

Introduction

This book is about how human beings grow and change over their lives, emotionally, psychologically, intellectually and as social beings. Even a book twenty times this length could not hope to offer a comprehensive coverage of this question and this book does not claim to do so. We hope, however, that it will provide an introduction to some of the main ideas that emerged in this area during the last century – and to some of the objections to and limitations of those ideas.

The book is aimed particularly at those working in, or studying for, the caring professions, jobs in which how human beings change is not just a matter of academic interest but one of practical concern. People in these professions have to draw on their understanding of what makes people grow and change in order to assess situations and decide on actions. In the absence of anything else, they have to rely on what they have learnt through their own experience. But we hope this book will add something to the ‘toolkit’ of ideas which they use, and we have tried to illustrate the ideas with some practical examples such as might be encountered in the ‘real world’.

There are many different perspectives from which you can look at human growth and development. You can look at it from primarily a biological viewpoint, and some other books indeed do so. Or you can look at it from a psychological viewpoint, looking at what goes on in people’s minds. Or you can look at it from the sociological point of view, which tends to see individual thoughts and feelings and beliefs as being ‘socially constructed’, the products of forces in society as a whole. There are probably other ways too.

This book will refer to biological and social factors in human development, and unlike the first edition, it has a chapter devoted to the sociological perspective. But its overall focus could be said to be ‘psychosocial’. It tends to concentrate on the interaction between individual psychological development and social context.

How this Book is Arranged

The chapter headings are, we hope, self-explanatory. The book begins with a birth and ends with a death; the first few chapters look mainly at childhood; the latter part of the book

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moves on through ideas about adolescence, adulthood and old age. So the book's structure very roughly corresponds to the course of a human life. But some chapters are focused on a particular theoretical approach or topic, rather than on a particular stage of life (Chapter 6 deals with the topic of adolescence, for example).

At the beginning of each chapter you will find a list of the topics covered. This is followed by an introduction to the subject matter of the chapter and the various topics to be covered then follow under headings and sub-headings. At the end of each chapter a summary of the chapter's contents is given.

Activities

We have interspersed our text from time to time with 'activities' in which we invite the reader to apply these ideas to imaginary scenarios or to their own lives.

These are intended to provide you with opportunities to reflect on what you have been reading and to relate it to your own experience. Sometimes they will ask you to reflect on your own life experience, partly because our own life experience is inevitably the most vivid source of information that we have about human growth and development, and partly because it is important to be aware of 'where you are coming from' yourself when you get involved in other people's lives. Sometimes they will invite you to consider hypothetical situations which professionals in one or other of the helping professions might encounter in their working lives.

After each activity, we offer some comments on the implications of the activity and sometimes suggest answers to questions where appropriate.

Although it is obviously up to you how much time you give to the activities – and we realise that some people dislike such devices, or do not find them useful – you do need at least to read them through because we will refer to them in the subsequent text.

From time to time, we have also inserted boxes in the text covering particular topics or providing additional commentary to the main text.

Further Reading

In addition to the sources referenced in the text in the normal way, we have included, at the end of each chapter, a Further Reading section space endash suggestions of books that you might want to look at if you want to pursue a subject further. Of course this is not in any way a comprehensive list, but hopefully it will be a useful starting point.