UNDERSTANDING DEVELOPMENT

Why and How We Study Children and Adolescents

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1 ISSUES AND THEMES IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

LEARNING QUESTIONS

1.1 Who needs to have a good understanding of child development, and why do they need this understanding?

1.2 What are the domains of child development and some recurring issues in the field?

1.3 What are the contexts in which children develop?

1.4 How can you be a smart consumer of information about development?

Take a moment to think about why you want to learn about children, adolescents, and their development. You may enjoy interacting with children and want to understand them better, or your career goal may involve working with children or adolescents. Perhaps you want to better understand yourself or those you know by exploring how childhood has affected who you have become. Your interest may be more scientific, with a focus on understanding the research that explains the processes of development. Your particular goal will influence how you approach the information in this book.

The information and activities in this book have been designed to stimulate your thinking in all these ways. We want to share with you the excitement we feel about the topic of child and adolescent development. By the time you finish reading this book, you will have a solid foundation in many important topics related to development, but we also hope to motivate you to continue learning about children and their development long after you have completed this course.

In this chapter, we introduce some of the basic concepts of child and adolescent development. We first look at why people study children and some ways they use knowledge about children to promote positive development. If you are curious about how you might use this knowledge in a future career, you will learn how to gather information about careers that require a good understanding of development. We then discuss some basic themes related to how development occurs and introduce you to the different contexts that influence children's lives. Finally, we provide strategies and guidelines that will enable you to differentiate reliable information from other material you may encounter as you study child development.

WHY STUDY CHILDHOOD?

Many people are interested in studying child development because the topic itself is fascinating and important. Some want information they will be able to use when they become parents. Many students plan to use this information in a future career as a professional who works with children or as a policymaker who shapes social policy that affects children and families. Some students want to become researchers to further the scientific understanding of children and how they grow and develop. These are all good reasons to study child development, and we explore them all in this chapter.

Understanding the Process of Development

One reason why students are interested in studying child development is to understand the role that infancy, childhood, and adolescence play in shaping who we become as adults. From the earliest days in the field of psychology, the idea that early experience has a special, even unique, impact on development has been a persistent theme. Researchers who study children's development have provided ample evidence that early traits, behaviors, and experiences are related to many adult outcomes. However, saying that the earliest stages of development are important for later outcomes is not the same as saying they are any more important than later periods of development. Instead, development is seen as a process in which each stage lays a foundation for the stages that follow and each stage plays an important role in how we function as adults.

An example of this principle comes from the research on competent parenting. It is not surprising that receiving sensitive, competent parenting when you are an infant or young child is associated with being a sensitive, competent parent when you have your own children. However, the pathway to becoming a competent parent is also affected by social competence with peers during childhood and adolescence and later competence in romantic relationships during early adulthood (Raby et al., 2015). Although experiences early in life have consequences for functioning later in life, this research shows that experiences all along the path to adulthood contribute to an adult's psychological functioning.

Sensitive parenting. Receiving sensitive parenting while you are an infant is associated with becoming a sensitive parent to your own children, but other experiences throughout your life also influence your ability to be sensitive and responsive.

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Using Our Knowledge of Child Development

A second reason to study child development is to be able to use this information to improve the lives of children and adolescents. An understanding of how children think, feel, learn, and grow, as well as how they change and stay the same, is essential to fostering positive development. This understanding can help parents and family members, professionals who work with children and families, and people who create and carry out social policies and design programs that affect the well-being of children and their families.

Parents and Family Members

Having a good understanding of children's needs and abilities at each stage of development can help all parents provide the appropriate amount and type of support and stimulation to foster their children's growth and development. When parents have a good understanding of how their children are developing, they engage in higher-quality interactions with them, use more effective parenting strategies, and provide more developmentally appropriate activities. And when their expectations for their children's behavior are realistic, they are more likely to use effective discipline strategies and to rely less on harsh, punitive ones (Bartlett et al., 2018).

Although this knowledge is helpful for all parents, it is even more crucial for particular segments of the parent population. A review of parenting programs for at-risk and disadvantaged parents, including mothers who were teenagers, unmarried, or living with incomes below the federal poverty threshold, found that a number of the programs designed to help parents learn more about child development had positive impacts for both the child and the mother (Chrisler & Moore, 2012). For the children, these benefits included a reduction in reported child behavior problems. For the mothers, they included a home environment that was more supportive of their children and parents who had more realistic expectations for them. Other research that looked at long-term outcomes from programs designed to improve the quality of parenting among those who were experiencing the most difficulty found that more of their children graduated from high school and fewer of the children had a child themselves or had a criminal conviction by age 19 (Reeves & Howard, 2013).

Teen parents. Teens who become parents may not be knowledgeable about child development. Participating in parenting programs can help them develop more realistic expectations for their child.

Child Development Professionals

You may be interested in studying child development because you see yourself in a future career that involves working with children and families. In different ways and at different levels, people in all the helping professions promote positive development for children and teens, engage in the identification and prevention of problems, and provide interventions when problems do occur.

Promoting the optimal development of children and adolescents is a primary goal of all professionals who work in the field of education and of the mental health professionals, youth service workers, and representatives of community organizations who run programs for children. Community organizers, community psychologists, and outreach workers are a few of the professions that focus on preventing problems before they emerge. Child therapists and family therapists are two types of professionals who help families address existing problems. Social workers, psychologists, marriage and family therapists, and child psychiatrists are other professionals who provide various types of interventions to families. Figure 1.1 shows three careers that require knowledge of child development: pediatrician, teacher, and speech therapist. This knowledge helps each of them find and use ways to support and encourage children and adolescents to reach their full potential.

We recognize that students today want to know where their education can eventually lead them and are hungry for information about future careers. If you are taking this course because you are

FIGURE 1.1 ■ Careers in child development. Professionals with a background in child development work in schools, medical facilities, and the legal system, and have many different roles in the community. These professionals, including those who work in early child care and education, have the knowledge and skills necessary to promote the development of children and to advocate for children and families.

considering working with children and families in the future, how much do you know about the career you are thinking about entering? You can assess your current knowledge about a career related to child development by completing **Active Learning: How Much Do You Know About Careers in Child Development?**

Active Learning: How Much Do You Know About Careers in Child Development?

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics maintains a website that has current information on hundreds of different careers, including many in the field of child development. You can go to their site and search for the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). From the home page for the *OOH*, if you click on "A-Z Index," you can select a career from the list or type the name of a career in the search box on that page. For each career, you will find this information:

- **What people in this career do**—duties and responsibilities.

- **Work environment**—where people in this career work and conditions affecting their employment.

- **How to become one**—the education and training required both for entry into the field and for advancement within this career. You will also find information about any certifications or licenses required to work in this profession and the skills and personal qualities required for success on the job.

- **Pay**—median annual wages earned in this career.

- **Job outlook**—how many people are currently employed in this career and whether demand for this profession is expected to increase or decrease in the next 10 years.

- **State and area data**—information on employment and wages in specific areas of the country.

- **Similar occupations**—additional information about careers related to the one you are researching. For instance, if you think you would like to be a child psychologist, here you will find that related careers include being a counselor, social worker, special education teacher, or recreation worker. If you click on any of these links, it will take you to the page in the *OOH* that provides information about that alternative career.

