



Who Are These People?: A Guide for Child Care Professionals

DETAILS

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Who are these people?

What do you know about them?



Suppose you had him...

Child care is full of promise and potential.

Child care in the United States is changing—because society in general is changing. Today, more children than ever are spending a significant portion of their first five years of life in an out-of-home setting. That means that next to the family environment, child care is where infants, toddlers, and preschoolers are undergoing their most critical development.

Studies show that children who have positive, productive experiences in child care are better prepared socially and academically at school entry, which means they have a better chance for educational success. The key, however, is the level of quality that a child care setting offers.

High quality is no longer a plus—it's a must. Child care must be all encompassing. It must address education, including school readiness. It must provide a safe and protective environment for children—one that fosters healthy emotional development and secure relationships with adults and other children. Above all, it must be a place where learning occurs amid loving care.

or her.



You are not a babysitter.

As a child care professional, you play an important role in a child's early learning and development.

It takes more than just diapering, feeding, and dressing children to ensure that they get the best possible start in life. It takes more than a roomful of expensive toys. Like good parenting, quality out-of-home care involves an eagerness to care about and interact with young children. As a child care provider, what you do—or don't do—and the relationships that you build with children will have important consequences for their development.

This booklet, from the National Academies in Washington, DC, with the support of the McCormick Tribune Foundation in Chicago, offers child care providers, educators, and everyone else who cares for children, newborns through age five, information and helpful suggestions on development and learning that can make daily caregiving more productive and enjoyable for adults and children alike.



Maybe they'll be famous.

Children are born ready to learn.

From birth, children are able to develop their own understanding of the world from their experiences. This knowledge helps them form expectations of how things and people behave. The more positive this foundation of experience, the better children will be able to deal with new experiences, both good and bad, throughout life.

Learning is based on a child's cognitive, social, emotional, language, and physical development, which are interdependent. For example, learning to count can be influenced by a child's emotional development; difficulty in getting along during playtime could be caused by delayed language skills.

Heredity and environmental influences also work together during development. They can be positive factors or sources of risk—especially for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers who have disabilities or who are exposed to poverty, violence, or environmental harms.

What can I do?

- ✦ Learn about the developmental stages that children go through to become familiar with what they should master before trying more difficult tasks.
- ✦ Be responsive to these stages. As children grow, offer them different opportunities to learn.
- ✦ Be sensitive to how a child's nature can affect your own response. Don't withdraw from an aggressive or hard-to-reach child.
- ✦ Get to know children personally so you can spot signs of stress that could potentially signal problems (in lots of homes, stress starts at an early age).
- ✦ Don't fall into the trap of thinking that a child is born with a predetermined potential—you can affect the child's potential positively.

Maybe not.



A child needs at least one loving adult.

Strong, nurturing relationships created in trusting and safe environments allow children to develop the emotional, social, and intellectual skills that form the foundation for later learning.

A child care provider should be a source of emotional stability and security that complements a parent's efforts and provides a child with the opportunity to spend more time learning.

Quality child care can also help compensate when negative factors such as family problems, poverty, and violence make life difficult for children and affect their ability to bond with adults, make friends, feel empathy, learn language, and develop other important skills. Providers can keep children on the road to healthy development by helping them learn how to love, communicate, solve problems, and look forward to the future.

What can I do?

- ✦ Keep communication open with parents and caregivers.
- ✦ Make the professional commitment to build quality relationships for *all* children under your care.
- ✦ Keep in mind that at some point you might be the only consistent source of stability and support in a child's life.
- ✦ Respect a child's emotional bond with you even when you feel stress.
- ✦ Watch for negative home or community factors affecting a child.
- ✦ Be positive. Treat a child as if you were that child looking for love and guidance.
- ✦ Alert parents if you observe that their child may be feeling stress or pressure.



You don't know how they'll turn out...

You have influence.

Your nurture and support can go far in the following areas of development:

Social and emotional growth

Socioemotional growth involves getting along with adults and other children. The secure relationships that children form help improve their social and intellectual skills. Emotional well-being and strong social skills help preschoolers develop self-esteem, feel competent, and see the world as a positive place.

What can I do?

- ✦ Be emotionally available. Your presence is very important for social development in the child care setting.
- ✦ Offer children many varied opportunities to interact with each other and with you.
- ✦ Respond and interact often, whether you are playing peek-a-boo with an infant or helping a four-year-old settle an argument with a playmate.
- ✦ Encourage and support experiences that help children progress from being helpless to being able to do something on their own.

Language, communication, and early literacy

There is a close relationship between language and reading. The earlier children receive help, the earlier they gain language and communication skills that are essential for reading readiness.

