

Explaining the Stages of Development to Children/Young People

Below is a detailed outline as to how you might explain the different stages in a way that is accessible to young people. Feel free to change the language, and be selective in terms of what you feel is most relevant and useful for you and the young person you are working with.

Included in each stage is a reference to how 'inappropriate' behaviour might be linked with the tasks. You might leave this out and see what links the young person him/herself makes.

Using the 3rd person can be a useful way of helping the young person to safely distance themselves as we look at the material – so it might be that you create a fictional character and plot his/her development through the different stages.

The Being Stage

This is about how we learn to make other people know what we need. We all need to learn to trust people – sometimes this is pretty easy, other times we can find this a bit trickier.

Babies naturally make the big people around them know that they need something – usually by crying!!! And usually the adults scramble around, trying to work out what the baby actually needs – is it time for a nappy change?; is the baby hungry? Tired?

When the adults help the baby out, say by giving it its feed, the baby begins to feel that it can trust them. It's as if the parents are saying:

- What you need is important to us.
- We want you to be here and want to care for you.
- You belong here.

We don't stop needing to learn to trust others. This is something we will keep learning about throughout our lives. So if we get a baby brother or sister, say when we are 6yrs old, we will need to check out that we are still important to our parents and that they will keep looking after us. When we start a new school, we need to work out which adults we can trust – who will help us if we get lost?

Sometimes we might find that we need to do this even in a classroom we've been in for a while. If we're getting into trouble, say for calling out too much, it might be that we need to think 'What do I really need here and how can I get that need met in a way that won't get me into trouble?'

The Doing Stage

The first time we come across these jobs is when we are a very young toddler. Toddlers love to explore things. When they eat most of the food goes on their clothes and around their face – anywhere but in their mouth sometimes. When you watch them, they often put things into their mouths, and they also put their fingers into all sorts of different places. That's why parents will put up stair gates and put those protectors into plug sockets – it's all about making sure that the house is safe whilst the toddler explores.

By doing these things, it's as if they are saying:

- You can use all of your senses when you explore.
- You can explore and experiment and we will support and protect you.
- You can be interested in everything.

- You can do things as many times as you need to.

And most of us like to keep exploring. Like when we move to a new school – we need to find out where the dining hall is, where the toilets are Sometimes we might find that our exploring creates a bit of a problem – like in lesson time if we are dismantling a pen to find out how it works! So we might need to find better ways to do our exploring.

The Thinking Stage

We all need to learn to think for ourselves. In fact, if we didn't ask questions like 'I wonder what would happen if

The first time we start to learn to think is as a toddler – remember how toddlers like to explore. Well they keep doing this, but as they get a bit older, they do more thinking . So they get curious – they look at the fire in the sitting room and think 'I wonder what would happen if I touch that thing that mum keeps telling me not to touch?'

We are curious as toddlers – and this curiosity is a really positive thing. You think about some of your lessons – science lessons can be a great time to be curious and to find out more about the world.

As we learn to think for ourselves, we want to do what we want to do. That's why a toddler's favourite word is often 'No!' If we videoed what was going on in a toddler's house, we might see something like the parent saying 'Come on, we're going to the shops' and the toddler replies with – what do you think? - 'No – me play with toys!'

What do you think happens next? – that's right, the adult might start to get annoyed – 'You are coming with me – now put your coat on.' And within minutes they've got locked in a battle.

Some of us might need some help with this stage – for example, if we find that we are often getting into trouble for pushing the boundaries – challenging the authority of others.

Here are some of the messages that help a child of this age begin to get these growing up jobs under their belt:

- I'm glad you're starting to think for yourself
- You can know what you need and ask for help.
- You can be yourself and we will still care for you.
- It's Ok for you to be angry, and we won't let you hurt yourself or others.
- You can say no and push the limits as much as you need to – and we will keep you and others safe as you do so.

The Identity and Power Stage

When we get to about 3 years old, we begin to want to find out more about who we are. We notice that boys and girls are different – they wear different clothes, play with different toys – you know, girls play with dolls, boys play with cars ...

