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Care of Children in Early Years: Principles of Caregiving of Children under Three Years

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It is well established that children grow from the time of conception. It is also believed that their learning starts even before they are born. Current research has repeatedly conveyed that an interactive environment, stimulation, warmth and care are essential for children to grow and learn.

Principles of Caregiving of Children under Three Years

The first three years are often called the foundation years as incredible growth takes place in all domains of development. The most important early experiences are provided by parenting and the nurturing home environment. Children are able to form relationships by consistent and continuous presence of caregivers who talk, feed, play and tend to give love and care.

Principle 1: Supportive and Responsive Environment

A supportive environment and responsive care provides a secure base and routine for children who are completely dependent on caregivers for all sensory interactions. Regular response for feeding, bodily needs and tactile comfort are primary needs of children.

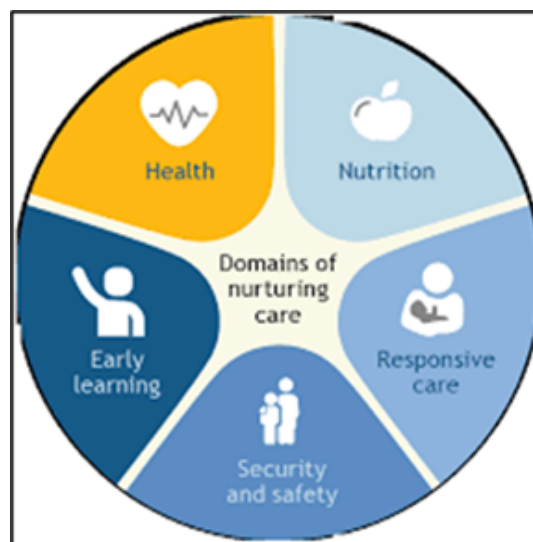
Principle 2: Responsive Relationships and Strong Life Skills

- Care giving practices must include eye contact with children and pleasant gestures or a hug every time they babble, cry etc. This helps form new neural connections in the brain leading to acquisition of better cognitive abilities and socio-emotional skills. Children must slowly develop independence in performing various tasks and activities.
- In this process, caregivers must establish routines; organize activities that foster creative play and model social behavior so that children can exercise their developing skills.

Principle 3: Reduce Sources of Stress

Reducing stress implies responding to children on demand, reaching out with multi- sensorial interactions such as audio, visual, sense of touch, suckling experiences and kinesthetic experiences. Leaving children alone or ignoring them can create disturbance and obstruct their growth and development.

Importance of Meeting Physical Needs



It is important to understand the care practices in relation to domains of development. First and foremost, children need to be fed, be physically and emotionally secure and be given stimulation. These are the basic ways to ensure growth, survival and development of children.

Nutritious Food

- Breast milk is best for babies. The benefits of breastfeeding have been known for decades in all the cultures across the world. It is proved as a complete food in itself and babies do not require nutrition supplements until they are six months of age. It protects them from infection and develops their immunity. It also reduces risk of infant morbidity and mortality.
- In addition, breast milk fulfills babies' need for the sense of touch and feel of comfort with their mothers. After six months, weaning may be started through the transition from mother's milk to semi-solid foods. Weaning foods are semi-solid foods that support the transition from breast milk to regular food.
- Care of lactating mothers is essential as babies are dependent on mothers for their nutritional needs. During lactation, the diet should include cereals, pulses, fruits, vegetables, nuts and dry fruits and dairy products. Non-vegetarian mothers should eat meat, fish and eggs. Mothers should take plenty of fluids such as clean drinking water, milk and fruit juices to keep themselves hydrated.

Protection, Adequate Sleep and Exercise

Holding them with care and interacting with them are of great value as this provides them physical and emotional safety. Caregivers must ensure comfortable clothing, adequate sleep and exercise for children. Let us learn about them.

- **Clothing:** Clothes for newborn should be soft and loose. In some families, newborn babies are made to wear a garment made out of an older person's used clothing. These are to ensure that children will be protected from stiff materials as their skin is soft and delicate. They should also be kept clean and not left wet for long.
- **Sleep:** We all know that babies sleep for almost 18 hours. This reduces gradually. Sleep is necessary for babies to grow just as sensory stimulation is essential for the brain to make neural connections. How much babies sleep varies depending on their age? As children grow, the total amount of sleep gradually decreases, but the length of nighttime sleep increases.
- **Exercise:** Babies in the first four weeks only move their limbs. This helps them to get an idea of space. Slowly, they begin to roll over, stay on their stomach and be able to attempt creeping, crawling and pulling themselves to a standing position. Games and play with infants are good exercises.