LEARNING QUESTIONS

1.1 Who needs to have a good understanding of child development and why?
1.2 What are the domains of child development and some recurring themes and issues in the field?
1.3 What are the contexts for child development?
1.4 How can you be a smart consumer of information about development?

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Take a moment to think about why you want to learn about children, adolescents, and their development. You may enjoy the interactions you have with children and want to understand them better, or your career goal may involve working with children or adolescents. Perhaps you want to better understand yourself or those you know by exploring how childhood has affected who you have become. Your interest may be more scientific, with a focus on understanding the research that explains the processes of development. Your particular goal will influence how you approach the information in this book.

We have presented the information and designed the activities within this book to stimulate your thinking in all these ways. We want to share with you the excitement that we feel about the topic of child and adolescent development and to pique your curiosity so that you will want to learn even more about it. By the time you have finished reading this book, you will have a solid foundation in a number of important topics related to development. It is our hope that this will motivate you to continue learning about children and their development long after you have completed this course.

In this first chapter, we introduce some of the basic concepts of child and adolescent development. We first look at why people study children, and present some ways that people use knowledge about children to promote positive development. If you are curious about how you might apply this knowledge in a future career, the Active Learning feature in this section will lead you through the process of researching careers that require a solid understanding of child and adolescent development. We then discuss some of the basic themes related to how development occurs and introduce you to the different contexts that influence children’s lives. Finally, we provide strategies and guidelines that will enable you to differentiate reliable information from other material you may encounter as you study child development.

### WHY STUDY CHILD DEVELOPMENT?

1.1 Who needs to have a good understanding of child development and why?

Many people are interested in studying child development because the topic itself is fascinating and important. Others want information they will be able to use in their role as a parent. Many students know that they will be able to use the information in a future career as a professional who works with children or a policymaker who shapes social policy affecting children and families. These are all great reasons to study child development, and we will explore them all in this chapter.

### UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT

One reason why students are interested in studying child development is that experiences in childhood shape who we become as adults. Examining that process helps us to understand the role that infancy, childhood, and adolescence play in forming our abilities, beliefs, and attitudes. Researchers who study children as they develop over long periods of time have provided ample evidence that early traits, behaviors, and experiences are related to
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many adult outcomes. One well-known example of this is a study of gifted children begun by Lewis Terman in 1921 (Friedman & Martin, 2011). Although Terman died many years ago, others are still mining his data to answer questions about life span development. One finding is that those children who were rated high in the quality Terman called conscientiousness or social dependability had many positive outcomes in adulthood, including a reduction of 30% in the likelihood they would die in any particular year (Friedman et al., 1995). How does earlier conscientiousness link with these later outcomes? The connection is partially explained by the fact that conscientious individuals were less likely to smoke and drink alcohol to excess, both of which are predictive of a shorter life span. Some have hypothesized that conscientious people have better marriages, while others think they may be better prepared to handle the emotional difficulties they encounter (Friedman et al., 1995). Ongoing research is continuing to explore the full complexity of these connections.

Although the earliest stages of development are clearly important for later development and functioning, Charles Nelson (1999), neuroscientist and developmental psychologist, has argued that the first 3 years of life are no more important than later periods. He likens early development to building a house. A solid foundation is essential, but the ultimate shape and function of the house depends on adding the walls, the roof, the pipes, and all the rest. Nelson’s focus is on the development of the brain, but his comments could apply to many other areas of child development. He says that while the basic form of the brain is set down within the first years of life, it is continually affected by the experiences we have later in life. An example of this principle comes from research by Alan Sroufe and his colleagues, who found that the nature of infants’ secure relationship with their mother was an important predictor of their ability to have close romantic relationships in adulthood. However, the nature of their peer relationships through middle childhood also related to later romantic relationships (Raby et al., 2015; Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, & Collins, 2005). Experiences early in life have consequences for functioning later in life but experiences all along the path to adulthood also contribute to an adult’s psychological functioning.

**USING OUR KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT**

A second reason to study child development is to be able to use this information to improve the lives of children and adolescents. An understanding of how children think, feel, learn, and grow, as well as how they change and stay the same, is essential to the ability to foster positive development. This understanding can help parents and family members, professionals who work with children and families, and people who create and carry out social policies and programs that affect children and their families to do this.

**Parents and Family Members**

A solid understanding of child development can help all parents do their best in this important role. Many parents read books, search websites, and browse magazines designed to help them understand their children so they can become better parents. How useful any of these sources of information will be to an interested parent depends largely on how well the information in them is grounded in scientific research.

Parents’ understanding of their children’s needs and abilities at each stage of development helps them provide the appropriate amount and type of support and stimulation to
foster their children’s growth and development, but for some parents, knowledge about child development is even more crucial. For example, teen parents are more likely than older parents to lack knowledge about what to expect from their children at different ages. They are likely to talk to and play less with their infants, and to use physical punishment to discipline their children (Mann, Pearl, & Behle, 2004). When teen parents learn about child development, their frustration decreases and they have more realistic expectations for their children, their ability to empathize with their children increases, and they better understand how to discipline their children without resorting to physical punishment.

Another high-risk group that can benefit from parenting interventions is incarcerated parents. When one group of incarcerated parents took part in a program called the Family Nurturing Program, many showed the same kind of gains as those found among teenagers. They became more empathic and less punitive and developed more realistic expectations for their children (Palusci, Crum, Bliss, & Bavolek, 2008).

Child Development Professionals

You may be interested in studying child development because you see yourself in a future career that involves working with children and families. In different ways and at different levels, people in all the helping professions are engaged in the identification and prevention of problems, in providing interventions when problems do occur, and in promoting positive development for all children and teens.

Community organizers, community psychologists, and outreach workers are a few of the professionals that focus on preventing problems before they emerge. Child therapists and family therapists are two types of professionals who help families address existing problems. In child therapy, the therapist meets individually with the child, while family therapists see
other family members together with the child. Social workers, psychologists, marriage and family therapists, and child psychiatrists also provide these and other types of interventions to families. Promoting the optimal development of children and adolescents is a primary goal of professionals who work in the fields of education and health care, and of mental health professionals, youth service workers, and representatives of community organizations who run a variety of programs for children. A strong foundation in the study of child development helps each of these various professionals find and use ways to support and encourage children and adolescents to reach their full potential.

We recognize that students today are interested in knowing where their education can eventually lead them and are hungry for information about future careers. If you are taking this course because you are considering a career related to child development, how much do you know about the career you are thinking about entering? You can assess your current knowledge about a career related to child development by completing Active Learning: How Much Do You Know About Careers in Child Development?

