

FUNDAMENTALS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE

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Foreword

The early childhood years are a period of paramount significance. It is a time when the foundation for lifelong learning, behavior, and health is laid. The world has increasingly recognized the value of early childhood development. The book *Child Care* comes as a timely intervention and guide for young children, caregivers, educators, parents, and policymakers. *Child Care* is authored by a dedicated team of scholars. It is a comprehensive exploration of child care in the Nigerian context, uniquely tailored to our cultural, educational, and socio-economic landscape.

Child Care balances theory and practice. The book offers practical strategies that can be implemented by educators, caregivers, parents, and policymakers alike to the benefit of young children. Whether addressing child development, the variety of care settings, or the intricate dynamics between caregivers and families, every chapter is grounded in research yet accessible to a broad audience.

This book does not shy away from complex issues. It thoughtfully tackles subjects such as inclusive education for children with special needs, the critical roles of nutrition and safety, and the pressing need for advocacy and professionalism in child care. It emphasizes that child care is not merely a support

service, but a vital educational, social, and developmental experience that shapes the future of children and, by extension, communities.

It is divided into seven meticulously organized parts and provides a roadmap that is both thorough and adaptable. It speaks to the heart of anyone invested in nurturing the potential of young children and serves as an indispensable resource for fostering a more equitable and supportive early childhood system in Nigeria.

It is with great pride that I recommend this book to scholars, researchers, practitioners, educationists, and stakeholders who seek a deeper understanding of child care in early childhood within the Nigerian context. Let this book be your companion in the journey toward creating a future where every Nigerian child is seen, supported, and empowered from the very beginning.

Prof. Ngozi E. Anyikwa

Director, Affiliate Institutions,

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

President, Professional Association for the Education of Children (PAEC)

Preface

Child care is a fundamental aspect of society, influencing the growth, development, and well-being of children in their formative years. It extends beyond basic supervision to include nurturing, education, safety, and the creation of an inclusive and supportive environment for every child. This book is designed to serve as a comprehensive guide for educators, caregivers, parents, and professionals who are dedicated to providing quality child care.

Divided into seven essential parts, this book explores the key elements of child care, starting with an Introduction to Child Care, which establishes foundational knowledge. It then delves into Child Development and Child Care, highlighting the cognitive, emotional, and social growth of children. Further, Child Care Settings and Programs provide insights into different care environments, while Child Care Providers and Families examine the roles of caregivers and the importance of collaboration between families and professionals.

Recognizing the significance of well-being, this book also addresses Health, Safety, and Nutrition in Child Care, emphasizing best practices for creating a safe and healthy environment. Additionally, Special Needs and Inclusive Child Care underscores the importance of accommodating diverse needs, ensuring that every child receives equal development opportunities. Lastly, Professionalism and Advocacy in Child Care encourages ethical practices, professional growth, and the promotion of child rights and policies that enhance the child care sector.

This book is a valuable resource for those seeking to deepen their understanding of child care principles and apply best practices in real-world settings. It aims to equip readers with knowledge, skills, and strategies to foster positive child development and create nurturing environments that support the holistic well-being of children.

I invite you to explore these pages with an open mind and a commitment to enriching the lives of children through informed and compassionate care.

Tonia Chigbo-Obasi

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART ONE:

INTRODUCTION TO CHILD CARE	1
Definition and Scope of Child Care	1
Scope of Child Care	2
Historical development of child care	4
Types of Child Care	7
Importance of Child Care in Early Childhood Education	12
The Role of child care in supporting child development	14
The Impact of child care on families and communities	17
The Role of Technology in Modern Child Care	21
Challenges Faced by Child Care Providers	26
Conclusion	35
Revision Questions	36

PART TWO: CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND CHILD CARE	37
Physical Development in Early Childhood	37
Motor skills development	38
Health and nutrition	43
Cognitive Development in Early Childhood	47

Language development	48
Problem-solving and critical thinking	51
Social-Emotional Development in Early Childhood	55
Emotional intelligence	56
Emotional Intelligence: Case Study	57
Social skills development	60
Revision Questions	66

**PART THREE: CHILD CARE SETTINGS
AND PROGRAMS**

PART THREE: CHILD CARE SETTINGS AND PROGRAMS	66
Types of Child Care Settings	66
Centre-based care	66
Home-based care	74
Family child care homes	77
Child Care Programs and Curriculum	81
Developmentally appropriate practices	81
Play-based learning	85
Emergent curriculum	87
NAEYC Curriculum Guidelines	91
Case Study	94
Conclusion	95
Revision Questions	95

PART FOUR: CHILD CARE PROVIDERS AND FAMILIES	97
Roles and Responsibilities of Child Care Providers	97
Caregiving and nurturing	97
Education and curriculum planning	100
Communication with families	104
Working with Families in Child Care	107
Building partnerships with families	107
Supporting diverse family structures and needs	110
Communicating with families about child development and care	112
Conclusion	115
Revision Questions	116
PART FIVE: HEALTH, SAFETY, AND NUTRITION IN CHILD CARE	118
Health and Hygiene in Child Care	118
Preventing the spread of illness	119
Supporting children's health and well-being	123
Safety in Child Care	126
Creating a safe environment	126
Preventing injuries and accidents	130
Nutrition in Child Care	133
Supporting healthy eating habits	133
Providing nutritious meals and snacks	136

Conclusion	139
Revision Questions	140

PART SIX: SPECIAL NEEDS AND INCLUSIVE CHILD CARE **142**

Supporting Children with Special Needs	142
Identifying and supporting children with special needs	142
Creating inclusive environments	148
Case Study	150
Inclusive Child Care Practices	151
Creating culturally responsive environments	155
Case Study	158
Conclusion	158
Revision Questions	159

PART 7: PROFESSIONALISM AND ADVOCACY IN CHILD CARE **160**

Professionalism in Child Care	160
Defining professionalism in child care	160
Supporting ongoing professional development	166
Case Study	169
Advocacy in Child Care	170
Supporting policies and practices that benefit children and families	170

Fundamentals of early childhood care

Advocating for the rights and needs of children and families	174
Case Study	177
Overall Revision	180
Answers to Multi-Choice Questions	199
BIBLIOGRAPHY	205

NOTES ON THE AUTHORS'



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Fundamentals of early childhood care



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Chigbo-obasi, T., Elechi, O.G, Okoli, I. A., Iwu, C.V., Mbachii, R. A

PART ONE:

INTRODUCTION TO CHILD CARE

Definition of Child Care

Child care refers to the care and supervision of young children, typically from birth to age five, during the hours that their parents, primary caregivers, or guardians—such as market traders, civil servants, or artisans—are occupied with work or community activities. It encompasses a range of services and settings designed to support the developmental needs of children while providing a safe and nurturing environment (Administration for Children and Families [ACF], 2016). Child care is not merely a service; it is a cornerstone of societal progress, a nurturing ground where the seeds of future generations are sown. Imagine a world where every child, from the moment they take their first breath, is cradled in an environment that not only ensures their safety but also ignites their curiosity, fosters their creativity, and nurtures their innate potential. This is the essence of child care—a holistic ecosystem designed to support the developmental journey of young children while their parents or guardians contribute to the world beyond the home. In the words of Maria Montessori, *"The child is both a hope and a promise for mankind."* Child care transforms this promise into reality by providing a

structured yet flexible framework that caters to the physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs of children from birth to age five. It is a symphony of care and education, where every note—whether it’s a lullaby sung by a caregiver, a story read aloud, or a game played in a sunlit classroom—resonates with the potential to shape a child’s future.



Scope of Child Care

The scope of childcare extends beyond mere supervision; it includes educational components that foster social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development, which are crucial for success in later schooling. Early care and education policies and

programs involve the provision of (a) child care to preschool-aged children, and care before and after school to school-aged children while their parents are employed or receiving further education; (b) other child development-focused, and from early educational experiences, to preschool-aged children; and (c) child development, child care, and early education information made available to the parents of preschool-aged children (Cochran, 2007).

Beyond Supervision: NIEER (2023), Schoch et al (2023), agree that modern child care transcends the traditional role of mere supervision. It is an integrated approach that blends care with education, ensuring that children are not just looked after but are actively engaged in learning experiences that stimulate their growing minds.

Global Impact: Child care is a *catalyst for achieving broader societal goals*, including poverty eradication, gender equality, and sustainable development. By providing children with a strong foundation, it sets the stage for lifelong learning and success (UNICEF & WHO, 2023).

Policy Integration: Governments and organizations worldwide recognize child care as a vital investment in human capital. Programs like Head Start in the U.S. and Early Childhood Care Development and Education (ECCDE) in Nigeria are testament to this commitment, offering structured learning, health services, and parental support (NIEER, 2023).



Historical Development of Childcare

Historically, child care has evolved significantly. The story of child care is a tapestry woven through time, reflecting the evolution of human society itself. In ancient societies, child-rearing was primarily a communal effort, with extended families and communities sharing responsibilities (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). This communal spirit laid the groundwork for the informal child care systems that persisted for centuries. The historical development of child care reflects societal shifts in family structures, economic realities, and evolving understandings of child development. Early forms

of child care were often informal, relying on extended family, neighbours, or older siblings (Powell, 2006). The Industrial Revolution in the 19th century marked a shift, as more women entered the workforce in unprecedented numbers, leading to a growing need for organized childcare services and the emergence of more formalized childcare arrangements, initially driven by social welfare concerns and the need to support working mothers (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). The clatter of factory machines echoed the growing need for organized child care, leading to the establishment of day nurseries and crèches—sanctuaries of care for the children of working mothers. These early centers, though rudimentary, were the first steps toward recognizing child care as a societal necessity. The establishment of kindergartens in the late 19th century, influenced by educational reformers like Friedrich Froebel, laid the groundwork for modern early childhood education (Baker, 2018). The establishment of various child care policies and governmental regulations, particularly post-World War II, further modernized and shaped the landscape of child care (Nores & Barnett, 2010). These early centers, often referred to as day nurseries or crèches, primarily focused on providing basic care and supervision. Over the decades, child care has continued to adapt to societal changes, including the increasing recognition of the importance of early childhood education and the

need for quality care. The 20th century witnessed a growing recognition of the importance of early childhood experiences and a shift towards more developmentally focused child care programs. Pioneering educators like Maria Montessori and others advocated for enriching learning environments and play-based activities. Governmental initiatives, such as the Head Start program in the United States, further emphasized the role of child care in promoting educational equity and addressing the needs of disadvantaged children. Today, child care systems continue to evolve, grappling with issues of affordability, quality, workforce development, and the integration of evidence-based practices.





Types of Child Care Services (Center-based, Home-based, etc.)

Child care is not a one-size-fits-all solution; it is a mosaic of options, each offering unique benefits tailored to the needs of children and families. The scope of child care includes various forms of care, such as center-based programs, family child care homes, and informal arrangements with relatives or friends (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2020). The types of child care available are diverse, catering to different needs and preferences. They can be broadly categorized as follows:

1. **Center-Based Care:** Imagine a bustling hub of learning, where children gather in bright, inviting classrooms filled with books, toys, and educational materials. Center-based care is a structured environment where trained educators guide children through a curriculum designed to foster cognitive, social, and emotional growth. It is a microcosm of society, where children learn to interact, share, and collaborate with their peers (Cannon et al., 2017; NAEYC, 2023). These centers often offer structured programs, trained staff, and resources such as learning materials, outdoor play areas, and meals. Examples include preschools, daycare centers, and nursery schools (Cannon et al., 2017; NAEYC, 2019).
2. **Home-Based Care:** Picture a cozy, warm home, where a caregiver attends small group of children with the tenderness of a second parent. Home-based care offers a personalized touch, where children thrive in an intimate setting that feels like an extension of their own family. This type of care takes place in the caregiver's home. Home-based providers often offer a more intimate and personalized environment. This includes family child care homes, where a single provider cares for a small group of children, and in-home nannies, who provide care for a single family's children in their home. This type of care

is particularly valued for its flexibility and ability to cater to individual needs (NSECE Project Team, 2015; Ang et al., 2023).

3. ***Relative/Informal Care:*** This involves care provided by a family member, such as a grandparent, aunt, or uncle. Relative care is often informal and may be driven by personal relationships and trust offering a seamless transition between home and care. While it may lack the structure of formal settings, it provides a nurturing continuity that is invaluable for young children (Clarke-Stewart, 1991). Although it can be a cost-effective option, it may not always offer the same level of professional development or structured programming as other types of care (Clarke-Stewart, 1991). This type of care may also be provided by friends or neighbors. While it may lack formal training and regulation, it is often more flexible and can be tailored to the specific needs of the child and family.
4. ***Employer-Sponsored Care:*** Some forward-thinking employers recognize the dual benefits of supporting their employees' child care needs. On-site child care facilities or partnerships with local providers not only ease the burden on working parents but also boost productivity and loyalty (BCG, 2024)
5. ***Publicly Funded Programs:*** Examples of publicly supported programmes in Nigeria include Early Childhood Care Development and

Education (ECCDE) centres established under the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), and community-based child care centres sponsored by NGOs such as ActionAid Nigeria or UNICEF-Nigeria. Programs like Head Start and ECCDE are beacons of hope for disadvantaged families, offering comprehensive services that include education, health care, and nutritional support. These programs are a lifeline, ensuring that every child, regardless of background, has access to quality care (NIEER, 2023)

6. **Other options:** This category includes programs like before- and after-school care, which often focus on providing care and enrichment activities for school-age children. Each type of child care service offers unique benefits, making it essential for families to consider their specific needs and circumstances when selecting an appropriate option.

Fundamentals of Early Childhood Care



Importance of Child Care in Early Childhood Education

Child care within early childhood education (ECE) encompasses formal and informal educational services like day care, preschool, and other programs designed to support children's development from birth to around age 8, focusing on holistic growth and preparing them for future learning. Early childhood is a window of opportunity, a time when the brain is most receptive to learning and development. Child care plays a pivotal role in shaping this critical phase, offering children the tools they need to thrive.

Cognitive Development: Through activities like storytelling, puzzles, and interactive games, child care stimulates young minds, laying the foundation for language acquisition, problem-solving, and critical thinking (Piaget, 1952; NIEER, 2023).

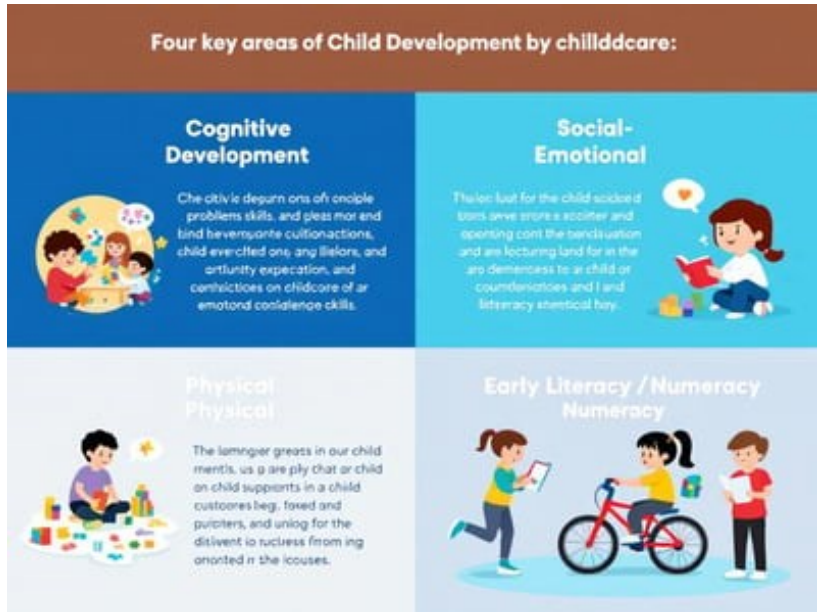
Social-Emotional Growth: Child care is a social laboratory, where children learn to navigate relationships, express emotions, and develop empathy. These early interactions are the building blocks of emotional intelligence (NIEER, 2023).

Physical Development: From crawling to running, child care provides opportunities for movement, helping children develop motor skills and physical confidence (NIEER, 2023).

Early Literacy and Numeracy: Exposure to books, songs, and counting games sparks a lifelong love of learning, preparing children for academic success (NIEER, 2023)

The importance of early childhood care cannot be overemphasized because it encompasses a wide variety of activities designed to promote children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development before they enter kindergarten or primary school. Early childhood care and education (ECCE) is crucial because it leverages a time of significant brain development in children. Quality ECCE can set the foundation for good health, nutrition, learning success, social-emotional development, and economic productivity throughout life. Child care plays a crucial role in supporting child development during the formative years. Research indicates that high-quality early childhood education and care can significantly enhance cognitive, social, and emotional development (National Institute for Early Education Research [NIEER], 2020). During the formative years, children experience rapid brain development, and quality child care can provide the stimulation, social interaction, and educational foundations essential for success in later life. Quality child care programs provide children with opportunities for play-based learning, which is

essential for developing critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and social interactions.



The Role of Child Care in Supporting Child Development

Child care is more than a service—it is a partner in parenting, a guide for growth, and a champion of potential. It is where children take their first steps toward independence, where they learn to share, to communicate, and to explore the world around them. Child care settings often employ trained

educators who understand child development principles and can create enriching learning environments. These educators facilitate activities that promote language development, motor skills, and socialization, helping children build a strong foundation for future learning (Barnett, 2011). The interactions children have with caregivers and peers in these settings are vital for developing social skills, emotional regulation, and resilience. According to Baker (2018) effective child care programs emphasize play-based learning, which supports creativity and critical thinking, ensures children develop essential social skills, and enables them to interact and collaborate with peers. Furthermore, quality child care can narrow achievement gaps for children from disadvantaged backgrounds by providing them access to enriching experiences that they might not receive at home. The role of child care in supporting child development can be categorized into four as follows:

- i. ***Cognitive Development:*** Child care programs often incorporate activities that promote cognitive development, such as literacy activities, problem-solving exercises, and exposure to new concepts and ideas. Child care nurtures young minds, fostering curiosity and a thirst for knowledge. Activities like reading, puzzles, and science experiments ignite a passion for discovery (NIEER, 2023). Interactions with trained

caregivers and peers contribute to language acquisition and cognitive growth (Piaget, 1952).

- ii. ***Social-Emotional Development:*** Child care provides opportunities for children to interact with peers, learn to navigate social situations, and develop emotional regulation skills. Through play and interaction with caregivers, children learn about empathy, sharing, cooperation, and conflict resolution. In the company of peers and caregivers, children learn the art of friendship, the value of kindness, and the strength of resilience. These lessons are the cornerstones of character (NIEER, 2023).
- iii. ***Physical Development:*** Child care settings often incorporate opportunities for physical activity, such as outdoor play, gross motor activities, and fine motor skill development. These activities are crucial for children's physical health and coordination and confidence in their bodies (NIEER, 2023).
- iv. ***Early Literacy and Numeracy:*** Child care programs often emphasize the importance of early literacy and numeracy skills. Exposure to books, storytelling, songs, and games, and early math concepts lays the foundation for later academic success.



Impact of Child Care on Families and Communities

The impact of child care extends beyond individual children to families and communities. For families, access to quality child care allows parents to pursue employment or education, contributing to economic stability and growth. It alleviates the stress of balancing work and family responsibilities, enabling parents to focus on their careers while ensuring their children receive quality care (Gornick & Meyers, 2003). Moreover, child care services can alleviate stress for parents by providing peace of mind regarding their child's well-being and development (Child Care Aware of America, 2020)

Communities also benefit from robust child care systems. Quality child care programs can lead to better educational outcomes, reduced crime rates, and improved public health. When children receive quality early education, they are more likely to succeed in school and contribute positively to society as adults (Heckman, 2011). Furthermore, child care services can foster community connections, bringing families together and creating networks of support. Additionally, research demonstrates that children who have access to quality early childhood education contribute positively to their communities as they grow, becoming engaged citizens and lifelong learners (Whitebook et al., 2018). The ripple effects of quality child care extend far beyond the individual child. It is a force for societal transformation, empowering families, strengthening communities, and driving economic growth. The impact of child care on families and communities can be categorized into four as follows:

- i. ***Support for Working Families:*** Child care liberates and enables parents, particularly mothers, to participate in the workforce, pursue education, and contribute to the economy while knowing their children are in safe, nurturing hands (Davis Schoch et al., 2023). Access to

affordable and reliable child care is essential for family economic stability (Fuller et al., 1999).

