

The Five Stages of Permanence

There are five stages of permanence. Each stage of permanence represents the capacity to maintain one's sense of existence and safety in different situations. Imagine as you study each one how it might feel to be in the world and not have the ability's each stage of permanence represents.

Differentiation – the capacity to:

- a) Tell the **difference between** things
- b) **Know** that you can tell the difference between things
- c) **Know** that even **as things are different they continue to exist and you continue to exist**

Example: the toddler learns to differentiate between his hands and his feet (a), before he is aware that he knows the difference between his hands and feet (b). When the toddler is focusing on his hands, his feet continue to exist. When the toddler is focusing on his feet, his hands continue to exist. Whether the toddler is focusing on his hands or on his feet, he continues to exist (c).

Stability – the capacity to:

- (a) Know that **things stay the same** across space and time
- (b) Know **that you know**, that things stay the same across space and time
- (c) **Know** that the other and the self **continue to exist** across space, time, changing situations and emotions

Example: The toddler knows that Mom is Mom whether she is next to the child or across the room, in the morning and in the afternoon (a). The toddler knows that he knows Mom is the same Mom here or there, now or later (b). The toddler knows that Mom continues to exist when he can't see her, when they are separated by time and/or space (c).

Agency – the capacity to:

- (a) **Control individual parts** of yourself, and of your world
- (b) To **know that you can control** individual parts of yourself and your environment
- (c) **Know** that even as you control different parts of yourself, you **continue to exist**

Example: The older infant can grasp a toy or a bottle (a) before she knows that she can grasp the toy or bottle (b). When the child knows that she can control her hands she can call upon that skill when she chooses and know that she continues to exist (c), to remain the same even as she uses one or another part of her body.

Flexibility - the capacity to:

- (a) **Do two things** at once,
- (b) Know that you can do two things at once
- (c) Know that even as you do two things at once, you **continue to exist**

Example: The child can read a book and swing her feet back and forth at the same time (a). The child knows that she can read a book and swing her feet back and forth at the same time and can do both at will (b). The child knows that as she reads a book and swings her feet back and forth at the same time she continues to exist.

Permeability - the capacity to:

- (a) Allow some things **in** and to keep some things **out**
- (b) **Know** that you can allow some things in and keep some thing out
- (c) Know that even as you let some things in and keep some things out, **you continue to exist**

Example: The young adult can accept some criticism, let some things in, and choose not to accept criticism that seems unjust, keep some things out (a). The young adult knows that she can choose to accept some criticism and not to accept other criticism (b). The young adult knows that as she accepts some criticism and does not accept other criticism she continues to exist (c).

Each of the 5 stages of permanence are unique capacities which enable the individual, of any age, to **feel** safe across varying experiences of being, of the self in the world. This feeling of safety and security is a sensory feeling.