

Promoting Emotional & Social Development in Early Years: Applying Erikson's Theory to Shona



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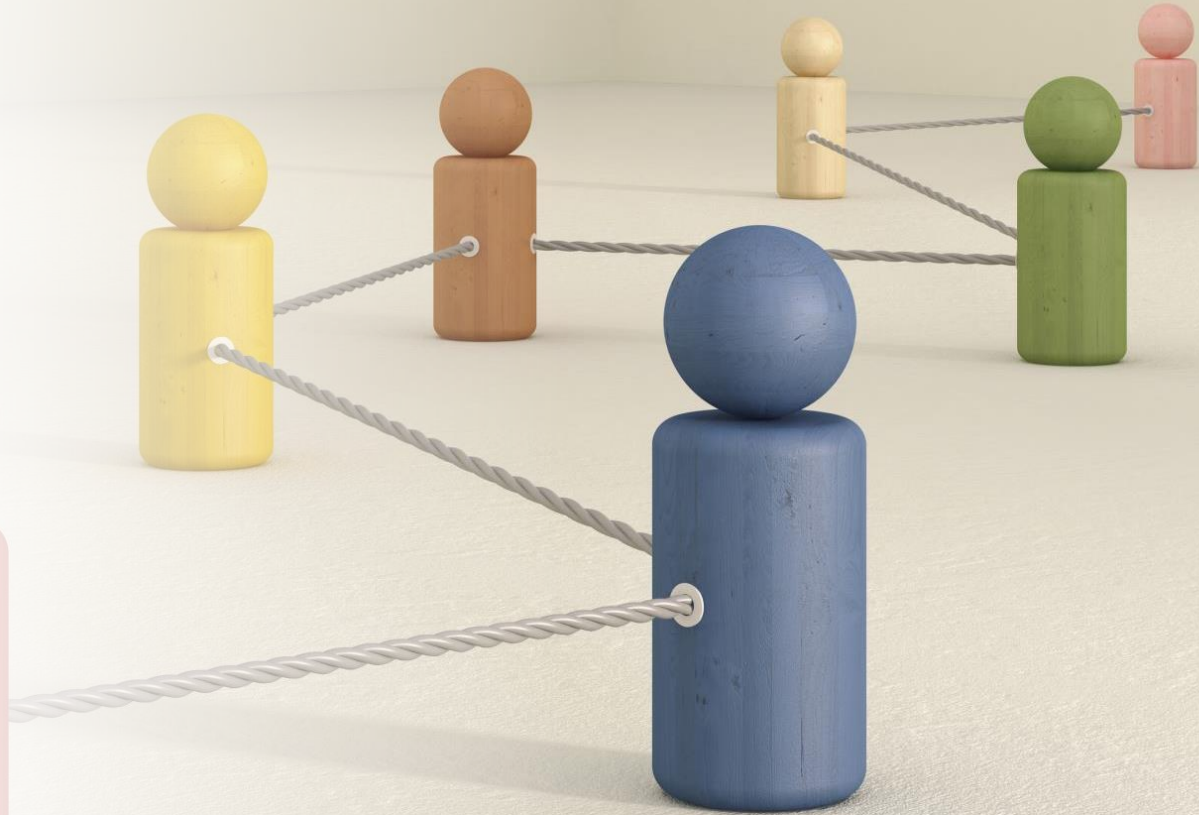
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Introduction

- Applies Erikson's psychosocial life span theory to 3- year-old Shona, newly in nursery.
- Shona shows separation anxiety, limited verbal communication, and difficulty joining group play.
- Framework chosen as it places emotional & social development at the heart of holistic growth (Erikson, 1950)



Erikson's Psychosocial Theory: Key Concepts

- Erikson identified 8 sequential lifespan developmental stages from infancy to old age (Erikson, 1950)
- Each stage involves a psychosocial crisis: balancing personal needs against social expectations (Gross, 2020)
- Positive resolution builds psychological strengths and confidence (Erikson, 1968)
- Unresolved tension may cause difficulties in later life stages (Gross, 2020)