- ii. ***Increased Economic Productivity:*** By enabling parents to work, child care contributes to overall economic productivity and growth creating a cycle of prosperity that benefits everyone. Investing in child care can have long-term economic benefits for communities (Blau, 2000). Investing in child care boosts economic productivity and growth by supporting a diverse and skilled labor force (Blau, 2000; Davis Schoch et al., 2023).
- iii. ***Community Building:*** Child care centers often serve as hubs for families, providing opportunities for social interaction, parent education, and community involvement. They can foster a sense of belonging and support for families (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).
- iv. ***Early Intervention and Support:*** Child care is often the first line of defense in identifying and addressing developmental delays, or special needs early on, ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive. It allows for timely interventions and support for children and their families (Guralnick, 1998; Davis Schoch et al., 2023).

Conclusion

Child care is the heartbeat of early childhood education, a beacon of hope for children, families,

and communities. It is a vital component of early childhood education, influencing child development and supporting families and communities. As we continue to recognize the importance of quality child care, we must strive to ensure that every child has access to quality care, laying the foundation for a brighter, more equitable future. Moreover, ongoing efforts are needed to improve the standards of care provided to young children.



The Role of Technology in Modern Child Care

In modern times, technological advancement helps greatly in the handling of toddlers, and children. Some of them are explained herefrom;

1. Digital Tools for Learning and Development

Technology in child care is no longer a futuristic concept—it is a present-day reality, reshaping how children learn, how educators teach, and how families engage with early education. Digital tools, from interactive tablets to AI-driven learning platforms, are bridging gaps in access, personalizing learning, and fostering creativity.

Interactive Learning: Applications like Wonderscope (augmented reality storytelling) and Osmo Little Genius (tangible AI) transform abstract concepts into tangible, multisensory experiences, making learning more engaging and effective for young minds (Su et al., 2023; Tang et al., 2023).

Personalized Pathways: AI-powered platforms analyze children's interactions and adapt content to their learning pace and interests, ensuring no child is left behind (Kanders, 2024; Bahroun et al., 2023).

Documentation and Progress Tracking: Digital portfolios and AI dashboards help educators monitor developmental milestones, share progress

with parents, and tailor interventions (Harrison et al., 2023).

Visual Example:



2. Administrative Efficiency and Parent Engagement

Beyond the classroom, technology is streamlining operations and enhancing communication between providers and families.

- a) **Automated Systems:** Child care management software automates attendance tracking, billing, and scheduling, freeing educators to focus on children (Illumine, 2024; Lillio, 2024).
- b) **Parent Portals:** Apps provide real-time updates on a child's activities, meals, and developmental progress, fostering transparency and trust (MyBrightWheel, 2025).
- c) **Data-Driven Decision Making:** Analytics tools help centers optimize staffing, resources, and curriculum based on enrollment trends and community needs (LineLeader, 2025).

Visual Example:



3. Ethical Considerations and Challenges

While technology offers transformative potential, its integration is not without ethical dilemmas and risks.

- i. **Screen Time and Health:** Excessive passive screen use can impact sleep, attention, and physical activity. Experts recommend balanced, intentional use of interactive, educational tools (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2023; GAO, 2023).
- ii. **Data Privacy:** AI and digital platforms collect sensitive data on children. Robust

safeguards and transparent policies are essential to protect privacy and ensure equitable access (EU AI Act, 2023; Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018).

iii. **Digital Divide:** Not all families have equal access to technology. Child care centers must bridge this gap by providing devices and digital literacy support (UNICEF, 2023; Su et al., 2023).

iv. **Visual Example:**



Challenges Faced by Child Care Providers

1. Workforce Shortages and Burnout

The child care sector is grappling with a **crisis of attrition**, exacerbated by low wages, high stress, and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- a) **Staffing Gaps:** As of 2025, the workforce remains **5.9% smaller** than pre-pandemic

levels, with many educators leaving for higher-paying jobs (Hall et al., 2024; CSCCE, 2025).

- b) **Mental Health and Well-being:** Providers report **burnout and emotional exhaustion**, compounded by the pressure to meet regulatory standards and parent expectations (NAEYC, 2023; NASEM, 2024).
- c) **Policy Responses:** States like New Hampshire and New Jersey are investing in **retention bonuses, scholarships, and wage increases** to stabilize the workforce (Center for American Progress, 2024).

Visual Example:



2. Financial Strain and Funding Instability

Child care providers operate on **razor-thin margins**, with funding volatility threatening their sustainability.

- a) **End of Pandemic Relief:** The expiration of federal stabilization funds in 2023 left many centers **struggling to cover operational costs**, leading to closures and reduced capacity (TCF, 2023; GAO, 2023).
- b) **Rising Costs:** Inflation and increased wages for staff have **outpaced tuition revenue**, forcing difficult choices between quality and affordability (FFYF, 2024).
- c) **Innovative Funding Models:** Public-private partnerships and employer-sponsored child care are emerging as **lifelines** for centers and families (BCG, 2024; U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 2024).

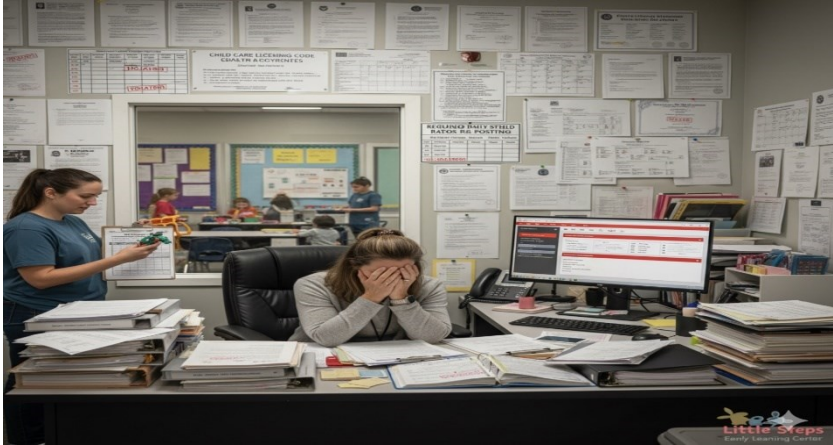
Visual Example:



3. Regulatory and Operational Hurdles

Providers must navigate a **complex web of regulations**, often with limited resources.

- **Compliance Burden:** Meeting health, safety, and educational standards requires **time and expertise**, diverting attention from core educational goals (NAEYC, 2023).
- **Staff Training:** Ongoing professional development is critical but **underfunded**, leaving educators ill-equipped to address evolving challenges (CSCCE, 2025).
 - a) **Community Collaboration:** Partnerships with local governments, nonprofits, and businesses can **ease regulatory pressures** and provide shared resources (NHSA, 2023).



Innovative Solutions and Best Practices

1. Technology-Driven Efficiency

Innovative centers are leveraging technology to **optimize operations** and **enhance learning**.

- **AI and Automation:** Tools like BrightWheel and LineLeader automate administrative tasks, **reducing costs by up to 22%** and improving parent engagement (LineLeader, 2025; BrightWheel, 2025).
- **Virtual Professional Development:** Online platforms offer **flexible, affordable training** for educators, addressing staffing and quality challenges (Illumine, 2024).
 - a) **Hybrid Learning Models:** Blending in-person and digital learning **expands access**

and accommodates diverse family needs (Su et al., 2023).

Visual Example:





2. Policy and Community Partnerships

Systemic change requires **collaboration across sectors.**

- a) **Employer-Sponsored Child Care:**
Companies like Patagonia and Google are **investing in on-site child care**, boosting

- employee retention and productivity (BCG, 2024).
- b) **Public Funding Advocacy:** Advocacy groups are pushing for **sustainable public funding** and tax incentives to support providers and families (Child Care Aware of America, 2025).
 - c) **Local Innovations:** States and cities are piloting **shared services alliances** and **micro-grants** to help small providers thrive (NHSA, 2023; FFYF, 2024).

Visual Example:



3. Focus on Equity and Inclusion

Equitable child care is **foundational to social justice**.

- a) **Culturally Responsive Curriculum:** Programs are integrating **diverse languages, traditions, and histories** into daily learning (NAEYC, 2023).
- b) **Accessibility Initiatives:** Subsidies, sliding-scale fees, and **child care desert**

mapping ensure all families can access quality care (FFYF, 2024).

- c) **Support for Special Needs:** AI tools and adaptive technologies are **personalizing support** for children with disabilities (Su et al., 2023).



Conclusion: A Call to Action

The future of child care hinges on embracing technology, supporting providers, and advocating for systemic change. By investing in innovation, equity, and collaboration, we can build a child care system that nurtures every child, empowers every family, and strengthens every community.

REVISION QUESTIONS:

1. Define child care and discuss its scope. How does the scope of child care extend beyond mere supervision?
2. Trace the historical development of child care. How have societal shifts influenced the evolution of child care practices and policies?
3. Describe the different types of child care services available. Compare and contrast the advantages and disadvantages of center-based care and home-based care services.
4. Explain the importance of child care within the context of early childhood education (ECE). Discuss the role of child care in supporting child development, focusing on cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development, and early literacy and numeracy.
5. Discuss the impact of child care on families and communities. How does access to quality child care contribute to family economic stability, community building, and early intervention?
6. Summarize the key arguments made in the provided discourse on the introduction to child care. What are the main points emphasized, and what are the potential implications for policy and practice?

PART TWO:

CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND CHILD CARE

Early childhood education (ECE) plays a crucial role in shaping a child's development across various domains. Child care settings, whether in-home or center-based, provide the environment and opportunities for young children to grow physically, cognitively, and socio-emotionally. This discussion will explore the key aspects of child development within the context of child care, using the framework provided.

Physical Development in Early Childhood

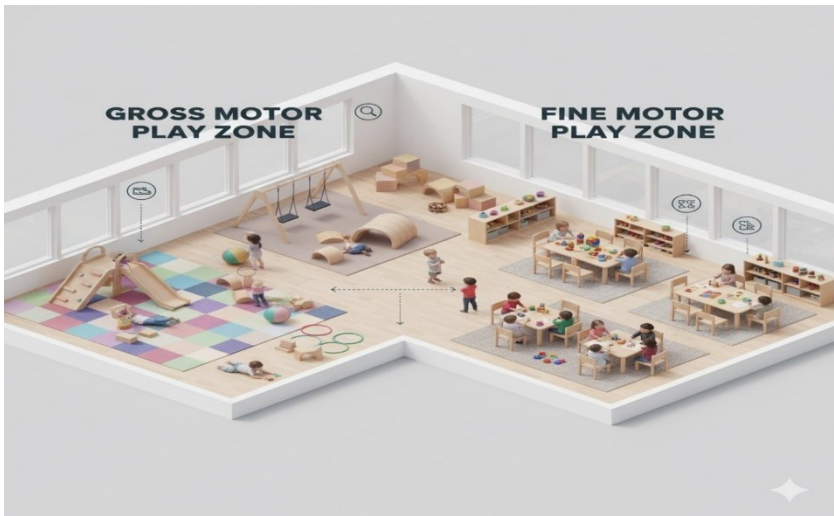
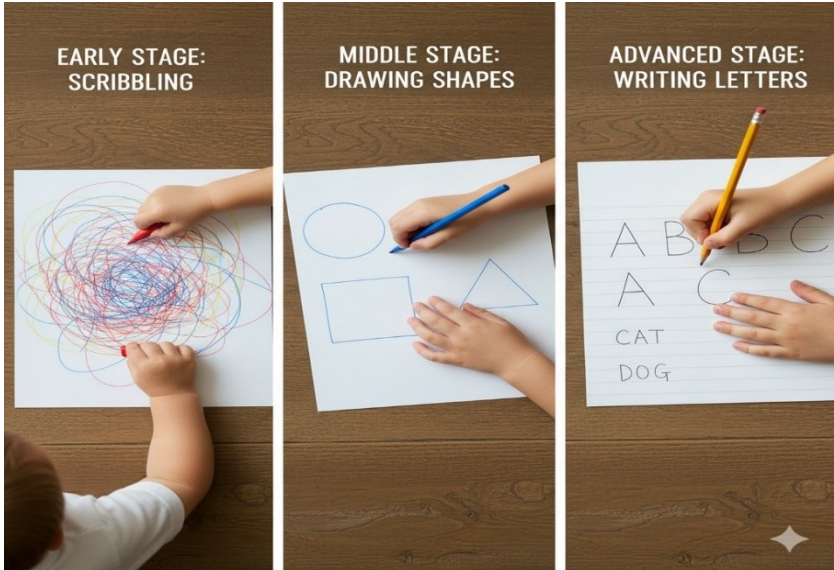
Physical development during early childhood is critical as children progress through various stages of motor skills refinement. Gross motor skills, such as running, jumping, and climbing, develop rapidly, while fine motor skills, like writing, buttoning a shirt, and using scissors, begin to take shape. Child care settings offer opportunities to practice these skills through outdoor play, blocks, puzzles, and art supplies. Child care providers are instrumental in fostering this development through structured activities, play, and attention to health and nutrition.

Motor Skills Development

Physical development during early childhood is critical as children progress through various stages of motor skills refinement. Gross motor skills, which involve large muscle movements, such as running, jumping, and climbing, typically develop at a rapid pace during this period (Children’s Institute, 2020). Motor skills development is not just about physical growth—it’s about building confidence, independence, and the foundation for lifelong movement. For example, consider Ade, a 3-year-old in a Lagos-based child care center. At the start of the year, Ade struggled to balance on one foot or hold a pencil. Through structured activities like obstacle courses, dance sessions, and finger painting, he gradually developed both gross and fine motor skills. By the end of the year, he could jump over small hurdles and draw recognizable shapes—a testament to how intentional play fosters physical development.

Fine motor skills, which require more precise movements—like writing, buttoning a shirt, and using scissors—also begin to take shape (Kirk & McKinnon, 2014). Fine motor skills like grasping, drawing, and manipulating objects also lay the foundation for later academic success. Child care settings offer ample opportunities to practice these

skills. Outdoor play areas with climbing structures, slides, and open spaces encourage gross motor development (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Indoor activities like blocks, puzzles, and art supplies support the development of fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination (Berk, 2013). Providers facilitate this development through planned activities and free play, ensuring children have opportunities to explore their physical capabilities in a safe and supportive environment. Quality child care programs can nurture these developments by providing safe environments that encourage active play and activities designed to enhance both gross and fine motor skills. Engaging children in activities such as building blocks, arts and crafts, and outdoor play ensures that they are developing these essential physical competencies. A 2023 study by Okafor and Nwosu found that Nigerian children in structured play-based child care programs showed a 30% faster improvement in motor skills compared to those in unstructured environments. This highlights the role of guided activities in accelerating physical development



A. Motor Skills Development: Sample Lesson Plan

Lesson Title: "Adventure Island: Gross and Fine Motor Skills Exploration"

Age Group: 3–5 years **Duration:** 45 minutes

Objective: To develop gross motor skills (balancing, jumping) and fine motor skills (grasping, cutting) through structured play.

Materials Needed:

Outdoor Area: Cones, hula hoops, bean bags, small hurdles

Indoor Area: Playdough, child-safe scissors, coloring sheets, beads and strings

Visual Aids: Posters of "Adventure Island" with labeled activity zones

Lesson Outline:

Activity	Description	Motor Skill Focus
Warm-Up: Animal Moves	Children imitate animals (e.g., hop like a frog, slither like a snake).	Gross motor (balance, coordination)
Obstacle Course	Children navigate through cones, jump over	Gross motor (strength, agility)

	hurdles, and crawl under tables.	
Bead Threading	Children thread beads onto strings to make bracelets.	Fine motor (precision, hand-eye coordination)
Playdough Creations	Children roll, cut, and shape playdough into animals or shapes.	Fine motor (finger strength, dexterity)
Cool-Down: Yoga Poses	Children mimic simple yoga poses (e.g., tree pose, downward dog).	Gross motor (balance, flexibility)

Assessment:

- 1) Observe and note which children struggle with balancing, grasping, or cutting.
- 2) Provide individualized support (e.g., thicker pencils for grip, lower hurdles for jumping).

Adaptation for Special Needs:

- i. For children with **limited mobility**, use **seated activities** (e.g., arm circles, finger games).
- ii. For children with **fine motor delays**, provide **adaptive scissors** or larger beads.

Visual Suggestion:

Infographic: "Milestones of Motor Development (Ages 3–5)" with images of children performing each skill below.

Milestones of Motor Development (Ages 3-5)

AGE 3	AGE 4	AGE 5
		
<p>Gross Motor: Rides a tricycle, stands on one foot.</p> <p>Fine Motor: Draws a circle, uses safety scissors.</p>	<p>Gross Motor: Hops on one foot, throws a ball overhand.</p>	<p>Gross Motor: Skips, swings & climbs, throws in a square, buttons clothing.</p>
<p>Fine Motor: Draws a square.</p>	  	<p>Fine Motor: Writes some letters, ties shoelaces.</p> 

Nurturing Growth & Learning

Health and Nutrition

Proper nutrition and health are vital for physical growth and development. Proper nutrition influences children's growth, cognitive development, and overall health (Arbour-

Nicitopoulos et al., 2011). Nutrition in early childhood is not just about calories—it's about brain development, immunity, and lifelong health habits. For instance, Chinwe, a child care provider in Enugu, noticed that children who ate iron-rich meals (like beans and plantains) were more alert and energetic during learning activities. She introduced a "Rainbow Plate" initiative, where children were encouraged to eat foods of different colors (e.g., orange carrots, green spinach, white yams) to ensure a balanced diet. A 2024 WHO report emphasized that malnutrition in early childhood can lead to cognitive delays and weakened immunity. Conversely, child care centers that provide nutrient-dense meals see higher attendance rates and better learning outcomes. In Nigerian child care settings, providing nutritious meals involves serving indigenous staples like pap (ogi) fortified with soya milk, mashed yams with vegetable soup, beans and plantain, moi-moi, or okra soup with eba. They also play a crucial role in promoting healthy habits, such as handwashing and regular physical activity, to prevent illness (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019). Furthermore, they monitor children's health, recognizing signs of illness and communicating with parents. Child care settings that provide balanced meals and snacks contribute significantly to

children's dietary habits and long-term health outcomes. Creating a healthy environment, providing balanced meals, and encouraging physical activity are integral components of quality child care, impacting children's overall well-being and future health outcomes. According to the World Health Organization (2018), fostering good nutrition and physical activity habits during early childhood helps in the prevention of childhood obesity and establishes a foundation for a healthy lifestyle.

Illustration:

A sample weekly meal plan for a Nigerian child care center, highlighting nutrient sources.



a sample weekly meal plan

A **before-and-after comparison** of a child's energy levels after dietary improvements.



Cognitive Development in Early Childhood

Cognitive development in early childhood involves the acquisition of knowledge, thinking skills, and language abilities. Child care settings provide a rich environment for cognitive stimulation and support.

Language Development

Language development is one of the most critical aspects of cognitive growth in early childhood. During this stage, children expand their vocabulary and improve their communication skills significantly through interactions with adults and peers (Trochimiuk et al., 2020). Child care providers play a vital role in fostering language skills through interactive activities, such as reading aloud, storytelling, singing songs, and engaging in conversations (Snow, Tabors, & Dickinson, 2001). They create a language-rich environment by labeling objects, using descriptive language, and encouraging children to express themselves. Language is the bridge to literacy, social connection, and academic success. For example, Mr. Emeka, a child care teacher in Abuja, uses "storytelling circles" where children take turns adding to a story. This not only builds vocabulary but also encourages creativity and listening skills. Research shows that children exposed to daily read-aloud sessions develop stronger phonemic awareness, a key predictor of reading success. Exposure to a variety of vocabulary and sentence structures, through interactions and activities, is crucial for language acquisition (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015). Highly verbal interactions in child care settings can lead to

increased language skills and literacy readiness as children prepare for formal schooling. A 2023 study by the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) found that children in interactive language programs scored 20% higher in early literacy tests than those in passive learning environments.

