

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model of Development

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model offers a comprehensive description of the factors influencing development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Individuals are at the center of Bronfenbrenner's model, and the *bio* in the title reflects genetic influences, such as health and body build. It also includes **temperament**, the relatively stable inherited characteristics that influence the way we respond to our social and physical environments. For example, temperament influences traits such as adventurousness, confidence, and happiness, and differences in individuals persist over time (O'Connor & McCartney, 2007). Siblings raised in the same environments often develop different personalities, and this helps us answer our second question above: "How might we explain why Sean and his older brother are so different?" Even though they were raised in the same family, their genetics resulted in different temperaments.

Temperament. The relatively stable inherited characteristics that influence the way we respond to social and physical stimuli.

Environmental Influences on Development

The *ecological* component in Bronfenbrenner's model suggests that a person's development is influenced by a complex set of systems in the environment, including family, peers, social institutions, such as churches and schools, and individuals' communities and cultures (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). These relationships are outlined in Figure 3.1. As you see in the figure, each system is nested in a larger system, and each layer is viewed as having a powerful impact on development (Berk, 2010). Let's look at these systems.

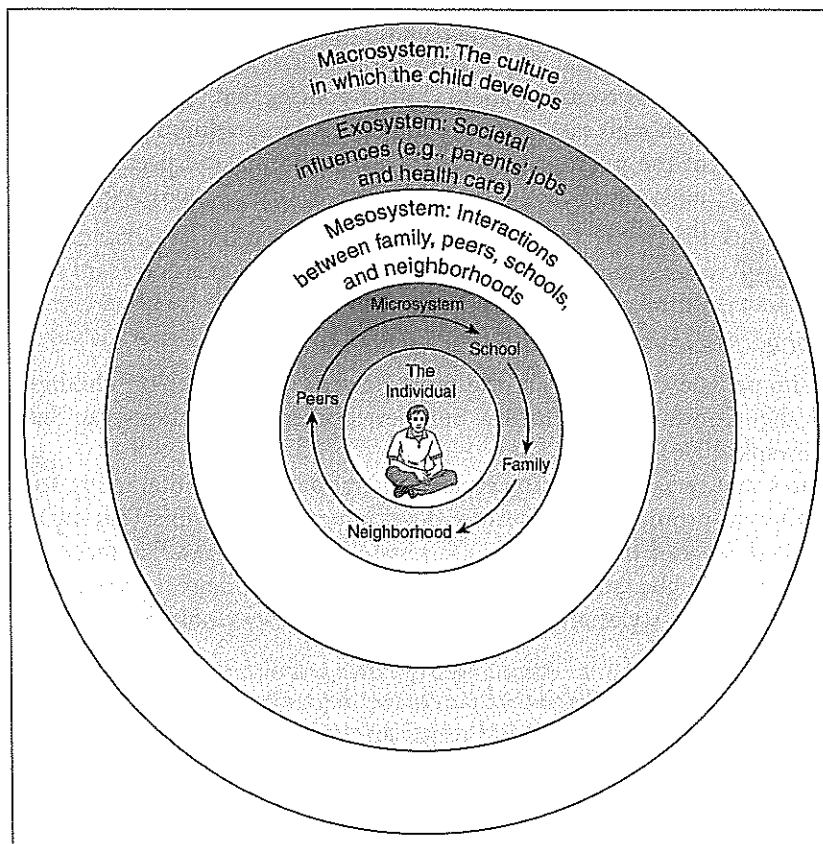


Figure 3.1 Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model of human development

Microsystem. In Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory, the people and activities in a child's immediate surroundings.

Mesosystem. In Bronfenbrenner's model, the interactions and connections between the different elements of children's immediate settings.

Exosystem. In bioecological theory, societal influences that affect both the micro- and mesosystems.

Macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner's fourth level, which includes cultural influences on development.

The **microsystem**, the innermost level, is composed of the people and activities in the child's immediate surroundings, such as family, peers, neighborhood, and school (Weigel, Martin, & Bennett, 2005). Some neighborhoods, for example, are safe and nurturant, while others are dangerous and toxic. Similarly, schools can be caring and supportive or sterile and impersonal (Fauth, Roth, & Brooks-Gunn, 2007; Kozol, 2005).

The **mesosystem** consists of the interactions between the elements of the microsystem, and healthy development depends on how effectively the elements work together. For example, parents and schools are two important elements of the microsystem, and effective schools promote high levels of parental involvement (Epstein, 2001).

The **exosystem** includes societal influences, such as parents' jobs, school systems, and workplace conditions like health care that influence both the microsystem and mesosystem. For example, parents' jobs can affect the amount of time parents have to spend with their children, and wealthy school systems provide nurses, counselors, psychologists, and smaller class sizes.

The **macrosystem** is the culture in which a child develops, and it influences all the other systems. For example, some cultures focus on the individual and emphasize autonomy, whereas others focus more strongly on social influences and conformity.