3. Relevance to early childhood development

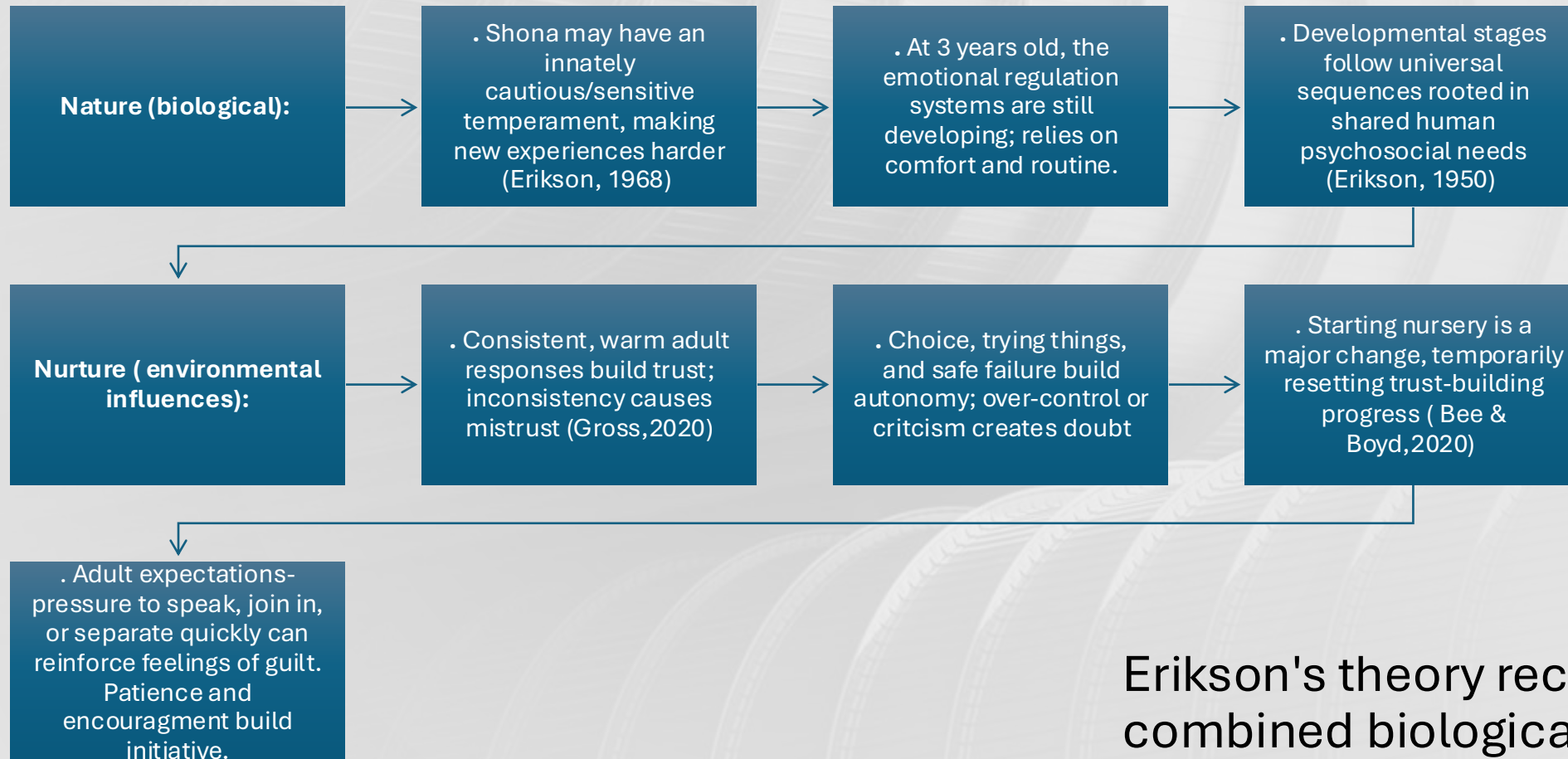
- Erikson's theory is especially valuable in early years settings because it:
- Takes a holistic view, linking emotional, social, cognitive, and physical development rather than treating them as separate.
- Focuses on the child's internal experience- how they perceive their safety, worth, and place in the world- rather than only observing outward behaviour.
- Provides a clear developmental sequence that shows emotional security is the foundation for all learning and social participation.
- Aligns with the early years foundation stage in England, which prioritises emotional wellbeing and secure attachments as prerequisite's for progress in communication, language, and personal, social, and emotional development.

