Week 1

Periods of the Life Span

Before moving into the main meat of our course, I'd like to give you a road map of sorts as to where we are going and what age periods we will be studying. Below you will see a schematic of the different developmental periods of the life span that developmental psychologists study, and I have outlined them below.

![Lifespan Development Diagram]

The Prenatal Period
- Broad definition: everything before birth of the child
- Subperiods:
  - *Conception*. This is where we will begin our study next week. Factors that go into conception, or the fertilization of the egg cell by a sperm cell, have immediate and long-term consequences for development. Such factors include maternal age, health of both parents, and genetic disorders of the parents.
  - *Prenatal period*. This is the pregnancy, the period between conception and beginning of labor. As we will see, a full-term pregnancy lasts about 39-41 weeks.
  - *Childbirth*. This period begins with subtle changes in both fetal and maternal activity, neurochemistry, and physiology. The experiences of both the mother and the baby during childbirth and labor can have implications for later development.

Childhood
- Broad definition: from the first moment of life outside the womb until age 18
- Subperiods:
  - *Infancy*. The first year of life. This includes the first few weeks of life as a newborn.
  - *Toddlerhood*. Ages 1-3 years (this is when kids are learning to walk and getting better at walking, thus the phrase "toddling around").
  - *Childhood*. This is often divided into "early childhood" (ages 3-6 years, or "preschool") and "middle childhood" (ages 6-10 years). Sometimes you will read the phrase "late childhood," which is roughly a few years before puberty. This subperiod of the childhood years (yes, I know it's confusing, that "childhood" is a subperiod of "childhood"!) is only roughly divided, as children begin to show markedly different trajectories of development.
• **Adolescence.** Begins in puberty (at the first menstrual cycle for girls and the first ejaculation for boys). End point is very transient—older texts would put it at age 18 years, others may say 20-22 years. For this class, we will assume adolescence is puberty through age 18.

**Adulthood**

- Broad definition: everything after age 18.
- Subperiods:
  - **Emerging adulthood.** Ages 18-25 years. This is a relatively "new" period of development, and as such the age range can vary considerably between texts. More broadly, it is defined as beginning at legal adulthood and ending when the individual is "really" a grown-up.
  - **Young adulthood.** Ages 25-45 years.
  - **Middle adulthood.** Ages 45-65 years.
  - **Old adulthood.** Ages 65 and up.
  - **Death and dying.** A bit different of a developmental period, but unique from the others. This can encompass the last few weeks to the last several years of one's life.

**References**
