

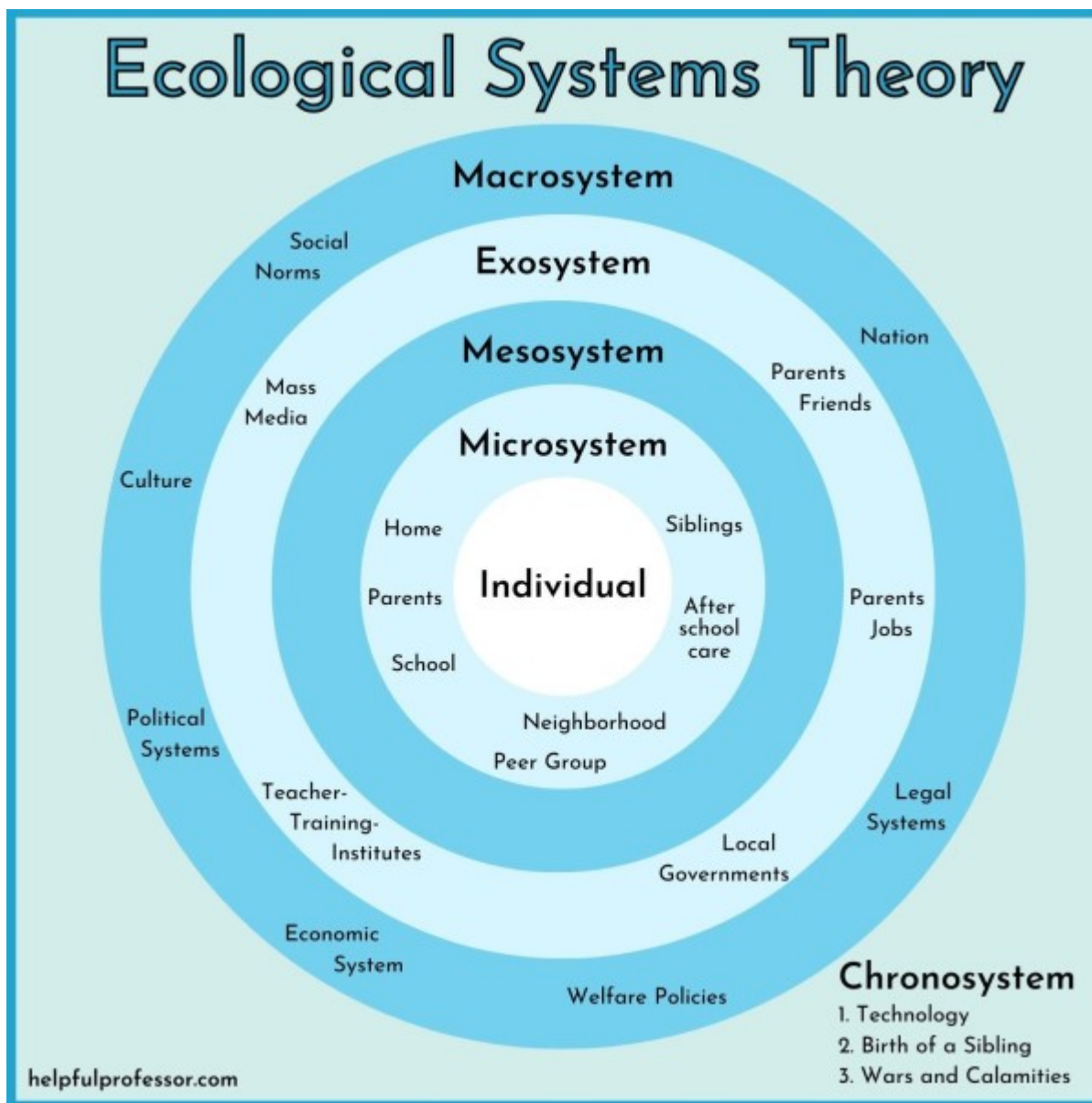


7 Microsystem Examples & Simple Definition (Bronfenbrenner)

By Chris Drew (PhD) / November 30, 2022

Examples of microsystems include the family, school, religion, peer groups, and neighborhoods. Microsystems are the closest influences to a child that directly affect their psychosocial development.

