Application of Developmental Theory

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**Introduction**

As a parent of a toddler, I can relate when I hear other parents speaking about the hills and valleys of parenting. It could be quite difficult at times but ever so often, I am able to put off my ‘Caribbean parenting style’ and put on the ‘psychological parenting style.’ One theory I tend to rely on is Erick Erickson’s psychosocial development theory. I take time to sit and understand the developmental stage my child is in and I soon realize that all the actions, reactions and struggles are quite normal according to Erikson’s theory.

Erikson's theory describes a variety of feelings individuals bring to task and that development is due to biological development and social maturity (Crain, 2015). As children develop trust in their caretakers, they eventually become more independent. They are secure in knowing that the others will be around when they need them and so they feel free to explore the world on their own (Crain, 2015).

Many parents think about developmental struggles in children; what causes them and what can be done to make things better. Psychological developmental struggles in children is a combination of genetic vulnerabilities as well as the stresses of an environment. This paper seeks to describe how parents can assist toddlers with their emotional development using Erikson’s psychosocial development theory.

**Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt**

According to Erikson each stage of development has a psychosocial crisis. Erikson terms the stage of toddlerhood as autonomy vs. shame and doubt. This stage occurs between the ages of eighteen months and three years. At this point, the child is developing physically and becoming more mobile and is discovering that he or she has a variety of skills and abilities like putting on clothes or shoes, playing with toys, feeding themselves etc. These skills represent the child’s growth and a sense of independence or as Erikson would say, a sense of autonomy.

A toddler’s developmental task is to become independent from their parents during this stage. They begin to assert their independence by walking away from their parents, guardian or caregiver, picking which toy they would love to play with and making choices about their likes and dislikes. As toddlers are on the quest to understand their identity, their needs and desires are made clear. To them, quite often it can feel like every choice they make is a new struggle (Quinn, 2018).

Erikson believes that when toddlers attempt to express themselves and it is met with encouragement, they will develop a sense of autonomy and independence. If these attempts are met with resistance or punishment, on the other hand, the toddler will develop a sense of shame and doubt and carry it into adulthood (Quinn, 2018).

**Assisting Toddlers with Emotional Development**

As previously mentioned, toddlers are at a stage where they want to express themselves and they want to explore the world. In the mind of a three-year-old, this is the only goal. Children at this age are egocentric, meaning they don’t see the world the way adults see the world. They are not thinking about the dangers in a situation, they are irrational and could sometimes be unrealistic. It is the stage where they throw tantrums and they could be very stubborn. Erikson’s theory still reminds parents that it is critical to allow their children to explore the limits of their abilities within an environment which is tolerant of failure. However, it is imperative to note that developing the ability to control your toddler’s emotions and behaviour is also a long process. Children continue to develop their social-emotional skills well into their teenage years, or even young adulthood (Children's Therapy & Family Resource Centre, 2011). The emotional growth will not happen overnight therefore parents must bear this in mind and exercise patience and show their toddler lots of love.

**What to do as a parent**

As a parent, instead of worrying about whether the day care attendants are questioning my parenting ability or straight up finding things my toddler does extremely funny, I will allow my child to wear his shoes on the wrong feet after he spent about ten minutes trying to put them on. Keeping in mind what was previously discussed, children must be encouraged, as they seek to find their independence. Criticizing them on these little things at this age, damages their self esteem and they can eventually loose their sense of autonomy.

A huge milestone at this stage is toilet training. “Like Freud, Erikson believed that toilet training was a vital part of this process. However, Erikson's reasoning was quite different than that of Freud's. Erikson believed that learning to control one's bodily functions leads to a feeling of control and a sense of independence” (Cherry,2020). This can be a rollercoaster at times because at this stage children do not always get it right. Children who come through this stage with flying colours will believe in themselves and feel secure in their abilities. Children who aren’t given the chance to assert themselves (within the limits you set) will battle with feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, according to Erikson (Lewis, 2020).

Keeping this in mind, as a parent, instead of shouting or getting angry because my son had an accident, I can let him know that he can do it right next time. I can also support his emotional development by praising him or also rewarding him when he gets it right.

Another thing that comes to mind with children at this stage is that they develop preferences. They know what they want and do not want to eat, they also know what they want and do not want to wear. As a parent this can drive you crazy at times, especially when you’re late or you just want to get the task done and move on to the next one. Again, I am reminded to exercise patience. In order to help my child to develop in this stage, I would allow him to choose his own snacks and let him choose what he wants to wear. Giving him two shirts to pick from eases frustration in both parties involved (the child and the parent).

The next thing is allowing him to put on the clothes himself. Rather than put on his clothes, I can be supportive by exercising the patience to allow him to try until he is successful at the task he chose to undertake or ask for my assistance. Children must be encouraged to become more independent but at the same time parents must protect them in order to avoid constant failure (McLeod, 2018).

According to McLeod, 2018, a graceful balance is required from parents as they keep in mind that they should not try to do everything for their toddler. At the same time, parents should not criticize a child if he or she failed at a particular task or had an accident (especially with toilet training). The goal is to be self-controlled without a lack of self-esteem. When a child achieves success in this stage, it will lead to the virtue of will.

**The Virtue of Will**

Children who struggle and who are shamed for their accidents and failures may be left without a sense of personal control. As mentioned before, success during this stage of psychosocial development leads to feelings of autonomy, failure results in feelings of shame and doubt. Children who successfully complete this stage feel secure and confident. They carry this confidence with them in their adolescent and adult life. The have a high self-esteem and they go after what they want to achieve. Often, they are very successful at doing so. On the other hand, those who do not successfully complete this stage develop a sense of inadequacy and self-doubt. They too carry these into adolescence and adulthood. “Erikson believed that achieving a balance between autonomy and shame and doubt would lead to will, which is the belief that children can act with intention, within reason and limits” (Cherry, 2020).

**Conclusion**

Erikson’s theory gives detailed information and clear guidelines that can help in children’s emotional development. This theory can be a very useful tool in helping parents really understand the stage their toddlers are in and the different milestones and struggles that comes along with it.

“If children in this stage are encouraged and supported in their increased independence, they become more confident and secure in their own ability to survive in the world. If children are criticized, overly controlled, or not given the opportunity to assert themselves, they begin to feel inadequate in their ability to survive, and may then become overly dependent upon others, lack self-esteem, and feel a sense of shame or doubt in their abilities” (McLeod, 2018).

Erikson’s theory sounds good and looks good on paper. As a parent I can say that it’s easier said than done. However, if parents are determined and they exercise patience as emphasized previously, they can play a very integral role in positively developing their child emotionally and socially. At the end of the day, the outcome is to have emotionally stable, independent successful children that will help them to become emotionally stable, independent successful adults.

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Grade: Far Exceeds the Standard.

Excellent grasp and illustrations of Erickson’s theory, Raenelle. You also cited some sources in correct APA style. Mrs. C. Mohammed