

The Seven Stages of Psychological Development



Richard Barrett

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Every human being grows in stages of psychological development, operates at levels of consciousness and lives inside a worldview.

There are many models of human development, each of which describes the process of psychological growth in slightly different ways.^{[1], [2]} The Barrett Seven Stages of Psychological Development Model is similar to most other developmental models but differs in one important respect. It looks at the human psyche^[3] through the lens of *ego-soul dynamics*—the growth and development of the ego, the alignment of the ego with the soul, and the activation of the soul consciousness. Most other models of human development ignore the ego and the soul. They ignore the fundamental reality of our being. You cannot understand your life if you ignore the motivations of the ego and the soul. The seven stages of individual psychological development and how they relate to the three stages of the evolution of the human psyche are shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: The Seven Stages of Psychological Development

The Seven Stages of Psychological Development

The growth and development of the ego

Between the moment we are born and the time we reach physical maturity, around twenty to twenty-five years of age, we pass through three stages of psychological development: surviving, conforming, and differentiating. These stages are primarily driven by our biological development—the development of our triune brain^[4] and the socialization needs thrust upon us by our parents and the culture of the community in which we live. By the end of the third stage of development, we are fundamentally enculturated by the beliefs of our parents and the community or society in which we live. We allow this to happen because this is the only way we can get our deficiency needs met - it is the only way we can survive, stay safe and feel secure. ^[5]

The alignment of the ego with the soul

The process of ego-soul alignment—the bonding of the ego with the soul—starts at the individuating stage of psychological development. Unlike the first three stages of psychological development, the individuating stage of psychological development is not thrust upon us by the biological and societal exigencies of growing up: this stage of development is driven by the evolutionary impulse of your soul. Many people fail to respond to this impulse because they find it difficult to get their deficiency needs met, or they live in an authoritarian regime where the freedom to individuate is denied them.

The process of ego-soul alignment can involve a significant shift in your sense of identity. If you do not feel aligned with the worldview (values and beliefs) of your parents or the community in which you were raised, you will begin to search for a new identity when you reach the individuating stage of development, one that is more in alignment with who you truly are. This can present many challenges to how you relate to your parents, your friends and the community you were raised in.

During the time it takes to formulate a new worldview (during your late teens, twenties and thirties) you can feel lost and insecure. Finding an answer to the question “Who am I?” becomes an important priority at this stage of your life.

The Seven Stages of Psychological Development

The activation of the soul

The process of soul activation begins at the individuating stage of development, where the focus is on ego-soul alignment, and continues in earnest at the self-actualizing stage of development where you focus on self-expression. At the integrating stage you focus on involves connecting with others in unconditional loving relationships so you can actualize your gifts and talents and thereby make a difference in your world. The serving stage of development involves finding ways to contribute to the well-being of others, humanity and the planet—finding fulfilment by living your soul's destiny.

The seven stages of psychological development

With this brief overview of the human psyche let us now explore in detail each stage of individual psychological development. Table 1.1 shows the needs and tasks associated with the seven stages of psychological development and the approximate age range when these stages occur. ^[6]

Stage of development	Age range	Task	Need
Serving	60+ years	Contributing to the well-being of others.	To be of service to humanity.
Integrating	50–59 years	Connecting in unconditional loving relationships.	To make a difference in your world.
Self-actualising	40–49 years	Discovering and expressing your gifts and talents.	To find meaning and purpose.
Individuating	25–39 years	Finding freedom to discover who you are.	To feel you can operate with autonomy.
Differentiating	8–24 years	Feeling accepted, respected, and recognized.	To feel a sense of self-worth.
Conforming	2–8 years	Feeling safe, protected, and loved.	To feel a sense of belonging.
Surviving	0–2 years	Feeling physically cared for and nurtured.	To feel in control of your life.

Table 1: The needs and tasks associated with the seven stages of psychological development.

The Seven Stages of Psychological Development

Surviving

For the first three months of life in utero—from the moment of conception to the formation of the reptilian mind/brain, the soul mind is the dominant interface with the embryo's external world—the mother's womb. The species mind, which is the subconscious of the soul mind, guides the development of the embryo into a foetus and creates a functioning body mind (reptilian mind/brain) by around the first trimester of gestation.