- **More information**—links to professional organizations that support and advocate for people working in this career. The organization webpages you find here are rich sources of information about each career, and you should look at one or two of them before you finish exploring this page.

Although the *Handbook* lists hundreds of occupations, you won't find every conceivable job title. For instance, *child life specialist* and *early interventionist* are not yet in the *Handbook*, but you can find information about a related career to begin your search. For instance, child life specialists do work similar to what a counselor does, but they work in the specialized setting of a hospital, and their clients are children with all kinds of illnesses and injuries and their families.

Another useful website if you are specifically interested in a career in the field of psychology is the American Psychological Association's site. On the page for Education and Career there is information on career paths in psychology, subfields in psychology, and careers with a bachelor's degree.

Policymakers

Most often we apply our understanding of child development directly to the work we do with children, but the well-being of children and families is also affected by the laws and programs that make up **social policy**. Legislators want to promote the health and success of their future citizens but also need to manage the cost of programs and services. Well-conceived and well-executed legislative policies can help to do that. Both the federal government and state legislatures fund many programs that support children's healthy social, emotional, and physical development.

One example of how research on child development can guide and inform the people who make social policies comes from the work of Walter Gilliam (2008), director of the Edward Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy at Yale University. Dr. Gilliam found that preschool children in Connecticut were more than three times as likely to be expelled as children in Grades K–12, but he also showed that when a mental health consultant was available to help teachers develop ways to handle problem behaviors, far fewer children were expelled. Today, in large part due to Dr. Gilliam's advocacy, the federal government provides funding for states, communities, and tribal nations to establish early childhood mental health consultation, and most states have developed such programs (Zero to Three, 2017).

Another example of social policy in action is the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), which provides supplemental food and nutrition education for nutritionally at-risk pregnant women and mothers whose income is below the federal poverty level, as well as their infants and children up to age 5. Good nutrition during a woman's pregnancy helps ensure the healthy development of her baby, and good nutrition during early childhood is associated with a number of positive outcomes throughout a child's life. Although these outcomes are important, the WIC program cost $5 billion in fiscal year 2021 (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2021). When an expensive program such as this one is up for renewal, lawmakers look to research conducted by experts in the field that can justify the expenditure.

The Women, Infants, and Children Program (WIC). This pregnant woman can use vouchers from WIC to help provide her with the nutritious diet that is essential for healthy prenatal development. Research that shows the effectiveness of such programs helps ensure their continued funding.

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A review of 40 years of research on WIC has found that participation in the program during pregnancy is associated with a reduced risk of having a low birthweight or premature baby and a greater likelihood of having healthier babies who are more likely to survive infancy. WIC participation is also associated with more nutritious diets and better infant feeding practices and an increase in the likelihood the infant will be immunized and receive preventive medical care (Carlson & Neuberger, 2017). In a study in California, researchers estimated that each dollar spent on prenatal WIC participation would result in a mean savings of between $1.24 and $6.83 (Nianogo et al., 2019). Information such as this helps policymakers evaluate the effectiveness of social programs and make modifications to them, if necessary.

There are a number of organizations that provide legislators and private citizens with information related to child development with the goal of helping bring about changes in social policy based on solid research. They include the *Society for Research in Child Development*, the *Society for Research on Adolescence*, the *American Psychological Association*, and the *Annie E. Casey Foundation*. The Annie E. Casey Foundation (n.d.) publishes an annual *Kids Count Data Book* that provides state-by-state data on the health, education, and economic well-being of its citizens. In addition to national statistics, you can

Making social policy. Social policy that affects children and families is made at the highest levels of the federal government down to local school boards and neighborhood councils. Interested citizens also take part in the process when they write letters to elected officials, sign petitions, work for causes they support, and vote.

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use a tool available on this site to create a custom report for a particular state, territory, or city by selecting from over 400 separate indicators of well-being. You might find this site helpful when you need current information for a paper you are writing.

As citizens, we bear a responsibility to vote and to speak out for the well-being of our children. The more we understand about their needs, the more effective we will be in advocating on their behalf and supporting the policies we believe will best serve them.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Knowledge Questions

1. What are some reasons for studying child development?

2. Who is likely to benefit from being knowledgeable about child development?

3. What is the relationship between social policy and research on child development?

Critical Thinking

What do you think would be the most effective ways for you, as a student, to impact social policy affecting children and families?

UNDERSTANDING HOW DEVELOPMENT HAPPENS

We have a lot of interesting ground to cover, so it's good to have a plan that breaks this journey into manageable pieces. To do that, we have organized information in this book by the ages and stages of life, then further divide information into the different domains of development: physical, cognitive, and social-emotional. There also have been a number of topics debated in the field of child development over the years. We briefly introduce you to several of these issues here and revisit them at various points throughout the book.

Ages and Stages

We use the terms *infancy, toddlerhood, early childhood, middle childhood*, and *adolescence* to identify broad periods of development that have behaviors or characteristics that set that stage apart from the other stages.

- During *infancy* (the first year of life), children are totally dependent on their caregivers for their physical care, but they already can use all their senses to begin exploring their world. During this period, they begin developing the motor skills they will need to explore it further. They also form a strong emotional attachment to their caregivers and lay the foundation for learning language.

- *Toddlers* (ages 1–3) continue developing their motor skills and can more actively explore their physical world. Language develops at an astonishing rate during this period, and toddlers begin showing independence and autonomy from their caregivers as they learn to do things for themselves.

- In *early childhood* (ages 3–6), children learn about the physical and social world through play. As peers become more important, young children learn the skills necessary to understand how other people think and feel.

- During *middle childhood* (ages 6–12), children develop the intellectual ability to think in a more ordered and structured way, and school becomes a major context for development. At this stage, children begin developing a clearer sense of self and an understanding of who they are and what makes them unique. Play and peers are essential parts of their lives.

- The physical changes associated with puberty mark the transition from childhood into *adolescence* (ages 12–18). As their bodies undergo the physical changes that move them toward adulthood, adolescents can think and reason at a more abstract level, and they develop a stronger sense of who they are and who they want to become. Family remains important to them, but peer relationships take on a greater importance than they had before.

- Although this book covers the stages from infancy through adolescence, we briefly describe a stage that begins in late adolescence: the stage of *emerging adulthood* (ages 18–25). This stage describes the period of transition between adolescence and adulthood. During this time, many young people feel they are no longer adolescents but also recognize they are not yet ready to fully assume the role of an adult in their culture (Arnett, 2015). It represents a time to explore the possibilities open to them in the realms of education, work, and relationships before committing to choices that will shape their adulthood.

Domains of Development

When studying development, we distinguish between three basic aspects or domains of development, as illustrated in Figure 1.2: physical, cognitive, and social-emotional. **Physical development** includes the biological changes that occur in the body, including changes in size and strength, as well as the integration of sensory and motor activities. Neurological, or brain, development has become a major area for research in physical development. **Cognitive development** includes changes in the way we think, understand, and reason about the world. It includes the accumulation of knowledge as well as the way we use that information for problem solving and decision making. **Social-emotional development** includes all the ways we learn to connect to other individuals, understand our emotions and the emotions of others, interact effectively with others, and express and regulate our emotions.