If we are a boy, we might not want to play with toys we think are 'girls' toys.' Or perhaps we do want to – but think we shouldn't. We might also notice that people are different in other ways – like their skin colour, or perhaps they have a disability that we notice as making them different to us.

We find out a bit more about this through stories – I wonder if you had a favourite story you liked to have read? Or a DVD you liked to watch over and over again? Who was your favourite character? What did you like about him/her? What was your favourite bit of the story?

The other important bit at this stage is finding out how much power we have. We might overhear children in the playground saying things like 'If you let me have that toy, I'll be your best friend' or 'I'll tell of you if you don't give me those sweets'. Children at this age quite often get into spats – and this can continue into the next stage

- You can explore who you are and find out about others.
- You can try out different ways of being powerful.
- You can be powerful and ask for help at the same time.
- All of your feelings are OK here.

The Skills and Structure stage

Between the ages of about 6 and 12, we really start to learn more about how to get on with others. We learn, like in so many different areas of our lives, by trying things out and sometimes making mistakes. So we fall in and out with our friends – one day we are best friends with Tom, the next day we think we can't even spend any time with him at all because he supports Chelsea now and we support Man U.

Getting on with others is a tricky business – and gets trickier during this stage. This is partly because we begin to find our own interests – like which football we support, or pop star we really like. And we are working out what's important to us - what makes things fair or not fair? We get mad when our parents have rules that we don't think are fair – like when we have to go to bed at a certain time when our mates go to bed later.

Like with the other stages, there are some positive messages that will encourage us during this stage. These include:

- You can learn from your mistakes.
- You can find ways of doing things that work for you.
- You can learn the rules that help you live with others.
- You can learn when and how to disagree.
- You can think for yourself and get help instead of staying in distress.
- You can think before you say 'Yes' or 'No'.

When we move to a new school we find ourselves working out how to get on with our new classmates and trying to make new friends. We also need to check out what the rules are. We might find that we test things a bit – just like when we were a toddler and we would say 'No!' just to see if the rules really do apply.

The Integration stage

What we see here are the milestones – what we are aiming for by the time we become an adult.

The teenage years are a time of finding out lots of new things about ourselves and the people around us. What we find is that we come back and visit the stages we went through before.

If we go back to the **Being** stage – remember this was about checking out where we can get care from – as a teenager, this becomes important again – but it's not to have a nappy changed, or to be put down to sleep. The important areas of care now are about having enough food (so we might get into arguments with an adult at home about raiding the fridge or going through too much food); being able to get a lift to and from our mates; and having enough money to do the things we want to do.

The **Doing and Thinking** stages – these were visited the first time round when we were toddlers. Do you remember? - we explored our surroundings by sticking our fingers into plugs etc etc. As a teenager, we still want to explore – and we want to have some excitement – so we might find that we do things that have a bit more risk – like doing skateboarding stunts, or (clearly this could get into difficult territory around drugs, alcohol etc etc – go with what you and the youngster are comfortable with, bearing in mind any legal responsibilities you might have here).

As a toddler we also needed to say 'No' to test the boundaries. Well, during our teen years, we might not lie on the floor flinging our arms about – but instead we might be getting into rows with the adults at home – and the doors are slammed and we stamp up to our room. Or at school we might be either saying 'No' or communicating 'No' by refusing to do certain things

Finding out who we are becomes really important during our teenage years. Just like when we were at the **Identity and Power** stage the first time round, we need to find out more about what it means to be a boy or girl – but this time it's more about growing up into a young man or young woman. And the thing that's really different here is sex. We might be getting very curious about this. We might spend ages getting ourselves ready in the morning to go out – putting on the gel, checking for spots etc etc and worrying about who fancies us.

The last stage we revisit is what's called the **Skills and Structure stage**. This is the one we first visit between the ages of around 6-12. As a teenager, we need to learn more of the rules to do with getting on with others – and how to repair things when we fall out with others. And we also need to be strengthening our self-esteem – taking care of how we see ourselves, learning to forgive ourselves when we make mistakes.