

Freud's psychosexual stages of development

Freud stated that there are five psychosexual stages through which a child moves in a fixed sequence which is strongly influenced by maturation. In each stage the libido, the instinctual sexual drive forming the motive force behind virtually all our behaviour, is invested in the part of the body that is most sensitive at that age. (Bee, 1994, p.27)

Stage	Age	Erogenous zones	Major developmental task (potential cause of conflict)	Adult characteristics of children who have been fixated at this stage
Oral	0-1	Mouth, lips, tongue	Weaning	Oral behaviour, such as smoking, overeating, passivity and gullibility
Anal	2-3	Anus	Toilet training	Orderliness, parsimoniousness, obstinacy or the opposite
Phallic	4-5	Genitals	Oedipus complex	Vanity, recklessness and the opposite
Latency	6-12	No specific area	Development of defence mechanisms	None: fixation does not normally occur at this stage

Genital	13-18	Genitals	Mature sexual intimacy	Adults who have successfully integrated earlier stages should emerge with a sincere interest in others, and mature sexuality
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Bee, H. (1994) *Lifespan development*. New York: HarperCollins College publishers

- The most famous of Freud's psychosexual stages of development is the phallic stage as it is here that the Oedipus and Electra conflicts are said to occur, producing anxiety which is resolved by identifying with the same sexed parent.
- Freud suggested that optimum development requires an environment that will satisfy the unique needs of each stage. For example a baby needs sufficient oral and anal stimulation and a four year old boy needs a father present with whom to identify and a mother who is not too seductive. An inadequate early environment will leave a residue of unresolved conflicts and problems which are then carried forward to subsequent stages. If the child becomes fixated at any one stage this can lead to problems in adulthood. For example a fixation at the oral stage may be associated with smoking or overeating in adulthood. (Bee, 1994, p.28) (Sugarman, 1986, p.82)
- Critiques of Freud's psychosexual stage theory-

The concept of unconscious motivations (e.g. libido) has been a profoundly important idea in current theories emphasising internal models of development but these concepts cannot be turned into valid and reliable measures for testing and to falsify.

Freud's theory is based primarily on clinical observations with individuals who had approached him for psychotherapy. This may have led Freud to his strong emphasis on pathological and negative psychological processes.