

Child Development Worldwide

NARRATOR:

Growing up is universal. Every culture distinguishes children from adults, and children across all cultures share developmental experiences. But a child's journey from conception to adulthood is guided by the culture or cultures in which the child is raised. How and when a child reaches adulthood varies widely across the world. Children in some cultures take on extensive work and household responsibilities at a young age, while in other cultures, becoming an adult and taking on adult responsibilities happens in the 20s. *Child Development Worldwide: A Cultural Approach* highlights cultural diversity within and across nations.

The first chapter introduces today's global human population and traces the history of how humans evolved to be a singularly cultural species—able to adapt to life in almost any part of the world. The chapter also shows how a human child is born at a less mature stage of development than any other species. Humans are influenced by genetics, but our immaturity at birth means brain maturation and early learning takes place within cultural environments, making us a uniquely adaptable species

But that early immaturity also makes us vulnerable. A child is most vulnerable during prenatal development and the first years of life, illustrated in chapters 2 and 3. Prenatal care for mother and baby improve the chance that all will go well, as does adequate nutrition in a child's first few years. Yet, even today, 80 percent of children in developing countries lack sufficient food and nutrients.

Chapter 4 looks at physical development and health in the 21st century. One example: although children in developing countries remain vulnerable to malnutrition and illness, today's children, adolescence, and emerging adults are bigger, stronger, and healthier than in any previous time in history.

Cognitive development is the focus of chapter 5, which explores children going from sensation based and concrete ways of thinking about the world, to abstract and complex cognition during adolescence. From peek-a-boo to poetry.

Babies can't speak, but chapter 6, all about learning language, shows they have an astounding ability to detect differences among sounds in all languages. Babies go from zero words to fluency in relatively few years. This chapter also describes children's creativity with language, including their ability to create sign language and slang.

CHILD:

"This is how you sign eat. This is how you sign more."

NARRATOR:

Across cultures, children learn to regulate their emotions explored in chapter 7. But the development of emotions, the self, and identity, also varies widely. The two's are not terrible everywhere. Adolescents are not volatile everywhere. And the self is not esteemed everywhere. However, children develop a gendered self everywhere as chapter 8 explains. Gender frames our emotion, thoughts, and actions, even as the strictness of gender roles varies widely across cultures and continues to change.

Chapters 9 through 13 focus on the network of social context that surround children's development beginning with friends and families in chapters 9 and 10. In all the world's cultures, family is the main context in which

children develop. Every young child needs the love and protection of parents or primary care givers to thrive. Children also rely on friends for support as well as for fun.

By adolescence and emerging adulthood, the emotional center of young people's lives often shifts from their immediate families to friends and romantic partners. But the timing and nature of this shift varies greatly from culture to culture. Chapters 11 and 12 explore how school and media profoundly shape children's knowledge and their emotional and social development. 150 years ago, few children in any country received schooling outside the home. And few had any exposure to media. In most of the world today, children's lives are oriented around school, and most children use media every day. About 90 percent of American babies have watched TV by age 9 months, and more than 90 percent of 13- to 17-year-olds connect to the internet daily.

Chapter 13 examines children moral, religious, and civic development. The emergence of emotions such as empathy and guilt, the development of reasoning about right and wrong, and involvement in religious and community organizations.

All of us share a common child development experience. No one can walk or talk in the early months of life. Everyone experiences puberty and reaches physical and sexual maturity in the second decade of life. But the culture in which we are raised also influences everything about us; from who lives in the household during childhood, to how much education we receive, to the gender expectations that shape us.

Child Development Worldwide delivers a deeper understanding of children's developmental journeys and a richer understanding of ourselves.