Erikson’s 8 Crises/Stages of Development

1. **Trust vs Mistrust**
   The first step to wisdom begins when a person is born to when they are about 1-1.5 years old. As a child, the parents are the most dominant figure in the baby’s life. If the parents nurture and love the child, showing them that the world is safe, then the child develops hope along with trust. If the child is under nurtured and abandoned then the child develops mistrust. Conversely, if the child is over nurtured the child can develop too much trust. This process of gaining trust, may involve oxytocin, a hormone in the brain that is activated through social interaction. The interaction with the parent may also include mirror neurons which are activated when one views an action that the child will imitate. Mirror neurons also take part throughout the growth of the child and through the eight steps.

2. **Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt**
   The second stage occurs between 1.0-2.5 years. This is the time that the child learns to walk and becomes more curious about their surroundings. If the child is allowed to explore, with some limits depending on safety, the child begins to assert their independence and have willpower and determination. Throughout the child’s exploring, they will make some mistakes and when being scolded they experience some shame and doubt. Without this shame they develop impulsiveness and can become too risky. The willingness to take on risky endeavors involves the orbitofrontal cortex which is involved in decision making and the medial prefrontal cortex. In order to limit a child’s impulses, having impulse control involves the dorsal anterior cingulated cortex, the lateral prefrontal cortex, and the inferior frontal gyres. The orbitofrontal cortex can also be involved in the third stage if the child does not experience a lot of shame and becomes ruthless.

3. **Initiative vs. Guilt**
   Stage three, occurs between the ages of three or four to about the ages five or six, is called the pre-operational or the play stage. The child can develop initiative. As the child plays they have positive responses to changes, they take responsibility, try out ideas, and the child begins to find a purpose in life. As the child continues to explore they can make mistakes, while being scolded the child will feel a certain amount of guilt. Although if there is too little guilt the child can become ruthless while with too much the child becomes inhibited, never try anything new in order to avoid the feeling of guilt.

4. **Inferiority vs Industry (competence)**
   Stage four, begins between five and six and until 11-12 years old or so. Along with parents, teachers and peers begin to interact with the child and contribute to the child’s learning and experiences. The child begins to learn about success and social skills. With success there are decisions
before one can be rewarded. Decision making with immediate rewards involves the limbic and paralimbic cortices or the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex\textsuperscript{3}. Although with too much success at one subject can lead to narrow virtuosity or too little success lead to, inertia, where the child never tries, and never makes any decisions, thinking that they can never be successful.

5. **Identity vs. Role Confusion**
Starts at the beginning of puberty and continues until eighteen or twenty years old. The teenager begins to form an identity, a self-image. They try to figure who they are, how they fit into society or their place in life and distinguish themselves from being a child\textsuperscript{1}. When making decisions a person may have empathy for others, but in making the decision they also need an image of themselves. The image of the self against others involves the superior temporal gyrus and inferior parietal lobe\textsuperscript{3}. Too much of an ego or identity and a person has no regards for others which involves the lateral frontoparietal region. Too little ego and the adolescent can become destructive believing they are nobody. By finding their role(s) or identity an adolescent eventually develops fidelity.

6. **Intimacy vs Isolation**
At stage six, between eighteen and thirty years old, the time of relationships begins and the adults chooses to either be intimate or isolated. The adults explore relationships and try to find a match. This stage also involves decision making maybe with some moral dilemma which involves the posterior superior temporal sculcus and the medial prefrontal cortex\textsuperscript{3}. The decision may also involve immediate reward vs. long term consequence. The decisions resulting in immediate reward involve either the limbic and paralimbic cortices or the dorsal prefrontal cortex. The long term reward of staying with someone and having a spouse involves the dorsal lateral prefrontal cortex and the parietal regions or the orbit frontal cortex\textsuperscript{3}. The regions that have been found between the different decision makings have yet to be fully differentiated with what occurs when the reward involves money.

7. **Generativity**
Stage seven occurs during adulthood, or when raising kids. The person becomes less selfish, they want to contribute to the welfare of the generations to come and prevent their children from having to deal with the problems they faced in life. Here empathy comes back into play, but more so, with mirror neurons of seeing others perform an action and then perform the action themselves. The actions now include trying to better the lives of their children. The parents cannot become too selfless; they also need to keep the image of themselves as they make decision with immediate rewards and long-term consequences. Otherwise they become overextended, with no time for themselves to enjoy their life. In the end the parents develop true caring.
8. **Integrity vs. Despair**

The final stage, stage eight begins during retirement at about sixty or even later these days. It’s an individual decision. Around retirement a person experiences some detachment from society, a sense of uselessness. They experience fears that they never had to deal with while growing up, for example falling down and not being able to stand up without help. Then they become concerned with death, they despair about the time they will cease to exist. Through this despair they reflect, become preoccupied with the past, their failures, and regrets. The goings through autobiographical reminiscence involves the medial prefrontal cortex and the ventromedial prefrontal cortex. They reflect on experiences and self judgment which also involves the medial prefrontal cortex. Too much of the reflections and they do not face the difficulties of old age. Too little and they develop contempt or disdain about life. Or through these reflections they come to term with their lives, with the end of life, accept their mistakes, and have no fears and obtain wisdom.

The eight stages to wisdom may not be the only path but it involves the interactions of the limbic system and the prefrontal cortex. Through the balance of the two portions of the brain wisdom can be developed in different times in a person’s life. Depending on their experiences they could develop wisdom earlier or later in life. For example by stage seven some people are not parents but can still obtain the value of caring through caring for their spouse, family members, or friends. But through the eight steps a person gains many values that are useful through life, like determination, hope, and purpose. Erickson’s steps summarize only a few experiences that can lead to certain values and to wisdom. Through the experiences other values may arise or a person may develop a different value. How a person deals with the problems they face and how they internalize or react to a certain experience can determine what a person adds or loses to their character. Not everyone needs to follow Erickson’s steps or even be aware that they exist. Most of the values we obtain seem to be more through the unconscious than the conscious. When a person is conscious about their actions or what values they want to gain from their actions they may try to exaggerate their actions and not fully internalize the value. Throughout life people can take in their experiences, learn from them and throughout their life gain wisdom.