

# Your Environment

From the moment you were conceived, you have lived in an *environment*. Anything that is outside of you and has an effect on you and your development is part of your environment. Since environment includes so many conditions, it is useful to divide it into two categories: physical environment and social environment.

## Physical Environment

The first physical environment for each person is the uterus. From the time of conception, outside influences begin to play a part in our lives. This is why it is especially important for pregnant women to get adequate rest, eat nourishing foods, and avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and unnecessary drugs.

The weather, the food you eat, the music you listen to, and even the colour of paint on the walls of a room are all part of your physical environment. Long rainy periods without sunshine make many people feel depressed and tired. Not eating regularly or eating too much junk food is hard on a

person's body. If you spend a lot of time in an environment that is extremely hot, cold, noisy, crowded or dirty, it can have an impact on your emotional and physical health.

Heredity and environment come together in one unique person and *interact* with each other. *Interact* means that heredity and environment have an effect on each other. Hay fever is a good example of this interaction. If you have hay fever, it means you inherited a tendency to allergies and have developed a sensitivity to a tiny part of the physical environment called pollen. Pollen makes you sneeze, gives you red eyes and a runny nose, and makes you feel awful. Your environment is interacting with your heredity and influencing you in a very unpleasant way.

In order to relieve your stuffy head, you may have to make some changes in your environment. Perhaps you will avoid going outside except when necessary. You may decide to take allergy pills or shots. Your inherited tendency to allergies is now having an influence on your environment.

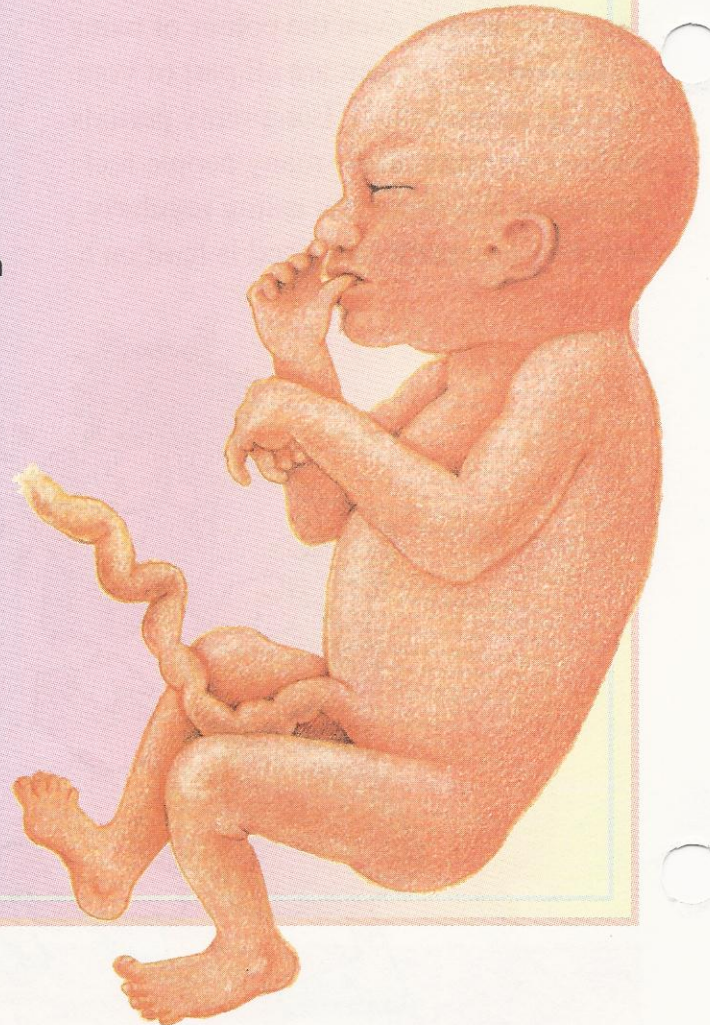




## The First Environment

In his book, *The Secret Life of the Unborn Child*, Dr. Thomas Verny tells a story about a man who could never understand why the cello line from certain pieces of music, which he had never seen before, seemed so familiar to him. When he mentioned this experience to his mother, she was able to explain it. His mother was a cellist, and the musical scores that were so familiar to him were those that she had practised while she was pregnant with him.

As we learn more about the development and abilities of the unborn child, we also discover new facts about the uterus as an environment. It is not quiet, but is filled with the noise of the mother's digestion, her heartbeat, her voice, other voices from people nearby, and sounds — like music. The baby hears clearly from the sixth month of development, and is disturbed by sudden loud noises, which he or she reacts to by kicking furiously. Emotions from the mother such as strong anger or fear also prompt the kicking reaction. Because babies are so sensitive to their environment, some researchers are convinced that it is important for mothers to care for themselves, not just physically, but emotionally as well. A happy and relaxed mother, who has the support of a considerate husband, helps to create a peaceful and comfortable environment for her unborn child.





## **Adoption, Heredity, and Environment**

Which is the most important influence on people — their heredity or their environment? This question has fascinated people for years. In recent years, most of the psychologists and medical researchers who study this issue like to point out that heredity and environment begin to interact from the moment we are born. Because of this interaction, it is almost impossible to separate these two influences.

Because they have not been raised by their birth parents, people who are adopted often wonder about their heredity. They may want to know about the medical background, appearance, interests, and talents of their birth parents. Nowadays, adoptive parents are much better informed than they were in the past about the birth parents, and can share this information with their adopted children. But there will still be some questions that remain unanswered. This is a serious concern for many adopted people.