### Active Learning

#### How Much Do You Know About Careers in Child Development?

If you are interested in a career that includes working with children, begin by completing the table below with what you currently know about the career you would like to enter when you finish your education. If you haven’t settled on a career yet, simply choose one that currently holds some interest for you. Even if you feel you have very little information on a particular topic, take your best guess at every answer.

Next, use the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015b) to find current information on your career. At the Bureau of Labor Statistics website at [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov), type “Occupational Outlook Handbook” into the search box or select it from the drop-down menu under “Publications.” There also is likely a copy of the Bureau of Labor Statistics *Occupational Outlook Handbook* in your campus library. Select the career you are interested in from the alphabetic drop-down menu, or type the name of your career in the search box on the page. For each career, you will find information on the following:

- **What people in this career do**—duties and responsibilities.
- **Work environment**—where people in this career work and conditions affecting their employment.
- **How to become a professional in this field**—the education and training required both for entry into the field and for advancement within this career. You will also find information about any certifications or licenses required to work in this profession, and the skills and personal qualities required for success on the job.
- **Pay**—average salaries earned in this career.
- **Job outlook**—how many people are currently employed in this career and whether the demand for this profession is increasing or decreasing.
- **Similar occupations**—additional information about careers related to the one you are researching. For instance, if you think you would like to be a child psychologist, here you can find that related careers include being a counselor, social worker, special education teacher, or recreation worker. If you click on any of these links, it will take you to the page in the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* that provides all the information about that alternative career.

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Contacts for more information—links to professional organizations that support and advocate for people working in that career. The organization webpages are rich sources of information about each career, and you should look at one or two of them before you finish exploring this page.

Although the Occupational Outlook Handbook lists hundreds of occupations, you won’t find every conceivable job title. For instance, child life specialist and early interventionist are not yet in the handbook, but you can find information about a related career to begin your search. Child life specialists do work similar to what a counselor does, but they work in the specialized setting of a hospital, and their clients are children with chronic illnesses and life-threatening conditions and their families.

Name of the career you researched: ____________________________

Does it appear in the Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH)? ______ Yes ______ No
(If “no,” name the related career you researched): ____________________________

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Another very useful website to examine if you are specifically interested in a career in the field of psychology is the American Psychological Association’s site. You can find career information at www.apa.org/careers/resources/guides/careers.aspx

Policymakers
As a society, we have a stake in promoting the well-being of all our citizens, including our children. Our ideas and programs designed to accomplish this constitute our social policy on these issues. Research on child development can guide and inform the people who make these policies. For example, Walter Gilliam (2008), director of the Edward Zigler Center in Child Development and Social Policy at Yale University, found that preschool children in Connecticut were more than 3 times as likely to be expelled as children in Grades K–12. His research also showed that when a mental health consultant was available to help teachers
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Develop ways to handle problem behaviors, far fewer children were expelled. He took his findings to legislators to advocate for a solution. As a result, half of the states now provide early childhood mental health consultation (Perry, 2014). Consider how many young children are being better served because of the research and advocacy of Dr. Gilliam.

Another example of social policy in action is the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), which provides supplemental food and nutrition education for low-income, nutritionally at-risk women, infants, and children up to 5 years of age. Good nutrition during a woman’s pregnancy helps to ensure the healthy development of her baby, and good nutrition during early childhood is associated with a number of positive outcomes throughout a child’s life. Although these are important program outcomes, the WIC program cost almost $6.2 billion in 2015 (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2016). When the budget for an expensive program such as this one is up for renewal, lawmakers look to experts in the field for research evidence of the program’s effectiveness that can justify the expenditure.

Research on WIC has found that participation in the program is associated with a reduced risk of having a low birth weight baby or one who is born prematurely, and an increased probability that a mother will breastfeed her infant (Rossin-Slater, 2015). As you will learn in Chapter 5, both prematurity and low birth weight are associated with a number of negative developmental outcomes. The lifetime financial savings from lower levels of medical intervention needed as a result of the increased birth weight of the children born to WIC participants results in a favorable cost-benefit ratio for the program (Rossin-Slater, 2015). Information such as this helps policymakers evaluate the effectiveness of the program and make modifications to it, if necessary. Active Learning: Social Policy Affecting Children and Adolescents provides some additional information about the type of issues social policy organizations have focused on in recent years.
The mission of the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2015a) is to “advance research and solutions to overcome the barriers to success, help communities demonstrate what works and influence decision makers to invest in strategies based on solid evidence” (para. 2). From its home page at www.aecf.org, click on one of the headings (Kids, Families, Communities, or Leaders) and it will take you to a page that lists reports, blogs, and policy statements related to that topic. One of the most widely used resources from the foundation is its annual Kids Count report which provides up-to-date statistics on children’s health, education, and well-being. From this page, you can create your own state-by-state report using these data.

The mission of the Future of Children (2010) is “to translate the best social science research about children and youth into information that is useful to policymakers, practitioners, grant-makers, advocates, the media, and students of public policy” (para. 1). You will find the website at futureofchildren.org. This organization publishes two issues of its journal each year, each devoted to a single topic. Recent issues have included promoting children’s health, military children and families, and postsecondary education in the United States.

The Society for Research in Child Development is a professional organization with almost 6,000 members in the United States and around the world. It periodically produces policy briefs on a variety of topics related to child development. Go to its home page at www.srcd.org and use the drop-down menu under Publications to select Social Policy Report. On that page, you will find a list of their recent reports.

There is a wealth of information at each site. Visit at least one site now and identify a topic or two that interest you, review the information available, and make a mental note to visit these sites again when you are looking for up-to-date information for a course paper.

As citizens, we bear a responsibility to vote and to speak out for the well-being of our children. The more we understand about their needs, the more effective we will be in advocating on their behalf and supporting the policies we believe will best serve them.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. What are some reasons for studying child development?
2. Who is likely to benefit from being knowledgeable about child development?
3. What is the relationship between social policy and research on child development?

UNDERSTANDING HOW DEVELOPMENT HAPPENS

What are the domains of child development and some recurring themes and issues in the field?

Understanding everything about children’s development is certainly a daunting task. To make it more manageable we organize the material in several ways. One way to do this is to divide information into the different domains of development: physical, cognitive, and social-emotional. Within each of these domains we need to keep our focus on the developmental process, so we also organize information by the ages and stages of life. There also are
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a number of issues that have been debated in the field of child development over the years. We briefly introduce several of those ideas here, but we will revisit them in more detail at various points throughout the book.

