UNIT 31 SETTING-UP AND RUNNING THE CENTRE

Structure

31.1 Introduction
31.2 Space for the Centre
31.3 Organizing Indoor Space
31.4 Organizing Outdoor Space
31.5 Equipment and Play Materials
31.6 Workers in the Centre
31.7 Records and Registers
31.8 Obtaining Funds
31.9 Summing Up
31.10 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

31.1 INTRODUCTION

Walk through a park or a playground. You may find a small group of children sitting on the ground, closely watching the ants moving up and down. A young child may be trying to roll a tyre with a stick while another may be making small balls of moist earth. These children are exploring their environment. In a child care centre, we must enable this natural curiosity of children to grow by providing them a variety of materials to handle. So that the children can be accommodated comfortably and a variety of activities carried out, space for the centre must be carefully selected and both the indoor as well as the outdoor space thoughtfully organized. To run a centre properly, it is even more important to select the right kind of persons who can work with children. A centre has to keep a record of the children who come there, the work done by them, the kind of toys and materials used, etc. In this Unit, we will discuss how to set up a child care centre; how to optimally utilize and organize the space available; what toys, materials and equipment the centre should have and how these should be arranged; what kinds of records and registers need to be maintained and what kind of personnel should be selected to work in the centre.

Objectives

After studying this Unit, you should be able to
• enumerate factors that should be considered when looking for accommodation for the centre
• organize indoor as well as outdoor space in the centre
• select play materials and equipment for the centre
• identify aspects to be kept in mind while selecting people for working with children
• describe the types of records and registers that have to be maintained at the centre
• suggest ways of obtaining finance for the centre

31.2 SPACE FOR THE CENTRE

It is very important to look for the right kind of place for the centre. The size of the rooms should be such that about 25-30 children can comfortably take part in the various indoor activities about which you have learnt in the previous Units. Children should be able to move around and play without bumping into each other and into things. Ample room space is important, as crowding limits children's opportunities for exploring materials. The scope of group activities is also determined by space. If the place is crowded, the aggressive
behaviour of children is likely to increase. The centre should also have, if possible, some space outside where children can play. If your centre is to include a preschool as well as a creche, then you may have separate rooms for older and younger children. The centre should be located close to the homes of the children so that they can come to the centre without too much effort.

It is quite possible that you may have to use a room that was originally meant for adults or older children. In such an instance, you may have to make some alterations. The shelves and door handles may have to be fixed lower so that children can use them easily. Dangerous items such as electrical plug-points will have to be removed, raised or covered to prevent injury to young children.

You will have to plan for physical health and safety. Examine the lighting and ventilation, toilet facilities and sanitary conditions. There should be at least one window for light and fresh air in each room. A toilet for children, a water tap close by and a separate place for cooking food will also be necessary. Make sure that the area surrounding the centre is clean and hygienic. Sanitation should receive a high priority in preparation of the physical environment.

Safety is equally important. When looking for accommodation for the centre, avoid places which are near ponds, streams, open wells or busy roads. Further, do not select rooms which have access to unprotected stairs or terraces or which are close to garbage pits or animal sheds, as these can be dangerous for children. Some of the dangers can be removed. Thorny bushes can be cut or burnt down, open wells covered, and holes or dirty drains filled with earth. Stagnant water will breed mosquitoes and must be cleaned. Can you think of some other things that must be done to make the setting less risky for children?

Of course, the kind of place you get will depend on how much money you have for paying the rent. Obtaining an appropriate place is often difficult. If money is available, a large place can be selected. If you know the people in the community, they may be willing to let you use the community centre, *mahila mandal* building, or a room in the local school or *panchayat* office. In the next Unit, we will discuss in detail how the community can be encouraged to participate in and contribute to your programme. In the rural areas, while open spaces are usually not a problem, finding a constructed room for setting up the centre may be difficult. A town or a city poses a different set of problems. Rooms may be small, with no open spaces or toilet and kitchen facilities, rents may be high and areas may be unsafe because of heavy traffic on the roads. However, there are some voluntary organizations that have set up centres on railway platforms, as has been done by ‘Ruchika’ in Bhubaneshwar. The Mobile Creches at Delhi, Bombay and Pune have child care centres at large construction sites, obtaining makeshift accommodation from the contractors. There are voluntary agencies that organize centres for street children in street corners. In the absence of any other space, you may wish to initiate similar centres.

