



# UNIT-3

## Caring for Child's Development

### Learning Outcomes

#### By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Understand the meaning of 'caregiver' from a child care and development perspective
- ✓ Discuss the four primary developmental areas and their significance
- ✓ Identify appropriate play and communication methods/activities for children of various ages

## Unit 3

### Caring for Child's Development

Caring for children is about more than covering their basic requirements for survival. Good care means ensuring children are safeguarded from harm, provided with the opportunity to learn and offered the time, attention and love they need as they progress towards adulthood. From birth, each and every child builds important bonds with the adults involved in their upbringing, their care and their support. Each and every lesson a child learns from these relationships has a major impact on their progress and development for a lifetime.

#### **Who is a Caregiver?**

The term 'caregiver' applies to the single most important person in the life of a young child. This is the individual who supervises the child, feeds them, shows them the affection they crave and generally meets all of their fundamental needs. It is also the caregiver who watches over the general health and wellbeing of the child, ensuring they are taken to an appropriate doctor or specialist if they become unwell.

In most instances, the primary caregiver in a child's life is his or her mother. Particularly in the case of a breastfeeding infant, their mother is the single most important caregiver – aka the 'primary caregiver'. The father of the child (or any other family member) could also be the primary caregiver, in the event that the mother is absent and/or has chosen not to breastfeed. If neither of the child's parents are present, the primary caregiver could be a neighbour, a friend or a more distant relative.

It is not uncommon in some cultures for a child to have several caregivers involved in their upbringing. Responsibilities may be shared between the child's mother, grandmother, older sister, aunt and so on, who take turns caring for the child. It is becoming increasingly common in western society for responsibility to be split down the middle between the mother and father, rather than one parent taking greater responsibility for providing care than the other.

#### **Caring for the Development of a Child**

As time passes, children develop new capabilities and learn new skills. On the physical side of the spectrum, babies grow into toddlers and children, learning how to walk, run, talk and play along the way. On the cognitive side, children gradually build the capacity to solve problems and think for themselves.

The care a child is provided with and everything they are exposed to from birth will contribute to their subsequent performance at school, along with their longer-term development into adults. It is therefore essential for mothers, fathers and anyone involved in caring for a child to know how to appropriately support their development from day one.

Research has shown that children grow into healthier and happier adolescents and adults when

provided with the plenty of time and attention on the part of their caregivers. By contrast, those who are neglected are more likely to encounter a wide variety of struggles as they grow and develop into adults.

### **What is Care for Child Development?**

*“From birth, babies can see and hear. The mother’s face is the favourite thing the young baby wants to look at. The baby sees the mother’s face and loves to respond to her smiles and sounds. A mother should begin to talk to her child from birth – and even before birth.”* – **World Health Organisation**

Each and every child is different, born with unique traits and characteristics that will subsequently influence their learning and development throughout childhood. In addition, the care a child is provided with during these early years will have a major impact on their future, moulding and shaping the teenagers and adults they will subsequently grow into.

*Research having shown that much of what a child learns, they learn at a very young age.*

All time spent playing and communicating with a young child plays a direct role in their strong and healthy development. From a surprisingly young age, children begin learning the most important skills that prepare them for life.

A baby can hear and see from the day it is born, which means that a child’s journey of learning and development also begins on their first day of life. In addition, research has shown that the human brain develops fastest during the first two years of life than at any other life stage. This is why good nutrition, good health and plenty of attention *and* affection are of particular importance during these early years.

In order for a child’s brain to develop as efficiently as possible, they need to be exposed to new experiences and situations on a regular basis. They need to explore, have things to touch, move around, see new things, hear new things and interact with new people.

All while being showered with as much love and attention as their caregivers can possibly offer.

### **Providing Children with a Safe Learning Environment**

Every second a child spends awake is time spent learning new skills and exploring the surrounding environment. It’s a non-stop learning experience that continues throughout childhood, calling for a safe, clean and appropriate physical environment in which they can learn and play. Taking all necessary steps to protect children from accidents and injuries is every caregiver’s responsibility.

In addition, it is also essential to ensure children are protected from anger, aggression, criticism and violence at all times. A safe, reassuring and non-threatening environment is important to enable children to build the confidence needed to learn, explore and understand the world around them.

Younger children have a tendency to explore the world around them with their mouths, attempting to lick, suck, chew or taste just about anything they can get their hands on. Their mouths help them understand important concepts like temperature, texture, moisture, smoothness, pliability and so on. Caregivers must therefore encourage this kind of play and exploration, though at all times ensure the child's health and safety is not compromised by the types of objects they put near their mouths.