When the body mind becomes operational, it becomes the new interface with the external world, and the soul mind becomes the subconscious of the body mind. The species mind (encapsulated in the coding of DNA) then becomes the unconscious of the body mind, guiding the development of the body through to maturity.

When the reptilian mind/brain is our dominant interface with the world (the last six months in utero) and during the first two years of your life, any difficulties experienced by the foetus or baby may influence the future functioning of the body. This leads to the phenomena known as epigenetics,^[7] where the expectant mother's experiences alter the expression of the DNA coding (not the actual coding) of her unborn child.

For example, during World War II, in the Dutch famine of 1944, thousands of mothers experienced harsh deprivations that affected their unborn children. Not only did these children grow up to be smaller than average, later on, the children of these children were also smaller than average—suggesting a DNA link. Over their lifetimes, the children who lived through the period of famine in utero experienced far above average rates of obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular problems, and other diseases related to an unhealthy body weight.

The primary focus of the body mind is staying alive. It does this by regulating the body's internal stability. Because of our species programming (DNA), the body mind instinctively knows how to manage the body's homeostatic functioning, and once the baby is born, it knows how to suckle and knows how to cry if it feels sensations of discomfort.

The Seven Stages of Psychological Development

The embryo, the foetus, or the baby are completely dependent on the mother for the baby's sense of well-being. The experiences that the foetus or baby have while the body mind is learning to be in a material world lead to the formation of the young child's subconscious beliefs—the body mind's autobiographical memory imprints (beliefs) that it uses to make meaning of situations that involve survival.

Although the body mind knows how to react to any internal instability, such as hunger, thirst, being too hot or too cold, it doesn't know how to alleviate the sensations it is experiencing. If the baby's reactions (grimacing, crying, etc.) to these discomforting sensations result in getting its needs met, it feels loved. If, on the other hand, its reactions go unnoticed or are ignored, it becomes increasingly distressed; it becomes fearful and experiences a sense of disconnection—a feeling of separation.

Gradually, the baby begins to link its sensations of discomfort, to the response it gets. It realizes that it is able, or, not able, to control its sense of well-being. If its needs are “magically” met by a parent when it reacts to its discomforting sensations, it feels in control of its world. If its needs are not met by a parent, it does not feel in control of its world—it feels fearful.

The problem the foetus or the newly born baby has is that it still believes it is living in an energetic field of connectedness and love—the world of the soul, because it has not yet learned about separation. The baby gradually learns through the experience of uncomfortable sensations that it is no longer living in that world, and it begins to fear separation. For the soul, the feeling of separation equates to a lack of love. Attachment theory^[8] suggests that all babies begin to experience this sense of separation somewhere between six and eighteen months.

At this point, usually around eighteen months to two years, the “pain” associated with the feeling of separation becomes too much for the soul to bear. It filters out this pain by creating the psychic entity we call the ego. The ego's role is to buffer the soul from the world of separation and enable you to become a viable independent entity in the material framework of your existence.

If the mother or caregivers of the baby are not vigilant, or if the baby is abused, left alone for long periods of time or abandoned, the baby will form subconscious beliefs that the world it lives in is an unsafe place and that it is not loved. From this point on, this person will seek to control what is happening in their environment to make sure they get their needs get met. As an adult, such a person will be cautious and vigilant and tend to micromanage or control whatever is going on around them that might affect their well-being.

The Seven Stages of Psychological Development

If, on the other hand, the mother or caregivers of the baby are attentive to its needs and are watchful and responsive to signs of distress, then the baby will grow up with the feeling of being loved and that the world it lives in is a safe place. The feeling of control the baby gets when its needs are quickly met and the belief it learns about being able to manage its environment (surviving) is an essential prerequisite for mastering the self-actualization stage of development later in life. If you don't feel in control of your life, you will not be prepared to take the survival risks that the journey into self-actualisation may entail by following your sense of purpose—the life your soul intended for you.

At the survival stage of development, love is experienced through the satisfaction of our physiological needs. This is when the body mind experiences stability. The body mind experiences instability—a lack of love—when it feels abandoned and uncared for.

