial Model of Adoption Adjustment

by David Brodzinsky, Marshall Schechter and Robin Marantz Henig

The chart is based on Danish psychologist Erik Erickson's seven-stage model of the developmental tasks that people face throughout a lifetime. Erickson identified conflicts that need to be resolved in various developmental stages. Issues that are unresolved resurface to affect later development throughout the lifetime of the person. Researchers, Brodzinsky, Schechter and Henig adapted Erickson's tasks to adoption.

Age	Psychosocial Tasks	Adoption-Related Tasks
Infancy to 18 months	Trust vs. Mistrust	Adjusting to transition to a new home. Developing secure attachments, especially in cases of delayed placement. Learning to trust adults.
18 months to 3 years	Autonomy vs. Shame	Beginning of independence. Adjusting to transition to new home. Developing secure attachments. Learning to trust adults.
3 – 6 years/preschool	Initiative vs. Guilt	Learning about birth and reproduction. Adjusting to initial information about adoption. Recognizing differences in physical appearance, especially in interracial and intercountry adoption.
6-11 years/ Middle Childhood	Industry vs. Inferiority	Understanding the meaning and implications of being adopted. Searching for answers and implications of being adopted. Coping with physical differences from family members. Coping with stigma associated with adoption. Coping with peer reactions to adoption, and that adoption means loss. Grieve loss even when happy with adoptive family. Begin to understand legal process; may fear being taken or relinquished again. Can express anger, hurt and sadness about feelings of abandonment and/or rejection.
12-18 years/ Adolescence	Ego Identity vs. Role Confusion	Further exploration of the meaning and implications of adoption. Connecting adoption to one's sense of identity; tend to guard thoughts Coping with racial identity in cases of interracial adoption. Coping with physical differences from family members. Resolving family romance fantasy; want more information about birthparents. Coping with adoption-related loss, especially as it relates to the sense of self. Considering the possibility of searching for biological family.
18-35 years/ Young Adulthood	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Further exploration of the implications of adoption as it relates to the growth of self and development

		<p>of intimacy. Further considerations of searching and reunion. Adjusting to parenthood in light of the history of one's relinquishment. Facing one's unknown genetic history in the context of the birth of children. Coping with adoption-related loss.</p>
<p>35-64 years/ Middle Adulthood</p>	<p>Generativity vs. Stagnation</p>	<p>Further exploration of the implications of adoption as it relates to the aging self. Reconciling the creation of a psychological legacy with one's unknown past. Further considerations of searching. Coping with adoption-related loss.</p>
<p>65 years and on/ Late Adulthood</p>	<p>Ego Integrity vs. Despair</p>	<p>Final resolution of the implications of adoption in the context of a life review. Final considerations regarding searching for surviving biological family.</p>