Although it is useful to make distinctions between these domains, it is important to understand that they continually interact with each other. For instance, during puberty, adolescents undergo dramatic physical changes over a short period of time, but these changes also affect social development. As adolescents grow to look more like adults and less like children, adults begin to treat them more like adults, giving them new responsibility and expecting greater maturity from them. These opportunities, in turn, contribute to the cognitive development of adolescents as they learn from their new experiences.

Themes in the Field of Child Development

We all have our own ideas about children. You brought some with you when you entered this class. Stop for a minute and think of a couple of sentences or phrases that capture what you believe to be true about how child development occurs. Do you believe that "if you spare the rod, you will spoil the child"? Or

FIGURE 1.2 ■ **Domains of development. When we study development, we look at changes in the physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development of children and adolescents.**

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that "as the twig is bent, so grows the tree"? Do you think that children are like "little sponges"? Or that they grow in "leaps and bounds"? Each of these bits of folk wisdom touches on an issue that has been debated within the field of child development. Here we introduce some of the recurring debates and controversies that we will revisit at various points in the book.

Nature and Nurture

Throughout history, the question of whether our behavior, thoughts, and feelings result from **nature**, our genetic inheritance, or from **nurture**, the influence of the environment, has shaped our understanding of why we act certain ways and how we can influence human behavior. The controversy was originally described as nature *versus* nurture. For example, let's say you are an aggressive (or shy, or outgoing . . .) person. Researchers wanted to find out whether you became aggressive because you were "born that way," with your genes determining the outcome, or whether you learned to be aggressive because of what you saw or experienced in your environment. People initially argued for one side or the other, but it became clear that any developmental outcome is an interaction of both.

Asking whether behavior is due to nature or to nurture is similar to asking whether your car needs an engine or wheels. You aren't going anywhere unless you have both, and they are going to have to work together if you are ever going to reach your destination. The field of *epigenetics* has made us aware that what counts is not just what genes you *have*, but also what your genes are *doing*, and what they are doing is influenced by the environment you are in (Nesterak, 2015). We have left behind the era of "nature *versus* nurture" and entered the era of "nature *through* nurture" in which many genes, particularly those related to traits and behaviors, are expressed only through a process of constant interaction with their environment (Quinn & D'Onofrio, 2020). We discuss these ideas further in Chapter 3.

Continuous Versus Discontinuous Development

Is development a series of gradual changes that modify behavior bit by bit, or does it proceed in leaps and bounds? In Chapter 2 and throughout the rest of the book, you will learn about some theories in the field of child development that describe development as a series of stages children move through, similar to the "leaps" just described. In these theories, each stage has characteristics that distinguish it from the stages that come before and after. Other theories, however, describe processes that change development in small increments.

One way to describe these two views of development is that continuous development represents quantitative change and discontinuous development represents qualitative change. **Quantitative changes** are changes in the amount or quantity of what you are measuring. For instance, as children grow, they get taller (they add inches to their height), they learn more new words (the size of their vocabulary increases), and they acquire more factual knowledge (the amount of information in their knowledge base grows). However, some aspects of development are not just the accumulation of more inches or words. Instead, they are **qualitative changes** that alter the overall quality of a process or function, and the result is something altogether different. Walking is qualitatively different from crawling and thinking about abstract concepts such as justice or fairness is qualitatively different from knowing something more concrete, such as the capitals of all 50 states.

Figure 1.3 illustrates quantitative and qualitative change as it is found in nature. Typically, **stage theories** describe development in terms of qualitative change, while **incremental theories** describe development as occurring through quantitative changes. Each approach may offer insight into different aspects of development. The small changes described by incremental theories can work together to change overall patterns of ability as children take a leap forward to a new stage in their development (Witherington, 2019).

Stability Versus Change

As we grow, develop, and mature, are we basically the same people we were at earlier ages, or do we reinvent ourselves along the way? We find evidence of both stability and change as we look at development. For instance, characteristics such as anxiety, depression (Lubke et al., 2016; Nivard et al., 2015), shyness (Karevold et al., 2012), and aggressiveness (Piquero et al., 2012) tend to be relatively stable over time. However, what does change is the specific way in which these characteristics are expressed. For example, young children hit, kick, or throw things when they are angry, but school-age children are more likely to express their aggression through teasing, taunting, and name-calling (Liu et al., 2013), and adolescents attack each other through social means (for example, spreading rumors or excluding others from social activities; Wang et al., 2012).

FIGURE 1.3 ■   Quantitative versus qualitative change. Some changes that occur as children grow are quantitative, as illustrated by the tree, which just gets bigger as it gets older. Other changes in children's growth are qualitative, as illustrated by this butterfly, which changes form at each stage of its development.
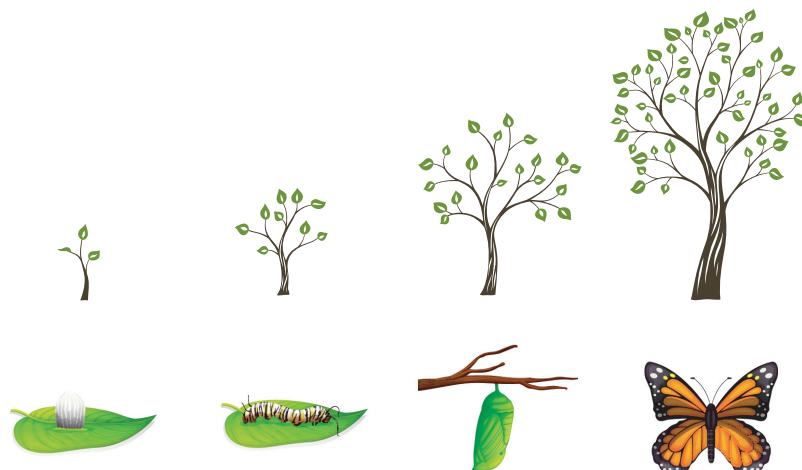
As an example of stability and change in development, we know that self-esteem goes through predictable changes as children move through childhood and adolescence. Young children often have a very high opinion of themselves and their abilities, but this high self-esteem typically drops as they enter school and their appraisal of their own abilities becomes more realistic. Early adolescence often brings another downturn, but self-esteem then rises steadily through the remainder of adolescence. If we focus on these age-related changes in self-esteem, we see considerable change. If, however, we shift our focus to the individual, we find that children, adolescents, and adults often maintain their relative position on many of the personality characteristics we measure. From this perspective, we see considerable stability in self-esteem because children who score near the top on a childhood measure of self-esteem tend to become adolescents and

Individual differences. Characteristics of individual children, such as age, gender, or ethnic background, can affect the developmental process, so outcomes that apply to one child will not necessarily apply to another. This means we must always be mindful of individual differences when we reach our conclusions.

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adults who will continue to score high on later measures of self-esteem (Trzesniewski et al., 2013). Figure 1.4 illustrates how there can be both change and stability in a single characteristic.

