

Child Development for Day Care Workers

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Preface

This book was written for beginning students, para-professionals, and other day care workers who wish to increase their understanding of infants and children. Although there are many guides for use in day care programs, none of them, to our knowledge, has gathered together basic information on the development of children and suggested the implications of this information for day care programs. In applying this information to day care work, we have drawn on our own experience in directing day care centers and in teaching.

We have attempted to present the information in as simple a way as possible, since our concern is to provide you with basic material upon which you can build your own program. Important terms are defined in the text and listed in a glossary at the end of each chapter, as well as in the comprehensive glossary at the end of the book.

Although it has been our experience that many students dislike learning about theory at the beginning of a course, we believe that theory serves as the foundation for further knowledge and professional growth and we therefore have presented this material in Chapter 1. Though this information may be demanding, we feel that it can easily be adapted to particular classroom situations. For those of you who are interested in further information, a list of supplementary readings is at the end of the chapter.

The emphasis throughout the book is on individuality and the importance of understanding each child in terms of the stage of development he or she is going through. There are chapters on infants, toddlers, and preschool children. These include discussions of the development of each of these stages out of the preceding one. Chapter 7 is devoted to the importance of working

closely with parents, and specific suggestions for procedures that may be used are included. Chapter 8 offers suggestions for increasing your information about children, and Chapter 9 is a brief history of programs for infants and young children.

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Introduction

This is a book about young children and the way they develop and behave. It is very likely that your interest in day care work results from a concern with children and a desire to work closely with them. Your interest may well have developed from the special appeal that all young creatures have, like kittens, and puppies. Human young are even more appealing because each one is an individual, each one a little different from the other. Realizing this may have increased your wish to become involved with children.

You may also have learned that along with the enjoyment and satisfaction you gain in working with children there goes a great responsibility to them as well. Your influence on a young child can have long-range effects, and it is important that you understand and accept this as a responsibility. This book provides information on how children develop that should help you to do this.

Studying children can be a life-long task. The research already completed, and that which is being done now, is considerable. The fields of anthropology, nutrition, medicine, and others, all contribute to the large and growing body of information. No one person could ever learn all there is to know about children, and no one book could contain all the information. However, as a day care worker, you should have some basic information to be prepared for your work.

No doubt you will be involved in planning the activity program for the children in your care. To plan wisely, you must understand their particular skills and interests. For example, if you know that toddlers (ages one to two and a half) spend their days in constant motion, you won't plan for them to sit still in a story group; story groups work well for five-year-olds, who are far less active. And, when you work with three-year-olds using

scissors, you won't expect them to cut out perfect circles and squares, because you will know that at this age children have trouble making scissors cut paper.

Knowledge of child development helps adults observe children more precisely. Good observation is the basis of good teaching, but time for observation of individual children is limited. Knowledge of child development will help you focus on what to expect and on where special attention is needed. Thus, for example, you can focus on the growing vocabulary of a two-year-old and pay less attention to his or her incorrect grammar, which will be corrected later. Knowledge of the children's skills and daily observations will help you to plan a program and select equipment.

Knowing how children develop will also help you to handle your own feelings about the way they behave. You all have memories of the way you were brought up and were expected to behave. Though you are only aware of some of these memories, any of them can influence the way you evaluate a child's behavior. Though you may feel that the way you were brought up is the only "right" way, there are actually many different ways to rear children and many different ways of behaving.

Children in day care centers come from many different kinds of families, and those families have many different ways of behaving. This is important to remember. Many of you were punished and made to feel guilty about behavior such as spitting, biting, and toilet accidents. If you know that this is common for two- and four-year-olds, you can accept these events and keep them in proper perspective. You can also help children develop more acceptable behavior, like expressing anger in words and eliminating in the toilet. In effect, you can help children because you understand why they behave as they do.

In considering their behavior, you must also remember that these children are growing up in a world that is different from the one you knew when you were

young. Today's children naturally reflect the great changes that have taken place. And, furthermore, they will grow up into a world which will be still more changed.

In your work, you will also be involved with parents. Professional knowledge about children should be shared with them to help them become better parents. Many parents have unrealistic expectations for a child at a particular stage of development, and many conflicts between parent and child can result from these misunderstandings. Parents may consider their child's behavior unacceptable in some way, but if they know that it is common in children of that age, they will feel better about the child and about themselves too. This added confidence will allow them to help their child's behavior mature. Overall, the child, the parent, and the day care worker will all benefit.

Now you can see how knowledge of the way children develop can influence program planning, observation of children, feelings about children, and work with parents. But this knowledge will not solve every problem.

Over and over again in your work, you will be faced with problems with a particular child at a particular time which you must do something about. What do you do, for example, when four-year-old Jimmy throws a block across the room? What do you do when three-year-old Mary wants to do nothing but sit in your lap? What do you do when two-year-old Sally repeatedly gets off her cot during nap time?

Knowledge of how children develop will help, but no rules apply to *all* children at *all* stages of development. Each child is unique, and he or she must be understood in terms of his or her particular level of development and skills. Your reaction, therefore, should be based not only on your general knowledge of children of the same age, but also on your knowledge of the particular child, and the best guess you can make as to the causes of the particular behavior.