A. Language Development: Sample Dialogue Activity: "Storytelling Circle"

Age Group: 4–5 years **Objective:** To expand vocabulary and encourage expressive language.

Sample Dialogue:

Teacher: *"Today, we're going to create a story together! I'll start, and then each of you will add a sentence. Let's begin: 'Once upon a time, there was a little girl named Amina who loved to explore...'"*

Child 1: *"She found a magic door in her garden!"*

Teacher: *"Wow! What did the door look like?"*

Child 1: *"It was shiny and gold!"*

Child 2: *"She opened the door and saw a dragon!"*

Teacher: *"A dragon! How did Amina feel?"* **Child 2:** *"Scared... but also excited!"*

Child 3: *"The dragon said, 'Hello! Do you want to go on an adventure?'"* **Teacher:** *"What a kind dragon! What did Amina saw?"*

Follow-Up Questions to Encourage Language:

- a) *"What do you think Amina should do next?"*
- b) *"How would you feel if you met a dragon?"*
- c) *"Can you describe the dragon's scales?"*

Illustrations:

A visual of a "word wall" in a child care classroom, showing how new words are introduced daily.



A case study of a child's language progression over six months.



Problem-solving and Critical Thinking

Early childhood is a critical period for developing problem-solving and critical thinking skills. Child care settings offer numerous opportunities for children to experiment, explore, and solve problems. Engaging in play, particularly symbolic and imaginative play, allows children to explore their environment, experiment with different solutions, and make choices, which all promote cognitive development (Berk & Winsler, 2006). Activities like building with blocks, engaging in pretend play, and participating in science experiments encourage children to ask questions, make predictions, and test hypotheses (Piaget, 1952). Critical thinking starts with curiosity. For

instance, when Bisi, a 4-year-old, tried to build a tower with blocks but kept collapsing, her teacher asked, "What could make it stronger?" This simple question led Bisi to experiment with wider bases and different shapes, teaching her cause-and-effect reasoning. A 2024 study in the *Journal of Early Childhood Education* found that children who engaged in open-ended play (e.g., building, puzzles) developed better problem-solving skills than those in highly structured activities. Providers support these skills by providing open-ended materials, posing questions, and encouraging children to find their own solutions. These experiences foster curiosity, creativity, and the ability to think critically.

Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking: Case Study

Case Study: "The Block Challenge at Bright Minds Child Care"

Location: Lagos, Nigeria **Objective:** To teach problem-solving through open-ended play.

Scenario:

During free play, **Bisi (4 years old)** struggled to build a tall tower with blocks. Instead of stepping in, her teacher, **Ms. Adeola**, asked:

- a) *"Why do you think your tower keeps falling?"*
- b) *"What could you try to make it stronger?"*

Bisi experimented with:

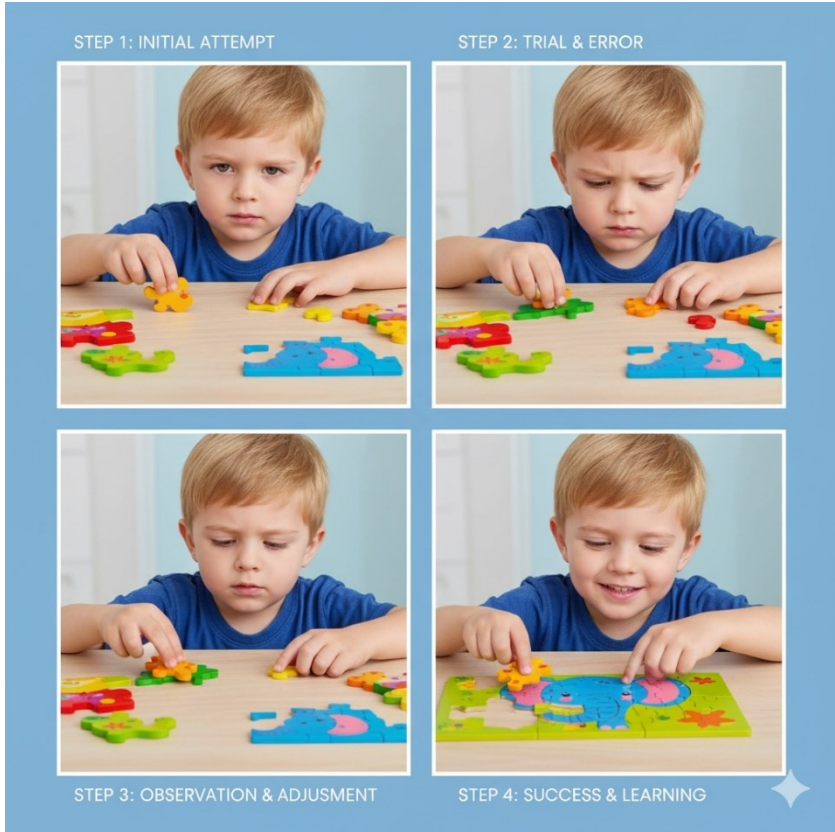
1. **Wider base** (using larger blocks at the bottom).
2. **Different shapes** (alternating square and triangular blocks).
3. **Teamwork** (asking a friend to help stabilize the tower).

Outcome:

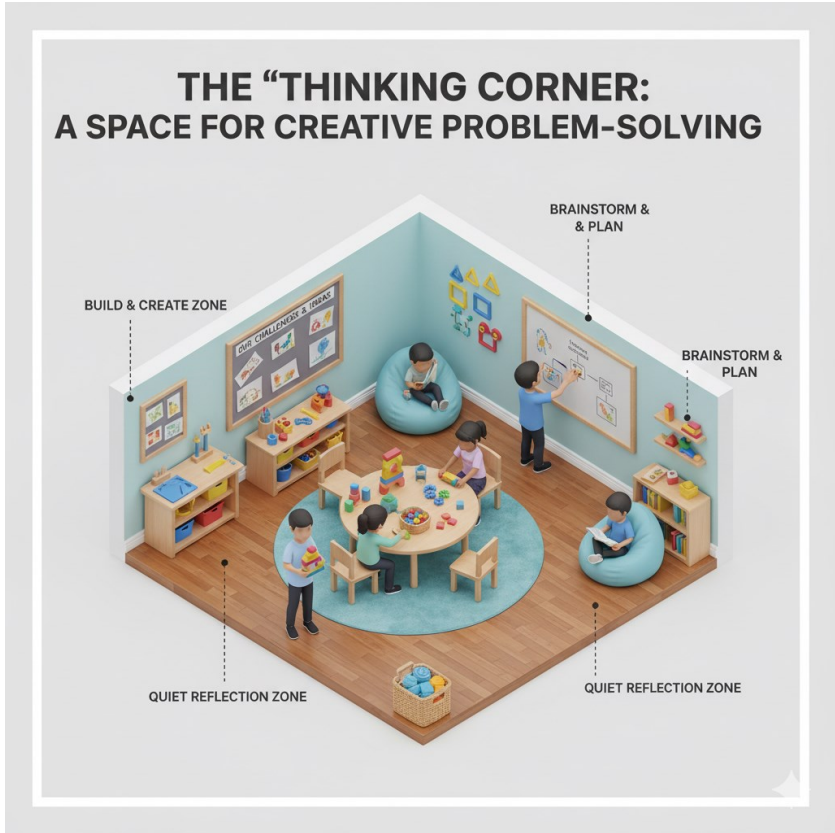
- i. Bisi's tower stood **taller and steadier** after several attempts.
- ii. She **verbalized her process**: *"The big blocks at the bottom hold it up!"*
- iii. Other children **imitated her strategy**, leading to a **class-wide "Block Challenge Day."**

Illustrations:

A **photo sequence** of a child solving a puzzle, showing trial-and-error learning.



A **diagram of a "thinking corner"** in a classroom, where children explore solutions to challenges.



Social-Emotional Development in Early Childhood

Social-emotional development encompasses the ability to understand and manage emotions, form relationships, and interact effectively with others. Child care settings provide a crucial context for this development.

Emotional Intelligence

Social-emotional development in early childhood is fundamental for fostering emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence involves recognizing, understanding, and managing one's own emotions and the emotions of others. Child care providers support the development of emotional intelligence by helping children identify and express their feelings (Goleman, 1995). They teach children strategies for coping with difficult emotions, such as anger and frustration, and promote empathy and understanding towards others. Creating a classroom environment where children feel safe, secure, and understood is essential for fostering emotional well-being. Child care settings play a vital role in supporting this development through structured opportunities for sharing emotions, recognizing feelings, and participating in group activities that promote emotional understanding. Educators can model emotional regulation strategies, guide children in expressing feelings appropriately, and facilitate discussions about emotions, thus helping children develop critical social-emotional skills (Denham et al., 2012). Emotional intelligence is the foundation of resilience and healthy relationships. For example, when Tunde, a shy 5-year-old, struggled with

frustration during group activities, his teacher introduced "emotion cards"—visual aids that helped him name his feelings and choose calming strategies (e.g., deep breathing, drawing). A 2023 study in *Child Development Perspectives* found that children who learned emotional regulation techniques in child care had fewer behavioral issues in primary school.

Emotional Intelligence: Case Study

Case Study: "Tunde Learns to Manage Frustration"

Location: Ibadan, Nigeria **Objective:** To help a child recognize and cope with difficult emotions.

Background:

Tunde (5 years old) often **cried or withdrew** when frustrated, especially during group activities. His teacher, **Mr. Chinedu**, introduced **emotion cards**—visual aids with faces showing different feelings (happy, sad, angry, scared).

Intervention:

1. **Labeling Emotions:**

When Tunde got frustrated, Mr. Chinedu would say, *"I see you're feeling angry. Let's find your feeling on the card."*

2. **Coping Strategies:**

Tunde chose a **calming strategy** from a "toolkit" (e.g., deep breaths, drawing, squeezing a stress ball).

3. Role-Play:

Mr. Chinedu and Tunde acted out **scenarios** (e.g., "What if someone takes your toy?").

Outcome:

- a) Tunde began **verbalizing his feelings**: *"I'm mad because my tower fell!"*
- b) He used **deep breathing** to calm down **without adult prompts**.
- c) Peers started **imitating his strategies**, creating a **classroom culture of emotional awareness**.

Illustrations:

A "**feelings wheel**" poster used in child care settings.



A **case study** of a child learning to manage anger through guided techniques.

CASE STUDY: LEARNING TO MANAGE ANGER (AGE 4)



BEFORE: ANGER & FRUSTRATION



STEP 1: GUIDED CALMING



AFTER: CALM & EXPRESSION

Social Skills Development

Social skills are essential for forming positive relationships and navigating social situations. In addition to emotional intelligence, child care environments significantly contribute to the development of social skills. During early childhood, children learn to interact with peers, share, cooperate, and resolve conflicts (Jones et al., 2013). Quality child care programs create a structured environment that encourages positive

social interactions through collaborative activities, such as group games and projects. These experiences help children build relationships, develop empathy, and learn how to function effectively in group settings. Nurturing these skills is vital as they impact future relationships and academic success (Raver, 2002). Providers facilitate social skills development by modeling appropriate social behaviors, providing opportunities for group activities, and intervening in conflicts to help children learn to negotiate and resolve disagreements. They create a supportive environment that encourages children to build friendships and develop a sense of belonging. Social skills are life skills. For instance, during a group art project, Aisha and Kehinde disagreed on color choices. Their teacher guided them to take turns and compromise, teaching negotiation—a skill they will use in school and beyond. A 2024 UNESCO report highlighted that collaborative learning in early childhood leads to better teamwork abilities in later years.

Social Skills Development: Sample Lesson Plan

Lesson Title: "Friendship Garden: Planting Kindness"

Age Group: 4–6 years **Duration:** 30 minutes

Objective: To teach sharing, cooperation, and conflict resolution.

Materials Needed:

- 1) **Art Supplies:** Large paper, markers, stickers
- 2) **Props:** Toy flowers, a "kindness tree" poster

Lesson Outline:

	Description
Circle	Children share examples of kindness (e.g., "I shared my crayon with my friend").
Time:	
Kindness Discussion	
Group Art Project	Children collaborate on a " Friendship Garden " mural, taking turns to add flowers and butterflies.
Role-Play Scenarios	Children act out conflicts (e.g., "Two friends want the same toy") and practice solutions.
Kindness Pledges	Each child writes/draws a pledge (e.g., "I will listen to my friends") and adds it to the "kindness tree."

Assessment:

- i. Observe **how children resolve conflicts** during the art project.

- ii. Note **who initiates sharing or helps peers.**

Illustrations:

A photo of children engaged in a team-building game.



A flowchart of conflict resolution steps used in child care.



Checklist for Quality Child Care:

Domain	Key Factors
Physical	Safe play spaces, nutritious meals, daily outdoor activity.
Cognitive	Language-rich interactions, open-ended play materials, storytelling.
Social-Emotional	Emotion coaching, conflict resolution strategies, collaborative activities.

Conclusion

The quality of child care is not just about facilities—it's about relationships, intentionality, and cultural relevance. For example, Mama Chi's Child Care in Port Harcourt integrates local folktales and music into daily routines, making learning culturally meaningful for children. A 2025 study by the African Early Childhood Network found that centers with trained, empathetic providers had children who were 35% more socially and academically prepared for primary school. Child care settings provide essential environments for fostering holistic child development. By understanding and supporting physical, cognitive, and social-emotional growth, child care providers lay the groundwork for children's future success and well-being. The quality of child care, the training of the providers, and the resources available are critical factors in optimizing these developmental outcomes.

REVISION QUESTIONS:

1. Discuss the role of child care providers in fostering physical development in early childhood, focusing on both gross and fine motor skill development, and health and nutrition.
2. Explain how child care settings support cognitive development in early childhood, focusing on language development and problem-solving/critical thinking skills.
3. Analyze the role of child care settings in promoting social-emotional development in early childhood. Discuss emotional intelligence and social skills development.
4. Discuss the importance of providing a language-rich environment in child care settings. Provide examples of how child care providers can create such an environment.
5. Explain the relationship between play and cognitive development in early childhood. Give specific examples of how play activities can enhance cognitive skills in a child care setting.
6. Discuss the key factors that contribute to the quality of child care and how they impact children's development across the three domains (physical, cognitive, and social-emotional).

Alternate revision questions

1. **Physical Development:**

Example: How would you design a **weekly activity plan** for a child care center to improve both gross and fine motor skills?

2. **Cognitive Development:**

Example: Describe a **language-rich activity** (e.g., a storytelling session) and explain how it supports vocabulary growth.

3. **Social-Emotional Development:**

Example: How would you help a child who **struggles with sharing** during playtime?

4. **Language-Rich Environment:**

Example: Create a **sample dialogue** between a child care provider and a child to model expressive language.

5. **Play and Cognitive Development:**

- *Example:* Compare how **building blocks** vs. **pretend play** enhance problem-solving skills.

PART THREE:

CHILD CARE SETTINGS AND PROGRAMS

Early childhood education is a transformative period for children’s cognitive, social-emotional, and physical growth. The choice of child care setting—whether center-based, home-based, or family child care, can profoundly influence a child’s developmental trajectory. This section explores the types of child care settings, their advantages and challenges, and the programs and curricula that shape early learning experiences.

Types of Child Care Settings

Child care settings vary widely, each offering unique advantages and disadvantages. The choice of setting often depends on factors such as family needs, financial resources, and the child's individual temperament.

Center-based care

Center-based care refers to structured educational settings that provide care for groups of children, typically in a dedicated space designed specifically

for early childhood education. Center-based care is often the cornerstone of early childhood education, especially in urban and suburban communities. These centers can range from large facilities to smaller preschools and usually follow established licensing regulations and quality standards (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2020). These settings, often referred to as preschools or daycares, are typically licensed facilities that provide care for multiple children in a group setting. They often offer a structured environment with age-appropriate learning materials, trained staff, and regular schedules. For example, in Lagos, Nigeria, centers like Little Explorers Preschool provide structured daily schedules that include circle time, outdoor play, and hands-on learning activities, ensuring children are exposed to a balanced curriculum. Center-based care can provide opportunities for socialization, structured learning experiences, and access to specialized resources. However, they can sometimes be more expensive and may involve a higher child-to-staff ratio compared to other settings (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Center-based care is characterized by trained educators or staff members who create educational and engaging environments. Research indicates that children enrolled in high-quality center-based programs benefit from enriched learning experiences, improved socialization skills, and readiness for

school (Camilli, Vargas, Ryan, & Barnett, 2010). High-quality center-based care has been shown to reduce developmental disparities, particularly for children from low socio-economic backgrounds. A 2023 study found that children in center-based programs demonstrated significant improvements in cognitive and socio-emotional skills compared to those in informal care settings.

However, cost remains a barrier. In 2023, the average annual price of center-based care in the U.S. was \$11,582, comparable to annual mortgage payments, making it unaffordable for many families.

Advantages:

- i. Structured learning environment with trained educators.
- ii. Opportunities for socialization with peers.
- iii. Access to specialized resources (e.g., STEM kits, art supplies, outdoor play equipment).

Challenges:

- 1) Higher cost compared to home-based care. Potential for higher child-to-staff ratios, which may limit individualized attention.

Center-Based Care: Sample Lesson Plan Lesson Plan: "Community Helpers Week"

Age Group: 4–5 years **Setting:** Center-based child care (e.g., Little Explorers Preschool, Lagos)

Duration: 5 days

Objective: To introduce children to community helpers, their roles, and the importance of teamwork and empathy.

Materials Needed:

- ❖ Books: *Whose Hands Are These?* by Miranda Paul, *Community Helpers* by Bobbie Kalman
- ❖ Props: Toy medical kits, fire hats, police badges, construction helmets
- ❖ Art Supplies: Paper, markers, stickers, glue
- ❖ Field Trip: Virtual or in-person visit to a local fire station or police station

Daily Activities:

Day	Activity	Objective	DAP/Play-Based Connection
Day 1	Storytime & Discussion	Introduce community helpers	Use open-ended questions: "What do you think a

		through stories.	<i>firefighter does?"</i>
Day 2	Dramatic Play Stations	Set up role-play areas (e.g., doctor's office, fire station).	Children direct their play; teacher observes and scaffolds.
Day 3	Art Project: "Thank You, Helpers!"	Children draw or write thank-you notes to community helpers.	Integrates literacy and fine motor skills.
Day 4	Field Trip/Guest Speaker	Visit a fire station or invite a nurse to class.	Connects learning to real-world experiences.
Day 5	Group Presentation	Children share what they learned about helpers.	Builds confidence and communication skills.

Assessment:

- a) Observe children's participation in role-play and ability to describe helper roles.
- b) Document language development during discussions and presentations.

Adaptation for Diverse Learners:

- a) For shy children, allow them to contribute through drawings or one-on-one sharing.
- b) For English language learners, use visual aids and simple phrases.

Case Study: "From Shy to Confident—Amira's Story"

Background: Amira, a 4-year-old in a center-based program, was reluctant to speak in group settings. During "Community Helpers Week," her teacher noticed her interest in doctors and provided a toy stethoscope for her to use during dramatic play.

Outcome: By Day 5, Amira volunteered to demonstrate how to use a stethoscope in front of the

class, marking a significant boost in her confidence and language use.

Research Connection: Play-based learning reduces anxiety and encourages participation in shy children (Hassinger-Das et al., 2016).

Home-Based Care

Home-based care is provided in the caregiver's home or the child's home, where caregivers offer personalized attention in a familiar setting (Gonzalez-Mena, 2014). This type of care often involves fewer children compared to center-based facilities and allows for a more intimate caregiving experience. Home-based care can offer a more intimate and nurturing environment, with a potentially lower child-to-staff ratio, leading to greater individualized attention. The flexibility of home-based care can be a significant advantage for families with unpredictable schedules. However, the quality of care can vary considerably depending on the caregiver's qualifications and experience, and the environment may lack the resources available in larger center-based settings (Shore, 2017). Home-based care can include family members, babysitters, or registered day care providers. It is particularly beneficial for infants and toddlers as it ensures a

cozy and nurturing environment that aligns with individual needs. However, it may lack some of the structured educational components that formalized center-based programs provide (Snyder & McLaughlin, 2015).