Conforming

Towards the end of the surviving stage of development, the infant becomes mobile and learns to communicate verbally. This is the time when the psychic entity we call the ego begins to form and the limbic mind/brain (emotional mind), which has been developing in the background, takes over as the dominant mind/brain. Whereas the focus of the body mind is on staying alive, the focus of the emotional mind is on keeping safety and ensuring that it is protected - hence the focus on belonging. The body mind goes on functioning in the background as the physical interface with the world, and the emotional mind becomes the social interface with the world.

When the emotional mind becomes dominant, the body mind becomes the subconscious of the emotional mind and the soul mind is pushed further into the background. It becomes the unconscious of the emotional mind. It still has some influence over the thoughts of the child, but these are less dominant than before.

If the child's emotional mind feels unfairly treated, instead of becoming angry with its parents, the child may repress the anger it is feeling and blame itself. The child blames itself because it is afraid to show anger towards its parents: if it does show anger towards its parents, it realizes that it might be more difficult to get its safety needs met in the future. This is when your inner critic is born—the voice of judgement about not being worthy or good enough to receive the love we are seeking. Unless it is dealt with at the time it happens, the emotional instability does not go away. It is always there in the background, influencing the child's and the adult's subconscious decision-making.

The Seven Stages of Psychological Development

At the beginning of conforming stage of development, the child may resort to temper tantrums to get its needs met. The young infant has not yet learned how to separate itself from its needs. Neither has it learned that the people it depends on for its survival and safety may have competing needs. If the parents give in to the child's temper tantrums, the child quickly learns that behaving "badly" is a good strategy for getting its needs met. When this happens, the parents' lives become intolerable—they become totally ruled by their children.

If, on the other hand, the parents make getting the child's needs and desires met conditional on the adherence to certain rules of behaviour—if the child is coerced into behaving in specific ways—the child will learn that love is conditional and will tend to use this strategy to manipulate others into getting its needs met later in life.

For the sake of family unity, the growth of the child's ego has to be managed. There are two ways of doing this: the correct way—by gradual socialization (getting the child to recognize that other people may also have needs); and the incorrect way—by attempting to crush the child's ego through force, punishment, or making the giving of love conditional.

If the child's parents or caregivers are attentive to the child's needs, if it is raised in a caring, loving environment where it feels safe and protected, then the child will grow up with the desire and willingness to form committed relationships and conform to society's rules when it reaches adulthood.

Participating in family rituals is important at the conforming stage of development, because they contribute to the child's feeling of belonging and safety. Learning to feel safe, comfortable, and loved at the conforming stage of development is an essential prerequisite for mastering the integrating stage of development later in life. If you don't feel safe in the presence of others—if you don't trust them—you will find it difficult to connect and cooperate with others when you become an adult.

At the conforming stage of development, love is experienced through the satisfaction of our safety and protection needs. This is when the emotional mind experiences stability. The emotional mind experiences instability when its love and belonging needs not met and it begins to believe that it is not worthy of love.

The Seven Stages of Psychological Development

Differentiating

Towards the end of the conforming stages of development, around the age of seven or eight, the rational mind (the neocortex), which has been developing in the background, gradually takes over from the emotional mind as our dominant interface with the world. The focus of the rational mind is on security—feeling respected and recognized by our parents, peers and the community to which we belong. The emotional mind goes on operating as our social interface with the world, and the body mind goes on operating as our physical (biological) interface with the world.

When the rational mind becomes dominant, the emotional mind becomes the subconscious of the rational mind, and the body mind becomes the unconscious of the rational mind. The soul mind becomes the super unconscious. Its influence is felt only faintly, if felt at all, especially if the fears of the ego are severe. The energy of love from the soul will not be able to break through the energy of fear of the ego.

Subconscious decisions made by the emotional mind can be overridden by the rational mind if the rational mind believes the reactions of the emotional mind (anger) would compromise its ability to get its security needs met. Therefore, most people tend to demote a lower order emotional need for a higher order rational need (security). If, however, you found it difficult to get your emotional needs met when you were young, the override function may be compromised. When you don't get your needs met, you will lash out, paying little attention to the consequence of your outbursts. Our prisons are full of people with faulty override functions.

When the child becomes a teenager, it starts to explore the world outside its family environment. Whereas parental and sibling relations were of significant importance to the child's safety up to the age of seven or eight, when the child gets close to its teens, its relations with its peers and the authority figures in its life, such as teachers or religious instructors, become important for satisfying its security needs.