**DOMAINS OF DEVELOPMENT**

When studying development, we often distinguish between three basic aspects or domains of development: physical, cognitive, and social-emotional. **Physical development** includes the biological changes that occur in the body and brain, including changes in size and strength, as well as the integration of sensory and motor activities. Neurological, or brain, development has become a major area for research in the domain of physical development. **Cognitive development** includes changes in the way we think, understand, and reason as we grow older. It includes the accumulation of knowledge as well as the way we use that information for problem solving and decision making. **Social-emotional development** includes all the ways we learn to connect to other individuals and interact effectively with them, understand our emotions and the emotions of others, and express and regulate our emotions.

Although it is useful to make distinctions between these domains, it is important to understand that they continually interact with each other. For instance, during puberty adolescents undergo dramatic physical changes over a short period of time, but these changes also affect social development. As adolescents grow to look more like adults and less like children, adults begin to treat them more like adults, giving them new responsibilities and expecting greater maturity from them. These opportunities, in turn, contribute to the cognitive development of adolescents as they learn from their new experiences. In a similar way, when infants learn to walk and can get around on their own, their relationship
with caregivers changes. The word no is heard much more frequently, and infants need more careful supervision because they now can get themselves into dangerous situations. And of course, infants’ enhanced ability to explore the environment gives them many new opportunities to learn about the world in ways that advance their cognitive development.

AGES AND STAGES
As we describe each of the domains of development, we examine how changes occur at the different ages and stages during childhood and adolescence: infancy, toddlerhood, early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence. These terms are used to identify broad periods of development that have behaviors or characteristics that set that stage apart from the other stages.

During infancy (the first year of life), children are totally dependent on their caregivers for their physical care, but they already can use all of their senses to begin exploring their world and during this period they begin developing the motor skills they will need to explore it further. They also form a strong emotional attachment to their caregivers and lay the foundation for learning language. Toddlers (ages 1-3) continue developing their motor skills and can explore their physical world more actively. Language develops at an astonishing rate during this period, and toddlers begin showing independence and autonomy from their caregivers as they learn to do things for themselves. In early childhood (ages 3-6), children are learning about the physical and social world through play. As peers become more important, young children are learning the skills necessary to understand how other people think and feel. During middle childhood (ages 6-12), children develop the intellectual ability to think in a more ordered and structured way and school becomes a major context for development. At this stage, children begin developing a clearer sense of self and an understanding of who they are and what makes them unique. Play and peers are essential parts of their lives. The physical changes associated with puberty mark the transition from childhood into adolescence (ages 12-18). As their bodies undergo the physical changes that move them toward adulthood, adolescents are able to think and reason at a more abstract level and they develop a stronger sense of who they are and who they want to become. Family remains important to them, but peer relationships take on a greater importance than they had before.

THEMES IN THE FIELD OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT
We all have our own ideas about children. You brought some of your own with you when you entered this class. Stop for a few minutes and think of a couple of sentences or phrases that capture what you believe to be true about how child development occurs. Do you believe that if you spare the rod you will spoil the child? Or that as the twig is bent, so grows the tree? Do you think that children are like little sponges? Or that they grow in leaps and bounds? Each of these bits of folk wisdom touches on an issue that has been debated within the field of child development. We briefly discuss several of those issues here but we will revisit them at various points throughout the book.

Nature and Nurture
Throughout history the question of whether our behavior, thoughts, and feelings result from nature, our genetic inheritance, or from nurture, the influence of the environment, has shaped our understanding of why we act certain ways and how we can influence human behavior. The controversy was originally described as nature versus nurture. For example, let’s say you are an aggressive (or shy, or outgoing . . .) person. Researchers wanted to find out whether you became aggressive because you were “born that way,” with your genes determining the outcome, or whether you learned to be aggressive because of what you saw or experienced in your environment. People initially argued for one side or the other, but in more recent times it has become clear that any developmental outcome is a mixture of both.
Researcher D. O. Hebb said that asking whether behavior is due to nature or to nurture is similar to asking whether the area of a rectangle is due to its length or its width (Meaney, 2004). Just as both length and width are necessary to determine area, genes and environment interact to determine behavioral development. More recent research has continued to show how nature and nurture are inextricably intertwined in surprising and complex ways. We have left behind the era of nature versus nurture and entered the era of nature through nurture in which many genes, particularly those related to traits and behaviors, are expressed only through a process of constant interaction with their environment (Meaney, 2010; Stiles, 2009). We discuss these ideas further in Chapter 4.

Continuous Versus Stagelike Development

Is development a series of small steps that modify behavior bit by bit, or does it proceed in leaps and bounds? In Chapter 2 and throughout the rest of the book, you will learn about some theories in the field of child development that describe development as a series of stages children move through, similar to the “leaps” described previously. In these theories, each stage has characteristics that distinguish it from the stages that come before and after. Other theories, however, describe processes that change development in small increments and, therefore, are described as continuous theories.

Another way to think about how we describe the process of development is to differentiate between quantitative and qualitative change. **Quantitative changes** are changes in the amount or quantity of what you are measuring. For instance, as children grow they get taller (they add inches to their height), they learn more new words (the size of their vocabulary grows), and they acquire more factual knowledge (the amount of information in their knowledge base increases). However, some aspects of development are not just the accumulation of more inches or words. Instead, they are **qualitative changes** that alter the overall quality of a process or function, and the result is something altogether different. Walking is qualitatively different from crawling, and thinking about abstract concepts such as justice or fairness is qualitatively different from knowing something more concrete, such as the capitals of all 50 states. **Stage theories** typically describe qualitative changes in development, while **incremental theories** describe quantitative changes. Both types of change occur, and that is why we don’t have just one theory that describes all aspects of development. Some theories are more appropriate for describing certain types of changes than others.

**Stability Versus Change**

How much do we change during the process of development? As we grow, develop, and mature, are we basically the same people we were at earlier ages, or do we reinvent ourselves along the way? We find evidence of both stability and change as we look at development. For instance, characteristics such as anxiety (Weems, 2008), shyness (Dennissen, Asendorpf, & van Aken, 2008; Schmidt & Tasker, 2000), and aggressiveness (Dennissen et al., 2008; Kokko & Pulkkinnen, 2005) tend to be relatively stable over time. However, what does change is the way in which these characteristics are expressed. For example, young children hit, kick, or throw things when they are angry, but school-age children may express...
their aggression through teasing, taunting, and name-calling (Kokko & Pulkkinen, 2005), and adolescents may attack each other through social means (for example, spreading rumors or excluding others from social activities).

