Erik Erikson, a 20th century psychologist, believed that people need to complete approximately 8 major psychosocial tasks during their lifetimes to become healthy personalities. If individuals are prevented through lack of nurturing from at least partially mastering each developmental task, their feelings of confidence and competence may be damaged. They may be less able to successfully function emotionally and socially in the world as older children and adults. The first two of Erikson’s developmental tasks are most important to us because of our interest in babies and toddlers.

**Stage 1: A sense of basic trust**

The first major task of life is to form a basic trust that the world and the people in it are friendly and predictable. A sense of basic trust gives new humans the feeling that they are loved and have value in the eyes of the most important adults around them. The formation of basic trust is the major task of a baby’s first year.

Completing this task depends primarily on loving, responsive, dependable parents. Other adults, such as grandparents and other family members as well as child care providers, also greatly matter.

Trust formed at this early stage gives a person confidence in herself or himself and a lifelong sense of curiosity about exploring the world.

**Stage 2: A sense of autonomy (independence)**

The second major task is to form a sense of independence, the feeling of being able to explore and accomplish things separately from parents. This task begins to occur as babies learn to walk and talk, that is, as they become toddlers.

Adults sometimes say that toddlers get into everything. Yes, they do want to explore everything if they trust themselves and the world around them! Learning and testing how things work, their own bodies, relationships, and all things mechanical is their major developmental task.

At this time loving parents and other adults must learn to appreciate their enthusiasm and curiosity, to guide them in controlling their behavior, and to set firm, reasonable limits for them. We can also celebrate their healthy emotional development by playing with them and helping them learn about the world.

By guiding their behavior and being playful teachers, we keep their trust and shape their growing sense of “I can do it!”