The teenager gets his or her security needs met, either by associating with a community, clique or gang of peers, or by staying in close contact with its parents. To get its security needs met, the teenager must find a way to become respected—to be recognized and felt seen: it must prove that it is worthy of belonging to the family or group of people it identifies with.

The Seven Stages of Psychological Development

There are three ways for teenagers to get the respect and recognition needs met: By physical body image displays: For boys, this means becoming strong or powerful; for girls, this means becoming beautiful or sexy. This is usually the route that is taken to get our recognition needs in peer gangs or cliques.

By displays of knowledge and learning: For boys and girls, this means becoming a good student and being smart. This is usually the route that is taken to get our recognition needs met from parents and authority figures.

By displays of status (“coolness”): For boys and girls, this means having the latest gadgets and the most fashionable hairstyles and clothes. This is usually the route that is taken to get our recognition needs met from our most of our peers, especially those of the opposite gender.

Which path or mixture of paths the teenager chooses to get its respect and recognition needs met will depend to a large extent on the relationship he or she has with his or her parents. If the relationship the teenager has with his or her parents is good, they will naturally feel recognized and appreciated; if the relationship the teenager has with his or her parents is poor, then they may turn to an authority figure or a peer group to get their recognition needs met.

What is important at this stage of development is for teenagers to get positive feedback from their parents or caregivers. If they do not get this positive feedback, they will seek to get it from other people. They will join a group or gang where they feel accepted, and where their gifts, skills, or talents are recognised.

If the teenager joins a gang, taking on dares can become a rite of passage for membership of the gang. This may lead young people “off the straight and narrow.” They may do things they know to be wrong simply to belong to a group where they feel recognised. Teenagers who form relationships with an adult outside the home to get their recognition needs met may leave themselves open to religious radicalization or sexual grooming.

Joining a gang may create conflicts in the teenager’s life at home, because they may get caught between two value systems: the value system of their parents and the value system of the group or gang to which they belong. If this situation is not handled sensitively by parents, home life will become difficult and may become intolerable. In which case, you will have a rebellious teenager on your hands.

The Seven Stages of Psychological Development

From a parental perspective, guiding rather than controlling, allowing rather than preventing, encouraging rather than denigrating, and trusting rather than doubting, gives teenagers space to safely explore who they are and find their sense of identity in the larger world outside the family home. The most important thing a parent or caregiver can do is to spend quality time with their teenager.

Feeling physically and emotionally secure in your community—having a healthy sense of self-esteem by being respected and recognized by others—is an essential prerequisite for mastering the serving stage of development later in life. If you don't feel secure in your community during your teenage years, you will not feel confident in contributing to society later in life.

At the differentiating stage of development, love is experienced through the satisfaction of our security needs. This is when the rational mind experiences stability. The teenage rational mind experiences instability—a lack of love—when respect and recognition are withheld or not met, and it is made to feel incompetent or not good enough.

Individuating

Around your mid-twenties, once your reptilian, limbic and neocortex are fully functional, you begin to feel the need for autonomy and freedom—to break the chains of dependency that keep you tied to the parental and cultural framework of your existence. You are finished with being dependent on others for the satisfaction of your deficiency needs; you are seeking independence. You want to become responsible and accountable for every aspect of your life; in particular, you will want to explore your own beliefs, and embrace and express your own values; not necessarily the values of your parents or the community in which you were raised.

Fundamentally, the task at the individuating stage of development is to embark on the journey that will lead to the recovery of your soul. Without fully realizing it, you will be dis-embedding yourself from your parental and cultural background and starting to align the motivations of your ego with the motivations of your soul.

For those who were fortunate enough to have been brought up by self-actualized parents, and lived in a community or culture where freedom and independence are celebrated, where higher education was easily available, where men and women are treated equally, and where they are encouraged from a young age to express their needs and think for themselves, they will find it relatively easy to move

The Seven Stages of Psychological Development

through the individuating stage of psychological development; that is, as long as they can find work that enables them to make a living. If you cannot find work that gives you financial independence, you will feel demoralized because you will not have the autonomy and freedom you need to individuate. You will still be under the control of your parents, because they will be paying your bills.