Individual Differences

Scientific research strives to identify general principles that describe average or typical patterns. We want to be able to make general statements about what usually happens. But you cannot spend much time observing children or adolescents without recognizing how different each one is from all the others. Our study of children needs to deal with both aspects of development—those aspects that are universal and shared by all or almost all members of a particular group, and those in which we differ from each other.

FIGURE 1.4 ■ Stability and change in self-esteem. This hypothetical example shows how four children might score on a measure of self-esteem at different ages. Their scores reflect typical change in self-esteem: high in early childhood, declining in middle childhood and early adolescence, and rebounding in later adolescence. However, the scores also show that the children tend to retain their relative rank compared to their peers. In other words, those with higher self-esteem early in development tend to be the children who have the highest self-esteem across these age-related changes.
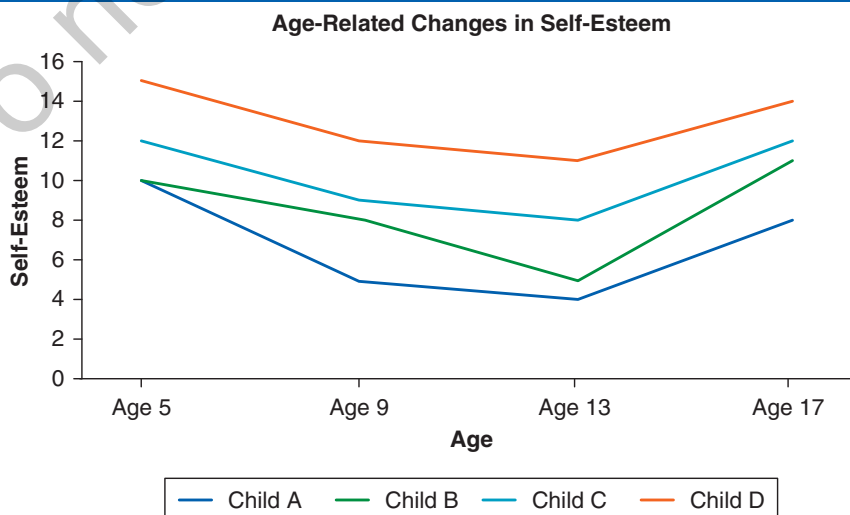
Age-Related Changes in Self-Esteem

Child A — Child B — Child C — Child D

Throughout this book, you will learn about general conclusions that are drawn from research. Although these are true as general statements, there also are numerous exceptions that give us insights we would not have otherwise. For example, children who grow up in families that live below the federal poverty threshold are at risk for a number of developmental and mental health problems, but some of these children manage to thrive in the face of great difficulty. In Chapter 13, we look at the factors that promote resilience in the face of a wide range of developmental risks and contribute to these individual differences.

While we can make valid general statements about how development proceeds, the developmental pathway of any given individual is difficult to predict. *Different* pathways can result in the *same* outcome, a process known as **equifinality** (*equi* = equal, *finality* = ends). For example, depression may result from biological and genetic processes, but it also can result from early traumatic experiences. However, it is also true that the *same* pathway can lead to *different* outcomes, known as **multifinality** (Almy & Cicchetti, 2018). For example, children who are victims of abuse can have many different long-term outcomes that can include depression but also resilience and healing. Individual characteristics of a child or an adolescent, including the child's temperament, sociability, and physical and intellectual ability, are just some of the characteristics that may influence the specific outcome in any given situation.

Although we routinely pay attention to how personal characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, and others impact an individual's development trajectory, the concept of **intersectionality** reminds us that these characteristics do not exist in isolation, but rather intersect with each other in complex ways that create unique developmental trajectories. Being a Black woman is a different experience from being a Black man, and being a Black woman is different from being a white woman. Both of these social identities—race and gender—can be a source of privilege or oppression. For example, while a Black woman may be harmed by both racism and sexism, a Black man may experience racism but also benefit from any gender privilege that may exist (Martin, 2010). One of the goals of this theoretical framework is to use research to inform social policy and promote social justice and equity.

This understanding of individual differences also has changed the way we view behavioral and emotional disorders. In the field of **developmental psychopathology**, psychological disorders are now seen as distortions of normal developmental pathways (Cicchetti, 2016). Accordingly, in this book we include these disorders in our discussions of typical development. For example, language disorders appear with the discussion of typical language development, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) appears in the section in which we describe the typical development of attention. Thinking about atypical development in this way may help reduce the stigma associated with mental disorders because it helps us see them as individual differences in development rather than as illnesses.

The Role of the Child in Development

Are you the person you are today because you *chose* to be that person, or did someone else *make* you who you are? How you think about that question pretty much sums up the issue of an active child versus a passive one. Some theories presume that it is the environment that shapes the development of the child. The clearest example of this way of thinking is called *behaviorism*. As you will see in Chapter 2, this approach looks at the way systematic use of rewards and punishment affects the likelihood that a child will—or won't—behave in certain ways. You may agree with this point of view if you think children are like lumps of clay that parents shape into the type of children they want. Other theories in child development give children a much more active role in shaping their own development. For example, Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, also discussed in Chapter 2, is based on the idea that children actively explore their environment and, in the process, construct their own ideas about how the world works.

As with some of the other issues we have already discussed, maybe the answer to this issue is not one or the other, but rather some combination of both. The concept of **niche picking** (Scarr & McCartney, 1983) suggests that people actively seek out environments that are a good fit with their genetic makeup. In this way, children actively shape their experiences by choosing environments that, in turn, enhance or inhibit the characteristics that initially attracted the child to that environment. And, while children

don't choose the family, neighborhood, or culture into which they are born, each of these environments significantly impacts and shapes their development. Later in this chapter, we describe in more detail the important roles specific contexts have on development.

Positive Psychology

For many years, research in the field of child development focused on understanding the cause of problems in people's lives and finding ways to restore their functioning and well-being. However, beginning in the late 1990s, a different way of thinking about development emerged as psychologists began to look for ways to foster optimal outcomes for all individuals, not just those who were struggling. The goal of positive psychology is to focus on strength, not weakness; to build on the best things in life, rather than repair the worst; and to help people live fulfilling, meaningful lives (Park et al., 2016; Seligman, 2011). Using this approach, researchers have identified a number of human strengths including courage, optimism, interpersonal skills, perseverance, and insight that allow all people not only to survive, but to flourish.

The influence of positive psychology on the study of child development is clearly seen in the **positive youth development** movement. The framework for positive youth development is based on a set of developmental assets that support optimal development for all children, not just those who are at risk. These assets allow children not only to cope with challenges, but also to take advantage of opportunities. You will learn more about the positive youth development movement in Chapter 15, but research guided by the positive youth development perspective appears in many topics throughout the book.

Integrating Themes and Issues

Each of the issues described earlier cuts across many of the specific topics that you will study. Each also has been the subject of discussion and debate for many years. For that reason, we are not searching for a single best way to understand the complex process of child development. Rather, each of these issues is a lens through which we can view the process. As you continue to read this book, think about the ways you conceptualize development. As your understanding grows, continue to ask yourself what you believe about development, but also think critically about *why* you hold these beliefs. You should expect your ideas to undergo some significant changes as your understanding of this process grows.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Knowledge Questions

1. What are the differences between physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development?
2. What is the difference between quantitative and qualitative changes that occur in development?
3. How does niche picking relate to the nature–nurture controversy?
4. What is the positive youth development movement?