What can I do?

- ✦ Provide lots of verbal stimulation. Read books, sing songs, tell stories, recite nursery rhymes, and routinely talk with children to help them advance in their cognitive and language development.
- ✦ Expose children to different conversational situations, in either group or individual settings, depending on age. Babies need more one-on-one attention; toddlers can benefit from both types of experiences.
- ✦ Encourage preschoolers to develop their language skills by asking them open-ended questions, such as *how* and *why*.
- ✦ Listen and respond to all children's efforts to communicate. It can be as simple as picking up a crying baby or answering a toddler's question.

or how much you'll influence them.



- ✦ Be patient with children who speak a different language or English dialect or who have special needs. They can learn if you assist them with simple interactions.
- ✦ Monitor progress to catch language problems early on, but remember that children learn in different ways and at different speeds.

Cognitive growth

Young children are extremely capable learners. They build on what they already know, but they need adult help to advance. Caregivers have enormous influence and the opportunity to provide support to children by motivating and guiding their learning.

What can I do?

- ✦ Create a safe, healthy, emotionally supportive environment that offers stimulating experiences.
- ✦ Provide children with toys, blocks, crayons, and other educational tools, but remember that your interaction helps them learn.
- ✦ Make children feel welcome to explore and ask questions.
- ✦ When children attempt a task, guide them by letting them do what they can. Help out with the more difficult parts.
- ✦ Praise children when they succeed. Encourage them when they need help, so they won't give up on themselves.
- ✦ Never intentionally embarrass children or hurt their feelings.



There's only one thing you know for sure.

Children are each one-of-a-kind.

Young children enter child care with unique backgrounds, experiences, and abilities. Levels of skill and development vary even among children of the same age. All of these differences can affect how a child adjusts and responds to a new learning environment.

Children develop best when involved in activities that are at an appropriate level of difficulty. By being aware of individual strengths and vulnerabilities and being sensitive to cultural, language, and socioeconomic backgrounds, caregivers can become skilled at identifying needs and creating effective learning experiences that build on a child's existing skills.

What can I do?

- ✦ When interacting with children, refer to people, places, and things familiar to them.
- ✦ Be sensitive to individual characteristics like temperament, learning style, and physical ability.
- ✦ Create activities that are interesting and challenging but achievable.
- ✦ Keep an eye out for potential developmental problems, but remember that children develop differently.
- ✦ Include children of all skill levels and abilities in activities.
- ✦ Learn about children's cultural backgrounds and let your teaching and caregiving activities reflect your knowledge.
- ✦ Try to adjust your teaching technique or strategy to fit individual needs.
- ✦ Never judge a child's potential by his or her current skills.

You WILL have an impact...



Parents are your partners.

Parents are a young child's first teachers. It is extremely important to keep the lines of communication open with them. Sharing information on progress allows parents to reinforce what their child has learned and helps providers gain more insight into the child's unique background.

Discussions should focus on a variety of child care topics, including health, safety, and emotional well-being. A provider with good communication skills can build trust and confidence in parents, especially those who are still getting used to the idea of leaving their child with others.

Perhaps most important, a strong partnership between caregivers and parents will show children that the adults in their lives care about each other and them.

What can I do?

- ✦ Talk with parents at drop-off and pick-up times. Don't wait for the parent to make the first move.
- ✦ Send notes, progress reports, newsletters, or find other ways to let parents know what their children are learning.
- ✦ Talk to parents about all aspects of a child's life, including the importance of routine pediatric care. Report signs of any potential developmental problems.
- ✦ Schedule regular meetings.
- ✦ Understand cultural and socioeconomic differences and adjust for them.
- ✦ Make parents feel welcome to visit their child anytime.
- ✦ Remind parents that they are the greatest influence in their child's life.



one way or another.

The more you learn, the more they'll learn.

Whether you are a child care aide, manager, preschool educator, or nanny, professional development is the best way to improve your effectiveness with children, increase your job satisfaction and salary, and ensure your career growth.

As the child care sector becomes more standardized and as pre-kindergarten programs such as Head Start become more focused on academic preparation, knowledge of early childhood development is more important than ever.

Although your field is challenging, keep in mind the importance of the work that you do. Learn and grow.

What can I do?

- ✦ Check out colleges and learning centers; investigate opportunities for financial aid.
- ✦ Apply for educational or training scholarships, wage supplements, or retention grants.
- ✦ Learn about federal and state initiatives that help cover education costs.
- ✦ Explore Internet discussion groups and on-line instruction.
- ✦ Visit the library for materials on early childhood development and teaching instruction.
- ✦ Attend local conferences and seminars.
- ✦ Form a support group with your co-workers.
- ✦ Seek support from your supervisor.
- ✦ Seek outside mentors who can help you with professional and personal issues.