Many find it difficult to extract themselves from the influence of their parents, even when they are financially independent; they are still looking for the love and respect from their parents that they never got when they were young. Others, such as those who live in authoritarian communities or repressive regimes, may be afraid to express themselves, because they fear being punished for breaking the rules or don't want to be locked up for speaking their truth.

Thus, if you were brought up by controlling parents, if you live in an authoritarian regime, if you are discriminated against because of your gender, sexual preferences, religion, or race, and you have fears about being able to meet your deficiency needs, you are likely to have difficulties moving through the individuating stage of development. Your fears will keep you anchored in the lower levels of consciousness which align with the first three stages of development.

Your task at the individuating stage of development is to master these fears so you are no longer dependent on others for your self-esteem, protection, and survival. If you do not overcome these fears, they will continue to show up in your life as an adult and make it extremely difficult to master the higher stages of development. Your soul needs you to let go of your parental programming and cultural conditioning, so you can fully express yourself in your adult years.

Self-actualising

If you successfully master the individuating stage of development, around the time you reach your late thirties or early forties, sometimes a little earlier and sometimes a little later, you will experience the soul's desire for self-expression. You will want to find a meaning and purpose to your life. You will be looking for a vocation or calling. This means uncovering your natural gifts and talents and making them available to the world.

For most people, the search for their vocation or calling usually begins with a feeling of unease or boredom about their job, profession, or chosen career—with the work they thought would enable them to feel secure by providing them with a good income and prospects for advancement leading to increased wealth, authority, or power.

The Seven Stages of Psychological Development

Uncovering your soul's purpose not only brings vitality to your life, it also sparks your creativity. You will become more intuitive and spend more time in a state of flow—being present in what you are doing and feeling committed and passionate about your life and work.

Mastering the self-actualising stage of development can be challenging, especially if your vocation or calling offers less security than the job, profession, or career you trained for earlier in your life. You may feel scared or uncomfortable about embarking in a new direction that does not pay the rent, the mortgage or finance your children's education but does bring meaning and purpose to your life.

This is why it so important at this stage of development to master your survival fears. Knowing you can take care of yourself gives you the confidence you need to explore your self-expression. If you are afraid that you might not be able to survive doing what you love to do, you may deny your soul expression. This will lead to mental suffering, culminating in depression. Uncovering and embracing your soul's purpose is vitally important, because it is the key to living a fulfilling life.

Some people find their vocation early in their lives; others discover it much later; some spend their whole lives searching. I often tell people who are having difficulty finding a meaning and purpose for their life not to worry. Only the ego is concerned about meaning and purpose: the soul is concerned about self-expression. Just do what you love to do—do what brings you joy. Be fully yourself. Full self-expression—making the most of your gifts and talents—is a sign that you are living in soul consciousness.

Integrating

If you were successful in traversing the individuating stage and found your soul's purpose at the self-actualising stage, when you reach your fifties you will want to use your gifts and talents to make a difference in the world. To do this, you will need to form caring relationships with those you want to help and those you want to collaborate with to leverage your impact in the world. Connecting with others who share your passion or calling and with those who will be the beneficiaries of your gifts and talents is essential for mastering this stage of development.

The Seven Stages of Psychological Development

To connect with and support others, you will need to tap into your emotional and social intelligence and exercise your empathy skills. You will need to feel what others are feeling if you are truly going to help them. Thus, how well you mastered the conforming stage of development will significantly influence your progress through the integrating stage of development.

Knowing you can handle your relationship needs—knowing you are lovable and can love others—gives you the confidence you need to successfully manage the integrating stage of development. In addition, you must also be able to cooperate with others by assuming a larger sense of identity and shift from operating independently to operating interdependently.

Some people get so wrapped up in their “work” at the self-actualising stage that they are unable to make the shift to the integrating stage. They get lost in their creativity, focusing only on the expression of their gifts and talents, rather than the larger contribution they could make if they were able to connect and collaborate with others. Working with others in service to the universal good is more likely to bring a sense of fulfilment than working on your own at this stage of your life.

I tell people who are finding it difficult to make a difference in the world not to worry. Only the ego is concerned with making a difference: the soul is concerned with connecting. You must first learn how to connect in unconditional loving relationships; only then can you make a difference in the world.

Serving

The last stage of development follows naturally from the integrating stage. I call this the serving stage of development. This stage of development usually begins in the early sixties. The focus of this stage of development is on selfless service to the community you identify with. What you are feeling is the soul’s desire for contribution.