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INTRODUCTION

We believe that the material presented here will provide a solid basis for understanding children, and that you will want to continue gathering knowledge. It is likely that the more you learn, the more curious you will become, and the more interesting your chosen field will be to you. The challenges and responsibilities are many, but the satisfactions to be found in working with children are great.

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Principles and Theories of Development

After studying this chapter, you should be able to:

1. describe changes in body proportions between birth and six years of age
2. describe the *cephalocaudal* and *proximodistal trends* in motor development
3. describe the following elements of Piaget's theory: *sensorimotor* and *preoperational periods*, *assimilation*, and *accommodation*
4. considering Erikson's theory of personality development, describe behavior that shows evidence of *trust*, *autonomy*, and *initiative*
5. describe the steps in *behavior modification*

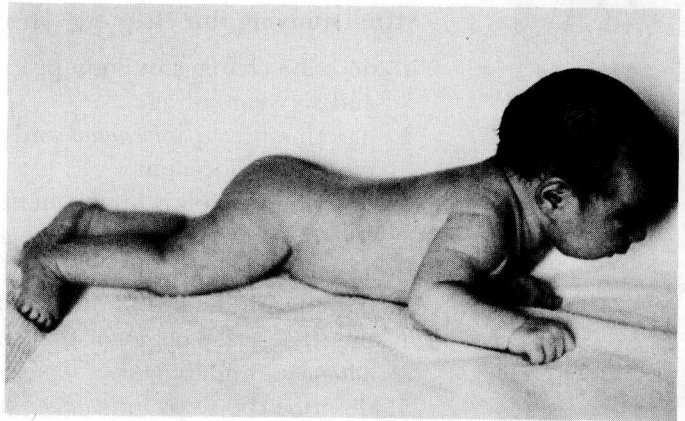
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CHILD DEVELOPMENT FOR DAY CARE WORKERS

Several principles and theories of development are discussed briefly in this chapter to give a basis for understanding their application in the later chapters on infants, toddlers, and preschool children. At first, theories may not seem very useful in your daily work. You may wish that we had provided rules that could be used with every child in every situation, but this is impossible. No set of rules can apply to all children and all situations. Learning to use the theories discussed in this chapter in making daily decisions will help you in working with children under age six.

Growth of the Body

You may have heard the statement that children are not miniature adults. Comparing the body proportions of newborn infants with those of adults proves this fact. Newborns are top-heavy—their heads account for one-fourth of their total body length, as compared with one-eighth of the body length in adults. When you compare the lengths of newborns and adults, you see that legs make up one-fourth the total body length of the newborns and one-half the length of the adults. It fol-



lows, then, that legs increase more rapidly in length than does the rest of the body from birth to adulthood. Children's rapid leg growth influences the way they control their bodies and develop motor skills.

TRENDS IN MOTOR DEVELOPMENT

Changing body proportions during the first six years mean that children's centers of gravity also change. Note the difference in the posture of toddlers walking with their legs far apart, in contrast with five-year-olds skipping with grace. Learning to cope with this changing body is an important process during these years.

Children of the same age vary in size, but body proportions are similar, and this shows a "built-in" plan of development. *Motor development*—the growth of skills for handling the body—provides further evidence for the unfolding ground plan. For example, all infants can control the upper part of the body before they can control the legs in walking. Infants never learn to walk before they can hold up their heads or sit alone. The sequence remains the same regardless of the specific age at which children learn these skills.

This sequence in developing control of the body is called the *cephalocaudal trend*. ("Cephalo" comes from the Greek word meaning "head" and "caudal," from the Latin word meaning "tail.")

Proximodistal trend refers to the development from the center to the edge of the body. "Proximal" means that part of the arm or leg that is closest to the point of attachment to the body. "Distal" describes the portion that is farthest from the body. Infants usually can reach toward and strike at a one-inch cube before they are six months old. But they cannot pick up the cube with their thumbs and forefingers until they are nearly a year old. Even at the end of the preschool period, children are awkward in using their fingers in dressing and in art activities. For example, most children cannot tie a bow or a knot until they are around five years old.

The age at which children are capable of specific motor skills depends both on the individuals' particular built-in plans of development and on the environment. For example, children who have not had chances to practice sitting and standing walk later than children who are given freedom of movement.¹ Adults do not need to teach children to walk; adults should help children learn to walk by providing freedom to explore, and praise for each new skill.

MATURATION AND PAST EXPERIENCE

What children are like at any given age depends on biological changes taking place according to their built-in plans (generally called *maturation*). What they are like also depends on their prior experiences. The children who were below average weight at birth (often called premature) may be expected to walk later than the children who were average or above average weight at birth. This is because their bodies need more time to develop to the point at which they are ready to walk. Severe illness may also slow the growth rate for a while, though after recovery children usually grow more rapidly.

UNEVENNESS OF DEVELOPMENT

We have noted that different parts of the body grow at different rates. This principle also holds true in development of skills. While children make important steps forward in one area, they may make little progress in another.

Unevenness can be seen in the development of large- and small-muscle control. Large muscles are involved in learning to walk, run, and climb. Control of small muscles is involved in the use of fingers. The ability to pick up an object with a pincer movement, using the thumb and first finger, appears toward the end of the first year, usually before infants learn to walk. For the next few years, they make rapid progress in running and stair-