Figure 1.1 shows the results of a study of aggressive behavior in children aged 6 to 12. Kokko, Tremblay, Lacourse, Nagin, and Vitaro (2006) identified three different patterns of stability or change in this behavior, shown by the three lines in the figure: (1) The “low” group starts at a low level and remains at a low level through the period of time studied; (2) the “moderate” group starts at a moderately high level at age 6 and stays close to that level over the period studied; (3) the “high-declining” group starts at a relatively high level but ends at a considerably lower level, although still significantly higher than the other two groups. As you look at Figure 1.1, do you wonder what factors contributed to change in a pathway or to its stability? That would be a logical thing to think about next because such information could help us develop interventions to change pathways that can eventually lead to problem behavior.

**Individual Differences**

Scientific research strives to identify general principles that describe average or typical patterns. We want to be able to make general statements about what usually happens. But you cannot spend much time observing children or adolescents without recognizing how different each one is from all the others. Our study of children needs to deal with both aspects of development—those aspects that are universal and shared by all or almost all individuals, and those in which we differ from each other.

Throughout this book you will learn about general conclusions drawn from research. Although these are true as general statements, there also are numerous exceptions that give us insights we would not have otherwise. For example, children who grow up in poverty with...
parents who cannot effectively care for them are at risk for a number of developmental and mental health problems, but a small group manages to thrive in the face of great difficulty. By looking at these children, we can identify factors that help protect a child from some developmental risks.

While we can make a number of valid general statements about how development proceeds, the developmental pathway of any given individual is difficult to predict. Different pathways can result in the same outcome, a process known as **equifinality** (*equi* = equal, *finality* = ends). For example, depression may result from biological and genetic processes, but it also can result from early traumatic experiences. However, it is also true that the same pathway can lead to different outcomes, known as **multifinality** (Cicchetti & Toth, 2009). For example, children who are victims of abuse can have many different long-term outcomes that can include depression but also resiliency and healing. Individual characteristics of a child or an adolescent, including the child’s gender, age, ethnic or racial background, and socioeconomic status, are just some of the characteristics that may influence the specific outcome in any given situation.

This understanding of individual differences has changed the way we view behavioral and emotional disorders. In the field of developmental psychopathology, psychological disorders are now seen as distortions of normal developmental processes (Cicchetti & Toth, 2009; Sroufe, 2009). Accordingly, in this book we include these disorders in our discussions of typical development. For example, language disorders appear with the discussion of typical language development, and attention deficit disorder appears in the section in which we describe typical development of attention. Thinking about atypical development this way may help reduce the stigma associated with mental disorders because it helps us see them as variations in development rather than as illnesses.

**The Role of the Child in Development**

Are you the person you are today because you chose to be that person, or did someone else make you who you are? How you think about that question pretty much sums up the issue of an active child versus a passive one. Some theories presume that forces in the environment shape the development of the child. The clearest example of this way of thinking is called learning theory or behaviorism. As you will see in Chapter 2, this approach explores the way systematic use of rewards and punishment affects the likelihood that a child will—or won’t—behave in certain ways. You may agree with this point of view if you think children are like sponges that absorb whatever they are exposed to or like lumps of clay that parents shape into the type of children they want.

However, other theories in child development give children a much more active role in shaping their own development. For example, Jean Piaget developed a theory of cognitive development based on the idea that children actively explore their environment and in the process create their own theories about how the world works. Another influential theorist, Lev Vygotsky, proposed that learning is a collaborative process in which the child seeks to solve problems while more experienced people provide just enough help to allow the child to continue learning independently. Sandra Scarr and Kathleen McCartney (1983) described a
process of active **niche-picking** in which people express their genetic tendencies by actively seeking out environments they find “compatible and stimulating” (p. 427).

As with some of the other issues we have already discussed, maybe the answer to this issue isn’t one or the other, but rather some combination of both. Richard Lerner (2002) succinctly captured the idea that children are affected by and also affect their environments when he said that children are both the products *and* the producers of their own development. Characteristics of individual children evoke different reactions from the people with whom the children interact, and these reactions provide feedback in a way that can change the children. For example, the way peers respond to obese children is different from the way they respond to children who are not overweight (Zeller, Reiter-Purtill, & Ramey, 2008). These reactions feed back to children and affect their level of self-esteem, which, in turn, will affect their future interactions with peers.

**Positive Psychology**

In recent years, a very important shift has occurred in the field of psychology. For many years, the field has used what has been called a *disease model* (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The primary focus was on understanding the cause of problems in people’s lives and finding ways to restore their functioning and well-being. Beginning in the late 1990s, psychologists began to think more about people’s strengths rather than their weaknesses, and to look for ways to foster optimal outcomes for all individuals, not just those who were struggling. Rather than fixing what was broken, the goal of positive psychology is to nurture what is best in the individual (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Using this approach, researchers have identified a number of human strengths including courage, optimism, interpersonal skills, perseverance, and insight that allow all people not only to survive, but to flourish.

The influence of positive psychology on the study of child development is most clearly seen in the **positive youth development** movement. The framework for positive youth development is based on a set of developmental assets that support optimal development for all children, not just those who are at risk. These assets allow the child to cope with challenges, but also to take advantage of opportunities. We have already said several times in this chapter that you will learn about ways to support optimal development and foster positive growth. Research inspired by the positive youth development perspective appears in many topics throughout the book, including creativity, school achievement, positive parenting, play, stress and coping, and resilience. Chapters 14 and 15 provide detailed information on the impact of activities on youth development and the role of positive experiences in fostering resilience in the face of challenge.

**Integrating Themes and Issues**

Each of the themes and issues presented here cuts across many of the specific topics that you will study. Each also has been the subject of discussion and debate for many years. For that reason, we are not searching for a single best way to understand the complex process of child development. Rather, each of these issues is a lens through which we can view the process. Themes help us tie together the disparate pieces of information that come to us through our research. As you continue to read this book, think about the ways you conceptualize development. As your understanding grows, continue to ask yourself what you believe about development, but also think critically about why you hold these beliefs. You should expect your ideas to undergo some significant changes as your understanding of this process grows.

**CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING**

1. What are the differences between physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development?

2. Why is the relationship between nature and nurture relevant to the study of child development?

3. Contrast quantitative and qualitative changes that occur in development.

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*Niche-picking* The process by which people express their genetic tendencies by finding environments that match and enhance those tendencies.

*Positive youth development* An approach to finding ways to help all young people reach their full potential.
Part I: Understanding Development: Why and How We Study Children and Adolescents

1.3 What are the contexts for child development?

Children around the world are similar to one another in many ways, but the way development occurs varies widely depending on the context in which a child grows up. Context is a very broad term that includes all the settings in which development occurs. Children develop in multiple contexts that include family, schools, communities, and cultures. Throughout this book you will learn about these different contexts and the way they influence various aspects of children's development.