How well you mastered the differentiating stage of development will significantly influence your progress through the serving stage of development. Having a healthy sense of self-esteem and self-confidence will enable you to make your gifts and talents available to those who need them.

It does not matter how big or small your contribution, what is important is fulfilling your soul’s purpose. Alleviating suffering, caring for the disadvantaged, and building a more loving society are some of the activities you may want to explore at this stage of your life. On the other hand, your contribution may be simply caring for the life of another soul.

The Seven Stages of Psychological Development

As you enter the serving stage of development, you will find yourself becoming more introspective and reflective—looking for ways to deepen your sense of connection to your soul and beyond your soul to the deeper levels of your being—connecting to whatever you consider to be the divine. You may become a keeper of wisdom, an elder of the community, or a person to whom younger people turn for guidance or mentoring.

As you make progress with this stage of development, you will uncover new levels of compassion in your life. You will experience feelings of well-being and fulfillment that you never experienced before.

You will begin to see how connected we all are; how, by serving others, you are serving your larger self. At this level of consciousness, giving becomes the same as receiving. When you give to others, you are giving to yourself. To experience these feelings more profoundly, you will want to become the servant of your soul. Eventually, you may realize that you don't *have* a soul, you *are* your soul; you are living the life of an energetic being in material awareness.

I tell people who are finding it difficult to master the serving stage of development not to worry about service. Only the ego is concerned with being of service: the soul is concerned about making a contribution to the well-being of others or the planet. If you cannot find ways of contributing, your life is basically over. Playing endless rounds of golf to lower your handicap, doesn't really do it for the soul.

Notes on the stages of personal psychological development.

I think it would be useful at this point to provide more information about how the seven stages of personal development operate. There are four topics I want to cover:

- The ordering of the stages of development.
- The link between the stages of development and levels of consciousness.
- What happens if we fail to master a stage of development.
- The formation of fear-based beliefs.

The Seven Stages of Psychological Development

The ordering of the stages of development

The seven stages of personal development occur in consecutive order. Each stage of development provides a foundation for the subsequent stage. You cannot jump stages, but from time to time you may experience higher *states* of consciousness, especially after you have reached the individuating stage of development. These are usually of brief duration —glimpses of the undivided wholeness of the world.

You must establish a stable energetic platform at each stage of development to proceed to the next. For most people, it takes a lifetime—at least sixty to seventy years—to pass through the seven stages of personal development. That is because each stage is linked to the seasons of our lives.

If you complete the journey through to the serving stage, you can look forward to flourishing in the latter years of your life. You will feel a deep sense of joy; you will experience good health and have a long life. The approximate age range of each stage of development, the tasks we must master, and the needs we must meet were shown in Table 1.

The first three stages of development are fixed in time. They are determined by the physical development of our brains and bodies and the mental development of our minds. Thereafter, if all goes well, it is possible to accelerate the stages of development, but it is quite rare. Many young people, especially the millennials, think they have reached the integrating stage of development because they want to make a difference in the world. This aspiration comes from the ego or the desire for social justice.

When someone is truly at the integrating stage of development, the desire to make a difference flows from their sense of empathy for the plight of others. Usually, this is not the case with millennials: their desire to make a difference comes either from their need for achievement or their desire for justice—to right the wrongs they see in the world. The hallmarks of the integrating stage are empathy for others and connecting in unconditional loving relationships.

No matter what age you are, to grow and develop you must address the fears and anxieties you have about being able to meet your deficiency (survival, safety, and security) needs—the unmet needs you may still have from the first three stages of development.

The Seven Stages of Psychological Development

Also, if you are at the individuating stage of development, you must learn to master your fear of leaving those you are dependent on—your parents and the community in which you were brought up—to find the freedom and autonomy you need to discover who you really are.

If you were brought up by self-actualized parents, this will not be difficult, because they will understand your need for autonomy. If you weren't brought up by self-actualized parents, you may find it challenging. They may not understand why you are distancing yourself from them; why you have a different worldview. You may be wondering why you no longer resonate with them. You may even feel guilt. Let the guilt go. Recognize they are on a different journey to yours. Stay loving and dutiful, but don't beat yourself up.