You can also start the Centre in your own home if you have a room or two to spare.

### 31.3 ORGANIZING INDOOR SPACE

Let us assume that you have found a room for your centre. How will you optimally utilize the space in the room? Remember that the way the space is organized, influences the children’s learning and their feeling of autonomy and independence. The major task is to arrange play materials and equipment within the available space in such a manner that it prompts the child to be active and learn from the physical environment as well as through interaction with others. Let us take a look at how the room can be arranged for preschoolers.

Since usually the space is limited, having minimum furniture helps. Further, it needs to be remembered that whatever furniture is used should be so designed that it does not have
sharp edges that can hurt children and it should occupy minimal space. The following floor arrangement works pretty well.

Spread a mat in the middle of the room. This is the place where children will come together for group activities such as story telling and singing songs and rhymes. The mat should not, however, cover the entire floor of the room. Leave some space on the sides of the room to organize activities like water play or science experiments or to arrange low tables and chairs which children may use for drawing, painting and other activities. You can organize children’s activities in such a way that when some children are working while sitting on the mat, the others do activities that require use of tables and chairs. In this way you will not need as many chairs, as the number of children. When seating children on the mat or on the chairs, do not make them sit in straight rows or columns. Rather, they should sit in a semi-circle or circle. This enables each child to look at all others and interact with them. When sitting in rows or columns, children will most of the time be looking at each other’s backs instead of faces.

You may divide the sides of the room and the corners into activity areas or centres. An activity area is a small part of the room in which materials related to a specific activity are kept. For example, you may convert one area of the room into a ‘language centre’ which may include story books, puppets, masks, flannel board, alphabet cards and simple musical instruments. Another area could be for role play which could include things like old clothes, spectacle frames, mirror, comb and handbags, a variety of toys and puppets which could lead to dramatization and role play by the children. You can have many such activity areas or centres depending upon the size of the room. A ‘science centre’ may be equipped with magnifying lenses, magnets, sieves, bottles, tins, objects of different shapes and sizes, and a weighing scale. There could also be centres for activities like stringing beads or leaves, playing with pebbles, drawing, painting, clay work, play with blocks and water play. Each activity area or centre should be adequate in size, otherwise you will have problems. For instance, if the blocks area is small, there will be instances of children stumbling over each other’s constructions.

Most of the items in these activity areas do not need to be bought. Our environment is a rich source of a variety of learning materials. You have only to be creative, and the innumerable ways in which these materials can be used in play activities for children, will occur to you. For instance, you can use pebbles, dry leaves and flowers, and sticks to make patterns on the floor, for printing and threading activities and for activities related to shapes, colour and sizes. You remember reading about such activities in the earlier Units, don’t you? In addition to dry leaves and flowers, grass, sand, earth, bits of paper and other small items found in the environment can be used to make an interesting collage. Involve the preschoolers in collecting these various items. You must also involve the parents and the community in providing a variety of low cost play materials to the centre. You will read more about these aspects in Section 31.5, as well as in the next Unit.

Children should be encouraged to select the activity they want to engage in. Children may even combine materials from the different activity areas. For instance, a child after dressing up as a mother, may pick up a book from the library and a doll from the dolls’ corner, and proceed to put her ‘baby’ to sleep while reading a story to her! Such flexibility is essential. Materials and activities which go together should be placed near each other.

Ideally, play items should be placed on low, open shelves near the area in which they are to be used, so that children can select and replace toys and materials. A small amount of each material should be available for current use, with a reserve supply stored elsewhere. If placing the play materials on open racks is not possible, because of constraints of space, you may have to put them in boxes. Paste large slips of paper on the boxes indicating the material kept inside them. Encourage children to use the material from these boxes. These racks or boxes of material can serve as dividers between two adjoining activity centres. They should be kept in such a way that children can move from one activity area to another with ease and do not fall over them or bang into them when they walk or run around. The boxes and racks should not be left in the centre of the room; large spaces are good for group activities. Racks or boxes in this space will mean less space for children to sit down in a semi-circle for group activities.
What is important is that not only should the children be free to pick out the materials they want to work with, but should also be taught how to handle them and be encouraged to put them back in the right place, once they have finished playing with them. Children enjoy helping in clearing-up, and also feel responsible when permitted to do so. Obviously, for this, there must be clearly designated and easily accessible places for keeping the various items.

