



The Important Role of the Caregiver

Unit One—Lesson One
The Important Role of the Caregiver

Caregivers attend to the needs of children at preschools, nursery schools, businesses, day care centers, and in private homes. In these settings, it generally involves the nurturing and teaching of children ages five and younger, but may also include school-aged children who come before and after the school day and/or during the summer. In addition to ensuring the safety and well-being of a child, a good caregiver attends to the emotional, intellectual, and creative needs of children. Caregivers should be enthusiastic and involved as they organize stimulating and interesting activities, manage creative play times, and supervise interaction with other children. Caregivers must also know how to communicate with infants and toddlers at their level of understanding in a nurturing and positive way.

Caregivers must keep records of each child's progress including daily observations and information about activities, meals served, and medications administered, and discuss the child's development and needs with the parents, who often feel left out of their children's day-to-day lives. They instruct children in health and personal habits such as eating, resting, and toilet habits, and identify signs of emotional or developmental problems in children and bring them to parents' or guardians' attention.

Being a caregiver is physically and emotionally draining. The caregiver will find that he or she is continually bending down, picking up, standing, lifting, or carrying small children. Infants and toddlers may cry or scream for little reason, they have little or no control over their bodily functions, and they require a great deal of attention and nurturing. Even with these drawbacks, people who work with children do so because they love them and enjoy being an important part of their physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development. The early childhood years are the most crucial in a person's intellectual and emotional development, and often shape a child's first memories. Caregivers see the importance of this role and have a strong desire to be a part of that special time in every person's life.