



Caregiver Characteristics II

Characteristics important in caring for an infant or toddler:

- Empathy and nurturing
- Decision-making skills
- Patience
- Safety and health consciousness
- Communication skills
- Ability to handle stress
- Understanding of child developmental stages

Empathy and Nurturing

Empathy is the ability to put oneself in the position of another and try to understand how that person is feeling; to have sympathy and compassion for another person. Nurturing involves giving tender care and protection while showing love, support, concern, and encouragement.

Decision-Making Skills

Caregivers encounter many different situations with infants and toddlers. Each situation requires that a caregiver be able to evaluate the situation and determine the best course of action to take:

- Identify the problem—what do you need to decide?
- List the various solutions—what are your choices?
- Evaluate each solution—consider the positive and negative outcomes.
- Choose the best solution.

Patience

Infants and toddlers can try your patience. They dawdle, they may refuse to do what you want or need them to do, and they often want to do the same things over and over. Patience is the ability to endure waiting or delay without becoming annoyed or upset; to persevere calmly when faced with difficulties.

Safety and Health Consciousness

Caregivers must be continually alert to ensure that there

are no safety hazards near an infant or toddler, and that children are not engaging in dangerous activities. Caregivers must know how to perform basic first aid and infant and toddler CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation). They should also be able to determine whether there is a medical emergency, and how to respond quickly and appropriately.

Communication Skills

Good communicators help guide the actions of children in a positive manner. If children misbehave, be sure they understand that you do not dislike them, even though you do not like their behavior. Use positive feedback to reinforce good behavior such as, “I like how you picked up your toys after playing with them.” Use corrective feedback to stop or change misbehavior, to tell the child what they should do, or what the appropriate thing to do is, or what you would like them to do. Corrective feedback uses positive requests in a respectful manner. For example, “Sally, please draw the picture on your own paper,” rather than saying, “Do not draw on Billy’s paper.”

Here are some basic guidelines when communicating with children:

Be Respectful: When you treat children with respect, you are modeling the behavior you expect from them. They in turn will treat you with respect. Use “please” and “thank you.” Do not call them names or say they are bad. This can hurt a child’s feelings and does not help a situation.

Keep it Simple: Children may have a hard time understanding long instructions or long words. Speak at a level that is easy for a child to understand. Keep your sentences short and simple.

Listen: Look at the child when he or she is talking to you. If possible, bend down so you are at eye level with the child. If you are not able to do what the child wants or you need to focus your attention on something else first, let the child know that you heard his or her request.

Remain Calm: Even if you are angry or frustrated with an infant or a toddler, use a calm voice and remain calm. If you need to, take a minute for yourself, and take a deep breath and count to ten.



Ability to Handle Stress

Sometimes children may misbehave. This may be an indication that they need help controlling their behavior and expressing themselves in a positive way. Remember that an infant is not capable of misbehaving. However, when a toddler, preschooler, or school-age misbehaves, you have three courses of action you can take:

- You can ignore it.
- You can say something to correct the child and change the behavior, telling the child what you would like him or her to do instead.
- You can physically take control of the situation. This is reserved for situations in which the child is doing something that is a threat to themselves or to others. For example, if a child is hitting or biting another child, you should gently grasp the child's arm and tell him or her that he or she is not allowed to do that. If the child appears to be angry, ask why he or she is angry and talk the situation through. If the child is about to throw an object at someone, take the object away.

As the caregiver, you need to decide which course of action is most appropriate, and then take it. Remind the child that it is the behavior, not the child that you do not like. Children need to know that you will not stop liking them if they misbehave. Use positive feedback to help guide children before they misbehave, and make positive and respectful requests when they misbehave. Modeling respect helps children see how they should behave with you and with each other. Never make fun of, hit, spank, shake, or shout at a child, no matter how frustrated you become with their behavior.

Understanding of Child Developmental Stages

All infants and toddlers pass through standard stages of development at specific ages. However, because all infants and toddlers are different, they may not be at the same developmental level as others, even though they are the same age. Some children progress more quickly, others more slowly. Caregivers need to understand the stages of development and the abilities of the children in their care.