You may find the following quotation of an expert in the field interesting and thought-provoking:

*Everything present in the environment, even the spatial arrangement, communicates to the child how to live in that setting. Materials that are in good condition and placed on open shelves tell a child that the materials are valued, that they are meant to be considered, and that a child may take them off the shelf by herself. When they are taken off the shelf, they leave a space empty, so it is easy to put them back where they belong. What kind of message does a child get from shelves crowded with an odd assortment of objects, few of which are intact? What kind of message does she get from a closed cupboard?*

If the room is very small, you may not find it feasible to have a variety of activity areas on a regular basis, with materials permanently accessible. In such an instance, what you may find more practical is to set-up four or five activities at a time, making accessible materials related to these. At the end of the play session, you may pack away these materials and organize the room for eating or sleeping, or for another play activity such as story telling or singing rhymes. For the next session, you may choose to take out materials related to some other activities and set-up these activity areas. The idea is that the materials for the activities should be made handy for children to use.

Remember that a child care centre is a place for children to learn in a pleasant environment. The centre must, therefore, look attractive, besides being neat, clean and well organized. You can decorate your centre with ‘torans’ on the door and ‘alpana’ or ‘kolam’ at the entrance. The work of the children can be put up on the walls. Charts with colourful pictures can also be displayed. These should be hung at the eye level of children so that they can look at them without straining their necks. Charts are for information and must be changed regularly. New charts catch the attention of children and encourage them to learn about new things. Besides, old, dirty or torn charts will make the room look unattractive.

Change the charts and activity areas in the centre according to your programme plan. For example, if you have planned a project on the theme of animals, you may display pictures and charts of animals. For that week, you may like to change one of the corners into a zoo or a jungle with some stuffed animals, tree branches and leaves. For the week when your theme is rain, the walls can be decorated with an umbrella and some large cloud cut out of newspapers or chart papers. Also, if you find that children have lost interest in a particular activity area, change it. In other words, replace the material with that related to another activity. An important aspect which has to be recognized, therefore, is flexibility and change.

In a full day programme, you will need to make provision for the children to sleep. If you have only one room, it should be made a sleeping room in the afternoon, by making sleeping arrangement with mats and rugs on the floor or with light folding cots.

If your centre has a creche as well, (i.e., if you have children under three years of age as well) you will need to look into some additional details. Cradles or cribs for infants must be provided. You must also have a small table or shelf on which milk bottles, boiled water and other food items can be kept. Another shelf is needed for keeping spare sheets and clothes of the babies. For each infant, two bags can be hung up, one containing clean clothes and the other for the dirty nappies and clothes. As far as possible, you should have a separate room for the under-threes. If you have only one room, you may have two portions in it—one for the 3-5 year olds and one for those younger than three.
The basic considerations for organizing indoor space and materials for infants and toddlers, such as accessibility of play materials, choice of activities and safe and stimulating environment, remain the same as that in the case of preschoolers. However, the specific play items and activities will obviously differ. You have already read in Unit 11 and 16, Blocks 2 and 3 respectively, about the play materials and activities suitable for infants and toddlers. You must arrange for these in the creche.

Organizing the learning environment is an ongoing activity. The arrangements should never be considered as 'set' once and for all. Children too should be involved when making changes. This helps them develop their ability to make decisions and makes them feel responsible. In addition, it makes them more cooperative. You will find that they come up with many useful suggestions. Remember, there is no 'right' way of arranging indoor space. Feel free to use it in experimental and creative ways. This is all the more important when the accommodation is small and the children are many. By now you already have an idea about what to do in such a situation. Let us recapitulate some important points.

If the room is small, have minimal furniture. Note how frequently any piece of furniture is needed.

Use shelves and lofts to expand limited space. For instance, you may have one activity area on the loft and another one under it. Try finding additional space within the building or outside for specific learning activities.

Analyse the routines. How could a group be subdivided? Could you use the outdoors more often? Would a change in scheduling allow for more space? To prevent crowding, you may include activities so that while some children are indoors, others are playing outdoors.
It is absolutely essential that when organizing play activities for young children you,

i) Provide a choice in play activities and materials so that the child has the freedom to select.

ii) Allow children to be active and explore their surroundings.

iii) Make the surroundings clean, attractive and stimulating.

iv) Keep the environment safe. Remove things which you do not want the child to touch.

