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So **you**'ve been asked to . . .

Serve in the Nursery



CAROL EVENHOUSE

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Congratulations! You've been asked to serve in your church nursery and you've agreed to do so. Maybe you've done this before and found it a thoroughly enjoyable experience. Or maybe this experience is brand-new for you. Whether you've had a lot of experience caring for young children or very little experience at all, this opportunity will have its challenges. Do you feel sure of yourself? Do you know what to expect? Are you feeling calm, cool, and collected? Or are you asking yourself . . .

Why is it that spending just an hour with the cutest, smallest, and possibly loudest segment of our church population can fill me with such fear and apprehension?

Don't worry. You're not alone. Everyone wants the nursery experience to be pleasant and enjoyable for volunteers and children alike. Yet not all nursery workers are certain just what to do in order to create a safe and happy environment for children. As you read this pamphlet, you will learn a little about how babies and toddlers develop. By better understanding infants and toddlers, you will be able to more competently and confidently meet their needs during that hour in the nursery.

Where It All Begins

Jesus captured the essence of nursery ministry when he told his disciples, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me" (Matt. 18:5). The welcome you extend to babies and toddlers in a church nursery is the very first experience most of them will have, outside of their family relationship, with the love of God. It is the start of a lifelong journey of learning about Jesus.

Caring for the physical needs of babies and toddlers is only one aspect of the nursery ministry. Another important part of your job in the nursery is to introduce children to God's love for them. Everything about your nursery—from the cleanliness of the toys to the smile on your face—will reflect the love of God in a place the children will come to know as "God's house."

Children form memories as they experience different environments. Very young children do not distinguish between feeling good physically and feeling good emotionally. So they experience the care provided in the nursery emotionally as well as physically. As they grow older, they may not recall exact memories, but they will retain definite feelings surrounding groups of memories. These "feeling memories" play an important role in the budding relationship children have with their heavenly Father. They

will begin to make the earliest connection between the security they feel in the nursery and God's love for them.

Prepare a Welcoming Environment

Remember that the church nursery is an important component of your church's outreach to young parents. An attractive, clean, and well-staffed nursery demonstrates your church's concern for the excellent care of infants and toddlers. This is a key factor for young parents who are considering affiliating with your church. In this session, you'll find some suggestions for making your nursery an attractive and inviting place for members and visitors.

Arriving early to set up the nursery for play will help make the nursery time enjoyable for caregivers and children alike. Remember that small children need visual enticements; they need to see the variety of toys in the room. When toys are stored in closed cabinets or in large toy boxes, small children cannot see that the room offers opportunities to explore. Even when children are familiar with the room and know that toys are in the cabinets, they cannot choose how they want to play. The stimulation of making choices is removed as they wait for toys to be given to them.

Setting Up the Infant Nursery

- Arrange toys on low shelves within reach of babies who can sit on the floor.
- Place a group of toys in various areas of the room so there is space around the toys and they are visible to crawling babies.
- Along with toys, display small board books on the floor within reach of exploring infants.

Teens can help by selecting toys for the babies, locating any missing pieces to toys, and, when the babies arrive, sitting on the floor with them and helping them begin to play.

Setting Up the Toddler Nursery

You'll want to group toys according to interest areas for toddlers and two-year-old children.

- Place board books near small chairs in a quiet corner of the room.
- Ride-on toys, slides, rocking horses, and other toys that encourage movement belong in another area.
- A small table and chairs should be located by kitchen toys.