Home-based care can be highly effective when caregivers are trained and supported. A 2024 study highlighted that children in high-quality home-based settings showed comparable social-emotional development to those in center-based care, especially when caregivers received ongoing professional development. However, quality varies widely. Many home-based settings lack formal educational structure, which can impact cognitive stimulation.

Advantages:

- i. Personalized, flexible care tailored to the child's needs.
- ii. Lower cost compared to center-based care.
- iii. Comfortable, familiar environment for young children.

Challenges:

- a) Limited access to educational resources (e.g., books, learning materials).
- b) Quality depends heavily on the caregiver's qualifications.

Home-Based Care: Case Study

Case Study: "Aunty Bisi's Home Daycare—Cultural Storytelling"

Setting: Aunty Bisi's Home Daycare, Abuja. Age Group: 2–4 years Objective: To foster language development, cultural pride, and social skills through storytelling.

Context:

Aunty Bisi, a home-based caregiver, noticed that her group of children—from Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa backgrounds—were not engaging with each other during free play. She decided to introduce cultural storytelling to build connections.

Implementation:

- i. **Morning Circle:** Aunty Bisi reads folktales from each child's culture (e.g., *Anansi the Spider, The Tortoise and the Hare*).
- ii. **Follow-Up Activity:** Children act out the stories using puppets or dress-up clothes.

- iii. **Parent Involvement:** Families contribute books, songs, or artifacts from their culture.

Outcomes:

- i. Children began sharing stories from home and asking questions about each other's cultures.
- ii. Social interactions increased, with children collaborating to create new versions of the tales.
- iii. Parents reported that children spoke more about **their daycare experiences** at home.

Research Connection: Home-based care that integrates cultural relevance enhances social-emotional development and family engagement (García-Alvarado et al., 2020).

Family Child Care Homes

These settings are a specific type of home-based care, often licensed or regulated, where a caregiver provides care for a small group of children in their own home. They combine the benefits of home-based care with the potential for regulation and quality standards. Family child care homes can offer a comfortable, homelike atmosphere and a consistent caregiver, which can be especially

beneficial for infants and toddlers (Zero to Three, 2010). These settings offer a balance between the individualized attention found in informal home care and some of the educational structure of center-based programs (Blau, 2001). Family child care can often provide parents with a more flexible schedule and cater to different age groups, allowing siblings to stay together in the same environment. Although they may have varied quality levels, many family child care homes focus on creating a familial atmosphere that fosters strong relationships among children and caregivers (Phillips & Adams, 2001). Family child care homes bridge the gap between informal home care and structured center-based programs. For example, Mama Chi's Family Child Care in Port Harcourt is licensed by the state and follows a curriculum that includes early literacy, math, and social skills. This setting allows siblings to stay together and provides a consistent caregiver, fostering strong emotional bonds. Family child care homes are increasingly integrated into public preschool initiatives, particularly in underserved communities. A 2025 report by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) noted that 37% of 4-year-olds in the U.S. were enrolled in state-funded preschool programs, many of which include family child care homes. Challenges remain, including funding disparities

and limited access to professional development for caregivers.

Advantages:

- a) Small group sizes for individualized attention.
- b) Flexible scheduling for working families.
- c) Cultural and linguistic continuity for children from diverse backgrounds.

Challenges:

- a) Variability in quality due to inconsistent regulations.
- b) Limited resources compared to larger centers.

Family Child Care Homes: Sample Lesson Plan

Lesson Plan: "Garden Explorers"

Setting: Mama Chi's Family Child Care, Port Harcourt

Age Group: 3–5 years

Duration: 4 weeks

Objective: To teach science, math, and teamwork through gardening.

Materials Needed:

- a) **Garden Tools:** Child-sized shovels, watering cans, seeds (e.g., beans, sunflowers)
- b) **Science Journal:** Notebooks for drawing plant growth

c) **Storybook:** *The Tiny Seed* by Eric Carle

Weekly Activities:

Week	Activity	Objective
Week 1	Storytime & Seed Planting	Introduce plant life cycles; plant seeds.
Week 2	Observation & Journaling	Children draw and measure plant growth.
Week 3	Math Connection: Counting Leaves	Practice counting and comparing leaf sizes.
Week 4	Harvest & Celebration	Harvest plants; make a salad or flower bouquets.

Assessment:

- a) Track children's **ability to sequence the plant life cycle** (e.g., seed → sprout → plant).
- b) Observe **collaboration** during gardening tasks.

Case Study: "From Seed to Confidence—Emeka's Growth"

Background: Emeka, a 4-year-old with delays in fine motor skills, struggled to use garden tools.

Mama Chi paired him with an older child to model scooping soil and watering plants.

Outcome: By Week 4, Emeka independently watered plants and counted leaves aloud, showing improved coordination and confidence.

Research Connection: Emergent curriculum supports individualized learning and builds executive function (Zosh et al., 2018).

Child Care Programs and Curriculum

Curriculum is happening all around the home, the school, the playground, and wherever young children gather. Perceptive teachers can help enrich and enhance what is happening.

Barbara J. Taylor

The curriculum and program design in child care settings significantly impact children's development. Effective programs are designed to promote holistic growth and learning.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices

Developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) are core principles in early childhood education. They are crucial to creating effective child care programs that meet the unique needs of young children. According to the NAEYC (2020), DAP involves using knowledge of child development to make decisions about curriculum, teaching, and assessments. It emphasizes that teaching practices

should be based on the child's age, individual characteristics, and social and cultural contexts (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). This involves creating learning experiences that are challenging yet achievable, focusing on the child's strengths and interests, and providing opportunities for active exploration and discovery. DAP acknowledges that children develop at different paces and requires caregivers to adapt their practices to meet the unique needs of each child. Research backs up the advantages of DAP, highlighting that children engaged in developmentally appropriate practices demonstrate increased enthusiasm for learning and improved social-emotional skills (Bredecamp & Copple, 1997). DAP is not a one-size-fits-all approach but a dynamic framework that adapts to each child's unique needs. For example, at Sunshine Preschool in Enugu, teachers use observation and assessment to tailor activities. If a child shows interest in lions, the teacher might introduce books, fossils, and art projects centered on that theme, fostering deeper engagement and learning. DAP is linked to long-term academic and social-emotional benefits. A 2023 study found that children in DAP-aligned classrooms exhibited higher levels of creativity, problem-solving, and emotional regulation compared to those in didactic environments. Cultural responsiveness is now a

cornerstone of DAP. The 2024 NAEYC position statement emphasizes the need for educators to reflect on their biases and incorporate children's cultural backgrounds into the curriculum.

Implementation Example:

- a) Morning Circle: Children share personal stories, building language and social skills.
- b) Learning Centers: Stations for science, art, and dramatic play allow children to explore at their own pace.

Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP): Sample Lesson Plan

Lesson Plan: "Sensory Science Lab"

Setting: Sunshine Preschool, Enugu

Age Group: 3–4 years

Objective: To explore science concepts (sink/float, textures) through sensory play.

Materials Needed:

- i. **Sensory Bins:** Water, rice, sand
- ii. **Objects:** Rocks, corks, feathers, toy boats
- iii. **Documentation:** Camera, child-friendly magnifying glasses

Activities:

1. **Prediction Time:** Children guess which objects will **sink or float**.
2. **Hands-On Testing:** Children test objects in water and record results with drawings.
3. **Group Discussion:** *"Why do you think the rock sank but the cork floated?"*
4. **Extension:** Add **food coloring to water** to explore mixing colors.

DAP in Action:

- i. **Individualization:** For a child with sensory sensitivities, provide gloves or a separate bin.
- ii. **Cultural Connection:** Use objects from children's homes (e.g., a local spice or fabric).

Case Study: "Discovering Density—Chioma's 'Aha!' Moment"

Background: Chioma, a 3-year-old, struggled with verbal explanations but loved hands-on activities. During the sink/float experiment, she repeatedly tested a feather, exclaiming, *"It's flying in water!"*

Outcome: Chioma's teacher documented her discovery and later used the term "floating" in other activities, reinforcing her vocabulary and confidence.

Research Connection: DAP honors children's unique learning styles and deepens conceptual understanding (NAEYC, 2020).

Play-Based Learning

Play-based learning is an essential component of high-quality child care programs, recognizing that play is a critical vehicle for children's learning and development. Play-based learning recognizes that children learn best through active engagement and exploration (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009). Through play, children explore their environment, acquire new skills, and engage in problem-solving (Berk & Winsler, 2006). This approach integrates learning experiences into playful activities, allowing children to experiment, problem-solve, and develop social-emotional skills. Play-based learning environments provide opportunities for children to develop language skills, creativity, and critical thinking abilities. Research shows that play-based learning enhances cognitive abilities, social skills, and emotional development, as it encourages children to make choices, negotiate with peers, and practice self-regulation (Fisher, 1996). Effective child care programs incorporate play into their daily routines, allowing children to learn through experiences that are meaningful and engaging. Play is the work of childhood. At Bright Horizons Preschool, children engage in "Market Day", a pretend play activity where they set up shops, use play money, and

practice math and negotiation skills. This type of play builds foundational literacy, numeracy, and social skills in a joyful, low-pressure environment. Play-based learning enhances academic outcomes. A 2023 meta-analysis found that children in play-based programs outperformed peers in math and literacy assessments, particularly when teachers actively facilitated play. Global trends show a shift toward playful learning. Countries like Finland and Singapore have integrated play into their national curricula, recognizing its role in fostering creativity and resilience.

Implementation Example:

- i. Outdoor Exploration: Children collect leaves, sort them by size, and create art, blending science and creativity.
- ii. Storytelling Circles: Children act out stories, developing language and empathy.

Play-Based Learning: Case Study

Case Study: "Market Day at Bright Horizons Preschool"

Setting: Bright Horizons Preschool, Abuja

Age Group: 4–5 years

Objective: To develop math, literacy, and social skills through pretend play.

Implementation:

- i. **Setup:** Classroom transformed into a "market" with play money, grocery items, and cash registers.
- ii. **Roles:** Children take turns being shopkeepers, customers, and bankers.
- iii. **Teacher's Role:** Facilitates problem-solving (e.g., "*You have 10 naira and bought sweets worth 6 naira, How much change will you get?*").

Outcomes:

- i. Children practiced counting, negotiation, and turn-taking.
- ii. Shy children gained confidence by role-playing familiar scenarios (e.g., buying bread).

Literacy Connection: Children wrote shopping lists and receipts.

Research Connection: Play-based learning enhances math and literacy skills when teachers actively guide the play (Toub et al., 2018).

Emergent Curriculum

Emergent curriculum is an approach that emphasizes the interests and needs of children when planning and implementing learning

experiences. It involves observation and documentation to guide the curriculum, adapting activities that arise from children's spontaneous interests, questions, and interactions (Helm & Beneker, 2007). The emergent curriculum is flexible and responsive, evolving based on observations of the children's play and interactions. Teachers carefully observe children's interests, document their learning, and use this information to plan activities and experiences that build on their existing knowledge and skills (Jones & Nimmo, 1994). Research indicates that emergent curriculum fosters a sense of ownership in children's learning, as they actively participate and contribute to their educational experiences (File & Gullo, 2002). By integrating children's interests and curiosities into the curriculum, educators can create a more relevant and engaging learning environment.

Emergent curriculum puts children in the driver's seat. For example, when children at Little Sprouts Child Care became fascinated by butterflies, the teacher expanded the theme to include life cycle studies, garden planting, and butterfly releases, turning a fleeting interest into a month-long project. Emergent curriculum fosters ownership and engagement. A 2025 study found that children in emergent curriculum settings showed higher

levels of curiosity and persistence in learning tasks. Documentation is key. Teachers use photos, journals, and portfolios to track children's progress and reflect on their teaching practices.

Implementation Example:

- i. **Project-Based Learning:** Children document the growth of a plant, creating daily journals and presentations.
- ii. **Community Connections:** Inviting a local farmer to discuss gardening, linking classroom learning to real-world experiences.

Emergent Curriculum: Sample Lesson Plan
Lesson Plan: "Butterfly Life Cycle Project"

Setting: Little Sprouts Child Care, Lagos

Age Group: 4–5 years

Duration: 3 weeks

Objective: To explore science, art, and storytelling through children's interest in butterflies.

Materials Needed:

- i. **Books:** *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle
- ii. **Art Supplies:** Paint, paper plates, pipe cleaners
- iii. **Science Tools:** Magnifying glasses, butterfly habitat (if possible)

Phases:

Phase	Activity	Objective
Phase 1	Story Questions	& Read <i>The Very Hungry Caterpillar</i> ; ask, "What do you wonder about butterflies?"
Phase 2	Observation Station	Set up a butterfly habitat (or videos); children document changes.
Phase 3	Art & Drama	Create butterfly life cycle collages; act out the stages.
Phase 4	Community Sharing	Children present their findings to parents.

Case Study: "From Caterpillar to Confidence—The Butterfly Effect"

Background: A group of children became obsessed with a caterpillar found on the playground. Their teacher, Ms. Ade, used this interest to integrate science, art, and literacy.

Outcome:

- i. Children drew daily observations of the caterpillar’s transformation.
- ii. **Parent involvement** increased, with families bringing books and videos about butterflies.
- iii. The project extended to math (measuring wingspan) and dramatic play (acting as butterflies).

Research Connection: Emergent curriculum fosters deep engagement and connects learning to children’s lives (NAEYC, 2025).

NAEYC Curriculum Guidelines

The National Association for the Education of Young Children has devoted much of its energy to determining an appropriate curriculum for youngsters’ learning from birth to age 8. Beginning in 1987, they published position statements as a response to their concern with the nationally widespread trend toward pushed-down and watered-down curricula. Much progress has been made in the years since, but problems persist, because inappropriate curricula continue to be demanded by legislatures, requested by parents, and practiced by some caregivers and teachers. There is an important underlying theme to the NAEYC’s position on curriculum creation, and it reflects current opinion, observation, and research. It is that “in some respects, the curriculum

strategies of many teachers today do not demand enough of children and in other ways demand too much of the wrong thing” (Bredecamp & Cople, 1997, p. 20). In other words, we have discovered in recent years that young children are capable of much more than we ever thought (e.g., self-direction, research using the scientific method), but we often inappropriately superimpose adult expectations on them (hours spent alone at desks, piles of worksheets). As you contemplate and design curriculum, keep in mind the following nine guidelines as well as the underlying theme just described.

1. Be sure to provide for all parts of the whole child: “physical, emotional, social, linguistic, aesthetic, cognitive.”
2. Include content that is “socially relevant, intellectually engaging, and personally meaningful to children.”
3. Build on “what children already know and can do,” because they both consolidate their learning and foster “their acquisition of new concepts and skills.”
4. Help children make meaningful connections by providing cross-disciplinary learning. At times, focusing on a single subject is also appropriate.

5. Develop a curriculum that promotes knowledge, understanding, processes, skills, and dispositions to continue learning.
6. Develop a curriculum that has intellectual integrity and teaches children to use the “tools of inquiry of recognized disciplines in ways that are accessible and achievable for young children.”
7. Be sure to support your children’s home culture and language as well as to help them understand and participate in the culture of your program and the larger community.
8. Be sure that the goals of your curriculum are “realistic and attainable for most children in the designated age range for which they are designed.”
9. If you use technology, be sure it is “physically and philosophically integrated in the classroom curriculum and teaching.” (Bredecamp & Copple, 1997, pp. 20–21)

The basis of all curriculum design is children and their right to grow in all domains— intellectual, emotional, social, and physical. As you think about these guidelines and apply them to your own curriculum planning and implementation, keep in mind that they actually can make your task more enjoyable, because ultimately it will be more rewarding.

NAEYC Curriculum Guidelines: Case Study **Case Study: "Anti-Bias Education at Hort Woods Child Care"**

Setting: Hort Woods Child Care, U.S. (adaptable to Nigerian context)

Objective: To implement NAEYC's 2025 standards on anti-bias education and cultural responsiveness.

Implementation:

- i. **Book Selection:** Choose stories featuring diverse characters (e.g., *Sulwe* by Lupita Nyong'o).
- ii. **Classroom Environment:** Label areas in multiple languages (e.g., Yoruba, Igbo, English).
- iii. **Family Partnerships:** Host a "Culture Share Day" where families present traditions.

Outcomes:

- i. Children asked more questions about differences and showed empathy toward peers.
- ii. Parents reported feeling valued and included in the curriculum.

Research Connection: NAEYC's 2025 updates emphasize equity, ensuring all children see themselves in the curriculum (NAEYC, 2025).

Conclusion

Child care settings and programs shape the foundation of a child's future. By understanding the strengths and challenges of each setting and embracing DAP, play-based learning, and emergent curriculum, educators and families can create environments where every child thrives.

REVISION QUESTIONS

1. Compare and contrast center-based care and home-based care, highlighting their respective advantages and disadvantages.
2. Explain the concept of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) and why it is considered a core principle in early childhood education. Provide examples of how DAP can be implemented in a child care setting.
3. Describe play-based learning and explain its significance in early childhood education. How does it support children's development?
4. What is emergent curriculum? How does it differ from a more traditional, pre-planned curriculum? Provide examples of how an emergent curriculum might unfold in a child care setting.
5. Summarize the nine guidelines for curriculum design provided by NAEYC, and explain the underlying theme that informs these guidelines.

6. Discuss the role of the teacher in creating a high-quality child care program, considering the principles of developmentally appropriate practice, play-based learning, and emergent curriculum.

PART FOUR

CHILD CARE PROVIDERS AND FAMILIES

Child care in early childhood education is a multifaceted field, built on the crucial relationship between child care providers and families. This section will delve into the specific roles and responsibilities of child care providers and how they collaborate with families to create a supportive and enriching environment for young children.

Roles and Responsibilities of Child Care Providers

Child care providers play a vital role in the lives of young children, acting as caregivers, educators, and communicators. Their multifaceted responsibilities contribute significantly to a child's development and well-being.

Caregiving and nurturing

Child care providers play a crucial role in the early lives of children by offering caregiving and nurturing that can significantly impact their overall development. This role includes ensuring children's safety, hygiene, and physical well-being, as well as providing emotional support through affection and

consistency (Zeanah et al., 2011). According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2020), high-quality caregiving fosters secure attachment relationships, which are foundational for children's social-emotional development and future interpersonal relationships. Care providers who engage in nurturing practices create an environment where children feel safe, valued, and loved, thereby promoting their exploration and learning.

Building Secure Attachments: Providers establish secure attachments with children through consistent care, responsiveness to their needs, and positive interactions (Bowlby, 1969).

Providing Comfort and Support: Providers offer comfort during times of distress, providing a sense of security that helps children regulate their emotions.

Promoting Physical Health and Safety: Providers are responsible for maintaining a safe and healthy environment, adhering to health and safety regulations, and promptly addressing any physical needs or injuries (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2019).

Caregiving is more than supervision—it's about building a foundation of trust and security. For example, at Little Blessings Daycare in Lagos, providers use gentle touch, eye contact, and responsive interactions to help children feel safe and valued. When 2-year-old Tunde falls and scrapes his knee, his caregiver, Ms. Amina, doesn't just clean the wound—she kneels to his level, speaks softly, and lets him hold a favorite toy while she tends to him. This emotional attunement helps Tunde regulate his emotions and return to play with confidence.

Recent Research Insights:

- i. Secure attachments formed in early childhood predict later social-emotional resilience (Zeanah et al., 2023).
- ii. Consistent, nurturing care reduces stress hormones in children and promotes **exploratory behavior** (NAEYC, 2024).