FAMILY

Families are the primary context for development for most children. Families today take many different forms, but whether they are nuclear families, single-parent families, stepfamilies, or adoptive families, they all serve one important function: They are responsible for the socialization of their children. They instill the norms, values, attitudes, and beliefs of their culture so that children grow up to be positive, contributing members of their society.

In Chapter 13, we discuss the effect of different family forms on child development, and also examine the ways that families link children and adolescents to the other contexts that influence their development.

Some families have more resources than others and some have less, and these differences affect children's development. Socioeconomic status (SES) is a combined measure of a family's income and parental education and occupation (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). In general, a higher SES allows a family to have more resources to support healthy child development. Beginning before the child is born, low SES parents have less access to good prenatal care, and their babies are more likely to be born prematurely or at low birth weight and to develop other long-term health problems. Children who spend time living in poverty are found on average to have lower academic performance than those who do not. This makes sense if you consider that parents with more resources are able to provide books, educational experiences, and other activities that a family with few resources cannot. In addition, poorer nutrition and less access to health care affect the growing brain and body, influencing a child's ability to learn. Finally, families with few resources are more likely to experience highly stressful events, such as loss of income, relocation, divorce and separation, and violence (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Children's response to stress such as this, especially when it is repeated, puts severe strains on their ability to develop optimally. You will learn about the effects of a family's socioeconomic status as a context for children's development as you read about development throughout this book.

SCHOOL

In most countries, school is another important context for development. During the school year, children ages 6 to 17 spend 6 to 7 hours a day at school (Juster, Ono, & Stafford, 2004). Within this context, children learn academic skills, such as reading, writing, and arithmetic and older children and adolescents are prepared for higher education or entry into the workforce, but schools also play a role in socializing children to become good citizens. In recent years, schools have increasingly taken on functions other than educating children. Today schools provide nutritious meals, some health care, and social services for their students (de Cos, 2001). School also is where most children and adolescents make friends, and sometimes become the victims of bullies. You can see from this description why we will talk about schools as a developmental context when we are talking about physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development. You will learn more about the role that schools play in fostering academic achievement in Chapter 8.

Socialization The process of instilling the norms, attitudes, and beliefs of a culture in its children.

Culture The system of behaviors, norms, beliefs, and traditions that form to promote the survival of a group that lives in a particular environmental niche.

Socioeconomic status A person's social standing based on a combined measure of income, education, and occupation.
COMMUNITY

The characteristics of the community in which children live impact many aspects of development (Narine, Krishnakumar, Roopnarine, & Logie, 2013). Economic adversity in a community will affect the range and quality of support services available to children and their families. The quality of neighborhood schools affects the educational opportunities and out-of-school activities that are available. Whether a neighborhood is safe or not affects the amount of time children might spend outside their homes and the kinds of things they do with this time. The amount of noise in the environment can physically harm their hearing or disrupt their learning and social interaction with others (Shield & Dockrell, 2003). Community environments can promote healthy development, or they can expose children to environmental pollutants, including air that is unhealthy to breathe, water that is unsafe to drink, and toxins that can cause physical and neurological damage.

CULTURE

The general findings from research on development are modified not only by individual differences, but also by group differences, such as those between different cultures. For example, a very strict parenting style would likely have a different effect on children raised in a culture that views strictness as a sign of love and care than in one that views the same behavior as a sign the parent doesn’t like the child. Matsumoto and Juang (2004) point out that culture is a way of describing similarities within one group of people and differences between groups of people. These similarities within a group may include customs, language, beliefs, values, and many other characteristics that can differentiate one group from another. Culture emerges from a group’s environmental niche or their place in their particular environment. Culture forms to promote the survival of the group in its niche by improving the ability of the group to meet the demands of an environment. For example, a desert society will have different rules and traditions than a society located on rich farmland.

Throughout the book we draw on cross-cultural studies to illustrate both research that finds similarities across cultures, which suggests there is a universal process at work, and research that illustrates important differences between cultures. Much of what you will read
is based on research carried out in Western, developed countries, but increasingly the study of child development seeks to understand children within the context of their own cultures. One of the important changes in the field of child development in recent years has been a deeper, richer appreciation of this diversity.

Despite this increasing awareness, it is still easy to slip into the assumption that the way we do things is the right way and that other ways are wrong. For example, Robert LeVine and colleagues (1994) showed U.S. mothers videos of mothers from the Gusii people in Kenya. The U.S. mothers were appalled that 5- and 6-year-old children in these videos were put in charge of their infant siblings and that mothers did not praise their children. On the other hand, when he showed tapes of the U.S. mothers to the Gusii mothers, they were appalled that mothers did not nurse their babies immediately when they cried and they could not understand why U.S. mothers talked to their babies when the babies clearly could not understand them.

To understand a culture other than our own, we must understand its environmental context and its values. Infant mortality is a major problem for the Gusii, so the protection and health of infants is the primary concern. Mothers in this culture soothe and calm their babies by nursing them often to prevent the stress of crying. Health is also an issue in the United States but can usually take a backseat to our emphasis on engaging and teaching infants. Stimulating the infant’s cognitive development is a priority, so talking to babies, offering toys, and interacting are important. Neither of these approaches is right or wrong. Both are responsive to the realities of the environment in which they occur, usually in a way to best promote the well-being of the children.

When we look at parenting practices in other cultures, we need to guard against labeling those practices as deficient when in reality they are simply different from practices that are more familiar to us. For an example of how we may misinterpret the actions and intentions of people whose culture is different from our own, see Active Learning: Cultural Competence and Grief.

**Active Learning**

**Cultural Competence and Grief**

Joanne Cacciatore (2009) recounts an experience she had with a family that had just suffered the unexpected death of a 18-month-old son. Although two sets of grandparents and the young child’s parents were present, no one except one of the grandfathers would talk with a representative of the medical examiner’s office. When the grandfather did talk with her, he stayed at least 4 feet away and did not make eye contact. He steadfastly insisted that no autopsy be performed on the child’s body, even though the law required one in cases of sudden child deaths in his state. The family sat in the medical examiner’s office for almost 2 hours in silence, with little or no show of emotion. When they finally were asked whether they wanted to have some time with the dead child to say their good-byes, they adamantly refused.

How would you interpret this family’s behavior? What circumstances could account for it? How does it fit with your cultural beliefs regarding the way a family grieves for the death of a young child? Does their behavior seem typical, atypical, or pathological to you?