The link between the stages of development and levels of consciousness

We grow in stages, and we operate at levels of consciousness. Normally, the level of consciousness you operate from will be the same as the stage of development you have reached. However, when your mind interprets a current experience as potentially threatening - compromises your ability to get your survival, safety, or security needs met - you will drop down to one of the first three levels of consciousness.

This does not mean you are moving to a lower stage of development. It simply means that you are moving to a level of consciousness where you are facing similar issues to those you had when you were at those earlier stages of development.

For example, if I am thirty-five years old and at the individuating stage of development and lose all my money, I will immediately descend to the surviving level of consciousness. Similarly, if I am single and move to a foreign country, I will want to make friends in my new environment. I will automatically descend to the relationship level of consciousness. In these instances, I do not go back to the surviving stage of development or the conforming stage of development, instead I return to the survival and relationship levels of consciousness.

The Seven Stages of Psychological Development

What happens if we fail to master a developmental stage.

The first three stages of development are intimately linked to the last three stages of development. If you are at the self-actualising stage of development—finding and engaging in work you are passionate about (fully expressing yourself)—you must be able to master your survival fears; you must feel you are in control of your life and not a victim.

If you are at the integrating stage of development—connecting with others in unconditional loving relationships to make a difference—you must be able to master your relationship fears; you must feel loved enough to feel safe in loving others.

If you are at the serving stage of development—contributing to the well-being of others, society or the planet—you must be able to master your self-esteem fears; you must feel confident enough to go out into the world and offer your gifts and talents. Thus how well we master the first three stages of development impacts our success in mastering the last three stages of development.

The formation of fear-based beliefs

Repeated painful experiences of not getting your deficiency (survival, safety, and security) needs met when you are young get “hard-wired” into your mind as fear-based beliefs, because the first twenty years of your life is a time of rapid emergent learning^[9] when the synapses in your brain are forming.

Synapses are “electrical” connections that correspond to the beliefs in your mind. Your synapses enable you to interpret your experiences by giving them meaning. The meaning you give to your experiences aligns with your strongest synaptic connections (beliefs). Consequently, if you constantly failed to get your needs met when you were young, during the period of emergent learning, you will have formed limiting beliefs (strong synaptic connections) that may haunt you for the rest of your life. You must build new synaptic connections if you want to change your beliefs and thereby change your life.

The first three stages of development operate on a strictly biological time scale: they are determined by the physical development (maturing) of our brains and bodies, and the associated mental development of our minds from the moment of conception to our mid-twenties. This is the period where we learn how to satisfy our deficiency needs.

The Seven Stages of Psychological Development

Thereafter, the passage through the individuating and upper stages of development depends on many factors: a) what type of regime you live in—democratic or autocratic; b) whether you are able to become a viable independent adult, responsible and accountable for your life; c) to what extent you learn to fully express your gifts and talents; d) to what extent you are able to connect with others in empathic relationships; and e) to what extent you are have the confidence to contribute your gifts and talents to the world.

No matter what age you are, to grow and develop you must address the fears and anxieties you have about being able to meet your deficiency needs (survival, safety, and security)—the needs you have from the first three stages of development. Also, if you are at the individuating stage of development, you must learn to master the fear of becoming independent—the fear of separating yourself from those you have been dependent on for your survival, safety and security needs, so you can find the freedom and autonomy you need to discover who you really are.

The application of the seven stages of psychological development is fully explained in my book [Evolutionary Coaching](#).

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1. For a list of development models, see Ken Wilber, *Integral Psychology: Consciousness, Spirit, Psychology, Therapy* (Boston: Shambhala Publications), 2000; and Dr. Alan Watkins, *Coherence: The Secret Science of Brilliant Leadership* (London: Kogan Page), 2014. ↑
2. You can also find a discussion of six models of maturation in George E. Vaillant, *Triumphs of Experience* (Boston: First Harvard University Press), 2012, pp. 114–189. ↑
3. See the appendix for an explanation of this term. ↑
4. See the appendix for an explanation of this term. ↑
5. Survival, safety and security needs. ↑
6. Throughout most of the remainder of the book, I will be shortening the term “seven stages of psychological development” to the “seven stages of personal development.” ↑
7. See the appendix for an explanation of this term. ↑
8. Ibid. ↑
9. Ibid. ↑