Critical Thinking

Compare how a parental belief that children play an active role in their own development versus the belief that children passively receive the influences of their parents affects the parenting strategies a parent might use.

CONTEXTS OF DEVELOPMENT

Children around the world are similar to one another in many ways, but the way development occurs varies widely depending on the context in which they grow up. *Context* is a very broad term that includes all the settings in which development occurs. Children develop in multiple contexts that include family, schools, communities, socioeconomic status, and cultures. Throughout this book, you will learn about these different contexts and the way they influence various aspects of children's development.

Family

Families are the primary context for development for most children. Families today take many different forms, but whether they are nuclear families, single-parent families, multigenerational families, stepfamilies, or adoptive families, they all serve one important function: They are responsible for the **socialization** of their children. They instill the norms, values, attitudes, and beliefs of their culture so that children grow up to be positive, contributing members of their society. We will discuss the effect of different family forms on child development in later chapters, and also examine the ways that families link children and adolescents to the other contexts that influence their development.

School

In most countries, school is another important context for development. In the United States, children have typically spent between six and seven hours a day in school five days a week (Lynch, 2019). Within this context, children learn academic skills, such as reading, writing, and arithmetic, and older children and adolescents are prepared for higher education or entry into the workforce, but schools also play a role in socializing children to become good citizens. In recent years, schools have increasingly taken on other functions besides educating children. Today, they provide nutritious meals, some health care, and a range of social services for their students. School also is where most children and adolescents make friends, and sometimes become the victims of bullies.

Much of this changed in 2020 with the advent of the worldwide coronavirus pandemic. School districts responded with a variety of approaches, ranging from continuation of in-class learning to complete reliance on distance education, and all hybrid variations in between. These responses affected many aspects of students' learning and development, which will be discussed in later chapters, but here we focus on their impact on school as a developmental context. Even before the pandemic, some families chose to homeschool their children, but in this case, homeschooling was a choice, and parents willingly took on the role of educator for their children. During the pandemic, many parents did not have a choice. They had to take on many of the roles usually filled by school personnel, as they became teacher's aides, guidance counselors, disciplinarians, and cafeteria staff. In some families, parents struggled to balance these demands with the work-at-home demands of their own employment. In other cases, essential workers had to find someone who could stay with their children or leave them alone at home. And in some families, parents moved out of the workplace altogether to oversee their children's education.

Many children struggled in this new learning environment. Some had only limited or inadequate access to the technology they needed to connect with their schools. Having a remote teacher did not work for the learning style of others, and a significant number of children simply did not attend their virtual schools or attended only sporadically (Harris, 2020). This has had the greatest impact on students with special needs or limited English language proficiency, as well as those from families with low incomes, those who live in rural communities where broadband access is limited or unavailable, those who have no permanent residence, and those in migrant families. In one survey of 1,500 families, children in families with income of less than $25,000 a year were 10 times more likely to do little or no remote learning compared to children in families with incomes of more than $100,000 a year (ParentsTogether Action, n.d.).

There is concern that the most disadvantaged children are the ones at greatest risk of falling behind their peers when they return to school. With perhaps the exception of children fortunate enough to be attending instructional pods (a learning environment in which a small group of parents hire an experienced teacher to work solely with their children), children do not have the social interaction with peers afforded by the typical classroom setting. This experience with virtual learning may have sensitized us to the essential role of schools as a context for children's development, but the consequences of these changes will only be determined by future research.

Community

The characteristics of the community in which children live impact many aspects of development. The nature of that community affects the range and quality of support services available to children and their families. The quality of neighborhood schools affects the educational opportunities and

out-of-school activities that are available. Whether a neighborhood is safe or not and whether there are public recreational spaces such as parks in the area affect the amount of time children might spend outside their homes and the kinds of things they do with this time (Kurka et al., 2015). You will learn more about the effects of children's involvement in the natural world in Chapter 11. Community environments can promote healthy development, or they can expose children to risks such as environmental pollutants, described in Chapter 8.

Block party. When neighbors get together for something like this block party, it helps to build a sense of community. The kind of neighborhood children live in makes a big difference in their lives.

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Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status (SES) is an indication of the perceived social standing or social class of an individual or group based on a combined measure of income, education, and occupation (American Psychological Association [APA], n.d.-b). Differences in SES are often associated with inequities in access to resources in a society, and these inequities, in turn, can have a negative impact on the lives of children and families.

This process begins even before a child is born when parents without adequate economic resources have less access to good nutrition and prenatal care. Consequently, their babies are more likely to be born prematurely or at low birthweight, leaving the child more vulnerable to long-term health problems and possible limits on the child's ability to learn. These families often live in neighborhoods that are both unhealthy and unsafe and have schools that offer students fewer opportunities to learn and achieve. Finally, families with few resources are more likely to experience highly stressful life events, such as loss of income, relocation, divorce and separation, and violence. Despite these economic disadvantages, we point out to you throughout the book that many children are able to overcome these challenges and lead healthy, happy, and productive lives (see, for example, Ellis et al., 2017; Mayo & Siraj, 2015; Ratcliffe & Kalish, 2017; Wadsworth et al., 2018), but as a society we have an essential stake in "leveling the playing field" so that every child has the chance to reach their full potential.

Culture

The general findings from research on development are modified not only by individual differences, but also by group differences, such as those between different cultures. **Culture** includes the behaviors, norms, beliefs, and traditions that are shared by a group and that are transmitted from one generation to the next (Matsumoto & Juang, 2017). Culture emerges from a group's environmental niche (or place in a particular environment) and promotes the survival of the group by improving the ability of the group to meet the demands of that environment. It also helps group members pursue happiness and

find meaning in life. To that end, for cultural groups that have previously been marginalized within the larger culture in which they exist, the term *adaptive culture* has been used to describe goals, values, and attitudes that differ from the dominant culture but that emphasize the strength of groups that have previously been marginalized (Perez-Brena et al., 2018).

In an attempt to move away from seeing parenting that is different from the majority through a deficit lens, the field has increasingly sought to understand children within the context of their own cultures. In this book, we draw on cross-cultural studies to illustrate both research that finds similarities across cultures, which suggests there is a universal process at work, and research that illustrates important differences between cultures that impact children as they develop. For example, in Chapter 6 we look at cross-cultural similarities and differences in child-directed speech. In Chapter 7 we look at how adaptive styles of attachment differ from one cultural context to another, as well as how emotions are displayed across cultures. We also look at cultural similarities and differences in children's play (Chapter 9), self-concept (Chapter 13), and self-esteem (Chapter 16), in addition to other topics.