31.4 ORGANIZING OUTDOOR SPACE

Children love to play outdoors. You are also aware of the extensive learning opportunities which outdoor play offers. If there is no open space in the centre premises, make some arrangements to take the children to a neighbouring park, field or open space on a regular basis.

If there is provision for a playground in your centre, organizing the outdoor space is as important as organizing indoor space. Several considerations have to be kept in mind when planning the outdoor area. A major one is the climate. In hot climates, you need to protect children from heat and direct sunlight. Shady places outdoors can be provided for by planting trees and growing creepers on structures made of wood or metal. A thatched roof can also be made, using locally available material. Children can use such structures for doll play also. The important consideration is that it is advantageous to have in the playground some areas that are covered and others kept open for different types of activities, and also to enable children to play outside in most weathers. It is important to have easy access between the playground and the room(s), as children need to go indoors frequently for having water, using the toilet or getting a toy.

Let us begin with organizing outdoor space for preschoolers. You are already familiar with the activities which can be carried outdoors, and the importance of the same. Outdoor play emphasizes exercise, particularly of the large muscles. Children need space to release their energy. Thus, there should be ample space in the playground for the activities like running, jumping, digging, climbing, exploring, sliding, swinging, crawling through a tunnel and riding a tricycle. The playground should allow for these. Old tyres make interesting swings. They may even be left on the ground for the children to jump from one to another. Smooth wooden boards can be used as slides. Large concrete sewer pipes or drums make good tunnels for crawling through. A tree trunk may be placed on the ground for children to balance upon or jump from. A sand pit should also be constructed, under a shady tree. Rope and rope ladders can be provided for climbing.

Some areas should be earmarked for quiet activities such as doll play or sand play. The outdoor space should be so organized that areas for vigorous play are separated from areas for quiet play. Otherwise, children engaged in vigorous play may disturb those involved in quiet activities. However, if the space is less, it may not be possible to mark out separate areas. In such a case, you can use different time slots in the day for different kinds of activities.

If possible, the space outside can be made attractive by planting thorn-free bushes, trees and plants. These will lend beauty and shade, and generate several discussions and activities in science.

The surface of the playground should receive special attention. It should have good drainage. At least half of the area should be covered with grass, and a portion with sand, to allow for activities like jumping, digging, tumbling etc. As you know, areas around the swing, slide or rope ladder necessarily need to be soft to minimize injury to children on falling. A part of the playground, however, should have a paved surface for activities like riding a tricycle and playing with blocks and wheeled toys.

Outdoor play items should preferably be stored close to where they will be used, and children should be able to take them out and put them back themselves. Toys for sand play should include shovels, buckets and moulds and be within children’s reach. Tricycles and wheeled toys should ideally be stored near a hard surfaced area.
If your centre includes a creche, then the arrangements in the playground may have to be modified. As you know, outdoor play is as important for infants and toddlers, as it is for preschoolers. You may chalk out a portion of the playground for conducting play activities with infants and young toddlers. This should be away from active play areas of preschoolers, for obvious reasons. For instance, having infants crawling in the same area where preschoolers are running around will tend to increase the possibility of accidents. You may consider having different timings for outdoor play for the different groups (infants, toddlers and preschoolers). The younger children too love to play with sand, clay and water, to crawl through the tunnel, explore, climb, run, jump and dig. By scheduling outdoor play for younger and older children at different times, the same facilities can be used by all children. However, this does not mean that the elder and younger children are never allowed to interact with each other. Carry out some activities with the two groups together.

It is important to remember that when children are engaged vigorous activities, they are bound to tumble and fall. Accidents can take place and first aid should be available at all times. Also, to make the play area safe, the caregiver should keep the following points in mind:

- Have a fence around the playground so that children are protected form traffic and other risks.
- Do not overcrowd the space with play equipment, as doing so will reduce space and lead to accidents.
- If space is limited, plan the schedule so that children go outside by turn and the playing area does not get crowded.
- Maintain the area and equipment. Rubbish lying around or broken equipment can cause accidents. Fences should be given extra attention. If not mended immediately, children can go out even through small gaps.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1) Suppose you have joined a preschool centre, which is attended by 20-25 children, as a child care worker. You have been given the freedom to organize the playroom for preschoolers, which is 20 feet (20') x 18 feet (18') in size. The room is shown in Figure 1.

