



## Make Amends

The reason Erik Erickson is written into every introductory to psychology textbook is because he was the first developmental psychologist to discuss life across the entire life span. He states that life has a number of challenges. They are described as tensions or push-pulls to be resolved. How one resolves the tension at one developmental stage determines how one enters the next stage.

Erickson discusses the final stage of development as “integrity versus despair.” Accordingly, in our final stage of life, we take stock of all that has gone before. There will be things from our life about which we will feel good and about which we will feel bad.

When added up, if the good outweighs the bad, we are said to die with integrity, a feeling good about life and ourselves. If the bad outweighs the good, we are said to die in despair, believing our lives may have been wasted and without merit. The goal, according to Erickson, is to die with integrity.

Is it ever too late to make amends? The answer is yes. However, one still has up to the final hour.

Interestingly, children, even of the middle age variety, benefit when a parent makes amends. Life is such that when young, we are prone to make mistakes, behave in ways that are harmful, hurt our children. The scars and estrangements can last seemingly forever, but truth be told, until death, can still remain repairable.

Scars and estrangements hurt not only the directly affected, but also those around the affected person. The scars and estrangements trickle into other relationships and like a cancer, spread to hurt others.

Scars and estrangements also run both ways. As the children are hurt, often, so too are the parents. Even in their old age, they too may be suffering not only the scars and estrangements from relationships before them, but also by the hurt of unresolved matters with their offspring.

This is an interesting time in recent history. The army of baby boomers are aging and their parents are passing on. Legacies are being determined right now. Some parents will pass with integrity, surrounded by family and friends and others will die in despair, with nary a soul to comfort them.

There is a profound opportunity that comes with age. We can prove ourselves not only older, but wiser too.

If you are hurt or estranged from a love one, consider what is left of life’s opportunities to make amends. While hurts may still abide, time has a way of placing behaviour in a context, an historical context.

We come to understand we are products of our place in history and of the family life we experienced. We come to recognize our own foibles as well as those of our parents. We come to appreciate we may have done better but for the tools we were equipped by life. We come to appreciate relationships matter and most of all, those between family members.

Seek to make amends. Improve the legacy. Alter the course of history.

To do so, send an email or letter to your family member. Even make a phone call. State your intentions and take responsibility for your contribution to past hurts. These gestures open the lines of communication and make possible a happier ending and passing – before it’s too late.

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