Ecological Systems Theory



“It takes a village to raise a child” is a popular African proverb.

Through centuries of accumulated folk wisdom, this proverb draws our attention to a fundamental sociological fact – that the process of social and psychological development of children is a complex process that involves a number of [stakeholders and institutions](#).

Urie Bronfenbrenner (1917-2005) demonstrated the scientific basis underlying this quote when he proposed his [ecological systems theory](#). This theory shows

how a large number of microsystems interact with an individual to shape their psycho-social development.



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What Is A Microsystem?

The microsystem is the innermost level in Bronfenbrenner's 5-tiered model of child development called the ecological systems model.

Each level in the model is represented by a circle, with the entire model taking the appearance of a series of 5 concentric circles moving outwards, having the child at its center.

The closer a circle or level is to the child, the greater is the degree of immediate influence it has on the development of the individual.

“Micros” in Greek means small, and the microsystem being composed of institutions and influences closest to the individual, is represented by the smallest circle in Bronfenmrenner's model.

The institutions that make up the microsystem tend to have an intimate, personal relationship with the child.

For example, the family, the school, and the peer group are all examples of microsystems with which an individual is involved personally. They each impact

an individual's development directly.



Microsystem Examples

1. Parents

From the time a child is born until well into adulthood, most individuals spend the maximum amount of their time with their parents.



For this reason, the parents are the most important microsystem. One's bond with one's family is not just social. It is also biological. What we inherit from our parents, for instance, includes genetic and biological traits such as physical features, height, behaviors, and so on.

Social psychology recognizes that the family, especially the parents, plays the most important role in shaping a child's personality.

For instance, the attachment theory in psychology holds that close proximity to at least one adult caregiver is essential for the normal social and emotional development of an infant.

This attachment to the primary caregiver is used by the infant as a "secure base" from which the infant explores relationships with other individuals (Cassidy, 1999).

Similarly, the psychoanalytic theory holds that childhood experiences, and in particular, a child's interaction with his or her parents are the building blocks of a child's personality.

2. School

The school is perhaps second in importance only to the family in its potential to shape a child's social and emotional development.

Schools are responsible not only for curriculum-based learning that equips a child with skills to make their way in the world. They are also responsible for the

moral, ethical, emotional, and social development of children (known as the [‘hidden curriculum’](#) of schooling).



Besides its role as a site for learning and education, a school also is a place where children form the strongest and most impactful bonds outside the family.

Teachers and seniors in school act as role models to children, whereas interaction with their peers enables children to understand values such as competition, cooperation, and coordination.

3. Religion

Religion is an inalienable part of human societies, and most individuals experience it in some form or the other.

In addition to being a source of morality, ethics, and values, religion provides traditions of codes of conduct that guide people on how to live their lives.

Initiation into religion begins at a young age; typically at the time of birth itself. For instance, the baptism of infants is commonly practiced among many Christians.

Similarly, the Jewish religion has the ritual of Bar and Bat Mitzvah on the 13th birthday of boys and girls respectively (which represent a child’s formal welcoming into the larger religious community).

From a scientific point of view, several studies have noted that religion is associated with positive psychological and social outcomes in the development



of children (Bartkowski et. al., 2008). However, religion can also have a detrimental effect on childhood development in cases where it acts as a source of conflict within families. In the words of Bartkowski, “if it takes a village to raise a child, religion occupies an important place in that village” (Barkowski et. al., 2008).

4. Peer Group

A peer group is a group of people with who the child plays, who generally are of a similar age and developmental stage.

According to ecological systems theory, a child’s peers are very influential in shaping their values, beliefs, tastes, and preferences.

The importance of the peer group to the development of children is well established in psychology and sociology.