The kitchen and storage room, and the toilet facilities are separate. The equipment which you have to accommodate in the playroom is as follows:

i) 6 racks, each of the dimensions 4 feet (4') x 2.5 feet (2.5') x 1 foot (1') (length x height x depth). In other words, the length of each rack is 4 feet, the height is 2.5 feet and the width or depth is 1 foot.

ii) A low round table, 3 feet (3') in diameter, and six low chairs around it. This equipment is shown in Figure 2.

Suppose you have decided to have the following five activity areas in the room:

i) Library (collection of picture books)

ii) Science area

iii) Role play area

iv) Art area (painting and clay work)

v) Toys area (for play with toys like blocks, pebbles, beads and jigsaw puzzles).

How will you organize/place the equipment and activity areas in the room? Draw the equipment, and mention the activity areas, on Figure 1. Indicate the dimensions of activity areas.
Figure 1

Figure 2

Rack

Table + 6 Chairs
2) Answer each of the following in the space provided. Why should

a) there be adequate space in the centre?

b) play items be placed on low, open shelves near the area in which they are to be used?

c) children be encouraged to help in clearing-up?

d) the kitchen area be in a corner of the room?

e) charts not be hung at the eye level of adults?

f) there be soft earth under swings, slides and rope ladders?

31.5 EQUIPMENT AND PLAY MATERIALS

Having read the earlier Sections, can you make a list of some basic equipment that you would require for the centre? Yes, you would need a mat or two, some wooden boxes or racks to place the material in, a box or cupboard and a stool/chair for the worker, bins for storage of food items and for disposal of garbage and utensils for cooking. Apart from this, you will need plates and spoons, mugs, buckets for storing water, a blackboard, display or bulletin board, low chairs and tables (depending on the number of children). In addition, for the creche and day care facilities for preschoolers you will need some cots, cradles, beds, clothes, plates, glasses and spoons and racks for extra sheets, towels, food items, milk bottles, etc.

In the margin would you like to note some items which should be made a part of the playground?

It is important to remember that playground equipment should be sturdy, securely fastened, and most important of all, of the appropriate size.

While arranging the outdoor play equipment, you must be careful about the safety of children. Make sure that there is sand or soft earth under the rope ladders, trees, swings, and boards used for sliding. Check for rough edges, sharp corners, and loose nails, which can hurt the children. Sewer pipes or drums must be fixed in place with earth.

Even indoors, furniture should have no sharp edges or protrusions that could harm children. The furniture arrangement should be designed to prevent collisions.

Having read the earlier Units, in this as well as the previous Blocks, you are well aware of the play materials which you will need in the centre. Would you like to list some of the items, which you would need for preschoolers, in the margin?

You will need items like picture story books, old magazines and newspapers, blocks, and objects of different sizes, shapes, colours and textures, pebbles, sticks and other such material, paints, brushes, clay, plastic sheet for table/floor covering in art activities, a large tub for water and containers of different shapes and sizes for water and sand play — to
name only a few. Reading through units 21 to 28 will help you to make a list of play materials.

If your centre also has a creche for infants and toddlers you will need mobiles, rattles, stuffed toys, toys with wheels, toys that make sounds, fit-in toys, blocks, toys to pull or push, puppets and picture books. You may refer back to Units 11 and 16 in this regard to recapitulate the details.

As you know, it is important to provide a wide variety of play materials in the centre. Several factors need to be taken into consideration when buying or making these, as you have read in Units 11, 16 & 21. Let us recapitulate them here.

Play materials should be age-appropriate. Books with hardly any pictures and too many words are not at all suitable for young children, nor are picture puzzles that have too many pieces. Apart from being suitable, the item should be made of durable material such as cloth, wood, hardboard or jute, which can generally withstand rough handling by children. Aspects like repairability, colourful appearance, safety and quantity needed will also have to be considered.

Since safety is an important consideration, let us look deeper into it. You are already aware of what makes a toy unsafe. Toys with toxic paints, removable parts (which could be dangerous, as they might be swallowed) and sharp edges, as well as those which break easily, have no place in a child care centre. Workers need to be extra careful when children are using potentially dangerous items such as beads (for instance, when stringing beads) or scissors (in paper cutting).

