American Psychological Association

Pursuing a Career in Developmental Psychology

ALL ABOUT DEVELOPMENT

The study of developmental psychology is essential to understanding how humans mature.

Throughout their lives, humans go through various stages of development. While most people follow common patterns in their development, others reach developmental milestones at a different pace. Developmental psychologists study how people grow and adapt at different life stages. They conduct research designed to help people reach their full potential.

For example, babies who are not walking by 15 months may be demonstrating a developmental delay or signs of a more serious health condition. Developmental psychologists work with parents and doctors to understand the situation and detect and treat any resulting psychological or health problems. By intervening early, developmental psychologists work to help a child get on track to normal development.

Developmental psychologists study changes in human development across the lifespan, including physical, cognitive, social, intellectual, perceptual, personality and emotional growth.

Developmental psychologists work with people of all ages to understand and support their growth.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Developmental psychologists work in a variety of settings, including academia, government agencies, health care facilities and schools.

Those working in colleges and universities tend to focus primarily on research or teaching. Others working in applied settings, such as health care facilities or clinics, help to assess, evaluate and treat people living with developmental disabilities. Developmental psychologists may also work in assisted living homes for the elderly, hospitals, mental health clinics and centers for the homeless.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

A doctoral degree is typically required for a career in developmental psychology. While the common educational pathway for a developmental psychologist is similar to that of psychologists working in other subfields — an undergraduate degree in psychology, followed by a master's degree and then a doctoral degree — specialized developmental psychology programs exist for students interested in entering a more intensive graduate PhD program immediately following undergraduate studies.

WHAT YOU CAN EARN

Salaries for developmental psychologists depend upon geographic location, work setting and job experience. According to Salary.com, the median annual earnings for developmental psychologists in 2009 ranged from $69,000 to $91,000. The highest 10 percent of earners made more than $100,000 per year.

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