But it is important for all of us to remember the immense contribution that environment makes to our identity — who we are now, and how we will develop in the future. Heredity is part of the picture, but it is environment that brings our genetic potential to life. Without nourishing food, shelter, warm clothes to wear, a loving family, friends to confide in, and the opportunity to learn, it would be very difficult for us to grow and develop and become the people God intended us to be.

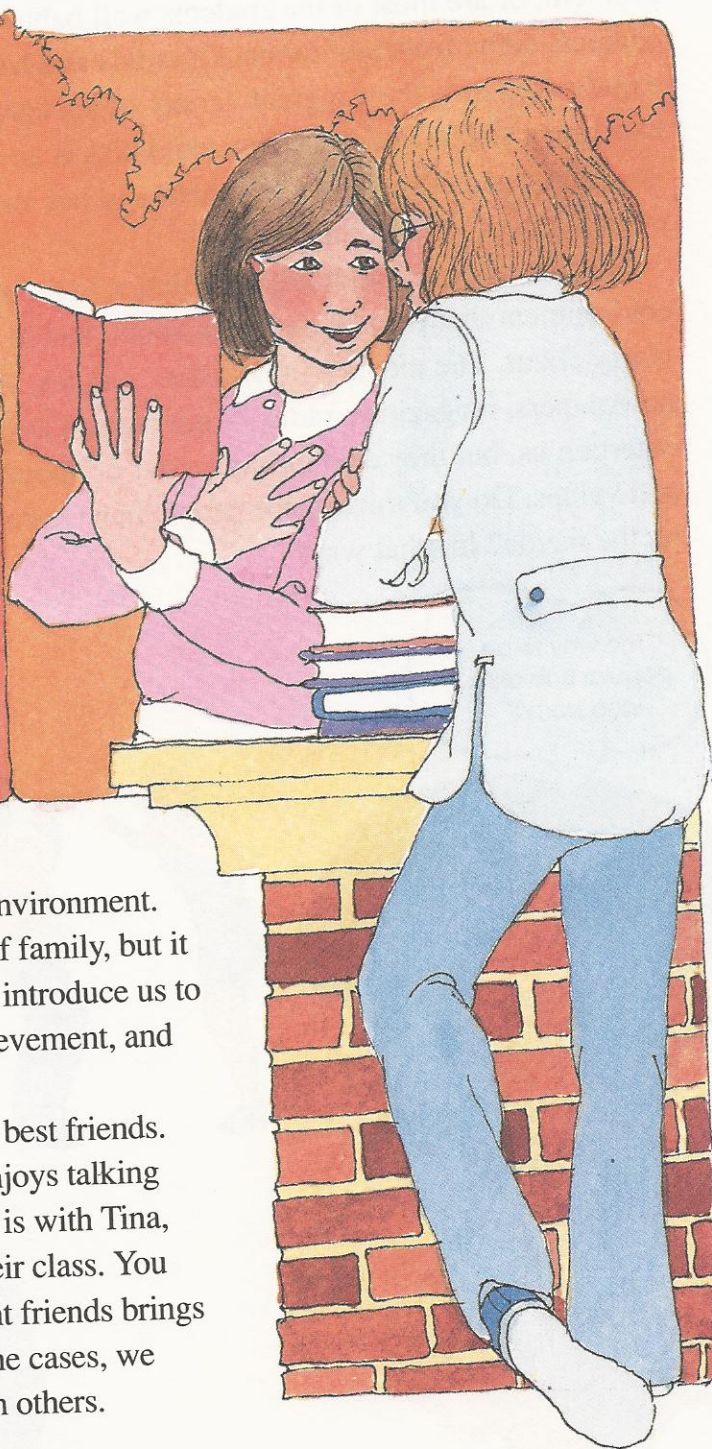
## **Social Environment**

In addition to the physical environment, you also live in a social environment, which is created by people. Each person who is part of your life, and especially those to whom you are close, contributes to your social environment. We know that social environments have a strong influence on each person, but this influence is much more complex and difficult to understand than the effects of the physical environment.





The family, however, won't be the only influence on an athletic career. A person might get a lot of support and encouragement from the family, but discover that he or she doesn't like competition, or has too many other interests to spend the necessary time on training. Or it could happen that the family environment provides very little support for an individual, and yet that person still manages to become an outstanding athlete.



- Friends

Friends are also an important part of our social environment. The influence of friends is not as strong as that of family, but it becomes more powerful as we grow up. Friends introduce us to new interests, influence our attitude toward achievement, and have an effect on our values and behaviour.

Tracey behaves quite differently with her two best friends. With Angie, she tends to be more serious and enjoys talking about poetry and plans for the future. When she is with Tina, Tracey laughs a lot and talks about people in their class. You have probably had similar experiences. Different friends brings out different aspects of our personalities. In some cases, we behave better with some people, and worse with others.



As well as your family members and friends, there are various groups to which you belong — your classroom, school, parish community, the teams and clubs in which you are active, and the neighborhood community in which you live. Together, the people who belong to these groups create a social environment that has an influence on each of them.

For example, think about your classroom environment. Is the general atmosphere warm or cool? Is discipline a problem, or are most of the students well behaved? Do most students come from similar backgrounds and have similar experiences or is there a great variety of backgrounds and experiences? Each of these characteristics is an aspect of your classroom's social environment and has an influence on you and on every other student.

There is another important contributor to the social environment that people often talk about, and in some cases, worry about. The media — television, movies, videos, newspapers, magazines, radio — are created to inform and entertain us, but they also influence our opinions, attitudes, and values. Do you think these people have been influenced by the media? In what way?