The Zone of Personal Development (ZPD) is a concept in psychology that demonstrates the importance of peer group in child development.

The developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) defined the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as the gap between what a child can do unsupported and what they can not, or in other words, the zone, where if, they were to learn from those more knowledgeable, they would become capable.

Vygotsky proposed that when a child engages with his or her peer group, they learn from those more knowledgeable than them and hence are able to advance within their ZPD (Yanitsky, 2018).



As an example of the ZPD, Vygotsky pointed out how children were able to become proficient in language naturally, but writing and mathematical learning did not progress at the same pace. Vygotsky argued that this was because mathematics and writing were taught only in the classroom environment by teachers, whereas a child was constantly engaged in learning language by interacting with his/her peers and elders.

The psychologist Judith Rich Harris (1938-2018) went a step further in emphasizing the centrality of the peer group in child development.

Harris argued in her book *The Nurture Assumption: Why Children Turn Out the Way They Do* that the peer group is a more important determining factor in shaping a child's personality than the role of parents.

As an example, Harris pointed how the children of immigrants quickly pick up the language and accent of their (new) home country which they pick up from their peers rather than from their parents. In many cases, they even become more fluent in it than their native language (Harris, 1998).

5. Neighborhoods

The impact of the neighborhood on child development is well studied in sociology.

For example, the Chicago School of Sociology studied the effects of neighborhoods that children grew up in and rates of delinquency and concluded

that the location of a neighborhood within a city was an important determinant of crime rates.



The [social disorganization theory](#) for instance underscored the proposition that delinquent behavior is learned by juveniles through interaction with others within a neighborhood. Thomas and Znaniecki (1918) defined social disorganization as the “inability of a neighborhood to solve its problems together.”

6. Siblings

Siblings, like peer groups, are direct influences on a child’s development. A brother or sister is often the first friend a child has.

Siblings can often have a positive influence by acting as the Vygotsky-like ‘[more knowledgeable other](#)’ who promotes development. Siblings can encourage each other to try harder and engage in healthy competition. They can direct each other’s attention and engage in [cooperative play](#).

But sometimes siblings can be a bad influence as well, such as when they encourage a younger brother or sister to swear or engage in bullying behaviors.

7. After School Spaces

After-school spaces are some of the most influential spaces for children after home and the school. They are also a space where children are first exposed to people from outside the close family.



After-school spaces include sporting clubs, organizations like cub scouts, and youth groups. These spaces are often less structured than school, allowing children to engage in unstructured play that allows them to explore their own identities and develop a greater sense of agency.

Other Levels In Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory contains five levels. They are:

1. The Microsystem
2. The [Mesosystem](#)
3. The [Exosystem](#)
4. The [Macrosystem](#)
5. The [Chronosystem](#)

Each layer impacts the child's development in its own way. By breaking up all the social influences on a child's development into five categories, we can start to analyze how children's development is influenced not just by biological but also social, cultural, historical, and other [contextual factors](#).

Conclusion

Bronfenbrenner's ecological system model is a comprehensive model of human development. It proposes that the development of an individual is the result of not just biological factors alone but rather the result of the entire ecosystem of institutions, norms, interactions, and events that surround an individual.

The microsystem is the innermost level in Bronfenbrenner's model consists of institutions that interact the most closely and most intimately with an

individual and shape their development. Its main characteristic is that the microsystem *directly* rather than *indirectly* influences a child's development.



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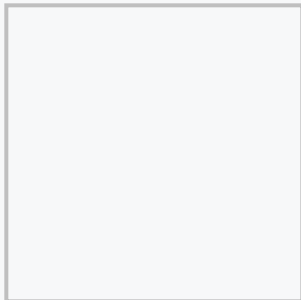
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[Chris Drew \(PhD\)](#)

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Dr. Chris Drew is the founder of the Helpful Professor. He holds a PhD in education and has published over 20 articles in scholarly journals. He is the former editor of the Journal of Learning Development in Higher Education.



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