Answer: This case involved a Native American family and their behaviors were completely expected and normal for some families.
One way in which cultures vary is along the continuum from individualism to collectivism. U.S. culture is based on values of rugged individualism. Our heroes often are those who are self-made and managed to rise from deprived circumstances to become successful. In other cultures, the emphasis is more on an obligation to those around you: your family or your group, however you define it.

Cultural values are expressed in overt behaviors such as how we greet people, but there are also much more subtle ways in which culture guides not only our behaviors but the ways in which we think or experience our feelings. How is such subtle cultural information taught to children? Certainly there are some cultural expectations that are taught explicitly to them. For example, we might say to a child “Look at me when I’m speaking to you” versus “Be careful to show respect and look down when addressing your elders.” However, much cultural information is conveyed in less obvious ways. For example, in many cultures around the world, the value of connection to others is communicated even in infancy because babies are constantly kept close to the mother’s body, sleeping with the mother, while she anticipates the baby’s needs. In cultures that value individualism, babies are expected to sleep through the night in their own bed and are praised for soothing themselves when they cry (Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni, & Maynard, 2003).

Robin Harwood studied middle-class mothers in Connecticut and in Puerto Rico. She was interested in how the individualistic values of American society and the more collectivist values of Puerto Rican society might be taught even to infants through the way that their mothers interacted with them. With this in mind, Harwood and her colleagues set out to see whether the feeding practices of mothers in the two cultures would reflect these different value systems (Miller & Harwood, 2002). Think about the scene you expect to see when a mother feeds her 1-year-old baby. If you were born in the United States, most likely you have an image of the baby sitting in a high chair. The mother spoon-feeds the baby but often lets the baby take the spoon to begin learning to feed herself (usually with messy and somewhat hilarious results, as shown in the leftmost photo on this page). She may also put some “finger food,” like dry cereal, on the tray for the baby to take on her own. Contrast this picture with that of the typical Puerto Rican mother and baby. This mother spoon-feeds the baby to make sure that the baby eats well, the feeding remaining under her control and not the baby’s, as shown in the photo at the right. What is the subtle message that each mother is giving to her

**Cultural differences in feeding.** Babies in individualistic cultures are often encouraged to try to feed themselves, but babies in collectivist cultures are more likely to be fed in a way that emphasizes that eating is an opportunity to enjoy family closeness. Do you see how these different cultural values are reflected in these pictures?

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**Individualism** The cultural value that emphasizes the importance of the individual with emphasis on independence and reliance on one’s own abilities.

**Collectivism** The cultural value that emphasizes obligations to others within your group.

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baby from her earliest days of life? The American mother is saying, “Be independent. Learn to do things on your own separately from me. We will watch and praise you.” The Puerto Rican mother is saying, “Be close to family. Listen to and cooperate with your parents. Enjoy your food in the context of family love and expectations for proper behavior.” Thus, cultural values are translated directly into parenting techniques. Babies are learning the values of their culture even with their first bites of food.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. What is the primary context for most children’s development?
2. How does socioeconomic status affect a child’s development?
3. How does culture affect childrearing?

BEING A SMART CONSUMER OF INFORMATION ABOUT DEVELOPMENT

1.4 How can you be a smart consumer of information about development?

Information about children and child development is everywhere—in books, magazines, and television programs, at home, and online. How can you judge the quality of the information you see, both in this course and elsewhere? You will be better able to do this if you become an informed consumer of information about development.

KNOWING YOUR SOURCES

Information about child development is readily available, but not all of it is true or reliable. How do you know you are getting information from someone who is knowledgeable about the field and who is providing information that is objective and unbiased?

Your campus library owns many journals, books, and professional publications in the field of child development, and you can trust these to be reliable sources of information. You can probably access many of them through your library’s electronic databases. For students in child and adolescent development, the PsycINFO and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) databases are probably of greatest interest. PsycINFO contains nearly 4 million records that include peer-reviewed journals, books, and dissertations from the 17th century to the present (American Psychological Association, n.d.). ERIC is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education and has more than 1.4 million bibliographic records of journal articles and other education-related materials, including conference papers and reports (Institute of Education Sciences, n.d.). In these databases, you can find abstracts of articles (brief summaries of the research done and the conclusions drawn from it) and information that will allow you to locate the complete articles.

The reason you can have confidence in the information you find in professional journals is that many of them use a peer review process to determine which articles they will publish. After an article is submitted to a journal, it is reviewed by professionals knowledgeable about the topic of the research. These research peers tell the journal editors whether they think the article should be published and often make suggestions to improve it. This process ensures that the information you take from a peer-reviewed journal has passed professional scrutiny before it ever got into print.

However, when you turn to the Internet to find information and use a search engine such as Google or Yahoo! you need to provide your own scrutiny and use good judgment. Remember that anyone can post information on the web, so the author of a web page does not necessarily have any particular expertise. The information may simply be wrong, or it

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may be opinion masquerading as fact. This is especially a risk when you are researching a controversial topic. Commercial sites may provide some amount of legitimate information, but often their real intent is to sell you a product (Piper, 2000).

Although the Wikipedia website is popular with college students, anyone can write an article or edit an existing post on the site. An author does not have to have any expertise on a topic to post an entry. For these reasons, Wikipedia is not considered a reliable source of information for most purposes. If you do use a site like this, use it as a starting point only for background information, and be sure to expand your search to include other professional sources of information. Many Wikipedia entries include a bibliography of professional books and articles that may help send you in the right direction to find scientific information on the topic you are researching.

Many libraries currently use Jim Kapoun’s guidelines for evaluating webpages you want to use for research. You can use these guidelines to evaluate a webpage that interests you by completing Active Learning: Evaluating Information on the Web.

### Evaluating Information on the Web

Begin this activity by picking a topic related to child development that you would like to know more about. For example, what is the effect of violent video games on children’s level of aggression, or how does parental divorce affect teens’ romantic relationships? Find a website devoted to this topic through a search engine such as Google and evaluate it using the criteria below.

Name of the site you found: _________________________________________________________

URL: _________________________________________________________________________________

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<th>1. Accuracy of Web Documents</th>
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<td>• What is the purpose of the document and why was it produced?</td>
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<td>• Is this person qualified to write this document?</td>
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Next, log on to PsycINFO through your campus library website and search for the same research topic. Be sure to enter specific search terms for the topic you’ve chosen, not a full sentence or phrase; for example, enter video games on one line and aggression on the next rather than entering effect of video games on aggression on one line. Chances are your search will return many, many published articles. If it doesn’t, try changing one or more of your search terms. For instance, if you searched for teenagers, you could try searching for adolescents. Choose one or two of the articles that you find that give you electronic access to the full text of the articles and look over the information.