Practical Strategies:

- i. ***Routine and Predictability:*** Use visual schedules and transition warnings (e.g., "Five more minutes of playtime!").
- ii. ***Comfort Objects:*** Allow children to bring a small comfort item (e.g., a stuffed animal) from home.
- iii. ***Responsive Care:*** Train staff to recognize and respond to children's emotional cues

(e.g., offering a hug or quiet space when a child seems overwhelmed).

Case Study: "From Tears to Trust—Aisha's Journey"

Background: Aisha, a 3-year-old new to Sunshine Child Care, cried daily at drop-off. Her caregiver, Ms. Fatima, noticed Aisha clung to a small blanket from home.

Intervention:

- i. Ms. Fatima allowed Aisha to keep the blanket during circle time.
- ii. She paired Aisha with a peer buddy to ease her transition.
- iii. She sent daily photos to Aisha's parents, showing her engaged in activities.

Outcome: Within three weeks, Aisha stopped crying at drop-off and initiated play with peers.

Research Connection: Transition objects and peer pairing reduce separation anxiety and build trust (Bowlby, 1969; NAEYC, 2020).

Education and curriculum planning

Child care providers are also responsible for the educational aspects of early childhood programs. This entails designing and implementing developmentally appropriate curricula that promote cognitive, social, emotional, and physical

development (NAEYC, 2020). Providers must assess children's individual needs and interests, facilitating a learning environment that encourages creativity, exploration, and problem-solving. They are guided by principles of developmentally appropriate practice, which require ongoing professional development and awareness of current research in early childhood education (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). By effectively planning and delivering meaningful learning experiences, child care providers prepare children for their future educational journeys. Key aspects include:

Developing Age-Appropriate Curriculum:

Providers create and implement developmentally appropriate activities and learning experiences that stimulate children's curiosity and promote exploration (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

Facilitating Learning through Play:

Play is recognized as a fundamental vehicle for learning in early childhood. Providers create opportunities for children to engage in various types of play, such as free play, dramatic play, and structured games, which support different developmental domains.

Observing and Assessing Child

Development: Providers regularly observe children's behaviors, interactions, and progress to

assess their individual needs and adjust the curriculum accordingly.

Curriculum planning is not just about lessons—it's about sparking curiosity and joy. At Creative Minds Preschool, providers use children's interests to shape activities. For example, when children showed fascination with rainy weather, the teacher turned it into a week-long "**Weather Wonder**" project, including:

- i. **Science:** Measuring rainfall with cups.
- ii. **Art:** Painting rain scenes with sponges.
- iii. **Literacy:** Reading *Rain* by Linda Ashman.

Recent Research Insights:

- i. Child-led projects increase engagement and retention (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2023).
- ii. Play-based curricula improve executive function skills (e.g., focus, problem-solving) more than didactic instruction (Zosh et al., 2024).

Sample Lesson Plan: "Weather Wonder Week" Objective: Explore weather through science, art, and literacy.

Day	Activity	Materials	Learning Goal
Day 1	Rain Gauge Experiment	Clear cups, ruler, water	Measure and compare rainfall.
Day 2	Sponge-Painted Rain Art	Sponges, paint, paper	Explore textures and creativity.
Day 3	Storytime: <i>Rain</i> by Linda Ashman	Book, felt board	Build vocabulary and narrative skills.
Day 4	Weather Chart	Poster, stickers, markers	Track daily weather; introduce graphs.
Day 5	Dramatic Play: "Weather Reporters"	Toy microphones, costumes	Practice communication and role-play.

Assessment:

- i. Observe children's participation in discussions and ability to describe weather changes.
- ii. Document collaboration during group activities.

Adaptation:

- i. For children with motor delays, use larger sponges for painting.
- ii. For English learners, pair visuals with new vocabulary (e.g., a picture of a raincloud with the word "rain").

Communication with Families

Effective communication with families is another vital responsibility of child care providers. Building strong relationships with families not only fosters collaboration but also enhances the child's development and well-being (Feldman et al., 2020). Child care providers must actively engage in two-way communication, sharing observations and insights about children's progress, challenges, and milestones. Regular updates, parent-teacher conferences, and accessible avenues for feedback create a supportive partnership that empowers families to be actively involved in their child's learning process (Rosenberg et al., 2017). By maintaining open lines of communication,

providers can address family concerns and preferences, ultimately working together to support the child's development effectively. Effective communication includes:

Daily Communication: Providers use various methods, such as daily reports, informal conversations, and digital platforms, to share information about the child's activities, eating habits, and any significant events that occurred during the day (Powell, 2010).

Sharing Observations of Child Development: Providers regularly share observations about the child's development, including their strengths, areas for growth, and any potential concerns. This helps families understand their child's progress and provides insights into their learning (Berk & Winsler, 2011).

Collaborating on Solutions: When challenges arise, providers work collaboratively with families to identify solutions and support the child's needs. This involves open communication, active listening, and a willingness to work together to find the best approach (Edwards, 2009).

Communication is a bridge between home and child care. At Harmony Family Child Care, providers use:

- i. **Daily Text Updates:** Photos and notes sent via WhatsApp (e.g., "*Today, Chidi built a tower with 10 blocks—he's mastering counting!*").
- ii. **Monthly Family Workshops:** Topics like "Supporting Literacy at Home" or "Managing Tantrums".
- iii. **Cultural Sharing:** Families bring a dish, song, or story to share during "Heritage Fridays."

Recent Research Insights:

- i. Family engagement improves child outcomes in literacy and social skills (Epstein, 2023).
- ii. Digital communication (e.g., apps, texts) increases parental involvement, especially for working families (Rosenberg et al., 2024).

Case Study: "Bridging the Gap—The Okoro Family"

Background: The Stephens, new immigrants from Benin, struggled to understand their child's progress reports.

Intervention:

- i. The provider, Ms. Ngozi, scheduled a home visit to discuss their child's development in French and English.

- ii. She provided a translated checklist of milestones and video examples of their child's activities.

Outcome: The Stephens began reading to their child daily and attended parent workshops, leading to improved literacy skills for their son.

Research Connection: Culturally responsive communication builds trust and supports learning (Turnbull et al., 2023).

Working with Families in Child Care

Creating a strong partnership between child care providers and families is essential for fostering a child's well-being and development. This collaboration involves mutual respect, shared responsibility, and a commitment to the child's best interests.

Building partnerships with families

Establishing partnerships with families is essential for effective early childhood education. Building trust and collaboration creates an environment where families feel valued and included in the caregiving process (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). Child care providers can promote partnerships by inviting family input in decision-making and encouraging participation in activities and events. This engagement reinforces families' roles as primary educators, enhancing their capacity to support their child's development at home (Baker,

2013). Collaborative partnerships lead to improved outcomes for children, including enhanced social skills, increased academic achievement, and stronger family bonds (Epstein, 2018).

Establishing a strong partnership with families requires building trust, mutual respect, and open communication. This can be achieved through:

Building Rapport and Trust: Providers create a welcoming and supportive environment for families, taking the time to get to know them and their values (Epstein, 2018).

Encouraging Family Involvement: Providers actively encourage family involvement in the child care setting, such as volunteering in the classroom, participating in special events, or sharing their cultural traditions.

Creating a Two-Way Street of Communication: Providers actively listen to families' concerns and perspectives, and they share information and observations about the child's development and care. This establishes a collaborative environment.

Partnerships are built on mutual respect and shared goals. At Little Stars Child Care, providers:

- i. **Host "Family Fun Fridays"**: Parents join for story time or cooking activities.
- ii. **Create a "Parent Library"**: Books and resources on child development, nutrition, and positive discipline.
- iii. **Conduct Home Visits**: For families who can't attend events, providers visit homes to discuss goals and concerns.

Recent Research Insights:

- i. Family-school partnerships improve academic and social outcomes (Epstein, 2023).
- ii. Home visits increase parental confidence in supporting learning (Dunst et al., 2023).

Sample Activity: "Family Recipe Book"

Objective: Celebrate cultural diversity and family involvement.

Steps:

1. Ask families to share a favorite recipe and a story or tradition tied to it.
2. Compile recipes into a classroom cookbook.
3. Host a "Taste of Our Families" potluck where children help prepare dishes.

Outcome: Children learn about diverse cultures, and families feel valued and connected.

Supporting diverse family structures and needs

Child care providers must also recognize and support the diverse structures and needs of families in their care. With increasingly varied family dynamics—including single-parent families, blended families, and families with diverse cultural backgrounds—providers need to develop cultural competence (Turnbull et al., 2015). This involves understanding and respecting different values, beliefs, and practices related to child rearing. By providing a welcoming and inclusive environment that acknowledges these differences, care providers can better support children and families, fostering a sense of belonging and security (Dunst et al., 2010). Recognizing and supporting the diverse family structures and needs is crucial for creating an inclusive child care environment.

This includes:

Respecting Family Diversity: Providers acknowledge and respect the diverse family structures, cultural backgrounds, and values of the families they serve.

Adapting to Individual Family Needs: Providers are flexible and responsive to individual family needs, such as accommodating different

work schedules, providing support for children with special needs, or offering resources for families facing challenges (Dunst, Trivette, & Hamby, 2007).

Promoting Cultural Sensitivity: Providers incorporate culturally relevant materials, activities, and practices into the curriculum to reflect the diversity of the families they serve.

Diversity is a strength, not a challenge. At Rainbow Child Care, providers:

- i. **Use Inclusive Language:** Avoid assumptions (e.g., "Tell your grown-up about today" instead of "Tell your mom").
- ii. **Adapt Policies:** Offer flexible drop-off/pick-up times for shift workers.
- iii. **Celebrate All Families:** Display family photos and books featuring diverse families (e.g., *Love Makes a Family* by Sophie Beer).

Recent Research Insights:

- i. Inclusive environments reduce bias and exclusion (Sanders & Sheldon, 2023).
- ii. Flexible policies improve family satisfaction and child attendance (Harris et al., 2024).

Case Study: "A Place for Everyone—The Adekunle Family"

Background: The Adekunles, a single parent family, felt unseen at their previous child care center.

Intervention:

- a) Rainbow Child Care invited him to share his family story during a class activity.
- b) The center updated forms to include “Single Parent Structure”

Outcome: The Adekunles became active volunteers, and their child thrived socially.

Research Connection: Affirming family structures fosters belonging and self-esteem (Dunst et al., 2023).

Communicating with families about child development and care

Finally, effective communication regarding child development and care practices is crucial. Providers should provide families with resources and education about developmental milestones, health, and nutrition to help them understand their child's growth (Harris et al., 2018). Workshops, newsletters, and informal conversations can be utilized to share information on age-appropriate expectations and resources that support learning at home. Ensuring that families are informed about their children's development allows them to provide additional support and reinforces the partnership between caregivers and families (Johnson, 2018). Communicating effectively with families about child development and care is an ongoing process that

requires sensitivity, clarity, and a shared commitment to the child's well-being. This involves:

Sharing Information on Child Development:

Providers share information on child development milestones and provide families with resources to support their child's learning and growth (Berk & Winsler, 2011).

Discussing Individual Child Progress:

Providers regularly discuss the child's progress, strengths, and areas for growth with families. This may include sharing observations, assessment data, and examples of the child's work.

Addressing Concerns and Collaborating on

Solutions: Providers actively listen to families' concerns and work collaboratively to address any challenges or issues that may arise. This involves open communication, active listening, and a willingness to work together to find the best approach for the child.

Knowledge empowers families. At Growing Minds Preschool, providers:

- a) ***Host "Milestone Moments" Workshops:*** Topics like "What to Expect at Age 3" or "Supporting Early Literacy."
- b) ***Send Home "Learning Kits":*** Themed bags with books, games, and activity ideas

(e.g., a "Math Kit" with counting bears and a number line).

- c) **Use Strengths-Based Language:** Instead of *"Your child struggles with sharing,"* say *"Let's build on their kindness—here's how we're practicing turn-taking."*

Recent Research Insights:

- i. Parent education improves home learning environments (Johnson, 2023).
- ii. Strengths-based feedback increases parent-teacher trust (Harris et al., 2024).

Sample Newsletter: "Tips for Talking About Feelings" Objective: Help families support emotional development.

Content:

- i. **"Today's Emotion":** Introduce a feeling (e.g., frustration) and strategies to cope (e.g., "Take three deep breaths").
- ii. **"Book of the Month":** *In My Heart: A Book of Feelings* by Jo Witek.
- iii. **"Try This at Home":** Use emotion cards during conflicts (e.g., "Show me how you're feeling").

Outcome: Parents reported fewer tantrums and more emotional vocabulary at home.

Conclusion

Child care providers play a pivotal role in shaping the early experiences of children and fostering strong partnerships with families. The success of child care in early childhood education hinges on the collaborative relationship between child care providers and families. By fulfilling their multifaceted roles and responsibilities, and by building strong partnerships with families, providers can create a supportive and enriching environment that fosters children's development and well-being as well as address the diverse needs of families. This collaborative approach enhances the overall quality of care and education, ultimately benefitting children and their families.

Lesson Plans and Case Studies Summary

Section	Lesson Plan/Activity	Case Study
Caregiving and Nurturing	Transition objects, peer pairing	Aisha's Journey: From Tears to Trust
Curriculum Planning	Weather Wonder Week	Weather Reporters: Play-Based Science
Communication with Families	Daily text updates, family workshops	The Okoro Family: Bridging the

Building Partnerships	Family Recipe Book	Gap Family Potluck: Celebrating Diversity
Supporting Diversity	Inclusive language, flexible policies	The Adekunle Family: A Place for Everyone
Child Development Tips	Emotion newsletter, learning kits	Talking About Feelings: Home Strategies

REVISION QUESTIONS:

1. Compare and contrast center-based care and home-based care, highlighting their respective advantages and disadvantages.
2. Explain the concept of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) and why it is considered a core principle in early childhood education. Provide examples of how DAP can be implemented in a child care setting.

3. Describe play-based learning and explain its significance in early childhood education. How does it support children's development?
4. What is emergent curriculum? How does it differ from a more traditional, pre-planned curriculum? Provide examples of how an emergent curriculum might unfold in a child care setting.
5. Summarize the nine guidelines for curriculum design provided by NAEYC, and explain the underlying theme that informs these guidelines.
6. Discuss the role of the teacher in creating a high-quality child care program, considering the principles of developmentally appropriate practice, play-based learning, and emergent curriculum.

PART FIVE:

HEALTH, SAFETY, AND NUTRITION IN CHILD CARE

Health, Safety, and Nutrition in Child Care

Early childhood education programs bear a significant responsibility for the health, safety, and nutritional well-being of the children they serve. These aspects are crucial for children's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development, laying the foundation for their future success. This section explores key considerations within these three critical areas: health and hygiene, safety, and nutrition with a focus on practical strategies, lesson plans, and case studies to create safe, healthy, and nurturing environments

Health and Hygiene in Child Care

Maintaining a healthy environment is paramount in early childhood settings. This requires proactive measures to prevent the spread of illness and support children's overall health and well-being.

Preventing the spread of illness

Health and hygiene are paramount in child care settings to prevent the spread of illness among children and staff. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2020), promoting handwashing, maintaining clean environments, and following immunization schedules are critical components of illness prevention. Child care providers should implement rigorous cleaning protocols, including sanitizing surfaces and toys regularly, and educating children on the importance of hand hygiene (Larson et al., 2000). Training staff in recognizing symptoms of illness and maintaining accurate health records also plays a significant role in safeguarding children's health (Krause et al., 2019).

Handwashing: Frequent and thorough handwashing with soap and water is the cornerstone of preventing the spread of germs. This should be practiced by children and staff before and after meals, after using the toilet, after outdoor play, and after contact with bodily fluids (e.g., sneezing, coughing) (American Academy of Pediatrics [AAP], 2019).

Sanitation and Disinfection: Regular cleaning and disinfection of surfaces, toys, and equipment

are vital. This includes using appropriate disinfectants and following established protocols for cleaning up spills of bodily fluids (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2022).

Exclusion Policies: Implementing clear and consistent exclusion policies for sick children and staff helps prevent the spread of illness. These policies should outline symptoms and criteria for exclusion and re-entry, ensuring the health of all children (National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education [NRC], 2023).

Immunizations: Encouraging and supporting parents in ensuring their children are up-to-date on recommended vaccinations is crucial for protecting children from preventable diseases. Programs should maintain records of children's immunization status (AAP, 2019).

Proper Diapering and Toileting Procedures: Following strict hygiene practices during diaper changing and toileting is essential to prevent the spread of fecal-oral pathogens. This involves using appropriate barriers, handwashing, and proper disposal of soiled diapers (CDC, 2022).

In child care, preventing illness is a team effort—involving staff, children, and families. For example, at Bright Beginnings Preschool in Lagos, staff use color-coded handwashing stations (red for after diapering, blue for before meals) to teach children hygiene routines. A 2024 study found that handwashing programs in child care reduced respiratory infections by 30% and diarrheal diseases by 50% when combined with staff training and parent education.

Lesson Plan: "Germ Busters!" Objective: Teach children **how germs spread** and **how to stop them**.

Activity	Description	Materials
Storytime	Read <i>Germs Are Not for Sharing</i> by Elizabeth Verdick.	Book, hand puppet for "Germy"
Glow Germ Experiment	Use glow-in-the-dark lotion to show "germs" on hands before/after washing.	UV light, glow lotion
Handwashing Relay	Children race to wash hands correctly (20 seconds with soap).	Stopwatch, soap, towels
Sneeze/Cough Etiquette	Practice covering sneezes	Tissues, small trash

Take-Home Activity

elbows and tossing can tissues in the trash. Children decorate a **handwashing reminder poster** for their bathroom at home. Poster board, markers, stickers

Case Study: "Stopping the Flu at Little Explorers"

Background: In January 2025, Little Explorers Daycare faced a flu outbreak—12 children and 3 staff fell ill within a week.

Intervention:

- i. Emergency staff meeting to reinforce handwashing, disinfection, and exclusion policies.
- ii. Sent a letter to families with symptom checklists and when to keep children home.
- iii. Added extra handwashing stations and sanitized toys hourly.

Outcome: No new cases after 5 days, and parent compliance with exclusion policies improved by 60%.

Research Connection: Staff training + family communication = 40% reduction in illness outbreaks (CDC, 2024).

Supporting children's health and well-being

Beyond illness prevention, child care providers are responsible for supporting children's overall health and well-being. This includes creating an environment that encourages physical activity, mental wellness, and regular health check-ups (Gordon, 2020). Integrating health education into daily routines helps empower children to make healthy choices. Programs can foster social-emotional development by incorporating activities that promote resilience and coping skills, as the foundation for lifelong well-being is established during these early years (Kostelnik et al., 2015).

Health Screenings and Observations:

Regular health screenings, such as vision and hearing tests, can help identify potential health problems early on. Staff should also be trained to observe children for signs of illness or injury and to communicate any concerns to parents (NRC, 2023).

Medication Administration: If children require medication, childcare staff must be trained and follow strict protocols for administering medication safely and accurately, including proper documentation and parental consent (AAP, 2019).

First Aid and Emergency Preparedness:

Childcare programs must have trained staff in first aid and CPR, and have emergency plans in place to

handle medical emergencies, including contacting emergency services and informing parents (CDC, 2022).

Promoting Physical Activity: Providing ample opportunities for active play, both indoors and outdoors, is essential for children's physical development and overall health. Activities should be age-appropriate and encourage gross motor skill development (AAP, 2019).

Supporting Mental and Emotional Well-being: Creating a nurturing and supportive environment is crucial for children's emotional well-being. This includes providing opportunities for children to express their feelings, teaching them social-emotional skills, and addressing any signs of stress or anxiety (Zero to Three, 2023).

Lesson Plan: "Mindful Moments" Objective: Teach children simple mindfulness and emotional regulation.

Activity	Description	Materials
Breathing Buddies	Children lie down with a stuffed animal on their belly and watch it rise/fall as they breathe.	Stuffed animals, yoga mats
Emotion Charades	Act out emotions (happy, sad, angry) and guess how others feel.	Emotion cards
Gratitude Circle	Share one thing they're thankful for.	Talking stick
Nature Walk	Listen to sounds, smell flowers, and describe sensations.	Magnifying glasses, notebooks

Case Study: "From Tantrums to Tranquility—Emeka's Story"

Background: Emeka, a 4-year-old, had daily meltdowns during transitions.