The Caregiver's Pledge

I will provide a nurturing, emotionally stable environment by:

- ✦ Being sensitive to each child's needs
- ✦ Providing an orderly, secure, safe, and healthy setting
- ✦ Encouraging self-expression, love of learning, and participation

I will promote positive social behavior by:

- ✦ Modeling positive behavior that embraces diversity and differences and demonstrates empathy and compassion
- ✦ Encouraging childhood friendships
- ✦ Teaching children how to resolve their conflicts



I will support a child's early learning efforts by:

- ✦ Providing activities that challenge children to think and solve problems
- ✦ Fostering curiosity, motivation, self-direction, and persistence
- ✦ Responding to each child according to his or her abilities and temperament

I will create helpful feedback by:

- ✦ Offering praise when appropriate and recognizing accomplishments
- ✦ Observing a child's interactions and behavior patterns
- ✦ Keeping routine, open communication with a child's parents and other caregivers

I will be self-reflective and adaptive by:

- ✦ Being sensitive to how my own views, cultural attitudes, and experiences influence my caregiving
- ✦ Recognizing that parents as well as children can contribute to the learning process
- ✦ Tailoring my caregiving to fit the learning needs of my children

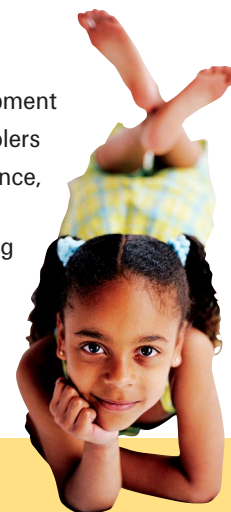
I will be ethically responsible by:

- ✦ Offering unconditional support and love to all children regardless of physical characteristics, behavior, social or religious status, and family income
- ✦ Investing in my professional development and honoring my professional obligations to provide high-quality care, instruction, and guidance
- ✦ Sharing my understanding of children with colleagues and parents

By publishing this booklet, the National Academies in Washington, DC, with the support of the McCormick Tribune Foundation in Chicago, aims to provide important information on early childhood development and education to adults who care for infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

Visit www.nap.edu for free access to the following National Academies studies on the development and education of children:

- ✦ From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development
- ✦ Eager to Learn: Educating Our Preschoolers
- ✦ How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School
- ✦ Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success



Resources

Contact the following organizations and government agencies for more information on child care, early education, and professional development:

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
(Administration for Children & Families)**

370 L'Enfant Promenade, SW
Washington, DC 20201
202-619-0257
www.acf.hhs.gov

Maternal and Child Health Bureau

Parklawn Building
Room 18-05
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857
301-443-2170
www.mchb.hrsa.gov

National Institutes of Health (NIH)

9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD 20892
301-496-4000
www.nih.gov

National Association for the Education of Young Children

1509 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036
1-800-424-2460
www.naeyc.org

National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies

1319 F Street, NW
Suite 500
Washington, DC 20004-1106
202-393-5501
www.naccrra.net

National Head Start Association

1651 Prince Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
703-739-0875
www.nhsa.org

ZERO TO THREE

2000 M Street, NW
Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036
202-638-1144
www.zerotothree.org

Civitas

1327 W. Washington Boulevard
Suite 3D
Chicago, IL 60607
312-226-6700
www.civitas.org

Children's Defense Fund

25 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20001
202-628-8787
www.childrensdefense.org

Prevent Child Abuse America

200 S. Michigan Avenue, 17th Floor
Chicago, IL 60604-2404
312-663-3520
www.preventchildabuse.org

National Association for Family Child Care

5202 Pinemont Drive
Salt Lake City, UT 84123
801-269-9338
www.nafcc.org

National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities

P.O. Box 1492
Washington, DC 20013
Voice/TTY: 1-800-695-0285
www.nichcy.org

National Domestic Violence Hotline

1-800-799-SAFE (7233)
TDD: 1-800-787-3224
www.ndvh.org

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One of the nation's largest charitable organizations, the McCormick Tribune Foundation provides grants in four program areas: communities, education, journalism, and citizenship—as well as a special initiatives program. The education program seeks to improve the quality of early care and education programs serving children from birth to age five in Chicago's low-income communities. The foundation works to meet this goal through the Focus on Quality initiative, a multifaceted program that supports quality-enhancement activities that give children the best possible start in life. MTF was established as a charitable trust in 1955 upon the death of Col. Robert R. McCormick, longtime editor and publisher of the *Chicago Tribune*. For more information, visit www.rmtf.org.

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