Understanding Bronfenbrenner's model has important implications for us as teachers. For example, knowing that neighborhoods, the school system, and the community at large all influence student development, we attempt to involve people at these levels in our students' education. For example, having a member of the police force or community service worker come into our classes and discuss the importance of safe neighborhoods and ways to involve students outside of school can make a difference in the personal and social development of our students. You might even speak at school board meetings to express concerns about district policies that influence schools. Although each system is important for development, elements of the microsystem—particularly parents and peers—are the most significant (Clarke-Stewart & Dunn, 2006). We turn to them next.



Healthy development depends on influences in a child's immediate surroundings, such as parents and teachers, working together.

Parenting style. General patterns of interacting with and disciplining children.

Parents' Influence on Development

Parents and other immediate caregivers are the most powerful influences on children's development, and they continue to influence our development throughout our lives (Landry, Smith, & Swank, 2006).

Research indicates that certain **parenting styles**, general patterns of interacting with and disciplining children, promote more healthy development than others (Baumrind, 1991). Parents' *expectations* and their *warmth* and *responsiveness* characterize these differences (Schaffer, Clark, & Jeglic, 2009). Using these factors as a framework, researchers have identified four parenting styles and the general patterns of personal development associated with them.

- **Authoritative parents** set high expectations and are warm and responsive. They are firm, caring, and consistent. They explain reasons for rules and frequently interact with their children, who tend to be mature, considerate, confident, secure, and successful in school (Gonzalez & Wolters, 2006).

Ed Psych and You

How did your parents raise you? How did this compare to your friends' experiences? How did their parenting influence your development? If you plan to have children, how will the way you raise them compare to the way you were raised?



- *Authoritarian parents* have high expectations but tend to be cold and unresponsive. They expect conformity, they don't explain reasons for rules, and don't encourage verbal give-and-take. Their children tend to be withdrawn, sometimes defiant, and lack social skills (Schaffer et al., 2009).
- *Permissive parents* are warm but hold few expectations for their children, who tend to be immature, compulsive, and unmotivated. Used to getting their own way, the children sometimes have trouble relating to their peers (Walker, 2009).
- *Uninvolved parents* have few expectations for their children and are cold and unresponsive. They have little interest in their children, who tend to lack self-control and long-term goals, and can also be disobedient and easily frustrated.

These parenting styles help you answer the questions we asked in "Ed Psych and You" in this section. We're certainly not suggesting that if your parents were authoritarian, permissive, or uninvolved you are doomed to a life of incomplete development, because these parenting styles describe general patterns, and exceptions will exist. However, an *authoritative* parenting style, one that combines high expectations and high levels of warmth and responsiveness, is most effective for promoting healthy development. Adolescents who characterize their parents as authoritative tend to connect to others who are well-rounded, and they are less likely to be swayed by peer pressure to use alcohol or other drugs (W. A. Collins, Maccoby, Steinberg, Hetherington, & Bornstein, 2000). At the other extreme, students who characterize their parents as uninvolved are more likely to party, use drugs, and reject adult values (Durbin, Darling, Steinberg, & Brown, 1993).

Healthy parent-child relationships promote **attachment**, a strong emotional bond between children and caregivers, and this bond can influence relationships with others throughout life (Thompson & Raikes, 2003). Children with secure attachments tend to be confident in their ability to explore the world, whereas children with insecure attachments can be fearful, anxious, and angry in interactions with caregivers. Some evidence indicates that authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved parenting styles are related to insecure attachments (Roeser, Peck, & Nasir, 2006).

Our understanding of effective parenting styles has implications for you as a teacher. The interaction styles of effective teachers are similar to those of effective parents, and the description of authoritative parenting strongly parallels recommended classroom management practices for teachers (Emmer & Evertson, 2009; Evertson & Emmer, 2009). This suggests that you set boundaries for your students, provide reasons for your rules, enforce the rules consistently, and hold students to high standards, both personally and academically. Doing so contributes to their development.

Attachment. The strong emotional bond that forms between children and caregivers.

Exploring diversity

Cultural Differences in Parenting Styles

The original research on parenting styles was done primarily with European American, middle-class families. And, with an authoritative parenting style viewed as desirable, families in the United States and Western Europe tend to encourage independence, competition, and freedom of expression.

However, many families from Asia, Africa, and South America believe in a more collectivist orientation, valuing obedience, deference to authority figures (especially parents), and the importance of the family (Morelli & Rothbaum, 2007). In particular, Asian American families, embracing values embedded in Confucianism, teach children that obedience is good and the

family is more important than individual wants and desires (Chao, 2001; Chen et al., 2001). Asian American parents, wanting to foster self-control and high achievement, are more likely to withhold praise, which they believe results in self-satisfied and poorly motivated children.

However, this strict and directive parenting, combined with high levels of warmth and emotional support, seems to produce higher achievement along with greater emotional maturity (Spera, 2005).