*Anything that represents a choking hazard or that could harm a sensitive mouth must be kept out of reach at all times.*

Making a child understand why you've taken something away from them at such an early age isn't easy, so caregivers can expect a certain amount of 'resistance' along the way.

### **The Importance of Constant Loving Attention**

Most children these days develop special relationships with a variety of individuals close to them. Over several generations, research has clearly shown the importance of developing a special loving relationship with at least one adult as a child. This is important for establishing a sense of belonging, subsequently translating to confidence and the desire to learn.

Children instinctively attempt to communicate with those around them from the day they are born. However, it is usually only the child's main caregivers who are able to both understand and communicate with their child during the first couple of years of their life.

The bond developed between a baby and a breastfeeding mother is unique and cannot be recreated. Breastfed babies effectively become a living and breathing 'part' of the mother's body – the two individuals becoming one, and sharing themselves in the most intimate way. This creates a sense of love, peace, contentment, safety and happiness in the baby – often resulting in an extraordinary bond and connection that lasts a lifetime.

This is one of many reasons why child developmental experts worldwide universally recommend breastfeeding (as opposed to formula), in any instance where a mother is capable of doing so.

### **Learning Through Experimentation and Imitation**

*"Children are curious. They want to find out how they can change and affect people and things around them, even from the first months of age. Play is like children's "work". Play gives children many opportunities to think and solve problems. Children are the first scientists." – World Health Organisation*

Much of a child's developmental journey is based around observation, imitation and experimentation. Essentially, children learn by both copying what other people do and by seeing what happens when they perform certain actions.

They take a box and empty the contents out all over the kitchen floor, they turn a set of pots and pans into a rudimentary drumkit, they pick up and throw items on a somewhat random basis and they pile things on top of one another. In each and every instance, learning something about the way the world works and the consequences of certain actions.

In addition, each of these behaviours represents a ‘physical’ activity of sorts, enabling the child to improve their coordination, motor skills and confidence. This is also where a rudimentary understanding of right and wrong begins to develop, when children are gently and encouragingly corrected for inappropriate actions or potentially harmful behaviours.

### **The Four Key Developmental Areas**

Almost every play or communication activity a child takes part in plays a role in their development. The same can also be said for every moment you spend with them, giving them the attention they crave and encouraging them to grow and evolve.

Even the simplest of games and activities can make a significant contribution to a child’s development over four key developmental areas as follows:

1. **Physical** – the child gradually learns how to stand, walk, grasp and hold objects, develop motor skills and improve their coordination.
2. **Social** – this incorporates all aspects of communication and the use of appropriate language and behaviours when interacting with others.
3. **Cognitive** – the capacity of a child to solve problems and think independently, reducing their reliance on their caregivers.
4. **Emotional** – the gradual development of patience, tolerance and the ability to keep anger, upset and frustration under control.

The key to success as a caregiver lies in combining sensitivity with responsiveness. Sensitivity means that you are always able to recognise what the child is attempting to communicate, which could be anything from affection to interest in something to hunger to boredom.

Responsiveness means being able to act appropriately and promptly to these attempts at communication, consistently meeting the child’s requirements without delay.

### **Age Specific Recommendations**

Formal care and support guidelines for babies and children vary significantly from one age group to the next. The first two years of a child’s life are considered by most authorities to be the most important of all, in terms of their subsequent contribution to the child’s ongoing development. From birth, therefore, every effort should be made to encourage a child’s development through appropriate play and communication.

Let’s take a look at some age-specific recommendations for play and communication, as outlined by the World Health Organization:

#### **For the Newborn, from Birth up to 1 Week**

##### **✓ Play**

A child’s education and development begin the moment they are born. It’s at this stage that providing a child with non-stop attention and affection is essential, while providing them with

the opportunity to see and hear the world around them. Newborns should also have the freedom to move their legs and arms freely, as they begin to develop their very first motor skills.

✓ **Communicate**

The best time to begin talking to a child is long *before* they are actually born. This helps establish a sense of familiarity with the voices of his or her caregivers, strengthening the bonds subsequently built following the child's birth. Babies communicate through a combination of cries, sounds and body movements, which caregivers must learn to interpret and respond to, in order to develop a sense of trust and confidence in their baby.

