

Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt

Erikson's Stage 2 Overview

Stage Basics

Age: 18 months to 3 years | Virtue: Will

Autonomy (Success)

Key Characteristics:

- Growing sense of independence
- Confidence in decision-making
- Willingness to try new things
- Healthy self-control
- Emerging self-determination

Shame and Doubt (Failure)

Key Characteristics:

- Feeling inadequate or flawed
- Excessive self-doubt
- Fear of trying new tasks
- Low self-esteem
- Constant need for reassurance

Key Developmental Milestones

Physical Mastery

- Potty training
- Walking and running
- Self-feeding with utensils
- Climbing and jumping

The Power of No

- Asserting separate identity
- Testing boundaries
- Developing will
- Healthy oppositional behavior

Making Choices

- Selecting clothes
- Choosing toys or books
- Picking snacks
- Deciding on activities

What Builds Autonomy

- ✓ Allow age-appropriate choices
- ✓ Let children try tasks independently
- ✓ Tolerate mess during learning
- ✓ Treat mistakes as learning
- ✓ Wait before helping (brief struggle)
- ✓ Validate their decisions
- ✓ Provide consistent boundaries

What Creates Shame

- ✗ Helicopter parenting/overprotection
- ✗ Harsh criticism of mistakes
- ✗ Shaming bodily functions
- ✗ Doing everything for the child
- ✗ Ridiculing attempts at independence
- ✗ Inconsistent or absent boundaries
- ✗ Comparing to other children

Long-Term Impact on Adults

High Autonomy Adults

- High self-determination
- Confident decision-making
- Healthy self-control
- Resilience to setbacks
- Balanced independence

High Shame Adults

- Chronic self-doubt
- Imposter syndrome
- Perfectionism or avoidance
- Low self-esteem
- Difficulty with autonomy