

As well as describing patterns of human growth and development, professionals try to explain *why* they happen. These explanations can have important implications for how we provide care for people.



Death is one of the few universal experiences that all human beings encounter.

Your assessment criteria:

P2 Explain the potential effects of five different life factors on the development of an individual

M1 Discuss the nature–nurture debate in relation to the development of an individual

D1 Evaluate how nature and nurture may affect the physical, intellectual, emotional and social development of two stages of the development of an individual

M1 Nature–nurture explanations

The nature–nurture debate contrasts two important ways of explaining human growth and development:

- The *nature* approach suggests that people are born with qualities, abilities and characteristics that determine the kind of person they will become.
- The *nurture* approach argues it is the way a person is brought up and their circumstances that are more important influences on the kind of person they become.

Nature influences on human growth and development include genetic factors and biological processes that affect the person from within. People who take an extreme nature viewpoint argue that we are pre-programmed by our genes and biological processes to develop and behave in certain ways. By contrast, nurture influences are non-biological, environmental factors that affect the person from outside. People who take an extreme nurture viewpoint argue that human beings are not programmed to develop in a specific way because we have free will, can make lifestyle choices and are influenced by a complex range of psychological, social, geographic and economic factors.



Key terms

Nature influences: biological factors and processes that influence growth and development

Nurture influences: external environmental influences on growth and development

The nature–nurture debate is often presented as an argument between two extreme viewpoints. However, researchers and health and social care practitioners are now more likely to adopt a third approach that takes account of both types of influence:

- Biological influences (nature) are important for *universal* forms of development, for example learning to walk.
- Environmental influences (nurture) are prominent in *particular* forms of development, for example, learning to speak with a Liverpool accent.

If you agree with this third approach, you would accept that genes enable most of us to learn to walk, but only a Liverpool upbringing leads to a person developing a genuine Liverpudlian accent.

D1 Evaluating the impact of nature and nurture influences

Nature and nurture influences on human growth and development can also be thought of as internal and external influences. Internal (nature) factors, such as genes, determine how a person grows and develops because they have a direct biological influence on the person. These internal nature-type influences tend to have their strongest impact on growth and development during infancy, adolescence and old age. Basic, biological processes cause irreversible physical changes to the human body during these life stages.

External environmental (nurture) influences, on the other hand, have a less direct effect on human growth and development. They tend to shape rather than determine a person's emotional, social and intellectual development and life course. External environmental influences are important, for example, in promoting social development during childhood and adolescence, and emotional development during infancy and adolescence.

P2 The process of maturation

Maturation theory is an example of a nature approach to human growth and development. This claims that maturation is a predictable sequence of changes in human growth and development that is controlled by genes. For example, during adolescence a girl's genetic programming ensures that she grows breasts, experiences changes in her body shape and begins menstruation. Similarly, maturation in adolescent boys results in the growth of facial hair, a range of changes to their physique and a deepening of the voice. In later life, maturation ensures that we all develop wrinkles in our skin. These physical changes that unfold in a relatively predictable way lead some people to refer to human beings as having a 'biological clock'.



Reflect

Which aspects of your own growth or development are best explained by nurture influences?



Discuss

What role does effective parenting play in the way a child behaves towards others? Can parents inhibit a child's aggressive disposition through nurturing, or are some children just naturally more aggressive than others? Reflect on the nature–nurture debate and discuss this issue with class colleagues.



Key terms

Maturation: *the gradual process of becoming physically mature or fully developed*