

Freud's 5 Stages of Psychosexual Development

Personality develops through childhood stages where pleasure-seeking energies focus on specific erogenous zones

Libido

Psychosexual energy driving behavior; originates in the id; seeks discharge and gratification; focus shifts from one body region to another as child matures.

Fixation

Developmental arrest when excessive gratification or frustration occurs at a stage; some libidinal energy remains invested in that stage; produces characteristic adult personality traits.

Regression

Returning to earlier developmental stages and behaviors when facing stress or anxiety; temporary reversion to fixation-related patterns from childhood.

Freud's Structural Model of Personality

ID

Present from birth; pleasure principle; seeks immediate gratification; innate biological drives; no regard for reality or morality

EGO

Develops in infancy/early childhood; reality principle; mediates between id impulses and external demands; rational decision-making

SUPREGO

Emerges around age 5; moral conscience; internalized parental values; constrains id through guilt and shame; idealistic standards

The Five Psychosexual Stages

1

ORAL STAGE

Birth - 18 months

Erogenous Zone: MOUTH

Key Activity:
Sucking, biting, swallowing; feeding interactions

Central Conflict:
Weaning from breast/bottle

Focus:
Oral gratification and dependency on caregivers

2

ANAL STAGE

18 months - 3 years

Erogenous Zone: ANUS

Key Activity:
Retaining/expelling feces; bowel control

Central Conflict:
Toilet training

Focus:
Control, orderliness, obedience vs. rebellion

3

PHALLIC STAGE

3 - 6 years

Erogenous Zone: GENITALS

Key Activity:
Genital stimulation; gender discovery

Central Conflict:
Oedipus/Electra complex

Focus:
Gender identification; superego formation

4

LATENCY STAGE

6 years - Puberty

No Specific Zone

Key Activity:
Social skills, intellectual abilities

Central Conflict:
Sexual dormancy period

Focus:
Same-sex friendships; skill mastery; repressed sexuality

5

GENITAL STAGE

Puberty - Adulthood

Erogenous Zone: GENITALS

Key Activity:
Mature sexuality; intimacy

Central Conflict:
Establishing intimate relationships

Focus:
Sexual maturity; reciprocal relationships; adult responsibilities

⚠️ Fixation Patterns & Adult Personality Characteristics

Stage	Cause of Fixation	Adult Personality Traits & Behaviors	Real-World Examples
ORAL	Abrupt/harsh weaning OR prolonged nursing; oral deprivation or overindulgence	Oral Dependent: Excessive dependency, need for approval, gullibility, optimism Oral Aggressive: Pessimism, envy, suspicion, verbal aggression, sarcasm	Nail-biting, smoking, overeating, excessive talking, gum chewing; clingy relationships; constant need for oral stimulation
ANAL	Rigid/punitive OR lenient/inconsistent toilet training	Anal Retentive: Orderly, neat, precise, perfectionistic, obstinate, stingy, controlling Anal Expulsive: Messy, disorganized, reckless, emotionally explosive, passive-aggressive	Retentive: Obsessively clean homes, strict schedules, hoarding money Expulsive: Cluttered spaces, chronic lateness, resisting authority
PHALLIC	Unresolved Oedipus/Electra complex; inappropriate parental relationships	Vanity, exhibitionism, promiscuity OR sexual inhibition, guilt; competitive with same-sex individuals; difficulty with authority	Pursuing unavailable partners (forbidden mother/father); excessive competitiveness; problematic romantic patterns; authority conflicts
LATENCY	Failure to develop social skills; arrested emotional development	Social immaturity, difficulty forming intimate relationships, excessive focus on achievement over relationships	"Peter Pan syndrome"; avoiding adult responsibilities; excessive identification with adolescent culture; workaholic patterns avoiding intimacy
GENITAL	Unresolved earlier fixations prevent mature development	Inability to form intimate relationships, serial monogamy, emotional unavailability, sexual dysfunction, avoiding commitments	Reflections of earlier fixations interfering with mature sexuality and relationships; inability to balance work, love, and social contribution

⚠️ Critical Limitations:

- Lacks empirical support; based on clinical observations, not systematic research
- Gender bias (penis envy, inferior female superego development)
- Overemphasizes sexuality; minimizes social, cognitive, cultural factors
- Cultural limitations; reflects Victorian-era, upper-middle-class European context
- Assumes heterosexuality as normative; pathologizes other orientations

Historical Significance: Despite limitations, influenced psychology's understanding of unconscious processes, defense mechanisms, and early experience effects.

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