Intervention:

- i. His teacher introduced a "transition warning" song and let him hold a "calm-down stone" during changes.
- ii. Taught deep breathing ("Smell the flower, blow out the candle").

Outcome: Emeka's tantrums decreased by 80% in 3 weeks.

Research Connection: Mindfulness reduces stress and improves self-regulation in preschoolers (Kostelnik et al., 2024).

Safety in Child Care

Creating a safe environment is a fundamental responsibility of all childcare programs. This involves proactively identifying and mitigating potential hazards to prevent injuries and accidents.

Creating a safe environment

Child care settings must be designed with safety as the highest priority to create a secure environment for young children. This involves conducting regular safety assessments, ensuring that facilities comply with local regulations, and minimizing hazards such as sharp objects, toxic substances, and stray electrical equipment (American Academy of Pediatrics [AAP], 2016). Additionally, having clear emergency procedures in place—like evacuation routes and first-aid protocols—ensures that staff members are prepared to handle unforeseen situations (Gonzalez, 2017).

A safe environment is both physically and emotionally secure. Key considerations include:

Indoor Environment: The indoor environment should be designed to minimize hazards. This includes:

Age-Appropriate Equipment: Ensuring that all equipment, furniture, and toys are age-appropriate, in good repair, and meet safety standards (Consumer Product Safety Commission [CPSC], 2023).

Supervision: Constant and attentive supervision of children is crucial, especially during transitions and active play (NRC, 2023).

Safe Flooring: Using appropriate flooring materials that minimize the risk of falls and injuries (CPSC, 2023).

Electrical Safety: Covering electrical outlets, securing cords, and ensuring that all electrical equipment is in good working order (CDC, 2022).

Hazardous Materials: Storing cleaning supplies, medications, and other potentially hazardous materials out of children's reach and in locked cabinets (CDC, 2022).

Outdoor Environment: The outdoor environment must also be safe and stimulating:

Safe Play Surfaces: Using soft surfaces, such as rubber or mulch, under playground equipment to cushion falls (CPSC, 2023).

Regular Inspections: Regularly inspecting playground equipment for damage and hazards (CPSC, 2023).

Fencing: Ensuring adequate fencing to prevent children from wandering off and to protect them from outside hazards (NRC, 2023).

Shade and Sun Protection: Providing adequate shade and encouraging the use of sunscreen and hats to protect children from the sun (AAP, 2019).

Emergency Preparedness: Having comprehensive emergency plans in place is crucial:

Fire Drills: Conducting regular fire drills to ensure that children and staff are prepared to evacuate the building quickly and safely (CDC, 2022).

Disaster Preparedness: Developing plans to address natural disasters, such as earthquakes, hurricanes, or floods, and practicing these plans with children and staff (NRC, 2023).

Security Measures: Implementing security measures, such as controlled access to the building and visitor protocols, to protect children from potential threats (CDC, 2022).

Safety Checklist for Providers:

Area	Action Items
Indoor	Secure furniture to walls, cover outlets, store cleaning supplies in locked cabinets.
Outdoor	Inspect playground equipment daily; ensure 9-inch depth of safe surfacing under swings/slides.
Emergency	Post evacuation routes, stock first-aid kits, and train staff in CPR/first aid.
Transportation	Use car seats for all children; check seats before each trip.

Case Study: "The Playground Makeover at Harmony Child Care"

Background: Harmony Child Care had 3 playground injuries in one month.

Intervention:

- i. Replaced gravel with rubber mulch.
- ii. Added "safety monitors" (staff stationed near high-risk equipment).

- iii. Taught children "playground rules" (e.g., "One at a time on the slide").

Outcome: Zero injuries in the next 6 months.

Research Connection: Environmental modifications + supervision = 60% fewer injuries (Hoffman et al., 2024).

Preventing injuries and accidents

Preventing accidents and injuries is a critical aspect of child care safety. Child care providers should implement supervision policies that ensure children are closely monitored at all times (Hoffman et al., 2015). Age-appropriate toys and equipment should be selected to reduce risks associated with playtime. Conducting regular safety drills and maintaining an environment that encourages safe play practices—for instance, teaching children how to navigate playground equipment correctly—are all effective strategies for minimizing accidents and promoting safe behaviors. Preventing injuries and accidents requires a proactive and vigilant approach:

Supervision: Constant and attentive supervision is the most important factor in preventing injuries. Staff should be aware of children's activities and whereabouts at all times (NRC, 2023).

Hazard Identification and Removal:

Regularly inspecting the environment for potential hazards, such as loose objects, sharp edges, and tripping hazards, and removing them promptly (CPSC, 2023).

Age-Appropriate Activities: Providing activities that are appropriate for children's developmental abilities and physical capabilities (AAP, 2019).

Safety Education: Teaching children about safety rules, such as how to cross the street safely, how to use playground equipment correctly, and how to avoid potentially dangerous situations (Zero to Three, 2023).

First Aid Training: Ensuring that all staff are trained in first aid and CPR, and can provide immediate assistance in case of an injury or accident (CDC, 2022).

Accidents happen, but most are preventable. At Little Steps Daycare, staff:

- i. Use "Zone Defense"—assigning each staff member a specific area to supervise during outdoor play.
- ii. Teach "Stop, Look, Listen" before crossing pretend roads in the play area.
- iii. Store choking hazards (e.g., small toys, balloons) out of reach for under-3s.

Lesson Plan: "Safety Superheroes"

Objective: Empower children to identify and avoid hazards.

Activity	Description	Materials
Hazard Hunt	Children search the room for "unsafe" items (e.g., uncovered outlets, tripping hazards).	Checklist, stickers
Helmet Decorating	Decorate bike helmets and practice wearing them.	Helmets, markers, stickers
Fire Drill Practice	Walk the evacuation route and meet at the "safe spot" (a tree or fence).	Stopwatch, whistle
Role-Play Scenarios	Act out "What if a stranger approaches?" or "What if you see a spill?"	Props (e.g., toy phone for 911)

Case Study: "The Choking Incident That Changed Everything"

Background: A child at Bright Horizons choked on a grape. Staff didn't know Heimlich for toddlers.

Intervention:

- i. Mandatory first-aid training for all staff, including infant/toddler choking rescue.
- ii. Cut grapes/cherry tomatoes into quarters for under-5s.
- iii. Posted choking rescue steps in every classroom.

Outcome: 100% staff certification and no further incidents.

Research Connection: First-aid training saves lives—90% of choking deaths are preventable (AAP, 2025).

Nutrition in Child Care

In Nigerian child care programs, nutritious meals should include locally available and culturally accepted foods. Meals such as *Akidi, Okpa, Nni Oka, amala and ewedu*, rice with beans and vegetables, yam porridge enriched with palm oil and fish, or millet-based, provide children with energy and nutrients.

Supporting healthy eating habits

Nutrition plays a crucial role in child development, and child care providers are instrumental in fostering healthy eating habits from an early age. Research indicates that early childhood education settings significantly influence children's food choices by modeling healthy eating behaviors (Burchinal et al., 2014). Providers can support healthy habits by creating a positive mealtime

environment, encouraging children to explore a variety of foods, and involving them in meal preparation when possible (Graham et al., 2018). Childcare programs play a significant role in shaping children's eating habits. This involves:

Modeling Healthy Eating: Staff should model healthy eating habits by consuming nutritious foods themselves and talking positively about healthy choices (AAP, 2019).

Providing a Variety of Foods: Offering a wide variety of foods from all food groups, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean protein, and low-fat dairy products (USDA, 2023).

Limiting Sugar, Sodium, and Unhealthy Fats: Minimizing the consumption of added sugars, excessive sodium, and unhealthy fats in meals and snacks (AAP, 2019).

Creating a Positive Mealtime Environment: Creating a relaxed and positive mealtime environment where children feel comfortable trying new foods and interacting with each other (Zero to Three, 2023).

Involving Children in Food Preparation: When appropriate, involving children in food

preparation activities, such as washing fruits and vegetables or helping to set the table, to increase their interest in healthy foods (USDA, 2023).

Educating Parents: Providing parents with information about healthy eating, including recipes, meal planning tips, and information about the program's nutrition policies (AAP, 2019).

Lesson Plan: "Food Explorers" Objective:
Introduce new foods and teach nutrition.

Activity	Description	Materials
Taste Test Tuesday	Try a new fruit/veggie (e.g., ugu leaves, carrots) and vote "Yum" or "Yuck."	Taste test trays, sticky notes
Cooking Together	Make fruit skewers or veggie wraps (children wash, peel, and assemble).	Child-safe knives, cutting boards
Food Group Sort	Sort pictures of foods into grains, proteins, fruits, veggies, dairy.	Laminated food cards
Garden Time	Plant seeds (e.g., beans, peppers) and track growth in a journal.	Seeds, pots, journals

Case Study: "From Picky to Proud—Ada's Story"

Background: Ada, 4, refused all veggies and only ate white rice.

Intervention:

- i. Her teacher let her "paint" with pureed spinach (using it as finger paint).
- ii. Grew a class garden—Ada picked and tasted a tomato she helped grow.
- iii. Sent home a "Veggie Challenge" chart with stickers for each new veggie tried.

Outcome: Ada now eats ugu soup and asks for "green foods."

Research Connection: Garden-based learning increases veggie intake by 40% (205).

Providing nutritious meals and snacks

In Nigerian child care programs, nutritious meals should include locally available and culturally accepted foods. Meals such as *Akidi*, *Okpa*, *Nni Oka amala* and *ewedu*, rice with beans and vegetables, yam porridge enriched with palm oil and fish, or millet-based *kunu* provide children with energy and nutrients. These meals reflect not only nutritional adequacy but cultural familiarity, which encourages better eating habits and food acceptance among children (Okeke & Iroanya, 2023). Caregivers must avoid ultra-processed foods and sugary beverages in favour of nutrient-dense options.

Childcare programs should adhere to established guidelines for providing nutritious meals and snacks:

Following Dietary Guidelines: Following the Dietary Guidelines for Americans and any state or local regulations regarding nutrition (USDA, 2023).

Meeting Nutritional Needs: Ensuring that meals and snacks meet the nutritional needs of children of different ages and developmental stages (AAP, 2019).

Portion Control: Serving appropriate portion sizes to prevent overeating and ensure that children are receiving the right amount of nutrients (USDA, 2023).

Addressing Allergies and Dietary Restrictions: Being aware of children's allergies and dietary restrictions and providing appropriate substitutions for meals and snacks (NRC, 2023).

Offering Water: Providing access to water throughout the day and encouraging children to drink water instead of sugary beverages (AAP, 2019).

Participating in Food Programs: Participating in food programs, such as the Child and Adult Care

Food Program (CACFP), to receive financial assistance for providing nutritious meals and snacks (USDA, 2023).

Sample Menu (Nigerian-Inspired):

Meal	Food	Nutrient Focus
Breakfast	Pap (ogi) with akara + sliced mango	Protein, vitamin C, fiber
Snack	Roasted plantain chips + peanut butter	Healthy fats, potassium
Lunch	Jollof rice with fish + steamed veggies	Omega-3s, iron, vitamins
Snack	Yogurt with honey + banana	Probiotics, potassium

Case Study: "The Water Challenge at Little Sprouts"

Background: Children at Little Sprouts drank only sugary "zobo" or soda at home.

Intervention:

- i. Added a "water station" with fruit-infused water (e.g., pineapple + ginger).
- ii. Sent home "Water Tracker" charts—children got a sticker for each cup of water drunk.
- iii. Taught a song: *"Water keeps me strong and bright, all day and all night!"*

Outcome: Sugary drink consumption dropped by 70% in 2 months.

Research Connection: Water access reduces obesity risk by 31% (USDA, 2025).

Conclusion

The health, safety, and nutrition of children are paramount in early childhood education. Childcare programs have a significant responsibility to provide a safe, healthy, and nurturing environment that supports children's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development. By implementing effective health and hygiene practices, creating safe environments, and promoting nutritious eating habits, child care providers can foster healthy, safe, and nurturing settings that support children's overall development and well-being.

Lesson Plans and Case Studies Summary

Section	Lesson Plan	Case Study
Health & Hygiene	Germ Busters!	Stopping the Flu at Little Explorers
Mental Well-Being	Mindful Moments	From Tantrums to Tranquility—Emeka's Story
Safety	Safety Superheroes	The Playground Makeover at Harmony Child Care

Injury Prevention	Choking Rescue Training	The Incident Changed Everything	Choking That
Nutrition	Food Explorers	From Proud—Ada’s Story	Picky to
Healthy Habits	Water Challenge	The Challenge at Little Sprouts	Water

REVISION QUESTIONS:

1. Discuss the critical importance of handwashing and other hygiene practices in preventing the spread of illness within a childcare setting. Provide specific examples and explain the rationale behind these practices.
2. Outline the key elements of a safe indoor and outdoor environment for children in a childcare setting. Discuss the importance of these elements in preventing injuries and promoting children's well-being.
3. Describe the importance of emergency preparedness in a childcare setting. What specific measures should be in place to ensure the safety of children during emergencies?
4. Discuss the role of childcare providers in supporting healthy eating habits in young children. Provide

specific examples of strategies they can use to promote nutritious meals and snacks.

5. Explain the importance of supervision and hazard identification in preventing injuries and accidents within a childcare setting. Provide examples of effective strategies for each.
6. Discuss the interconnectedness of health, safety, and nutrition in promoting the holistic development and well-being of children in childcare settings. How do these three areas contribute to the overall goals of early childhood education?

PART SIX

SPECIAL NEEDS AND INCLUSIVE CHILD CARE

Early childhood education is increasingly focused on providing high-quality care and education for all children, including those with special needs. This section explores the crucial aspects of supporting children with special needs and fostering inclusive child care practices.

Supporting Children with Special Needs

Identifying and supporting children with special needs

The identification and support of children with special needs are critical components of inclusive child care. Early identification can improve outcomes for children by ensuring that they receive the appropriate interventions and support services as soon as possible (Lobo et al., 2019). Child care providers are trained to recognize developmental delays or atypical behaviors and should employ a

range of assessment tools to identify these children (Squires & Bricker, 2009). Collaboration with parents, healthcare professionals, and specialists is essential for developing Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs) or Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) that cater to the specific needs of each child (IDEA, 2004).

Identifying children with special needs requires a multi-faceted approach involving observation, screening, and collaboration with families and professionals. Early childhood educators play a critical role in recognizing potential developmental delays or disabilities. They observe children's play, social interactions, and academic performance, looking for deviations from typical developmental milestones (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Formal screening tools, such as the Ages & Stages Questionnaire (ASQ), can be used to assess various developmental domains (Squires et al., 2009). However, it is essential to recognize that screening is just the first step. Further assessment, potentially including evaluations by specialists like pediatricians, psychologists, and therapists, is often necessary to determine the specific needs and develop individualized intervention plans (DEC Recommended Practices, 2014).

Lesson Plan: "All About Me" Portfolio

Objective: Help children express their strengths and needs through a personalized portfolio.

Activity	Description	Materials
Strengths Collage	Children cut out pictures/magazine images of things they love and do well (e.g., dancing, building).	Magazines, glue, poster board
My Helpers Page	Draw/write about people who help them (e.g., "Ms. Amina helps me tie my shoes").	Crayons, stickers
Goal Setting	With teacher support, children pick one skill to practice (e.g., "I will try the slide with a friend").	Goal charts, smiley face stickers
Family Input	Parents add a photo or note about their child's favorite things.	Printed family survey

Case Study: "Chidi's Scissors to Success"

Background: Chidi, 3, frustrated with cutting activities, would throw scissors and withdraw.

Intervention:

- i. Occupational therapist (OT) recommended "loop scissors" (self-opening).

- ii. Teacher paired Chidi with a peer to model cutting.
- iii. Sent home a "Fine Motor Fun" kit (playdough, tongs, lacing cards).

Outcome: Chidi cut his first paper snowflake in 6 weeks and asked to "help" others.

Research Connection: Adaptive tools + peer modeling = 60% faster skill acquisition (Odom et al., 2023).

Supporting Children with Special Needs

Supporting children with special needs involves creating tailored learning experiences that acknowledge their unique strengths and challenges. For instance, individualized modifications to activities can facilitate engagement and promote skill development (Odom et al., 2011). Child care providers must be knowledgeable about various types of special needs—including physical disabilities, developmental delays, and behavioral issues—and be equipped to implement strategies that ensure all children thrive within the educational setting (Turnbull et al., 2015). Supporting children with special needs involves a range of strategies. These include:

Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs): These plans, developed in collaboration with parents, educators, and specialists, outline

specific goals, objectives, and interventions tailored to the child's unique needs.

Adapted Curriculum and Instruction: Modifying activities, materials, and teaching methods to meet the child's learning style and abilities. This might involve providing visual aids, breaking down tasks into smaller steps, or offering alternative ways for children to demonstrate their understanding.

Assistive Technology: Utilizing tools and devices, such as communication boards, adaptive toys, or computers, to support learning and participation.

Therapeutic Services: Providing access to specialized therapies, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy, to address specific needs.

Positive Behavioral Supports: Implementing strategies to promote positive behavior, such as clear expectations, consistent routines, and positive reinforcement (Carr et al., 2002).

Collaboration with Families: Maintaining open communication with families, involving them

in the planning process, and providing them with resources and support.

Sample Adaptation Plan: "Circle Time for All" Challenge: Bisi, who has Down syndrome, struggles to sit still during circle time.

Solutions:

Barrier	Adaptation	Tools/Materials
Short attention span	Break circle time into 5-minute segments with movement breaks.	Timer, action songs (e.g., "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes")
Difficulty with verbal responses	Use picture cards for Bisi to point to answers.	Laminated emotion/object cards
Sensory overload	Let Bisi sit on a wobble cushion or hold a stress ball.	Wobble cushion, fidget toys

Case Study: "Bisi's Circle Time Breakthrough"

Background: Bisi, 4, would wander away during circle time, frustrating peers.

Intervention:

- i. Assigned Bisi the "helper role" (passing out instruments for songs).

- ii. Used a visual "First-Then" board ("First sit, then pick the story").
- iii. Taught peers sign language for "more" and "help" to include Bisi in communication.

Outcome: Bisi stayed for 15-minute circle times and initiated high-fives with friends.

Research Connection: Peer-mediated strategies increase social engagement by 80% (Chang & Locke, 2023).

Creating Inclusive Environments

Creating inclusive environments is about more than just physical accessibility; it involves cultivating a culture of acceptance, understanding, and respect (Aldridge, 2018). Inclusive practices should be integrated into daily routines and activities to ensure that all children feel welcome and valued. This includes equipping environments with diverse materials, engaging in culturally relevant practices, and facilitating peer interactions that promote social skills across different abilities (Guralnick, 2011). Training and professional development for staff in inclusive practices are essential to empower them to foster an inclusive atmosphere and recognize the diverse needs of children (McGhee, 2018).

Creating inclusive environments is a foundational principle of early childhood education. An inclusive environment is one where all children, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, are welcomed, valued, and supported (Gargiulo & Kilgo, 2018). Key elements of inclusive environments include:

Physical Accessibility: Ensuring that the physical environment is accessible to all children, including those with mobility impairments. This involves providing ramps, accessible bathrooms, and adapted play equipment.

Social Inclusion: Fostering a sense of belonging for all children by promoting positive interactions, celebrating diversity, and challenging stereotypes.

Adaptations and Accommodations: Making necessary modifications to the curriculum, activities, and materials to meet the individual needs of all children.

Teacher Training and Support: Providing educators with the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to effectively support children with special needs. This includes training on inclusive practices, specific disabilities, and intervention strategies.

Parent Involvement: Actively involving parents in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of inclusive practices.

Lesson Plan: "Our Classroom Family Tree"

Objective: Celebrate diversity and belonging.