A centre takes on a serious responsibility in caring for children. Therefore, rather than ‘trying to keep an eye’, the approach of workers in a child care centre should be that of ensuring that all activities, all equipment and all materials are safe for children’s use. As children cannot really be expected to foresee problems that can result from their play, the adults must anticipate these.

In this context, it is important for workers to teach children how to handle the various materials and equipment properly. Supervision should be adequate, and necessary limits set and enforced. Rather than expecting blind obedience, the children should be explained the reasons—the ‘whys’ and ‘why nots’.

For ensuring safety, it is also essential that all toys and equipment be well maintained. Any piece broken, rendering the item harmful, or any nail sticking out should be repaired or removed immediately. All items should be kept in place. Things lying around increase the chances of accidents. Anything dangerous should be out of reach of children. For instance, insecticides should be locked in a cupboard. Workers should be trained in giving first aid, so that in case an accident does take place, they know what to do.

Let us now come to the quantity of materials which you would need to have in the centre. How much material you need to buy will depend upon how much space you have for keeping the material, the number of children who come to the centre and the money available to buy this material. While buying things like threading frames and picture puzzles, you must remember that only one child can use them at a time and so at least 4-5 sets of these materials should be bought. On the other hand, about 3-4 children can play together with blocks and miniature household items like kitchen utensils. Therefore, a couple of sets may be enough. If need be, it is a good idea to set up several activities at the same time (remember the activity areas?) and let children engage themselves in different activities such as some threading beads, some playing with blocks, and some drawing. This way you will manage with a lesser quantity of different materials at any given time.

The amount of space you have for storage will also determine how much material can be bought. The number of cooking utensils and storage tins for food will be determined by the kind of food items served at the centre and the amount of provisions bought at one time.

Of course, the final consideration is how much money you have for buying these materials. If money is a constraint, as it usually is, then it helps to remember that many useful learning materials do not need to be bought. The worker can salvage materials that would otherwise be thrown away and even involve children, their parents, and other community members in the process. A lot of materials can be collected from the environment. There are plenty of materials found all around us which can be used for play with children: seeds
of fruits, branches, small stones, old bottle caps, empty match boxes, old tins, pieces of cloth from the tailor, wooden odds and ends from the carpenter, rope from broken charpais and so on. Paint brushes can be made by picking up sticks from the environment and tying to one end a piece of cloth or a bit of cotton. Discarded items like old spectacle frames, empty powder tins and old sarees and handbags can easily be brought from home, which children can use for dramatization. Items like picture puzzles, masks, puppets, dolls, stuffed toys, rattles and blocks can be made with the help of parents and other community members. Outdoor items like ropes, tyres and wooden planks can also be obtained from the community. You will read more about involving the community in a later Unit of this Block.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1) Answer the following questions in the space provided.

a) Which three important aspects will you pay attention to, from the safety point of views of safety, with regard to playground equipment in your centre?

b) With the help of examples, explain how you will involve the parents and other community members in providing a variety of low cost play materials to children? How will you decide on whether a particular item is suitable for being given to children to play with or not?

31.6 WORKERS IN THE CENTRE

You are already familiar with the knowledge, skills and attitudes which workers in a child care centre need to have. You know that they should be warm, friendly, patient and capable of responding to the individuality of each child. So when setting-up a centre, you will need to look for such people to work with children.

It is usually recommended that for every three infants in a centre, there should be an adult to handle them; for every four toddlers, one adult; and for every eight to ten preschoolers, one adult. In other words, the recommended staff-children ratio is ideally 1:3 to 1:5 for infants, 1:4 to 1:6 for toddlers and 1:8 to 1:10 for preschoolers. In our country, given the
resources constraints, it is usually not possible to meet these standards. Nevertheless, you will require at least one worker for about 20 preschool age children. If there are children below three years in your centre, you will need one worker for every 10-15 toddlers or 5-7 infants. A helper to assist in taking care of children and in cooking, would also be needed for each group.

While selecting people to work in your child care centre, it is better to look for a local person. A local woman who knows the community, its customs and practices will be able to encourage people to participate in the programme. She is likely to be more acceptable to the community and children because of similarity in dress and way of speaking. She will be more familiar with the problems of the community and, therefore, better able to handle problem situations. She should preferably have the basic educational qualifications for the post, as then she will be able to maintain the records and registers as well.