4. Application to Shona's Situation

- Shona's observed behaviours can be understood as developmental responses shaped by unresolved or emerging resolution of earlier psychosocial stages (Erikson, 1950)

Observed behaviour	Erikson-based explanation	Identified developmental need
Separation anxiety when left by carers	Still building trust in the new nursery; change disrupts predictability. Trust vs Mistrust tension.	Need: consistent, predictable relationships to build safety & reliability (Gross, 2020)
Limited verbal communication	Lack of confidence to speak; holds back to avoid attention/disapproval. Initiative vs guilt tension (Erikson,1968)	Need: a low-pressure environment where communication is invited & valued.
Difficulty engaging in group play	Needs confidence in Autonomy & Initiative; withdraws as protection (Erikson, 1950)	Need a gradual, supported introduction to social activity at her own pace.

5. Nature and Nurture Influences



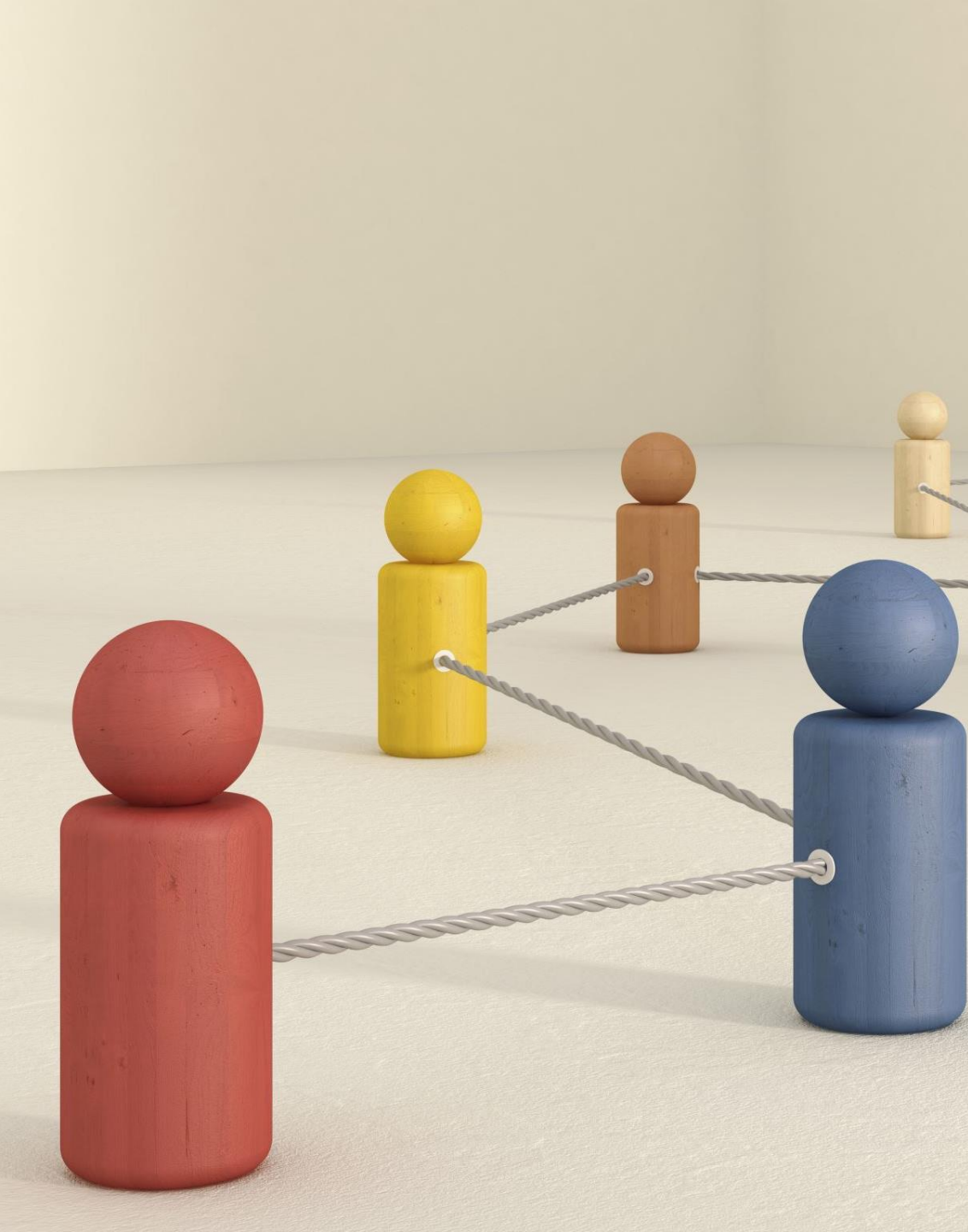
Erikson's theory recognises combined biological and environmental influences on development (Gross, 2020)