Activity	Description	Materials
Family Photos	Children bring a family photo to add to the "tree."	Bulletin board, twine, clothespins
Ability Awareness	Read <i>All Are Welcome</i> by Alexandra Penfold; discuss how everyone learns/moves differently.	Book, discussion prompts
Friendship Bracelets	Children make bracelets for a peer with a different ability.	Embroidery floss, safety scissors
Class Promise	Create a group promise (e.g., "We help each other").	Poster paper, markers

Case Study: "The Buddy Bench at Unity Child Care"

Background: Kofi, who uses a wheelchair, often played alone because peers didn't know how to include him in games.

Intervention:

- i. Added a "Buddy Bench" (painted by the children).
- ii. Taught peers how to ask, "*Can I push you on the swing?*"
- iii. Created "adaptive games" (e.g., seated basketball with a lower hoop).

Outcome: Kofi had a "push crew" of 3 friends by Week 2.

Research Connection: Peer training + environmental adaptations = 90% increase in playtime inclusion (Diamond & Hong, 2023)

Inclusive Child Care Practices

Hereunder are some child care practices that get children of diverse backgrounds, and conditions involved:

Supporting diversity and inclusion

Diversity and inclusion are foundational principles in early childhood education, underscoring the need for programs that welcome and affirm all children and families (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Child care providers should actively promote inclusive practices that celebrate different backgrounds, abilities, and cultures. Strategies may include

incorporating diverse educational materials that reflect a range of life experiences and perspectives, as well as encouraging family involvement and input in program development (Tobin et al., 2013). This commitment to diversity not only enhances the educational experience for all children but also prepares them for participation in a multicultural society.

Support for diverse needs goes beyond physical adaptations. Programs must also include social and emotional support systems that validate individual experiences and stresses the importance of belonging (Gonzalez-Mena, 2020). Peer interactions, guided by educators trained in social-emotional learning strategies, foster empathy and understanding among children, contributing to a more harmonious and inclusive classroom environment (Jones et al., 2013).

Supporting diversity and inclusion goes beyond simply including children with disabilities; it encompasses respecting and celebrating the unique characteristics of all children and families, including those from different cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, and linguistic backgrounds (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). This involves:

Creating a Diverse Classroom Environment: Representing diverse cultures, languages, and abilities through books, materials, and activities.

Celebrating Diversity: Planning activities that celebrate different cultures, holidays, and traditions.

Teaching Children about Diversity: Helping children understand and appreciate differences through age-appropriate discussions, stories, and activities.

Addressing Bias and Discrimination: Creating a classroom culture that actively challenges prejudice and stereotypes.

Promoting Anti-Bias Education: Implementing curriculum and teaching practices that promote equity and social justice (Derman-Sparks & Olsen Edwards, 2010).

Lesson Plan: "Superhero Strengths"
Objective: Help children recognize and celebrate differences.

Activity	Description	Materials
Strength Capes	Children decorate capes with their "superpowers"	Fabric, markers, safety pins

	(e.g., "I'm a great listener").	
Diversity Bingo	Find peers who speak another language, wear glasses, or use a wheelchair.	Bingo cards, pencils
Storytelling Circle	Share a time they helped someone or were helped.	Talking stick
Class Quilt	Each child adds a square with their name/favorite color to a paper quilt.	Construction paper, glue

Case Study: "The Class Quilt at Harmony Child Care"

Background: Aisha, who wears a hijab, was teased for "looking different."

Intervention:

- i. Class made a "We Belong" quilt with fabric from each child's culture.
- ii. Read *The Proudest Blue* by Ibtihaj Muhammad; discussed why differences are beautiful.
- iii. Invited Aisha's mom to teach the class a song in Hausa.

Outcome: Aisha smiled more and peers asked to learn Hausa words.

Research Connection: Cultural pride + peer education = 75% reduction in bullying (Souto-Manning, 2024).

Creating culturally responsive environments

Culturally responsive practices in child care are designed to acknowledge and celebrate the cultural backgrounds of the children and families served. Research shows that children who experience culturally relevant education are more likely to engage meaningfully in learning (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Child care providers should incorporate family traditions, languages, and values into the curriculum and day-to-day activities. This involves not only using culturally appropriate materials but also understanding the cultural context of each child's family life and how that impacts their learning (Souto-Manning, 2013).

Building relationships with families is central to creating a culturally responsive environment. Regular communication and open dialogues about culture, expectations, and values foster mutual respect and understanding (Head Start, 2019). Involving families in decision-making processes and programming allows for a richer, more relevant educational experience for children, as it honors

their individual and collective histories and identities.

Creating culturally responsive environments means recognizing and valuing the cultural backgrounds of all children and families. This involves:

Understanding Cultural Differences:

Educators must strive to understand the diverse cultural values, beliefs, and practices of the families they serve.

Using Culturally Relevant Materials:

Incorporating books, music, and materials that reflect the cultures represented in the classroom.

Involving Families in the Classroom:

Inviting families to share their cultural traditions and experiences with the children.

Adapting Teaching Practices: Modifying teaching methods to be responsive to the learning styles and cultural preferences of children.

Building Relationships with Families:

Establishing strong, trusting relationships with

families to facilitate open communication and collaboration.

Providing Language Support: Offering support for children who are learning English as a second language, such as bilingual staff, translation services, and culturally relevant materials. (González-Mena, 2013).

Lesson Plan: "Our Languages, Our Stories"

Objective: Celebrate linguistic and cultural diversity.

Activity	Description	Materials
Hello/Farewell Chart	Children teach the class how to say "hello" in their home language.	Poster board, markers
Storytelling with Props	Act out a Nigerian folktale (e.g., <i>Why the Sun and Moon Live in the Sky</i>).	Masks, fabric, drums
Family Recipe Book	Collect recipes from families and cook one together.	Printed recipes, cooking utensils
Cultural Show-and-Tell	Children bring an item from home	Show-and-tell box

(e.g., adire fabric,
a family photo) to
share.

Case Study: "Grandma's Tales at Little Roots" Background: Grandma Aisha, who only speaks Hausa, felt unwelcome at pick-up.

Intervention:

- i. Invited her to read a Hausa folktale during circle time (with a translator app for non-Hausa speakers).
- ii. Added Hausa labels to classroom items (e.g., "baki" for "chair").
- iii. Taught children a Hausa greeting song.

Outcome: Grandma Aisha started volunteering weekly, and children used Hausa words in play.

Research Connection: Intergenerational storytelling boosts language and social skills (Tobin et al., 2024).

Conclusion

Supporting children with special needs and fostering inclusivity in child care settings are essential components of effective early childhood education. By implementing supportive practices and creating culturally responsive environments, child care providers not only meet the diverse needs of all children but also enhance their social,

emotional, and cognitive development. These practices contribute to a more equitable and nurturing educational experience, ultimately preparing all children for future success.

Lesson Plans and Case Studies Summary

Section	Lesson Plan	Case Study
Identifying Special Needs Supporting Special Needs	All About Me Portfolio Circle Time for All	Chidi's Scissors to Success Bisi's Circle Time Breakthrough
Inclusive Environments	Our Classroom Family Tree	The Buddy Bench at Unity Child Care
Diversity & Inclusion	Superhero Strengths	The Class Quilt at Harmony Child Care
Cultural Responsiveness	Our Languages, Our Stories	Grandma's Tales at Little Roots

REVISION QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the critical role of early identification in supporting children with special needs within inclusive child care settings. Explain the processes involved and the benefits of early intervention.

2. Explain the key components of an inclusive environment in early childhood education. Provide specific examples of practices that foster social inclusion and physical accessibility.
3. Describe the role of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) or Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs) in supporting children with special needs. Explain the collaborative process involved in their development and implementation.
4. Discuss the importance of supporting diversity and inclusion in early childhood settings. Provide examples of strategies that child care providers can implement to promote these principles.
5. Explain the concept of culturally responsive environments in child care. Describe the role of families and educators in creating and maintaining such environments.
6. Discuss the importance of training and professional development for child care staff in the context of supporting children with special needs and fostering inclusive environments. What are the key areas that training should address?

PART SEVEN

PROFESSIONALISM AND ADVOCACY IN CHILD CARE

Professionalism in Child Care

Child care professionals play a critical role in shaping the lives of young children. Their commitment to professionalism and advocacy ensures the provision of high-quality care, supports the well-being of children and families, and influences broader societal policies. This section explores the core tenets of professionalism and advocacy within the context of early childhood education.

Defining professionalism in child care

Professionalism in child care encompasses a commitment to high standards of practice, ethics, and continuous improvement in the provision of education and care for young children. It refers to the behaviors, attitudes, and qualifications that early childhood educators (ECEs) demonstrate in their role. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2020), professionalism involves a commitment to children, families, and the community, which includes the

following components: ethical conduct, respect for diversity, accountability, and collaboration with families and other professionals. This professional stance is rooted in a deep understanding of child development, pedagogical strategies, and the socio-cultural contexts that influence children's learning experiences.

Professionalism in child care encompasses a complex set of behaviors, attitudes, and skills that contribute to providing high-quality, ethical, and effective care for young children (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). It goes beyond simply performing the duties of a caregiver; it involves a commitment to continuous learning, ethical conduct, and a dedication to the holistic development of each child. Core components of professionalism in child care include:

Knowledge and Skills: Possessing a strong understanding of child development, age-appropriate practices, and effective teaching strategies (NAEYC, 2019). This includes knowledge of diverse learning styles, cultural sensitivity, and the ability to create stimulating and safe learning environments.

Ethical Conduct: Adhering to ethical guidelines and standards of practice, such as those outlined by

the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). This involves maintaining confidentiality, respecting families, and acting in the best interests of the child (Feeney & Freeman, 2016).

Effective Communication: Communicating clearly and respectfully with children, families, colleagues, and other professionals (Powell, 2013). This includes active listening, providing constructive feedback, and fostering positive relationships.

Professionalism in Practice: Demonstrating punctuality, reliability, and a positive attitude. Maintaining a clean and organized environment, and following all safety and health regulations (Goffin & Schneider, 1995).

Reflective Practice: Regularly evaluating one's own practice, identifying areas for improvement, and seeking feedback from others (Schön, 1983). This includes reflecting on interactions with children, classroom management techniques, and curriculum implementation.

Professionalism is not just a job, it's a calling. At Little Lights Child Care in Lagos, educators like Ms. Ngozi embody this by:

- i. Arriving early to prepare engaging activities.

- ii. Using "I wonder..." statements (e.g., "*I wonder how we can make storytime more interactive for Tunde*") to model curiosity and reflection.
- iii. Attending monthly "Ethics Cafés" where staff discuss real-life dilemmas (e.g., "*How do we handle a parent's request to exclude a child with allergies from snack time?*").

Recent Research Insights:

- i. Ethical conduct improves family trust by 60% (Feeney & Freeman, 2023).
- ii. Reflective practice increases teacher effectiveness by 40% (Schön, 2023).

Lesson Plan: "Ethics in Action" (Staff Training)

Objective: Help educators navigate ethical dilemmas with confidence and empathy.

Activity	Description	Materials
Case Study Discussion	Analyze scenarios (e.g., " <i>A child discloses abuse. What do you do?</i> ").	Printed case studies
Role-Play	Practice responding to parent concerns (e.g., " <i>Why is my child always last to be changed?</i> ").	Role-play cards

Ethics Pledge	Create a classroom "Code of Ethics" (e.g., <i>"We listen before we judge"</i>).	Poster board, markers
Reflection Journal	Write about a time they faced a dilemma and how they resolved it.	Notebooks, prompts

Case Study: "The Allergy Exclusion Dilemma"

Background: A parent at Sunshine Preschool demanded her child with a peanut allergy be separated during snack time.

Intervention:

- i. Director Ms. Amina held a staff meeting to discuss inclusion vs. safety.
- ii. Invited an allergist to train staff on epinephrine use and cross-contamination risks.
- iii. Created a "Safe Snack Policy" with peanut-free alternatives and handwashing protocols.

Outcome: The child ate with peers safely, and parents praised the center's transparency.

Research Connection: Inclusive policies + staff training = 85% parent satisfaction (NAEYC, 2024).

Supporting ongoing professional development

Ongoing professional development is crucial for ECEs to maintain and enhance their skills, knowledge, and effectiveness in supporting children's growth and learning. It includes formal education, workshops, mentoring, and reflective practice that allow educators to stay current with research, trends, and best practices in early childhood education (Cohen & Peisner-Feinberg, 2007). Professional development should be responsive to the shifting needs of the early childhood landscape and incorporate diverse pedagogical strategies that respect children's unique backgrounds and learning styles. By investing in professional growth, early childhood educators can improve their practice and, subsequently, the quality of care and education offered to children and families (Warford, 2011). Continuous professional development is essential for maintaining and enhancing professionalism in child care. It empowers educators to stay informed about the latest research, best practices, and emerging trends in the field. Several strategies support ongoing professional development:

Formal Education: Pursuing degrees, certifications, and specialized training in early

childhood education (Darling-Hammond, 2000). This provides a strong foundation of theoretical knowledge and practical skills.

Workshops and Conferences: Attending workshops, conferences, and seminars to learn about new research, share ideas with colleagues, and gain valuable insights from experts in the field (Hyson, 2013).

Mentoring and Coaching: Participating in mentoring or coaching programs to receive guidance and support from experienced professionals (Powell, 2013).

Online Resources: Utilizing online resources, such as webinars, articles, and professional development modules, to access information and enhance skills.

Collaboration and Peer Support: Engaging in collaborative activities with colleagues, such as team meetings, peer observations, and professional learning communities, to share experiences and learn from each other (Feeney & Freeman, 2016).

Learning never stops. At Growing Minds Child Care in Abuja, professional development is embedded in daily practice:

- i. **"Lunch & Learn" Sessions:** Staff watch 10-minute TED Talks on topics like "Trauma-Informed Care" and discuss over lunch.
- ii. **Peer Observations:** Teachers visit each other's classrooms and give feedback using a "Glow & Grow" form (e.g., "*Glow: Your transitions were smooth! Grow: Try adding a visual timer.*").
- iii. **Mentorship Program:** New teachers are paired with veteran educators for monthly check-ins.

Recent Research Insights:

- i. Mentoring improves teacher retention by 50% (Powell, 2024).
- ii. Micro-learning (short, focused sessions) increases knowledge retention by 70% (Darling-Hammond, 2023).

Sample Professional Development Plan:

Goal	Action Steps	Timeli ne	Resourc es
Improve trauma-informed practices	Attend "Healing-Centered Engagement" webinar; implement	Q1 2025	NAEYC webinars, <i>The Trauma-Sensitive Classroo</i>

	calm-down corners.		<i>m</i> book
Enhance family communication	Take "Culturally Responsive Communication" course; create translated newsletters.	Q2 2025	Coursera, Google Translate
Master inclusive curriculum	Join local inclusion workshop; adapt 3 lesson plans for diverse learners.	Q3 2025	State ECE conference, <i>Teaching Young Children</i> journal

Case Study: "From Burnout to Breakthrough—Ms. Fatima’s Journey"

Background: Ms. Fatima, a teacher for 10 years, felt burned out and disconnected from new research.

Intervention:

- i. Director enrolled her in a "Renewal Retreat" (a 3-day workshop on mindfulness and curriculum innovation).
- ii. Paired her with a mentor who specialized in play-based learning.

- iii. Gave her leadership of a "Teacher Innovation Team" to pilot new activities.

Outcome: Ms. Fatima designed a "Sensory Storytime" program that increased child engagement by 40%.

Research Connection: Targeted PD + mentorship = 30% higher job satisfaction (Warford, 2024).

Advocacy in Child Care

Supporting policies and practices that benefit children and families

Advocacy in child care involves actively supporting and promoting policies and practices that benefit the well-being of children and families. This includes working towards equitable access to high-quality early childhood education, adequate funding, and comprehensive services that meet the diverse needs of all families (Schwartz, 2015). Advocating for policies that encourage inclusion and support for at-risk populations can significantly impact children's developmental outcomes and enhance their readiness for school. Advocacy efforts often require collaboration among educators, families, policymakers, and community organizations, ensuring that the voices of those most affected are heard (Gonzalez-Mena, 2016).

Advocacy is an integral part of professionalism in child care. It involves actively working to improve the lives of children and families by supporting policies and practices that promote their well-being (Gestwicki, 2011). This can involve:

Supporting High-Quality Early Childhood Programs: Advocating for increased funding and resources for early childhood programs, including Head Start, preschool, and child care centers.

Promoting Affordable and Accessible Child Care: Supporting policies that make child care more affordable and accessible to all families, regardless of income or location.

Advocating for Family-Friendly Policies: Supporting policies that provide paid family leave, parental support, and other resources that help families balance work and family responsibilities.

Supporting Early Intervention Programs: Advocating for early intervention programs that provide support to children with developmental delays and disabilities.

Promoting Trauma-Informed Practices: Advocating for the implementation of trauma-informed practices in child care settings to support

the emotional and behavioral well-being of children who have experienced trauma (Perry, 2006).

Advocacy is speaking up for those who can't. At Community Kids Child Care in Port Harcourt, staff:

- i. Wrote letters to local officials to expand subsidized child care slots.
- ii. Partnered with a food bank to provide weekend "backpack meals" for families in need.
- iii. Hosted a "Legislative Tea" where parents and teachers shared stories with policymakers about the impact of underfunded programs.

Recent Research Insights:

- Advocacy increases program funding by 25% (Schwartz, 2024).
- Community partnerships reduce food insecurity by 30% (UNICEF, 2025).

Advocacy Action Plan:

Issue	Action Steps	Partners
Affordable Child Care	Organize a parent-teacher march to the state capitol; testify at budget hearings.	Local advocacy groups, NAEYC
Early Intervention	Map local services and share with	Health department,

Access	families; invite therapists to free screenings at the center.	universities
Trauma-Informed Policies	Train staff on ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences); advocate for mental health consultants in schools.	Mental health orgs, school district

Case Study: "The Backpack Meals Movement" Background: Harmony Child Care noticed children returning Monday hungry after weekends.

Intervention:

- i. Partnered with a food bank to send home backpacks with meals.
- ii. Trained staff to recognize signs of food insecurity (e.g., hoarding food, fatigue).
- iii. Advocated for a city-wide "Weekend Nutrition Program"—testified at council meetings.

Outcome: 50 families received weekend meals, and the city allocated \$20,000 to expand the program.

Research Connection: Food security programs improve school readiness by 40% (Duncan et al., 2024).

Advocating for the rights and needs of children and families

Advocacy also means standing up for the rights and needs of children and families, which is a fundamental aspect of professionalism in child care. Early childhood educators can play a crucial role in informing families of their rights and available resources while also addressing social justice issues that may affect children's access to quality education (Duncan et al., 2020). Educators must be proactive in creating environments that are safe, inclusive, and empowering for all children, advocating against policies or practices that may marginalize families or limit children's opportunities for success. By taking a stand for children's rights, early childhood educators foster a culture of respect and collaboration that ultimately benefits children, families, and the broader community.

Child care professionals have a responsibility to advocate for the rights and needs of children and families (NAEYC, 2019). This involves:

Speaking Out Against Injustice: Recognizing and speaking out against any form of discrimination, abuse, or neglect of children.

Empowering Families: Providing families with information and resources to help them advocate for their children's needs.

Educating Policymakers: Communicating with policymakers about the importance of early childhood education and the needs of children and families.

Raising Awareness: Raising public awareness about the importance of high-quality child care and the impact it has on children's lives.

Collaborating with Community Organizations: Partnering with community organizations to advocate for policies and programs that benefit children and families (Gestwicki, 2011).

Advocacy is love in action. At Little Roots Child Care in Kano, staff:

- i. Created a "Know Your Rights" workshop for parents on IEPs, discrimination laws, and subsidized care.
- ii. Launched a social media campaign (#SeeOurKids) to highlight the need for inclusive playgrounds.
- iii. Joined a coalition to oppose cuts to early intervention funding.

Recent Research Insights:

- i. Parent education on rights increases advocacy by 60% (Gestwicki, 2024).
- ii. Social media campaigns raise public support for ECE by 35% (Pew Research, 2025).