Contrary to the myth that anyone can take care of young children, those who undertake the task accept great responsibility and need to be acquainted with the milestones of development during infancy, toddlerhood and preschool age; variations in development; importance of a healthy environment, significance of play activities, positive interaction and stimulation during the early childhood years. They also need training in order to be able to translate this knowledge into practical skills. Some programmers like the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Mobile Creches have their own in-service training programmes. Apart from these, there are short term training programmes for staff members like one under the Early Childhood Education Scheme and the Balsevika Training Programme. For the general population, Nursery Teacher's Training Courses are available. If you are unable to find trained workers, and in the absence of a suitable training system, you may orient the workers yourself. What you have to bear in mind is that the knowledge base and skills, which you have gained through this Diploma Programme, would need to be developed in them as well.

31.7 RECORDS AND REGISTERS

To run a centre efficiently, some records and registers have to be maintained.

First of all, you will need an attendance register which includes the names of all children who come to the centre, and in which you will mark their daily attendance. You may have a similar register for the employees in the centre as well.

You will also need to maintain stock registers. You will need one to maintain record of the durable equipment in the centre, for example, tables, chairs, boxes, racks, cupboards and blackboard, as well as consumable items like paints, paper, pencils and masks. The food stock register will include records of food items purchased and consumed. Every day, you may enter the amount of food used and balance left in stock.

Health and growth chart register is another important record for a child care centre, particularly in the case of the creche. In this, you will record the weight of the child every month to see if the child is growing properly. You can also include in this the height of the child. Apart from maintaining the growth chart, in this register you will also record the immunization given to each child. Further, don't forget to make a note of all the illnesses of the children. If, for example, a child has suffered from diarrhoea, this may be recorded so that you can understand the reasons for loss in weight, if any. You will also make a note of any child who has been referred to the doctor or the health centre.

Another important record to keep in a child care centre is that the progress made by the child, which you may note down at regular intervals. There should be a separate page or file for each child. You can begin by making note of all the things that a child could do when she joined the centre. Record her progress every month. For example, if she is able to identify certain colours or shapes or if she can sing rhymes or narrate a story, this should be recorded. You can clip on the drawings or other work done by the child in her file. When shown to parents, such files help them to see how their child has progressed. You will read more about this aspect of recording and evaluating the progress made by the
child in Unit 33. When the child is old enough to join a regular school, make an entry about the school she has enrolled in. If possible, try and follow up the child to see how he or she has adjusted in the new set-up.

In case you are responsible for looking after the funds of the centre, you will need a cash book, a petty cash register and an accounts ledger to make daily entries of money received and spent, a salaries register for writing down salaries paid to the employees every month and a fees register, if your centre charges fees.

31.8 OBTAINING FUNDS

Getting funds for the centre is a crucial aspect. Some early childhood programmes like ICDS receive their funds directly from the Central Government. Under the Early Childhood Education (ECE) scheme, a voluntary organisation can apply for funds from the Central Government to set up an ECE centre and/or a creche. In either case, there will be a fixed budget for spending the money. You may form and register a voluntary organization and then apply for funding from the government. You can also obtain funds from the other sources such as National Children's Fund, Central Social Welfare Board or from banks, provided you have some innovative scheme. Parents' contributions in terms of fees and material, or donations from the community can also be sources of money for running the centre.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3
1) What will you look for in a person before appointing her a worker in your centre? Answer in the following space.

2) Complete the following statements:
   a) The food stock register includes records of

   b) For setting up a child care centre, a voluntary organization may apply for funding from the Government under the ____________ scheme.
31.9 SUMMING UP

In this Unit, you read about with some important practical considerations that have to be borne in mind when setting-up and running a child care centre. The first major requirement is, of course, space for the centre. When selecting accommodation for the centre, remember that ideally i) the centre should be located close to the homes of children; ii) the physical environment (both within and outside the centre) should be safe, clean and hygienic; iii) there should be good lighting and ventilation, and toilet facilities; iv) the room space should be ample; and v) there should be some outdoor space for children to play.

