

Foundations of a Healthy Lifestyle

INTRODUCTION

As you read, leading health indicators in the United States are trending downward. One of the fundamental goals of early childhood education is to reverse those trends.

The opening chapters of your textbook and your first three assignments lay the foundations for this work. You'll learn about the most up-to-date theories regarding the effects of heredity and environment on children when you study ecological systems theory and the bioenvironmental reciprocity model. These theories explain how genetic materials shape children, including during the prenatal stage of development. You'll also be introduced to current thinking about educators' roles, especially when it comes to creating developmentally appropriate, comprehensive health education.

Then, you'll learn what development means. Children are rapidly evolving creatures, and you'll learn to break down development sequences and understand what's transpiring as children master various skill sequences. You'll learn about the various ways in which children develop—physically, cognitively, and emotionally—and the importance of providing the right kind of stimulation needed to motivate a child during these crucial years.

One of the most critical elements in development is a balanced, healthy diet. Early childhood educators play a very significant role in creating lifelong attitudes toward food, and this lesson will provide you with a sound understanding of the various components that make up nutrition. Since teachers are now expected to serve as nutritionists, you'll find this to be an insightful, important lesson.

After completing Lesson 1, you'll have a richer, more comprehensive understanding of the extraordinary importance of development-based lessons and the educator's role in the lives of young children. Helping children to understand and



appreciate the components of a comprehensive, lifelong healthy lifestyle is one of the most important things you'll achieve as teacher.

OBJECTIVES

When you complete this lesson, you'll be able to

- Explain the ecological systems theory and the bioenvironmental reciprocity model and how genetic materials shape children
- Create developmentally appropriate, comprehensive health education
- Define *development* and *nutrition*

ASSIGNMENT 1

Read the following assignment in this study guide. Then read in your textbook Chapter 1, “Health and Fitness Concerns of Infants, Toddlers, and Young Children,” on pages 3–16. Be sure to complete the self-check to gauge your progress.

Chapter 1 of your textbook explores the state of health—especially that of children—in the United States and provides a comprehensive overview of the goals of a curriculum for young children. Early childhood educators and caregivers clearly play an important role in this area. One of their jobs is to reverse current health trends, and this is no small task! Poor diets and more time sitting in front of televisions, computers, video games, and other screens are causing unhealthy children. Unfortunately, commercials, marketing campaigns, food manufacturers, and peers encourage this behavior. It may sometimes seem as though the entire culture is lined up against healthy lifestyles, no matter how much lip service we give to the term!

The battle for longer, better quality lives is worth fighting and can be won. Numerous organizations and government agencies are fighting, researching, and creating programs that can help reverse unhealthy trends. You'll be introduced to many of them as you proceed through this course.

One of this course's goals is to acquaint you with the idea of *comprehensive health education*. A comprehensive health education program has eight components, which are discussed on pages 7–8. Carefully read those pages, which provide a basic outline for this course. A comprehensive program is important because it suggests that the various components of a healthy lifestyle are interrelated. Fitness, safety, health, nutrition, parental, and community involvement are all necessary; if you take away one of the elements, the whole structure is likely to collapse.

In the past, people asked what was more important—*nature* (hereditary factors) or *nurture* (a child's culture and environment). Chapter 1 addresses that question and introduces the *ecological systems theory* and the *bioenvironmental reciprocity model*. These concepts provide the foundation for many of the ideas you'll read about later in this course. Both emphasize the relationship between a child, with all of his or her genetic characteristics, and an environment. Rather than taking the side of nature or nurture, these models emphasize the ongoing, dynamic relationship between individual and environment.

Many physical attributes are inborn. Some of the unhappy conditions that begin at conception and during the prenatal period are covered on pages 10–12. These may play a role in the child's later development.

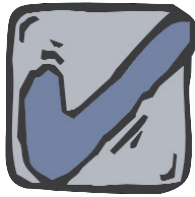
No matter what a child's genetic inheritance is, nearly all children can become *health literate*. This means that children can become critical thinkers, learners, and communicators. A fundamental goal of health education isn't to fill children with a slew of facts, but to teach the skills and behaviors needed to make smart choices throughout their lives when it comes to fitness, nutrition, and safety. Prevention is important. Most of the conditions afflicting Americans today aren't communicable diseases, but chronic conditions that are directly related to unhealthy lifestyles. These can certainly be avoided!

Part of helping children to create these healthy lifestyles is to serve as a role model. While you read, think about the ways you can apply what you've learned to children in an educational setting; also think about your own lifestyle. It's never too late to learn and to correct some of our own lifestyle choices!

On page 14, you'll find a list of six categories of risk behaviors that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has identified as leading culprits in unhealthy lives. You'll focus on the first three:

- Behaviors that result in both intentional and unintentional injuries
- Dietary patterns that contribute to disease
- Insufficient physical activity

Safety, nutrition, and fitness are the foundations of a long and healthy life.



Self-Check 1

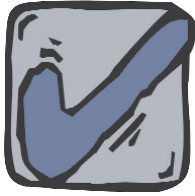
At the end of each section of *Health, Safety, and Nutrition for the Young Child*, you'll be asked to pause and check your understanding of what you've just read by completing a "Self-Check" exercise. Answering these questions will help you review what you've studied so far. Please complete *Self-Check 1* now.

Indicate the answer to each question.

1. Research shows that the typical American diet leads to obesity. What chronic diseases can result from obesity?

2. What eight categories should be included in a comprehensive school health program?

(Continued)



Self-Check 1

3. *True or False?* Sport development is a critical part of early childhood physical education.

4. Define *ecological systems theory*.

5. What is the importance of the zygote when it comes to child development?

6. What are the six categories of risk behaviors? Which ones are of particular interest to early childhood educators?

7. According to ecological systems theory, what is an exosystem?

Check your answers with those on page 51.