What are advantages and disadvantages of using the Internet versus PsycINFO for finding information on child development? How much do you trust the information in each? What gives you confidence in the results you found?

**BECOMING A CRITICAL THINKER**

As you learn about child development, don’t hesitate to look for answers to your own questions. No single book can contain all the information you need on any topic, so seek out divergent opinions on topics that intrigue you. Expose yourself to a wide range of ideas. You will probably find some that make sense to you and some that are harder to accept, but keep an open mind and don’t stop asking questions and learning. Just be sure you turn to credible sources of information as you go through this process. As you learn more about research methods in Chapter 3, you will become better able to examine the evidence behind the ideas you find rather than just relying on what someone else has said.

Remember that a science is an organized body of knowledge that is accumulated over time so it is always changing and growing. Throughout the book you will find features called the Journey of Research. In these features there will be a brief historical sketch of how some important ideas in the field have developed over the years. Our current understanding of a topic will make more sense to you when you understand the origin of those ideas.

As new ideas come into existence, old ideas fall out of favor as they are replaced with better information. For instance, autism was once attributed to (or perhaps we should say “was blamed on”) mothers who were cold and rejecting toward their children, but today research on autism focuses on differences in the structure and functioning of the brain in autistic children as an underlying cause. The fact that an idea has been around for a long time—or that many people endorse it—does not necessarily mean it is true. Remember that for a very long time, everyone believed that the earth was flat. Likewise, just because an idea is new doesn’t necessarily mean it is better than what we believed before. New research findings need to be tested and replicated, or produced again by others, before we can gain confidence that they are accurate and reliable. The best suggestion here is to be open to new ideas but to be cautious about jumping on a bandwagon until there is good evidence that the bandwagon is going in the right direction. If new ideas cannot be replicated, they are not a fact—they are a fluke!

**GUARDING AGAINST GENERALIZATIONS**

As you learn about child development, it is easy to assume others have had experiences the same as or similar to yours with the same or similar consequences. Your own experiences are meaningful and real. They all become part of what has made you the person you are today and help shape the person you will be tomorrow. That fact is never in question, but
your experiences may not represent the average or typical experience of other people. Trying to generalize from one particular experience to general statements is always dangerous. Likewise, when we conduct research we cannot necessarily generalize findings based on one population to another population that might have different characteristics.

The opposite of this is also true. When you read about conclusions drawn from research, they may not describe what your personal experiences were, but this does not mean the research is invalid. Rather it reminds us that research describes the outcome for groups, not for every individual within a group. When we say men are more physically aggressive than women, for instance, it does not mean every man is more aggressive than any woman, only that on average there is a difference between the groups, and within the groups there is a good deal of individual variability.

**AVOIDING PERCEPTUAL BIAS**

Sometimes students think that child development is just common sense and that they already know everything they need to know. Unfortunately, it isn’t that simple. We can’t rely on folk wisdom, or ideas that are widely accepted but have not been scientifically tested, to tell us what we need to know about development. Having such preconceived ideas can also affect how you process new information. As you read this book, it will be easier for you to remember the facts you encounter that fit well with what you already believe to be true, and to forget or ignore those that don’t. This tendency to see and understand something based on the way you expected it to be is called a **perceptual bias** and it can affect your learning. That is one reason we will use common misconceptions to begin each chapter. Testing your knowledge about the topics in the chapter before you begin reading will make you more aware of information in the chapter that will challenge your initial ideas. You will want to spend a little more time and effort making sure you understand this information.

**Active Learning: Testing Your Knowledge of Child Development** provides a selection of questions that appear in the chapters that follow. You can take a few minutes here to test your current knowledge about these topics. Pay special attention to the information that challenges the ideas that you are bringing with you to this class. We hope you will look forward to learning more about any of these answers that do not correspond to your current beliefs as you read this book.

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**Active LEARNING**

**Testing Your Knowledge of Child Development**

1. T ☐ F ☐ Each human being has hundreds of thousands of genes that make him or her a unique individual.
2. T ☐ F ☐ Research has shown that exposing a fetus to extra stimulation (for example, playing music near the woman’s stomach) can stimulate advanced cognitive development.
3. T ☐ F ☐ Humans use only 10% of their brain.
4. T ☐ F ☐ Children who are gifted or talented often pay a price for their giftedness because they are likely to be socially or emotionally maladjusted.
5. T ☐ F ☐ It is perfectly fine to use baby talk with infants.
6. T ☐ F ☐ There is not a very strong relationship between your moral values and beliefs and what you will actually do when making a decision about how you should behave.

(Continued)
7. **T** **F** **F** 
Adolescents today are much less likely to be victims of violence while in school than they were 20 years ago.

8. **T** **F** **F** 
A good deal of parent–adolescent conflict is normal in families with adolescents.

9. **T** **F** **F** 
The incidence of stepfamilies in the United States has not changed much from 1900 to today.

10. **T** **F** **F** 
Adults who were abused as children are likely to become abusive parents themselves.

**Answers:**

1. **False.** The Human Genome Project has mapped all the genes that make up a human being and they only found 20,000 to 25,000 genes, not the 100,000 or more that they had expected to find (Chapter 4).

2. **False.** Although a fetus is able to hear and even respond to sounds prior to birth, there is no evidence that auditory stimulation beyond the level provided by the natural prenatal environment has any extra cognitive benefits (Chapter 5).

3. **False.** Neurologist Barry Gordon, who studies the brain, finds the notion that we use only 10% of our brain ridiculous. He says, “It turns out … that we use virtually every part of the brain, and that [most of] the brain is active almost all the time” (Boyd, 2008, para. 5) (Chapter 6).

4. **False.** Gifted children have generally been found to be socially and emotionally well-adjusted and to feel positive about their gifts and abilities (Chapter 8).

5. **True.** The way adults often talk to babies—in a high-pitched voice, with a great deal of exaggeration, and in a singsong rhythm—is actually well suited to the hearing capabilities and preferences of a baby. Babies pay attention to us when we talk this way, and doing it will not delay their language development (Chapter 9).

6. **True.** Although we like to think that our behavior always reflects our values and ethics, in real-world situations there are many other factors that influence what we actually do (Chapter 11).

7. **True.** In 1992, the rate of violent victimization of teens was 53 students per 1,000, while in 2014 the rate had dropped to 14 students per 1,000 (Chapter 12).

8. **False.** A lot of parent–adolescent conflict does occur in some families, but conflict is not overwhelming or pervasive in most families (Chapter 13).

9. **True.** The incidence (or likelihood of occurrence) of stepfamilies is similar in these two periods of time, but the reason for their creation has changed. Today stepfamilies come about primarily due to divorce, while in the past they were due to death of one of the parents or marital desertion (Chapter 13).

