

Stages of Empathy and Perspective Taking Development

Hoffman's Stages of Empathy Development	Selman's Stages of Perspective Taking (Role Taking)
<p><u>Global empathy</u> -- In the first year, children may match the emotions they witness (e.g., by crying when another infant is crying, but the emotion is involuntary and undifferentiated).</p>	<p><u>Undifferentiated or Ego-centric (age 3-6)</u>: Children recognize that the self and others can have different thoughts and feelings, but they frequently confuse the two.</p>
<p><u>Egocentric empathy</u> -- From the second year on children actively offer help. The kind of help offered is what they themselves would find comforting and is in that sense egocentric; nevertheless, the child at least responds with appropriate empathic efforts.</p>	<p><u>Subjective or Social-informational (ages 5-9)</u>: Children understand that different perspectives may result because people have access to different information. Nevertheless, despite the realization that the perspectives can differ (based on say the different information that each may have) the preponderant tendency is to consider one's own perspective as valid. The child may believe that the sole reason for different perspectives is because of differences in information.</p>
<p><u>Empathy for another's feelings</u> -- In the third year, with the emergence of role-taking skills, children become aware that other people's feelings can differ from their own. Their responses to distress may thus become more appropriate to the other person's needs.</p>	<p><u>Self-reflective (ages 7-12)</u>: Children can "step in another person's shoes" and view their own thoughts, feelings, and behavior from the other person's perspective. They also recognize that others can do the same. This not just a logical realization that someone can have a different perspective but also a realization that either perspective can be equally valid given the other person's unique situation. Thus, one thinks and feels like the other person and can both suffer and enjoy the outcomes of situations as they unfold from the other person's perspective. What is lacking, however, is for the child to be able to consider both perspectives simultaneously.</p>
<p><u>Empathy for another's life condition</u> -- By late childhood or early adolescence children become aware that others' feelings may not just be due to the immediate situation but stem from their more lasting life situation. Empathy may also be found with respect to entire groups of people (the poor, the oppressed, etc.) and thus transcend immediate experience.</p>	<p><u>Third-party or 'Bystander' (ages 10-15)</u>: Children can step outside a two-person situation and imagine how the self and other are viewed from the point of view of a third, impartial party. This includes the ability to keep multiple perspectives in mind at the same time. One does not see from this perspective and then from the other – one looks at the entire big picture or view and understands that different people are having different perspectives.</p>
	<p><u>Societal (Ages 14-adult)</u>: Individuals understand that third-party perspective-taking can be influenced by one or more systems of larger societal values. One realizes that one can have different neutral perspectives on a situation, each of which would be colored by the values that are dear to the social and cultural context in which the situation occurs and which dictate what a neutral perspective is. One may realize that some values are desirable and others are not and that the perspective that is informed by desirable values is preferable.</p>

Sources:

Hoffman: Schaffer, H. R. (1996). Social development. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers.

Selman: <http://the-mouse-trap.com/2006/08/22/development-of-perspective-taking-a-pre-requisite-for-different-stages-of-moral-development/>; <https://www.cheatography.com/davidpol/cheat-sheets/robert-selman-s-stages-of-perspective-taking/>; <https://everything2.com/title/Selman%2527s+Five+Stages+of+Perspective+Taking>