

So That Is Why They Act that Way!

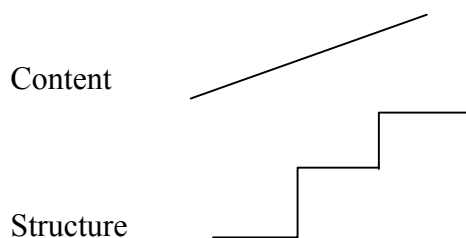
How a Young Person Changes Through Stages of Development, and How Understanding these Stages Can Make You Wish You Learned This a Long Time Ago

Developmental psychologists like Piaget and Kohlberg spent their lives studying how humans change and grow. They discovered that, while information is added linearly, our system of processing information changes abruptly in distinct “stages”. These stages are sequential, invariable in order, and deeply affect the way a young person understands their world. Developmental stages also impact the nature of spiritual growth, as well as what a student responds to. Once you know what these developmental pioneers found, you will be able to make sense of all kinds of interesting characteristics you observe in your young people and be better equipped to lead them.

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Developmental Stages

1. Within the mind of a young person, two things change as they grow
 - a. content – what they know
 - b. structure – how they organize what they know.
2. Content is added gradually over time, structure changes abruptly in “stages” or “steps”.



This is like global reorganization in a file system – it impacts everything because it changes the way things are connected to each other.

Sequential (goes in order), and cannot skip a stage

These changes affect:

- a. Logic - How we think and understand.
 - b. Moral reasoning – How we decide what is right and wrong
 - c. Relationships – How we build and maintain relationships
 - d. Source of authority – Who we listen to and why
3. According to Fowler, Piaget, Kohlberg and others, there are five basic stages. Each is characterized by a different “stream” in which the person is embedded.

Stage 1 – Intuition (2-7 years old)

Stage 2 - Events (7-14 years old)

Stage 3 – Relationships (13-21 years old)

Stage 4 – Concepts and Ideas (19-26? Years)

Stage 5 – Principles (27 +)

Things to remember

1. A person will always interpret information from the perspective of the stage they are in.
2. There is nothing “more” or “less” spiritual about one of the stages. It is possible to walk closely with God at any stage, though the nature of the relationship changes. The higher stages are, however, more developmentally mature.
3. Generally people have the least tolerance for the stage they just left.
4. Stage transitions create a great deal of disruption and instability in a person and they will often lose orientation or swing to extremes when they are moving from one stage to another.
5. The “engines” that move a person forward are stimulation (a rich environment with much to interact with) and disequilibrium (the inability to make sense of the world through my current mode of understanding)