- **6. Evidence-Based Strategies and Interventions – supporting emotional, social, cognitive and physical wellbeing.**
- Support is structured to build from foundational needs upwards, directly reflecting Erikson's stage sequences:
- **Emotional well-being**
- Build trust via a consistent key person, predictable routines, reassurance & reliability.
- Low-pressure environment: invite, don't demand, praise effort not just success.
- **Social well-being**
- Follow her lead in play supported introduction to group activities at her pace.
- Home-nursery partnership: Share updates and small successes with parents/carers; align routines and settling-in approaches between home and nursery to reinforce consistency.
- **Cognitive & communication well-being**
- Offer choices to build confidence & decision-making. Singing, puppets, 1:1 chats before large groups.
- Encourage initiative, ask questions, explore ideas, and express herself freely.
- **Physical well-being**
- Allow tasks at her own pace, no rushing, safe space to move, try, explore physically.
- Visual timetables & familiar routines reduce anxiety. Support physical calm & regulation (Bee & Boyd, 2020)

• 7. Critical Evaluation of Erikson's Theory

- Erikson's theory provides a robust, child-centred foundation for practice, but works best when combined with other perspectives-such as attachment theory or communication development frameworks- to provide complete, individualised support.

Strengths:	Limitations:
Compassionate, non-judgemental framework; views behaviour as developmental, not misbehaviour.	Broad stage lacks detail for specific needs, e.g. speech/language delay; may need specialist input.
Clear, actionable guidance linking theory to daily practice. Covers full lifespan; shows early support builds long-term resilience.	General timelines do not account for individual & cultural differences in development
A holistic approach: emotional growth underpins communication, social skills, learning & confidence (Erikson, 1968)	Less focus on biological/neurological factors now known to affect temperament & emotional regulations (Erikson, 1968)



8. Conclusion

- Shona's anxiety, limited communication, and withdrawal are understandable responses to a new environment, reflecting the developmental process of building trust, autonomy, and initiative. Erikson's theory shows that these stages cannot be rushed: emotional safety must come before confidence to speak, play, and connect. By providing consistent, patient, and encouraging support, practitioners help Shona build the internal resources she needs to thrive. Nature shapes her potential, but consistent, nurturing care shapes her progress- and in her own time, she will move forward. (Gross, 2020)

Reference

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