

Universal Themes: Fear & Safety

12 Common Developmental Themes

Universal Themes

Fears (Freud, 1926; Lieberman & Van Horn, 2008) • Pain • Loss (separation anxiety) • Losing love and approval • Body damage • Being bad (social disapproval)	Safety (Lieberman, 2014) • Being with loved ones • Food • Shelter • Bodily pleasures • Beauty • Meaning
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12 Common Developmental Themes (Lieberman, Ghosh Ippen, & Van Horn, 2015)

1. Crying and proximity-seeking are the young child's most basic communication tools, and children develop a healthy sense of competence and self-esteem when the parent responds by offering comfort.
2. Young children have a strong desire to please their parents, although parents are often unaware of it.
3. Separation anxiety is an expression of love and fear of loss rather than a manipulative ploy.
4. Young children fear losing their parent's love and approval.
5. Young children imitate their parents because they want to be like them.
6. Children blame themselves when their parent is angry or upset or when something goes wrong. This tendency is an emotional by-product of the cognitive egocentrism of young children, which leads them to overestimate their role in the relation between cause and effect (Piaget, 1959).
7. Young children believe that the parents are always right, know everything, and can do anything they wish. This belief in the parents' omnipotence goes hand in hand, often paradoxically, with children's belief in their own power and their determination to assert it.
8. Children feel loved and protected when parents are confident about their child-rearing practices and enforce their rules about what is safe and what is dangerous, right and wrong, allowed and forbidden.
9. Toddlers and preschoolers use the word "no" as a way of establishing a sense of autonomy, not out of disrespect for the parents.
10. Babies and young children remember. They have well-developed memories from an early age, and their capacity to remember precedes their capacity to speak about their memories. Memory is particularly vivid for events that evoke strong emotions, such as joy, anger, or fear. The memories may not be completely accurate because they are influenced by the child's affective state and cognitive level, including their understanding of cause-effect relations. Children are keen observers of what happens around them and may remember it for a long time afterward.
11. Babies, toddlers, and preschool children feel intensely but don't yet know how to regulate their emotions. Intense crying, tantrums, and aggression are not expressions of the child's intrinsic nature but manifestations of distress that the child is too immature to express in socially acceptable ways.
12. Conflicts between parents and children are inevitable due to their different goals, personalities, and developmental agendas. Conflicts can serve a valuable developmental function when they are used to highlight the separate but equal legitimacy of the partners' goals and wishes and to mobilize collaboration for the purpose of resolution.