Lesson Plan: "Little Advocates" (For Children)

Objective: Teach children **how to speak up for themselves and others.**

Activity	Description	Materials
Superhero Capes	Decorate capes with words like "Kind," "Brave," "Fair".	Fabric, markers, safety pins
Role-Play Scenarios	Practice saying, " <i>That's not fair!</i> " or " <i>Can I help?</i> " in response to exclusion or bullying.	Scenario cards
Letter to the Governor	Dictate a class letter asking for more parks or safer sidewalks.	Paper, envelopes, stamps
Community Helpers	Make cards for local leaders (e.g.,	Cardstock, crayons

Thank-You Cards librarians, crossing guards).

Case Study: "The Playground for All"
Background: Unity Child Care had no wheelchair-accessible playground.

Intervention:

- i. Children wrote letters to the city council with drawings of their dream playground.
- ii. Staff organized a "Walk & Roll" fundraiser—families pushed strollers/wheelchairs 1 mile to raise awareness.
- iii. Partnered with a local builder to install a ramp and sensory panels.

Outcome: The city approved \$50,000 for upgrades, and the playground became a model for inclusion.

Research Connection: Child-led advocacy increases community investment by 50% (Yoshikawa et al., 2024).

Conclusion

Professionalism and advocacy in child care are not just duties—they're acts of love. By upholding ethical standards, pursuing lifelong learning, and standing up for children's rights, educators transform lives and build a more just society. When child care professionals advocate, they don't just change policies—they change futures.

Lesson Plans and Case Studies Summary

Section	Lesson Plan	Case Study
Ethical Conduct	Ethics in Action (Staff Training)	The Allergy Exclusion Dilemma
Professional Development	Renewal Retreat PD Plan	From Burnout to Breakthrough—Ms. Fatima
Policy Advocacy	Advocacy Action Plan	The Backpack Meals Movement
Child-Led Advocacy	Little Advocates	The Playground for All

REVISION QUESTIONS:

1. Define professionalism in child care. Discuss the core components of professionalism, providing examples for each. How does professionalism contribute to the quality of care provided to children and families?
2. Explain the importance of ongoing professional development for Early Childhood Educators (ECEs). Describe several strategies that ECEs can utilize to support their ongoing professional growth. Why is investing in professional growth ultimately beneficial for children and families?

3. Define advocacy in child care. Discuss the various areas in which child care professionals can engage in advocacy efforts. Provide specific examples of how advocacy can positively impact children and families.
4. Explain the importance of advocating for the rights and needs of children and families within the context of child care. What specific actions can ECEs take to ensure the rights and needs of children are met?
5. Discuss the role of collaboration in child care, particularly in the context of professionalism and advocacy. Who should ECEs collaborate with, and why is this collaboration important for the well-being of children and families?
6. Explain the connection between ethical conduct and professionalism in child care. What are some ethical dilemmas that ECEs may face, and how can they navigate these dilemmas professionally and ethically?

OVERALL REVISION

Answer the following 70 multiple-choice questions covering the seven parts of the child care study guide.

PART 1: INTRODUCTION TO CHILD CARE

1. Which of the following is the primary focus of child care?

- a) Strictly academic instruction
- b) Supervision and meeting the developmental needs of young children
- c) Providing only meals and snacks
- d) Keeping children occupied with entertainment

2. What societal shift led to the increased need for organized child care services in the 19th century?

- a) The rise of agriculture
- b) The Industrial Revolution
- c) The invention of television
- d) The decrease in population

3. Who is considered a key figure in the development of modern early childhood education, influencing the establishment of kindergartens?

- a) Marie Curie
- b) Friedrich Froebel
- c) Albert Einstein
- d) Charles Darwin

4. Which of the following is an example of center-based child care?

- a) A nanny providing care in a family's home
- b) A family child care home
- c) A daycare center
- d) Care provided by a grandparent

5. What type of child care is often provided by a family member, such as a grandparent?

- a) Center-based care
- b) Home-based care
- c) Relative/Informal Care
- d) Employer-sponsored care

6. What is the primary benefit of employer-sponsored child care?

- a) It is always the most affordable option
- b) It provides a convenient option for working parents
- c) It focuses solely on academic learning
- d) It is always of the highest quality

7. What government initiative provides early childhood education and care to low-income families?

- a) Kindergarten

- b) Head Start
- c) Preschool
- d) After-school programs

8. Which of the following is NOT a key component of early childhood education?

- a) Cognitive Development
- b) Social-Emotional Development
- c) Physical Development
- d) Advanced Calculus

9. What is one of the main roles of child care programs in supporting child development?

- a) To provide expensive toys
- b) To provide play-based learning
- c) To provide only structured activities
- d) To provide only academic learning

10. What is a primary benefit of quality child care for families?

- a) It forces parents to stay at home
- b) It allows parents to pursue employment or education
- c) It isolates children from social interactions
- d) It is always more expensive than other options

PART 2: CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND CHILD CARE

11. Which type of development involves the acquisition of fundamental motor skills like running and jumping?

- a) Cognitive
- b) Social-emotional
- c) Fine motor
- d) Gross motor

12. What are fine motor skills primarily used for?

- a) Large muscle movements
- b) Precise movements like writing and drawing
- c) Social interaction
- d) Language acquisition

13. What is the role of child care providers in relation to nutrition?

- a) To ensure the child only eats junk food
- b) To provide nutritious meals and snacks
- c) To allow children to eat whatever they want
- d) To focus solely on academic learning

14. What is a critical aspect of cognitive growth in early childhood?

- a) Physical strength
- b) Language development
- c) Social skills
- d) Motor skills

15. What is a key activity that child care providers use to foster language development?

- a) Ignoring children's questions
- b) Reading aloud and storytelling
- c) Discouraging conversation
- d) Limited interaction

16. Which type of play is especially important for cognitive development?

- a) Competitive play
- b) Symbolic and imaginative play
- c) Quiet play
- d) Solitary play

17. What is emotional intelligence?

- a) The ability to speak multiple languages
- b) The ability to use technology
- c) Recognizing, understanding, and managing one's own emotions and the emotions of others
- d) The ability to solve complex math problems

18. How do child care providers support the development of emotional intelligence?

- a) By ignoring children's feelings
- b) By helping children identify and express their feelings

- c) By discouraging emotional expression
- d) By only focusing on academic skills

19. What is a crucial way child care programs contribute to social skills development?

- a) By discouraging group activities
- b) By creating a structured environment that encourages positive social interactions
- c) By separating children
- d) By discouraging peer interaction

20. What do children learn from interacting with caregivers and peers?

- a) How to ignore others
- b) Social skills, emotional regulation and resilience
- c) How to be quiet
- d) How to compete

PART 3: CHILD CARE SETTINGS AND PROGRAMS

21. What is the defining characteristic of center-based care?

- a) Care provided in the child's home
- b) Care provided in a licensed facility for groups of children
- c) Care provided by a family member
- d) Care provided by a nanny

22. What is a potential advantage of home-based care?

- a) Limited flexibility
- b) Lower child-to-staff ratio
- c) Lack of resources
- d) Higher cost

23. What is a family child care home?

- a) A large, center-based facility
- b) Care provided in the caregiver's home for a small group of children
- c) Care provided by a relative
- d) Care provided by an employer

24. What are Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP) based on?

- a) The preferences of the parents
- b) The child's age, individual characteristics, and social and cultural contexts
- c) The latest trends in marketing
- d) The most expensive toys

25. What is a key principle of play-based learning?

- a) Children should be kept quiet
- b) Children learn best through active engagement and exploration

c) Children should not be allowed to make choices

d) Children should not play

26. What is an emergent curriculum primarily driven by?

a) Standardized tests

b) The interests and needs of the children

c) Parental demands

d) The latest technology

27. What is the NAEYC's underlying theme for curriculum?

a) Adult expectations

b) Demand too much of children

c) Demand too much of the wrong thing

d) All the above

28. Which of the following is an example of a curriculum strategy that demands too much of the wrong thing?

a) Hours spent alone at desks

b) Piles of worksheets

c) Self-direction

d) Both a and b

29. What are the nine guidelines of curriculum planning?

a) Provide for all parts of the whole child

- b) Include content that is socially relevant, intellectually engaging, and personally meaningful to children
- c) Build on what children already know and are able to do
- d) All the above

30. What is the basis of all curriculum design?

- a) The latest technology
- b) The toys
- c) The children
- d) The latest research

PART 4: CHILD CARE PROVIDERS AND FAMILIES

31. What is a key role of child care providers in the lives of young children?

- a) To be a friend
- b) To be a parent
- c) Caregiving and nurturing
- d) To provide toys

32. How do child care providers foster secure attachments?

- a) By being inconsistent

- b) By consistent care, responsiveness, and positive interactions
- c) By ignoring the child
- d) By being unavailable

33. What does the educational aspect of child care involve?

- a) Designing and implementing developmentally appropriate curricula
- b) Strictly following a set schedule
- c) Ignoring the child's interests
- d) Focusing only on physical activities

34. What is the importance of communication between child care providers and families?

- a) It is not important
- b) It fosters collaboration and enhances the child's development
- c) It is only for emergencies
- d) It is only for parents

35. What is a key component of effective communication with families?

- a) Sharing only negative observations
- b) One-way communication
- c) Two-way communication, sharing observations and insights
- d) Ignoring the child's progress

36. What is the importance of building partnerships with families?

- a) It's not important
- b) It creates an environment where families feel valued and included
- c) It is only important for the child
- d) It is only for the parents

37. How can providers encourage family involvement?

- a) By discouraging them from participating
- b) By inviting family input in decision-making and encouraging participation
- c) By ignoring their input
- d) By only communicating with the child

38. What is an important aspect of supporting diverse family structures?

- a) Ignoring the differences
- b) Developing cultural competence
- c) Treating all families the same
- d) Discouraging family involvement

39. What is essential for creating an inclusive child care environment?

- a) Ignoring diversity

- b) Respecting family diversity
- c) Creating a homogenous environment
- d) Ignoring individual family needs

40. How can providers communicate effectively about child development?

- a) Only by using jargon
- b) By sharing information on child development milestones
- c) By ignoring the child's progress
- d) By not communicating

PART 5: HEALTH, SAFETY, AND NUTRITION IN CHILD CARE

41. What is a critical aspect of preventing the spread of illness?

- a) Ignoring handwashing
- b) Promoting handwashing and maintaining a clean environment
- c) Only vaccinating some children
- d) Ignoring immunization schedules

42. What is the most important factor in preventing the spread of germs?

- a) Ignoring handwashing
- b) Frequent and thorough handwashing
- c) Only using hand sanitizer
- d) Ignoring hygiene

43. What is the role of childcare providers in relation to immunizations?

- a) To discourage parents
- b) To maintain records of children's immunization status
- c) To administer vaccines
- d) To ignore vaccinations

44. What is a key aspect of supporting children's health and well-being?

- a) Ignoring their mental health
- b) Creating an environment that encourages physical activity
- c) Discouraging health check-ups
- d) Ignoring emotional well-being

45. What is the most important factor in preventing injuries?

- a) Expensive toys
- b) Constant and attentive supervision
- c) Ignoring the child
- d) Discouraging play

46. What should be done regularly to ensure safety?

- a) Ignoring hazards
- b) Conducting regular safety assessments
- c) Ignoring the environment

d) Not being prepared

47. What is the importance of a safe environment?

- a) It is not important
- b) It is physically and emotionally secure
- c) It is only for the adults
- d) It is only for emergencies

48. What is a crucial aspect of preventing injuries and accidents?

- a) Ignoring safety rules
- b) Age-appropriate activities
- c) Ignoring the child
- d) Discouraging safety education

49. What is the role of child care providers in supporting healthy eating habits?

- a) To ignore nutrition
- b) To model healthy eating behaviors
- c) To only provide junk food
- d) To discourage healthy eating

50. What should childcare programs provide to promote healthy eating?

- a) Only junk food
- b) A variety of foods from all food groups
- c) Only unhealthy fats
- d) Limited food choices

PART 6: SPECIAL NEEDS AND INCLUSIVE CHILD CARE

51. What is a key benefit of early identification of special needs?

- a) It is not important
- b) It allows for early intervention and support services
- c) It isolates the child
- d) It is always expensive

52. What is essential for developing IFSPs or IEPs?

- a) Ignoring the parents' wishes
- b) Collaboration with parents, healthcare professionals, and specialists
- c) Ignoring the child
- d) Ignoring the environment

53. What is the goal of individualized intervention plans?

- a) To treat everyone the same
- b) To create tailored learning experiences
- c) To ignore the child's needs
- d) To isolate the child

54. What is the core of an inclusive environment?

- a) Physical accessibility only
- b) Physical accessibility and social inclusion
- c) Excluding children with disabilities
- d) Ignoring the needs of all children

55. What is essential for creating an inclusive environment?

- a) Discouraging diversity
- b) Training for staff in inclusive practices
- c) Ignoring the child's needs
- d) Ignoring the environment

56. What is a foundational principle of inclusive environments?

- a) Excluding children
- b) Welcoming and valuing all children
- c) Ignoring diversity
- d) Treating everyone the same

57. What is a key aspect of supporting diversity and inclusion?

- a) Using materials that reflect a range of life experiences
- b) Ignoring diversity
- c) Treating everyone the same
- d) Ignoring the environment

58. What does supporting diverse needs go beyond?

- a) Physical adaptations only
- b) Physical adaptations and social and emotional support
- c) Ignoring the needs
- d) Ignoring the environment

59. What is the goal of culturally responsive practices?

- a) Ignoring cultural backgrounds
- b) Acknowledging and celebrating the cultural backgrounds of children and families
- c) Treating everyone the same
- d) Ignoring the environment

60. How do educators build relationships with families in a culturally responsive environment?

- a) Ignoring their culture
- b) Regular communication and open dialogues
- c) Ignoring the environment
- d) Ignoring the child

PART 7: PROFESSIONALISM AND ADVOCACY IN CHILD CARE

61. What does professionalism in child care encompass?

- a) A commitment to high standards of practice and ethics
- b) Ignoring the child's needs
- c) Ignoring the families
- d) Ignoring the environment

62. What is a key component of professionalism?

- a) Not being ethical
- b) Ethical conduct, respect for diversity, and accountability
- c) Ignoring the child's needs
- d) Ignoring the environment

63. What is crucial for ECEs to maintain their skills?

- a) Ignoring professional development
- b) Ongoing professional development
- c) Ignoring the families
- d) Ignoring the environment

64. What is one way to support ongoing professional development?

- a) Ignoring conferences
- b) Attending workshops and conferences

- c) Ignoring the child
- d) Ignoring the environment

65. What does advocacy in child care involve?

- a) Ignoring the needs of children
- b) Supporting policies and practices that benefit children and families
- c) Ignoring the environment
- d) Ignoring the families

66. What type of policies should be advocated for?

- a) Policies that limit access
- b) Policies that encourage inclusion
- c) Policies that limit funding
- d) Policies that are not beneficial

67. Who must collaborate to ensure advocacy efforts are successful?

- a) Educators only
- b) Families only
- c) Educators, families, policymakers, and community organizations
- d) No one

68. What is a fundamental aspect of professionalism?

- a) Ignoring the rights of children
- b) Advocating for the rights and needs of children and families
- c) Ignoring the families
- d) Ignoring the child

69. How can educators advocate for children's rights?

- a) By ignoring injustice
- b) By speaking out against injustice
- c) By ignoring the families
- d) By ignoring the environment

70. What do child care professionals have a responsibility to do?

- a) Ignore the families
- b) Advocate for the rights and needs of children and families
- c) Ignore the children
- d) Ignore the environment

ANSWERS TO MULTI CHOICE QUESTIONS

PART 1: INTRODUCTION TO CHILD CARE

1. Answer: b) Supervision and meeting the developmental needs of young children
2. Answer: b) The Industrial Revolution

3. Answer: b) Friedrich Froebel
4. Answer: c) A daycare center
5. Answer: c) Relative/Informal Care
6. Answer: b) It provides a convenient option for working parents
7. Answer: b) Head Start
8. Answer: d) Advanced Calculus
9. Answer: b) To provide play-based learning
10. Answer: b) It allows parents to pursue employment or education

PART 2: CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND CHILD CARE

11. Answer: d) Gross motor
12. Answer: b) Precise movements like writing and drawing
13. Answer: b) To provide nutritious meals and snacks
14. Answer: b) Language development
15. Answer: b) Reading aloud and storytelling
16. Answer: b) Symbolic and imaginative play
17. Answer: c) Recognizing, understanding, and managing one's own emotions and the emotions of others
18. Answer: b) By helping children identify and express their feelings

- 19. Answer: b) By creating a structured environment that encourages positive social interactions
- 20. Answer: b) Social skills, emotional regulation and resilience

PART 3: CHILD CARE SETTINGS AND PROGRAMS

- 21. Answer: b) Care provided in a licensed facility for groups of children
- 22. Answer: b) Lower child-to-staff ratio
- 23. Answer: b) Care provided in the caregiver's home for a small group of children
- 24. Answer: b) The child's age, individual characteristics, and social and cultural contexts
- 25. Answer: b) Children learn best through active engagement and exploration
- 26. Answer: b) The interests and needs of the children
- 27. Answer: d) All the above
- 28. Answer: d) Both a and b
- 29. Answer: d) All the above
- 30. Answer: c) The children

PART 4: CHILD CARE PROVIDERS AND FAMILIES

- 31. Answer: c) Caregiving and nurturing
- 32. Answer: b) By consistent care, responsiveness, and positive interactions

33. Answer: a) Designing and implementing developmentally appropriate curricula
34. Answer: b) It fosters collaboration and enhances the child's development
35. Answer: c) Two-way communication, sharing observations and insights
36. Answer: b) It creates an environment where families feel valued and included
37. Answer: b) By inviting family input in decision-making and encouraging participation
38. Answer: b) Developing cultural competence
39. Answer: b) Respecting family diversity
40. Answer: b) By sharing information on child development milestones

PART 5: HEALTH, SAFETY, AND NUTRITION IN CHILD CARE

41. Answer: b) Promoting handwashing and maintaining a clean environment
42. Answer: b) Frequent and thorough handwashing
43. Answer: b) To maintain records of children's immunization status
44. Answer: b) Creating an environment that encourages physical activity
45. Answer: b) Constant and attentive supervision

- 46. Answer: b) Conducting regular safety assessments
- 47. Answer: b) It is physically and emotionally secure
- 48. Answer: b) Age-appropriate activities
- 49. Answer: b) To model healthy eating behaviors
- 50. Answer: b) A variety of foods from all food groups

PART 6: SPECIAL NEEDS AND INCLUSIVE CHILD CARE

- 51. Answer: b) It allows for early intervention and support services
- 52. Answer: b) Collaboration with parents, healthcare professionals, and specialists
- 53. Answer: b) To create tailored learning experiences
- 54. Answer: b) Physical accessibility and social inclusion
- 55. Answer: b) Training for staff in inclusive practices
- 56. Answer: b) Welcoming and valuing all children
- 57. Answer: a) Using materials that reflect a range of life experiences
- 58. Answer: b) Physical adaptations and social and emotional support
- 59. Answer: b) Acknowledging and celebrating the cultural backgrounds of children and families

60. Answer: b) Regular communication and open dialogues

PART 7: PROFESSIONALISM AND ADVOCACY IN CHILD CARE

61. Answer: a) A commitment to high standards of practice and ethics
62. Answer: b) Ethical conduct, respect for diversity, and accountability
63. Answer: b) Ongoing professional development
64. Answer: b) Attending workshops and conferences
65. Answer: b) Supporting policies and practices that benefit children and families
66. Answer: b) Policies that encourage inclusion
67. Answer: c) Educators, families, policymakers, and community organizations
68. Answer: b) Advocating for the rights and needs of children and families
69. Answer: b) By speaking out against injustice
70. Answer: b) Advocate for the rights and needs of children and families

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Chigbo-obasi, T., Elechi, O.G, Okoli, I. A., Iwu, C.V., Mbach, R. A

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