Although the field of child development has shown a deeper, richer appreciation of cultural diversity in recent years, it is still easy to slip into the assumption that the way *we* do things is the right way and that other ways are wrong. **Parental ethnotheories** are a framework for understanding how a particular cultural context impacts a child's development (Harkness et al., 2011). Within any given culture, the ideas parents have about the best way to raise a child reflect the values, beliefs, and traditions of that culture. While there may be a few things that are universal and shared across all or most cultures (for instance, that parents love and want what is best for their child), what they think is best with regard to food, sleep, play, and many other aspects of development can vary greatly from one cultural setting to another. To guard against labeling culturally based parenting practices as deficient rather than simply as different, we must understand that parenting practices are a reflection of the particular set of cultural values held by the parents. When we do that, we will see that there are different ways to raise children that are responsive to the realities of a particular environment and promote the well-being of children in that culture.

Cultures have often been described as varying along a continuum from *individualism* to *collectivism*. In individualistic cultures, heroes often are those who are self-made and who manage to rise from deprived circumstances to become successful. The emphasis is on being independent, competitive, and unique. In collectivist cultures, the emphasis is more on an obligation to your family or your group, however you define it, and identity is derived primarily from the individual's social affiliations. Children are raised to be aware of how their behavior affects others and are encouraged to share resources, with an emphasis on maintaining harmony in social relationships (Thies & Travers, 2006).

In the past, Western industrialized societies have been the prototype of individualistic cultures, while Asian cultures have been the prototype of collectivist cultures. However, researchers have begun to question whether this "east–west" dichotomy adequately describes cultural differences. Researchers who conducted a study of cultures around the world found that there is not one unitary way to be independent or interdependent (Vignoles et al., 2016). For example, Latin American cultures are often identified as collectivist because of a cultural focus on interdependence, but the Latin American samples in their study emphasized independence on six of the seven cultural dimensions they identified. Similarly, Middle Eastern samples emphasized self-reliance, toughness, and self-enhancement (which are individualistic characteristics) along with attention to others and the social consequences of one's behavior (which are collectivistic characteristics). These researchers call for future research that looks at the different ways that individuals within different cultural groups are both independent and interdependent.

Some cultural expectations are taught explicitly to children. For example, in Western cultures we might say to a child, "Look at me when I'm speaking to you," whereas parents in other cultures might tell a child that not looking directly at an adult is a sign of respect. However, much cultural information is conveyed in more subtle ways through various parenting practices, including how parents deal with issues as basic as how to feed infants and toddlers (Bornstein, 2012).

Think about what you would expect to see when a parent in the United States feeds their 1-year-old baby. Most likely you have an image of a baby sitting in a high chair. The parent spoon-feeds the baby but often lets the baby take the spoon to begin learning to feed themselves (usually with messy and somewhat hilarious results, as shown in the photo on the left in Figure 1.5). By contrast, in cultures that

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emphasize interdependence rather than independence, feeding remains under the control of the parent, as shown in the photo on the right. In the process, the child learns to be patient and cooperate with another person. Mealtime becomes an expression of family love and expectations for proper behavior.

Active Learning: Parenting Behaviors Across Cultures

lets you think about some of the differences in how parents treat their infants and young children in ways that reflect their cultural values.

Active Learning: Parenting Behaviors Across Cultures

For each of these descriptions, decide if you agree or disagree that it is a good way to raise a child.

1. A good parent would allow a young infant to nap outside in below-freezing weather.

2. A good parent does not begin toilet training a toddler until the child is between 2 and 3 years old and has shown an interest in it.

3. A good parent puts a toddler to bed by 7:00 or 7:30 p.m. each night.

4. A good parent lets infants, toddlers, and even young children sleep in the parents' bed.

5. A good parent doesn't prepare special food for young children; they simply eat what their parents eat.

Answers:

1. *Yes*, if you live in a Scandinavian country where parents believe that sleeping in the fresh air helps to prevent colds or the flu.

2. *Yes*, if you are in a Westernized country. *No*, if you live in most other countries (Young, 2018). *No*, if you are in China or Vietnam where parents begin watching an infant in the first days of life for signs that the infant is urinating or defecating and make a low whistle at those times so the infant learns to associate the sound with the need to relieve themselves. In one study, by using this method, all infants were potty trained by 9 months of age (Duong et al., 2013; Young, 2018).

3. *Yes*, if you live in the United States. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that infants get 12 to 16 hours of sleep (including naps) each day, toddlers get 11 to 14 hours, and preschoolers get 10 to 13 hours. *No*, if you live in Spain where parents usually put their children to bed around 10:00 p.m. so they have time to be around family while they socialize with each other (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016; Choi, 2014; Lane, n.d.).

4. *No*, if you are in a Western country. The American Academy of Pediatrics continues to recommend that infants sleep in the same room as parents, but in a nearby crib or bassinette and never on a soft surface like a couch or chair (AAP Task Force on Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, 2016). *Yes*, if you are in Japan where it is common for children to sleep in their parents' bed until the next child arrives, and then often to sleep with another family member for several more years (Lane, n.d.).

5. *No*, if you are in many Westernized countries where many parents prepare "child-friendly" foods for their children. *Yes*, if you are in France or South Korea. In these cultures, eating is an important social experience, and children join adults at the table and eat the same food as they eat from a very early age (Young, 2018).

Despite cultural differences in parenting, infants and toddlers around the world all learn to eat, sleep, and go to the bathroom in accordance with the expectations of their cultures. This is an example of *equifinality* as described earlier in this chapter. There may be multiple pathways, but they all get the child to the same place.

Historical Time

A child's development is marked by the historical time in which the child is born and develops. Major historical events including wars, depressions, terrorist attacks, and pandemics make the experiences of children living through them different from those of children who came before or come after them. You could ask your parents or grandparents about how the world they grew up in was different from the world that children live in now. The way a historical event impacts a child's development is also affected by how old the child is when that event occurs.

We have all been marked by our recent experience with the coronavirus, but its impact on children's health, well-being, education, and family relationships will only be fully understood later in their development. Children have been isolated from friends and activities they enjoy. As we have mentioned, they may be learning virtually in their own homes rather than in a classroom with a teacher and their friends. They dealt with fears about illness, death, and dying that may not have been experienced by children since the polio epidemic of the 1950s. The consequences of the pandemic also will differ depending on the age of the child. While a toddler might receive less attention from a parent who is struggling to cope with the pandemic, a child in middle school loses the chance to play with friends, and social isolation may contribute to a teenager's sense of isolation and depression.

Coping with a pandemic. Wearing a face mask and frequently sanitizing your hands became a routine part of life for young children during the coronavirus pandemic. These responses to the threat of the virus will become part of their early life story.

istock/Orbon Alija

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Knowledge Questions

1. What is the primary context for most children's development?
2. How does socioeconomic status affect a child's development?
3. How does culture affect child-rearing practices?
4. What are some examples of how history can shape childhood experiences?

Critical Thinking

Why is it so easy for us to slip into thinking that the way we have been raised is the best way to raise children? What can be done to overcome this tendency?

BE A SMART CONSUMER OF INFORMATION ABOUT DEVELOPMENT

Information about children and child development is everywhere—in books, magazines, and television programs; at home; and online. To be able to judge the quality of all this information on development, you will need to become an informed consumer. When you are planning to make a large purchase, you often make a better choice if you gather information from a variety of sources and evaluate how trustworthy they are. You can use a similar process when learning about child development.