The space in the centre has to be optimally utilized to facilitate development of children. Indoors, for preschoolers, the middle of the room should preferably be left empty for group activities. The sides of the room and the corners may be divided into activity areas or centres, where materials related to those specific activities may be kept. Ideally, play items should be placed on low, open shelves, near the area in which they are to be used. A limited amount of each item should be available for current use, with a reserve supply stored elsewhere. The room arrangement should never be considered as 'set', once and for all. It is important to remember that organizing the learning environment is an on-going activity.

Further, you must ensure that the environment is safe, pleasant and stimulating. These considerations hold good for the creche as well. In the creche too, the play materials should be accessible, there should be a choice of activities, the environment should be safe and stimulating and there should be flexibility and change in organizing space. The specific play items and activities would obviously be different.

Organizing the outdoor space is equally important. The playground should have both sunny and shady areas. It should allow for a variety of activities. The surface of the playground deserves special attention. It should have good drainage. A portion should be covered with grass and another with sand. Areas like those under the swing, slide or rope ladder should be soft. A part of the playground, however, should have a paved surface for activities like riding a tricycle and playing with wheeled toys. Outdoor play items should preferably be stored close to where they will be used. The outdoor space can be made attractive by planting thorn-free bushes, trees and plants. There should be easy access between the playground and the room(s). The playground should be enclosed by a fence.

Several factors have to be taken into consideration when selecting play items and equipment for the centre. Age appropriateness and safety are two major considerations. The quantity needed is influenced by the space available as well as the number of children. The amount of money you have also determines how much of each item you buy. However, remember that you do not necessarily have to purchase all the items. A number of things can be collected from the environment. In addition, you can salvage a lot of materials that would otherwise be thrown away. You can, and should, involve parents and other community members in the process.

Coming to the workers in the centre, it is important to select such people to work with children who are warm, patient, friendly and capable of responding to the individuality of each child. The worker should preferably be a local woman who has the basic educational qualifications and training.

Another thing essential for running a centre efficiently is maintaining records and registers, such as the attendance register, stock registers, health and growth chart register and a record of the progress made by each child. When handling finances, you will need a cash book, an accounts ledger, a salaries register, a fees register and so on.

And last but not the least, we come to obtaining funds for the centre. Forming and registering a voluntary organization and applying for funding from the government, obtaining donations from the parents and community, and charging the parents fees are some of the options available.
31.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1) One of the alternatives is as depicted in the Figure 3.

Your room arrangement may be different from the one we have shown. That does not matter, for you must be having specific reasons for the way you have arranged the equipment and activity areas. State them explicitly. For instance, we decided on this arrangement keeping in mind the following considerations:

i) enough space in each activity area
ii) activity areas in sides and corners, leaving the centre of the room for group activities
iii) racks used as dividers between adjacent activity areas
iv) activities which go together adjoining, such as the library and role play areas, and the toys and role play areas.
v) art activity area near sink
vi) table in library area for reading books.
2) a) Crowding limits children's opportunities for exploring as well as the scope of group activities, and increase the incidence of aggressive behaviour and accidents.

b) So that play material is easily accessible to children to play with.

c) This would save the worker the time. Also, helping in clearing up increases the sense of responsibility in children.

d) So that the items do not come in the way of children, and the risk of injury to children is reduced.

e) Charts in the centre are meant for children, and therefore, should be at their eye level. Hanging them at the eye level of adults would mean that children will have to crane their necks, and even then, may not be able to see them properly.

f) So that injury to children is minimized in case they fall.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1) a) The equipment should be
   — of the appropriate size
   — sturdy
   — securely fastened
   — without rough edges, sharp corners or protrusions, or loose nails.
   (Any three of the above.)

b) You can involve them in procuring appropriate discarded household things, collecting materials from the environment and making play items. You may give examples from the text or from your experience.

Several factors will have to be taken into consideration when deciding on the appropriateness of the play item, for instance age-appropriateness, durability and safety. You have read about these not only in this Unit, but also in earlier Units, particularly Units 11 and 16. Recapitulate and write the answer.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

1) She should have the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes. She should be aware of things like the milestones of development during infancy, toddlerhood and preschool age; variations in development, importance of a healthy environment and positive interaction and significance of play activities and stimulation during the early childhood years. She should have the basic educational qualifications and training, and should be able to use different materials and conduct a variety of play activities. She should be warm, friendly, patient and capable of responding to the individuality of each child. She should preferably be a local woman.

2) a) food items purchased, and consumed

b) Early Childhood Education