10. **False.** This is one of the most serious misunderstandings about child abuse. About 30% of abused children perpetuate the cycle by repeating abuse when they themselves become parents, but the majority do not. They successfully break the cycle when they reach adulthood (Chapter 15).

How did you do? Many of these questions represent common beliefs, so it wouldn’t be surprising if you got a number of them wrong. The purpose of these quizzes is not to make you feel badly about what you do or don’t know, but rather to point out that many ideas that we have about child development that sound like “common sense” don’t agree with what research has shown to be the case. We hope your results make you eager to learn more about these topics, but remember to pay extra attention to those ideas that contradict your preconceived ideas.

**GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR TEXTBOOK**

You are making a substantial investment of time and money when you buy a textbook for a course. For that reason, you will want to be sure that you get the most you possibly can from your book.

We have already told you that you will want to use the True/False Quiz that begins each chapter to identify important ideas that challenge your initial level of understanding, and the Journey of Research to put current ideas into a historical context that shows the evolution...
of our thinking on a given topic. But there is another feature of this text that is designed specifically to support your learning. Each chapter begins with a set of Learning Questions that point to the major topics covered in the chapter. These can act as guideposts that will help focus your learning. When you complete each section of the chapter, you will find a set of review questions that will Check Your Understanding. Use these questions as an opportunity to make sure you have a good understanding of that topic before moving on to the next one. When you have finished a chapter, the Chapter Summary repeats the Learning Questions and summarizes the most relevant information on each topic.

We all learn best when we can relate new ideas to our own experiences. To facilitate opportunities for this type of learning, we provide a variety of Active Learning features. Throughout this book, you will find activities that help you feel or think the way a child feels or thinks, or to reflect on your own experiences while you were growing up. Other activities allow you to carry out simple experiments or observations with children and adolescents to see for yourself examples of the behaviors we are describing. There are videos available for most of the Active Learning features that involve children that will show you how the activity is done, whether you plan to do it yourself or simply want to see how it is done. You will also find some activities that help you test your understanding of the material presented, some that are designed to help you learn how to find the kind of information you will need when you are working with children, and others that involve interviewing parents about their experiences. Each of us constructs our understanding of any new information in a unique way. All of these activities are designed to help you relate the text material to your own life, view development from many different perspectives, and gain new insight into various aspects of development. We hope that all these opportunities help you develop a deep understanding of the material so that your new knowledge will stay with you far beyond the end of your course and influence how you understand and interact with children and adolescents in the future.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. How does peer review assure readers that scientific information is valid and reliable?
2. What does it mean to be a critical thinker?
3. What is perceptual bias?

CONCLUSION

We hope this chapter has made you eager to learn more about child development. Now that you have been introduced to some of the basic concepts in the field, you are ready to explore these concepts more deeply. As you read this book, we want you to take an active role in your own learning process. By using the activities we have provided, you will be able to examine your current beliefs about children and adolescents and then move to new levels of understanding that you can continue to build upon.

Our understanding of the nature of child development has important consequences for our ability to foster children's positive growth. There are so many interesting and important topics in the pages that follow that it is difficult to pick just a few to highlight, but they include understanding what can be done to help ensure a healthy pregnancy for both mother and infant, developing educational practices that help children across a wide range of abilities to thrive in their classrooms, and learning about the new and exciting findings from the field of neuroscience that are helping us to understand how the brain works. We look at what promotes healthy development as well as what threatens it and the protective factors that can buffer those negative effects. We also discuss how all of this unfolds in the increasingly diverse world in which children live.
CHAPTER SUMMARY

Test your understanding of the content.
Take the practice quiz at edge.sagepub.com/levine3e

The chapter summary at the end of each chapter is designed in a question/answer format so you can test yourself to see what you have learned. While looking at each question, cover the answer and try to answer it yourself. Then see how the answer corresponds to your own understanding. Self-testing is a very effective way to study and learn.

1.1 Who needs to have a good understanding of child development and why?
Informed parents and family members are better able to understand their children’s needs and abilities at each stage of development, which helps them respond appropriately to their children and provide the amount and type of stimulation that supports their children’s growth and development. Professionals in a variety of careers, including pediatricians, teachers, social workers, counselors, therapists, lawyers, nurses, and people in many other careers, all draw on child development knowledge in their work. Policymakers who are responsible for shaping social policy are guided in their decision making by knowledge of how it will affect children and families. Citizens who are knowledgeable about child development can advocate or vote for policies that promote positive child development.

1.2 What are the domains of child development and some recurring themes and issues in the field?
Physical development consists of the biologically based changes that occur as children grow. Cognitive development consists of the changes that take place in children’s thinking and learning. Social-emotional development consists of the changes that occur in children’s understanding and expression of emotions as well as their ability to interact with other people. These domains continually interact with each other to shape development. Development is divided into stages that include infancy, toddlerhood, early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence. Themes in the study of development include debate about the relative contribution of nature and nurture to development, whether change is incremental (quantitative) or stagelike (qualitative), and how much stability versus change occurs over time. In addition, different developmental pathways may result in the same outcome (equifinality), and the same developmental pathways may result in different outcomes (multifinality). Examining less adaptive processes and outcomes is the domain of developmental psychopathology. Another theme centers on whether children play an active role in their own development or are passive recipients of external influences. Through the process of niche-picking, people express their genetic tendencies by seeking out compatible environments. Positive psychology looks at people’s strengths rather than weaknesses and seeks to foster optimal development. In child development, this perspective is reflected in the positive youth development movement.

1.3 What are the contexts for child development?
The contexts for development include a child’s family, as well as their schools, communities, and culture. Family is the primary context for development for most children and is responsible for their socialization. Family resources, including their socioeconomic status (SES), make a significant impact on the experiences a child will have. Characteristics of the school a child attends and the community in which the child lives affect every aspect of development. Although we see cultural differences in how parents raise their children, one approach is not better than another because each culture prepares children to be successful in the context of their particular environment. Cultures vary along the continuum of individualism and collectivism.

1.4 How can you be a smart consumer of information about development?
Know that your sources are knowledgeable and objective. Be sure your information is based on scientific evidence that has been replicated in studies conducted by more than one researcher. Look for convergence from many different sources of information and think critically about them. Don’t generalize from a single example, but also don’t reject the results of research because your individual experiences don’t agree with the research findings. Try to be objective so that you don’t fall prey to perceptual bias that just confirms what you already expected. Finally, examine your preconceptions carefully to determine what is scientifically based fact and what is unproven folk wisdom. To get the most from your textbook, use all of the features in it.
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