Know Your Sources

Knowing the source of the information you are using is the first step in becoming an informed consumer. You should ask yourself if you are getting information from someone who is knowledgeable about the topic and is providing objective and unbiased information, or if you are getting information from someone who is not credible or is presenting personal opinion as though it were fact.

Your campus library owns many journals, books, and professional publications in the field of child development, and you can trust these to be reliable sources of information. Many of them are available through your library's electronic databases. For students of child and adolescent development, the APA PsycInfo® and ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) databases are probably of greatest interest. APA PsycInfo contains more than 5 million abstracts for peer-reviewed journals, books, chapters, and dissertations (APA, 2021). ERIC is a database of indexed and full-text literature and resources related to education, including journal articles, conference papers, curriculum guides, dissertations, and policy papers from 1966 to the present (EBSCO Information Services, n.d.). In these databases, you can find information on how to locate the complete articles of interest to you.

The reason you can have confidence in the information you find in professional journals is that many of them use a **peer review** process to determine which articles they will publish. Articles that are submitted to a journal are reviewed by professionals knowledgeable about the topic of the research before it is accepted for publication. This process ensures that the information in peer-reviewed journals has passed professional scrutiny before it gets into print.

When you turn to the internet to find information, you need to provide your own scrutiny and use good judgment. Remember that anyone can post information on the web, so the author of a webpage does not necessarily have any particular expertise. Their information may simply be wrong, or it may be opinion masquerading as fact. This is especially a risk when you are researching a controversial topic. Two domain names that can generally be trusted are .edu, used by educational institutions, and .gov, associated with government agencies. While commercial sites may provide some amount of legitimate information, their real intent often is to sell you a product.

Although the Wikipedia website is popular with college students, anyone can write an article or edit an existing post on the site, so Wikipedia is *not* considered a reliable source of information for most

purposes. However, many Wikipedia entries include a bibliography of professional books and articles that can point you to scientific information on the topic you are researching, so if you use a site such as this, use it only as a starting point for your research.

By completing **Active Learning: Evaluating Information on the Web**, you can use the same guidelines many libraries use to evaluate a webpage that interests you.

Active Learning: Evaluating Information on the Web

As we rely more and more on web-based sources for our information, it has become increasingly difficult to distinguish fact from fiction on the internet, so it is important that we develop the digital literacy needed to identify sites that provide accurate and unbiased information. Checklists for evaluating websites have been popular in classrooms, libraries, and even earlier editions of our books. Checklists suggest that you evaluate a website using criteria such as these:

- Relevancy (Is the information relevant to your question?)

- Appropriateness (Is the information appropriate for the reader's age and values?)

- Detail (Is there adequate depth of coverage of the topic?)

- Currency (When was the information published or last updated?)

- Authority (What are the qualifications of the author of the site?)

- Bias (Was the information designed to inform, persuade, entertain, or sell something to the reader?) (RADCAB, n.d.)

However, cleverly designed websites that are intended to fool or mislead you can meet all these criteria. For instance, there is a site supposedly devoted to preserving the habitat of the Pacific Northwest tree octopus that would pass this review. We assume that you know that an octopus does not live in trees, but this page is filled with facts and figures, appears to be from an authoritative source, has links to reference articles (which are as phony as the site itself), and is current. You would not want to make a donation to the sponsoring Wild Haggis Conservation Society based on what you read there.

Rather than simple checklists, fact-checkers for news organizations usually take a different approach. They begin evaluating a site itself by looking at what other authoritative sources say about the site's sponsoring organization or author. This is called a *lateral search*. Once they establish that the site is legitimate and reliable, they can continue to check the accuracy of the information on the site against other sites (Breakstone et al., 2018). Currently there are efforts to develop curricula for use at the middle school and high school level to teach students media literacy skills that can be applied not only to websites, but also to blogs and social media (Canadian Press, 2017; Poynter Institute, n.d.).

These are essential skills for students today. You could choose a topic you are interested in that involves some degree of controversy (for example, vaccinating children, children co-sleeping with parents, or prescribing medication for children with ADHD), find a website on that topic, and do your own lateral search. What would you conclude about the credibility of the site you initially found?

Become a Critical Thinker

In addition to learning a great deal about child development, we want you to be able to think critically about the information. This means that you will need to be actively engaged with the material so that you can reflect on it. We expect you to ask questions and examine the assumptions that underlie research rather than just accepting information at face value. No single book can contain all the information you need on any topic, so don't hesitate to look for answers to your own questions and seek out divergent opinions on topics that intrigue you. Expose yourself to a wide range of ideas. Some will make sense to you, and some will be harder to accept, but keep an open mind. As you learn more about research methods in Chapter 2, you will become better able to examine the evidence behind the ideas you find rather than just relying on what someone else has said.

Science is an organized body of knowledge that accumulates over time, so it is always changing and growing. Throughout the book, you will find features called the **Journey of Research** that present a brief historical sketch of how some important ideas in the field have developed over the years. Our current understanding of a topic will make more sense to you when you understand the origin of those ideas. The fact that an idea has been around for a long time—or that many people endorse it—does not necessarily mean it is true. Remember that for a very long time, everyone believed the Earth was flat. Likewise, just because an idea is new doesn't necessarily mean it is better than what we believed before. New research findings need to be tested and replicated (that is, produced again by others) before we can gain confidence that they are accurate and reliable. The best suggestion here is to be open to new ideas but to be cautious about jumping on a bandwagon until there is good evidence that the bandwagon is going in the right direction.

Guard Against Generalizations

As you learn about child development, it is easy to assume others have had the same or similar experiences to yours with the same or similar consequences. Your own experiences are meaningful and real. They are part of what has made you the person you are today and help shape the person you will be tomorrow. That fact is never in question, but trying to generalize from your particular experience to general statements about everyone else's experience is always dangerous. Likewise, when we conduct research, we cannot necessarily generalize findings based on one population to another population that might have different characteristics.

On the other hand, the conclusions drawn from research may not describe what your personal experiences were, but this does not mean the research is invalid. Rather, it reminds us that research describes the outcome for groups, not for every individual within a group. When we say men are more physically aggressive than women, for instance, it does not mean every man is more aggressive than any woman; it means only that on average there is a difference between the groups, but within the groups there still can be a good deal of individual variability.

Avoid Perceptual Bias

Sometimes students think that child development is just common sense and that they already know everything they need to know. Unfortunately, it isn't that simple. We can't rely on folk wisdom, or ideas that are widely accepted but have not been scientifically tested, to tell us what we need to know about development. Having such preconceived ideas can also affect how you process new information. As you read this book, it will be easier for you to remember the facts you encounter that fit well with what you already believe to be true, and to forget or ignore those that don't. This tendency to see and understand something based on the way you expect it to be is called a **perceptual bias**, and it can affect your learning. That is one reason we will begin each chapter after this one with a set of questions reflecting common misconceptions about topics you will read about in that chapter. Testing your knowledge about these topics *before* you begin reading will make you more aware of information in the chapter that will challenge your initial ideas. You will want to spend a little more time and effort making sure you understand this information.