**For the Infant, from 1 Week up to 6 Months**

✓ **Play**

This tends to be the stage at which babies not only like to reach for and grab everything nearby, but also put everything they grab straight into their mouths. This is due to the fact that their mouths are extremely sensitive and enable them to explore the differences between cold and warm, hard and soft, rough and smooth and so on. Though it also creates difficulties keeping babies safe from potentially harmful objects. The provision of safe, clean and colourful toys and items is therefore essential, in order to encourage infants to safely and hygienically discover and 'taste' the world around them.

✓ **Communicate**

Children of this age also begin to make all manner of new sounds, which when imitated by the caregiver give the child the indication they're being heard and understood. The child may also start attempting to imitate the sounds they hear, resulting in an entertaining and highly beneficial conversation of sorts. Every possible effort should be made to encourage children to communicate with confidence from the earliest possible age.

**For the Child, from 6 Months up to 9 Months**

✓ **Play**

At this stage in a child's development, they will inevitably have begun banging objects against other objects to see (and enjoy) the sounds they make. Children at this age also like to experiment with deliberately dropping and throwing things, which can again be in relation to the sounds they make and to see what happens next. All of which can be challenging and frustrating for caregivers, who should remain mindful that all of this experimentation is an important part of the 'science' of growing up. The child is learning and developing, even if their approach to doing so isn't entirely conventional.

✓ **Communicate**

It's important to remember that children can recognise their own name long before they can actually say it themselves. When the child's name is used regularly in a kind and caring tone of voice, it makes them feel special and as if they are a valid and important member of the family. In addition, children of this age appreciate it when those around them respond (in one way or

another) to the sounds they make. Banging and throwing things around might seem like unacceptable behaviour, but in many instances is simply a case of the child looking to attract your attention and earn your appreciation.

### **For the Child, from 9 Months up to 12 Months**

#### ✓ **Play**

There's a heightened sense of curiosity, humour and entertainment in the way children of this age play. They tend to be fascinated when one object disappears behind another or is hidden in any way – peek-a-boo being a guaranteed source of entertainment. When children of this age can't see something, they question where it has gone, whether it is still there, if and when it will come back and whether they can find it. Simple 'hide and seek' type activities are great at this age for stimulating a child's intellect and development.

#### ✓ **Communicate:**

Conventional speech still isn't possible at this age, but children nonetheless have a much more developed understanding of the language used by those around them. They know their name and respond when called, they know the names of certain animals and they know some of the parts of the body. You can ask a child of this age to point to their nose or to the dog and they can do so, despite the fact that they cannot use these words themselves as of yet.

### **For the Child, from 12 Months up to 2 Years**

#### ✓ **Play**

Activity levels at this age suddenly spike almost overnight, resulting in children's relentless desire to investigate, explore and move around. It's practically impossible for kids of this age to stay still, though they rarely need many conventional toys and games to keep them entertained. It's the classic case of kids within this age group being more entertained by the boxes things are supplied in than their actual contents. Adults are encouraged to play with children in their own preferred way, providing a constant spoken account of what's happening to help develop the child's communication skills. Plenty of praise is also essential, as children's feelings are particularly easy to hurt within this age range.

#### ✓ **Communicate**

Most children will have started to use words by this age, which may primarily take the form of monosyllabic expressions and requests. The word 'water' spoken by a child of this age could indicate they want a drink, or would like some water to play with. However, caregivers can use much more diverse commands and requests when communicating with children of this age. "Do you want to play outside" is a question the child may understand and be able to respond to, despite not having such an advanced grasp of verbal communication as of yet.

**For the Child, 2 Years and Older****✓ Play**

This is the age at which games and playtime can begin taking an altogether more formal or academic approach. Kids of this age will still enjoy playing with almost any random household objects they can get their hands on, but are also more likely to respond positively to puzzles, counting games and so on. Along with relishing the opportunity to learn through play, kids of this age delight in the praise and attention they receive upon accomplishing tasks and learning new skills.

**✓ Communicate**

It's not uncommon for children to have surprisingly competent verbal communication skills by the time they reach two years old. They're also capable of understanding more commands, questions and requests – asking questions being a great way of encouraging kids of this age to talk. In addition, it's important to take a sensitive and strategic approach to the correction of verbal communication errors. Younger children will always make plenty of mistakes while learning to talk, but correcting them in the traditional sense can harm their confidence and discourage them from speaking. As children learn to speak by imitating those around them, they will eventually pick up on the correct pronunciation of a word or phrase by listening to and copying their parents.

**Further Reading:**