

MENTAL HEALTH WORKSHEET SERIES
VOLUME 8



Parenting Across the Life Span

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Thank you for honoring the work and the care behind it.

While it can be used as a tool to supplement an existing therapeutic relationship with a licensed mental health professional (LMHC, LCSW, LMFT, LPC, or a Licensed Psychologist), this resource should NOT be used as a substitute for therapy.

If you find that this resource brings up feelings and thoughts that are challenging to deal with on your own or with a trusted person, I encourage you to seek therapy to continue your healing journey.

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Raising children is a journey filled with growth, discovery, and challenges—not just for the child, but for the parent as well. One of the most helpful tools for understanding this journey comes from psychologist Erik Erikson, who outlined eight stages of psychosocial development. Each stage represents a key period in life where children (and eventually adults) face unique challenges, opportunities, and tasks that shape their sense of self and how they relate to the world.

For children, these stages are especially important because they lay the foundation for lifelong emotional health, confidence, and relationships. When parents understand what their child is going through at each stage, they can provide the right kind of support to help them thrive. Parenting is not just about meeting physical needs like food and shelter—it's also about nurturing trust, independence, creativity, resilience, and identity.

Erikson's theory highlights that at every stage, children face a central developmental conflict. How these conflicts are resolved depends heavily on the environment—and parents play the most critical role. Consistent support and guidance can help children develop confidence and security, while unhelpful responses may create fear, doubt, or mistrust that can carry into adulthood.

Understanding these stages gives parents a powerful roadmap. It not only helps us recognize what our children need most at different ages, but also shows how our own behavior can shape their emotional development and strengthen the parent-child relationship.

Soulfull Note to Self:

By learning and applying these principles, parents can feel more confident in guiding their children through the ups and downs of growing up, while fostering resilience, emotional well-being, and a strong, loving relationship that lasts a lifetime.

This guide is designed to walk you through each of Erikson's eight stages with:

- **A simple explanation of what children typically experience,**
- **The ways parents can best support them,**
- **Common pitfalls to avoid, and**
- **Bonding strategies to build connection and trust.**

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VOL. 8

Stage and Age Range	Typical Behaviors & Developmental Factors	Parenting Support & Impact
Stage 1 Trust vs. Mistrust (0-1 year old)	Infant depends on caregivers for all their needs, learning whether the world is safe and reliable, or not.	Support: Responding promptly builds trust and security, teaching the infant that their needs matter. Pitfall: Ignoring or inconsistent care creates mistrust, leading to anxiety and difficulty forming bonds later. Bonding: Warm touch and consistent routines foster attachment, laying groundwork for emotional stability.
Stage 2 Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (1-3 years)	Toddler develops independence, mobility, and self-control.	Support: Allowing safe choices and encouraging independence builds confidence and autonomy. Pitfall: Over-controlling or shaming mistakes teaches self-doubt and fear of failure. Bonding: Patient guidance strengthens trust in the parent-child relationship, reinforcing security while exploring independence.
Stage 3 Initiative vs. Guilt (3-6 years)	Child experiments with imagination, leadership, and decision-making.	Support: Encouraging curiosity and responsibility helps develop initiative, leadership, and problem-solving. Pitfall: Criticism or dismissal of ideas causes guilt and hesitation, stifling creativity. Bonding: Shared play and enthusiasm validate the child's efforts, strengthening connection and self-worth.

Parenting Across the Life Span

VOL. 8

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Stage 4 Industry vs. Inferiority (6–12 years)	Child seeks competence through school, hobbies, and peer relationships.	Support: Valuing effort and progress promotes perseverance and self-confidence. Pitfall: Negative comparisons or ignoring achievements foster feelings of inferiority and inadequacy. Bonding: Taking interest in their projects shows acceptance and pride, deepening trust and motivation.
Stage 5 Identity vs. Role Confusion (12–18 years)	Teen explores identity, values, and belonging; balances independence and guidance.	Support: Respecting self-expression supports identity formation and resilience. Pitfall: Forcing roles or dismissing feelings leads to confusion, rebellion, or dependency. Bonding: Open dialogue and shared experiences create mutual respect, keeping lines of trust open.
Stage 6 Intimacy vs. Isolation (18–40 years)	Young adults form close relationships and seek belonging.	Support: Modeling healthy relationships promotes empathy and emotional maturity. Pitfall: Pressure or criticism of life choices can push toward isolation or insecurity in relationships. Bonding: Ongoing trust and availability reinforce lifelong emotional support and closeness.

Parenting Across the Life Span

VOL. 8

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Stage 7 Generativity vs. Stagnation (40–65 years)	Adult focuses on meaningful work, guiding others, and leaving a legacy.	Support: Encouraging balance helps foster generativity, contribution, and fulfillment. Pitfall: Neglecting relationships or personal growth can cause stagnation, resentment, or disconnection. Bonding: Shared family projects and mentoring create lasting impact and stronger intergenerational ties.
Stage 8 Integrity vs. Despair (65+ years)	Older adult reflects on life's meaning and legacy.	Support: Listening and validating experiences helps achieve peace, wisdom, and acceptance. Pitfall: Dismissing feelings of loss or regrets fosters despair and hopelessness. Bonding: Storytelling and legacy-building reinforce belonging, continuity, and family pride.



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VOL. 8

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About THE CREATOR

I'm a Midwestern girl raised in a home adorned in Black art, music, literature, and culture. From Faith Ringgold on the walls, to Toni Morrison on the shelves, and old-school R&B spinning through the house, my upbringing instilled a deep pride in my heritage, and a love for storytelling, creativity, and community that still guides me today.



My academic path took a few turns—Nursing, and then Psychology at Fisk University, a master's in Sociology, and ultimately a second master's in Counselor Education—each step clarifying my calling to become a therapist. Through personal experiences, faith, and growth, I felt led toward soul-centered, culturally grounded mental health work.

When I'm not in session, I'm creating, coloring, crocheting, listening to music, podcasts or audiobooks, or watching historical and sociocultural documentaries and classic Black sitcoms. I'm a proud member of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc., a wife to my best friend, a mama to one radiant daughter, a dog mom, and a caregiver in the sandwich generation—held up by strong women, deep friendships, and a whole lot of love.