For example, these are some ideas you may have about child development. Do you think these statements are *true* or *false?*

1. Research has shown that exposing a fetus to extra stimulation (for example, playing music near the pregnant woman's stomach) can stimulate advanced cognitive development. [Chapter 4]

2. Most adults who were abused as children become abusive parents. [Chapter 10]

3. Programs that build students' self-esteem not only improve their grades but also help reduce delinquency, drug use, and adolescent pregnancy. [Chapter 13]

4. Rates of adolescent smoking and alcohol consumption are at their lowest levels in more than 40 years. [Chapter 14]

5. Many gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning adolescents say their school is one of the most accepting parts of their community. [Chapter 14]

6. Adolescents today are much less likely to be victims of violence while in school than they were 20 years ago. [Chapter 16]

The first three statements are *false* and the last three are *true.* How did you do? These statements represent common beliefs that have been contradicted by research findings, so it wouldn't be surprising if you got a number of them wrong. If you are curious about those answers, you can check the chapter they are in to see *why* each answer is either true or false.

We don't want to make you feel bad about what you do or don't know, but we do want to point out that many ideas about child development that sound like "common sense" don't agree with what research has shown to be the case. We hope you will remember to pay extra attention to those ideas that contradict your preconceived ideas.

Get the Most From Your Textbook

We are sure you will want to get the most you can from your textbook. We have already told you why you will want to use the **Test Your Knowledge** true/false questions that begin each chapter after this one to identify important ideas that challenge your initial level of understanding, and the **Journeys of Research** to understand the evolution of scientific thinking on a given topic. Each chapter begins with a set of **Learning Questions** that relate to the major topics covered in the chapter. They can act as guideposts that will help focus your learning. When you complete each section of the chapter, you will find a set of review questions that will **Check Your Understanding**. Use the **Knowledge Questions** as an opportunity to make sure you have a good understanding of that topic before moving on to the next. **Critical Thinking** will help you be sure that you can use and apply the information, make inferences based on what you have learned, and integrate new ideas with old ones. When you have finished a chapter, you can review and test yourself on what you have learned by using the **Chapter Summary**. Look at each of the Learning Questions from the beginning of the chapter and try to decide how you would answer each question before looking at the summary that follows it.

Because we all learn best when we can relate new ideas to our own experiences, we also provide a variety of **Active Learning** features. Some of these activities are designed to help you feel or think the way a child feels or thinks or to reflect on your own experiences while you were growing up. Others allow you to carry out simple experiments or observations with children and adolescents to see for yourself examples of the behaviors we are describing. Still others provide creative ways to apply the knowledge you are gaining as you read the book.

All of these activities are designed to help you become engaged with the material so that you can relate it to your own life and gain new insight into various aspects of development. We hope these opportunities help you develop a deeper understanding of the material so that your new knowledge will stay with you far beyond the end of the course you are taking and will influence how you understand and interact with children and adolescents in the future.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Knowledge Questions

1. How does the peer review process assure readers that scientific information is valid and reliable?
2. What does it mean to be a critical thinker?
3. What is *perceptual bias*, and why do we need to guard against it?

Critical Thinking

Which of the features of this textbook do you think will be most helpful to you? Explain why you think these features will be a good fit with your learning style or study habits.

CONCLUSION

We hope this chapter has made you eager to learn more about child development. Now that you have been introduced to some of the basic concepts in the field of child development, you are ready to explore these concepts more deeply. There are so many interesting and important topics in the pages that follow that it is difficult to pick just a few to highlight, but they include understanding what can be done to help ensure a healthy pregnancy for both mother and infant, developing educational practices that help children across a wide range of abilities to thrive in their classrooms, and learning about the exciting new findings from neuroscience that are helping us understand how development of the brain is reflected in the behavior of children and teens. We look at what promotes healthy development, what threatens it, and the protective factors that can buffer those negative effects. We also discuss how all this unfolds in the increasingly diverse world in which children live.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The summary at the end of each chapter is designed in a question/answer format so that you can use it to test yourself on what you have learned. While looking at each question, cover the answer and try to answer it yourself. Then see how the answer corresponds to your own understanding. Self-testing is a very effective way to study and learn.

1.1 Who needs to have a good understanding of child development, and why do they need this understanding?

With an understanding of child development, parents and family members are better able to understand their children's needs and abilities at each stage of development, which helps them respond appropriately and provide the amount and type of stimulation that supports their children's growth and development. Professionals in a variety of careers draw on child development knowledge in their work. Policymakers and program developers responsible for **social policy** must understand how policies will affect children and their families. Citizens who are knowledgeable about child development can advocate and vote for policies that promote positive child development.

1.2 What are the domains of child development and some recurring issues in the field?

Physical development consists of the biologically based changes that occur as children grow. **Cognitive development** consists of the changes that take place in children's thinking and learning. **Social-emotional development** consists of the changes that occur in children's understanding and expression of emotions as well as their ability to interact with other people. Issues in the study of development include debate about the relative contribution of **nature** and **nurture** to development, whether change is continuous (**quantitative**) or discontinuous (**qualitative**), and how much stability versus change occurs over time. In addition, different developmental pathways may result in the same outcome (**equifinality**), and the same developmental pathway may result in different outcomes (**multifinality**). Although we look to make general statements about development, we also consider the effect of individual differences. **Developmental psychopathology** sees psychological disorders as distortions of normal developmental pathways rather than as illnesses. The **positive youth development** movement looks for ways to help all children reach their fullest potential. Another debate examines whether children play an active role in their own development or are passive recipients of external influences.

1.3 What are the contexts in which children develop?

The contexts for development include a child's family, as well as their schools, communities, and **culture**, all of which are embedded in the context of historical time. Family is the primary context for development for most children, and a family's **socioeconomic status (SES)** plays a

significant role in the experiences a child will have. Characteristics of the school a child attends and the community in which the child lives affect every aspect of development. Historical events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, can change children's experiences with family, school, and community. We see cultural differences in how parents raise their children that reflect **parental ethnotheories**, which are the beliefs in each culture regarding what will prepare children to be successful in the context of their particular environment.

1.4   How can you be a smart consumer of information about development?

Be sure you know your sources. Learn to critically evaluate information that comes from the internet. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Be open to new ideas, but don't assume that information is better simply because it is newer. Don't generalize from a single example, but also don't reject the results of research because your individual experiences don't agree with the research findings. Realize that understanding development requires more than the ideas you bring to the course, and don't fall prey to **perceptual bias** that just confirms what you already expected. Make good use of the pedagogical features that are included in your text because they can help you master the material.

KEY TERMS

Cognitive development (p. 10)

Culture (p. 17)

Developmental psychopathology (p. 14)

Equifinality (p. 14)

Incremental theories (p. 12)

Intersectionality (p. 14)

Multifinality (p. 14)

Nature (p. 11)

Niche picking (p. 14)

Nurture (p. 11)

Parental ethnotheories (p. 18)

Peer review (p. 21)

Perceptual bias (p. 23)

Physical development (p. 10)

Positive youth development (p. 15)

Qualitative changes (p. 12)

Quantitative changes (p. 12)

Social policy (p. 7)

Social-emotional development (p. 10)

Socialization (p. 16)

Socioeconomic status (SES) (p. 17)

Stage theories (p. 12)