

Topic: CHILD DEVELOPMENT

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DAY-CARE CENTRES AND PRE SCHOOLS FOR CHILDREN

The first five or six years of childhood are said to be a critical or sensitive period in the development of children. The damage done in early childhood cannot be fully compensated in the later period of life. Proper stimulation of all areas of development is necessary for a child reaching his maximum growth potential. With the necessity for women to take a part time or full-time job, mothers need a place where their children will be given custodial care. With growing number of children entering child-care centres at a very young age, parents, psychologists, educators, and nutritionists are becoming concerned about the potential effects of child care centres on the development of the child.

Needs of infants and small children

The parents look forward to have their own children to love and to cherish. Having a child at home means that one should be prepared for all the basic needs of the baby. Every child needs to:

- Be loved and feel physically, mentally and socially secure.
- Have food for optimum growth and development.
- Be clothed for protection against all possible weather conditions. Clothes also contribute to one's personality in any social set up.
- Have a shelter/home that will provide protection against natural calamities. Shelter also provides the much-needed physical security against thieves, burglars and bad elements.



Fig. 1 - Care of Infants and children

What is substitute child care?

You are now familiar with the needs of small children. These are generally fulfilled by parents in the family. Economic factors often force the mothers to take up jobs. Consequently, young ones need to be taken care of by older siblings, neighbours or relatives etc. What role are the siblings, relatives and neighbour playing in bringing up the children? They are mother substitutes while she is at work. Hence substitute child care can be defined as “the care rendered to the child to meet the basic needs in the absence of mother/parent.” Substitute care can be made available both at home (siblings, relatives) and outside (creche/day care centres).

Kinds of substitute child care

Substitute child care is provided by the following:

- a) Older siblings
- b) Relatives/neighbours
- c) Hired help
- d) Creche/day care centres
- e) Pre-nursery/nursery school/Balwadi.

You will now study about the effectiveness of each of these parent substitute care facilities.

Sibling Care is very common among families in low income group. Infants and children are left under the care of a slightly older child. You might find a 6 years old child looking after two to three smaller siblings. How effective or safe can this child care be? Not very effective, because six years old is not equipped with skills required for the usual child rearing. Slightly older children are not mature enough to care for the young ones. Hence it might be a better idea to find an alternative yet safe substitute child care centre. Relations and Neighbours can and do play important role in the upbringing of small children in the home itself. Presence of elders in a family with small children is a big boon. Grandparents in a family provide very loving and safe child care. Neighbours can be a family away from your own family. In the absence of suitable mother substitute, neighbours can provide the much-needed substitute child care. This sort of child care is generally of a short duration. In case the neighbour has time and is willing to provide support on a regular basis it would be advisable to speak frankly with the neighbour. After discussion you should arrive at an understanding where by you can provide suitable compensation for the neighbour's help. Hired Help is a common feature in affluent urban families. One should carefully interview the hired help (Ayah/maid servant) as regards their reliability and experience of being able to provide for all the basic needs of the young one. Have you heard about the importance of police verification before hiring the services of the 'Ayah/maid servant'? Parents should keep a strict vigil on the hired help for the safety of their child.

Creche: Do you know what a creche is? "It a safe place where small children can be left and looked after while the parent is working." Creche is a day care centre. Parents take their children home after the working hours are over. Have you ever visited a creche? Creches take care of children upto 3 years of age. Here the children are left under the expert care of qualified and responsible staff/adults.

Hence the mothers can carry on with their jobs without anxiety as regards their child.

What Parents Should Think About When Choosing

Day-Care centres

Is the centre licensed and regularly checked by government authorities? What is the cost for each child? How old is the child? Are there other children of the same age for companionship? Is the centre near enough to the parents' place of work, so it could be quickly reached in an emergency? Is it well equipped for activities? Do those who manage and work at the centre like the jobs? Do they act as though their task is just to baby-sit, or do they encourage the physical and psychological development of the children? Are there enough teachers and aides to give child individual attention? Is there careful supervision of all children at all times? Is the food well prepared, of good quality, and suited to the age of the children? Is the environment relaxed and happy or do the children seem bored and irritable?

Specific needs of children up to three years of age

These can be listed as below:

- Feeding the child according to his/her needs.
- Keeping the child clean.
- Providing facilities for rest and sleep.
- Availability of toys to play with.
- Providing the facility of exercise.
- Clean and safe environment.

Facilities provided by an ideal creche

A creche should fulfil all the above needs of the small children. Well-organised creches also have the facility of medical check-ups for the small children.

a) Feeding of children: Very small children are fed by the staff of the creche. All possible care is taken to observe the rules of hygiene while feeding these children.

(i) The milk/food is fed to the child at appropriate time and temperature.

(ii) Older children are made to wash their hands before and after the meal timings.

b) They are made to sit and eat in company. This is how they learn the table manners.

c) Keeping the child clean. Creches will have certain number of children who are toilet trained. Hence special care is taken to keep these children clean and dry. Children should be encouraged to relieve themselves. They should learn to keep toilet clean and also wash their hands with soap and water.

d) Providing the child with rest and sleeping facilities: Little children need to sleep and rest a while in a comfortable bed. The creche should provide individual care to small babies. Older children can make use of floor mats to sleep on. Little children enjoy having their own small pillow and small toy to sleep with.

e) Toys for playing help the children to play in a happy atmosphere. There should be toys to suit the children of different ages. Some useful appliances help child to exercise and explore his/her environment. Walkers, tricycles, small monkey-ladders etc. can be kept in small barricaded play area in the creche

f) Clean and safe creche environment ensures safety of little children against diseases and accidents. Trained and healthy staff are the strength of every efficient creche.

g) Medical and first aid facilities should be available in each creche. Wherever needed skilled nursing staff could help in emergencies.

Availability of a doctor once in a fortnight/month is an added health promotional requirement of a good creche. A first aid kit should be available at each creche. Some large organisations are extending the creche facilities to the children of their own employees only.