



# FIRST 1000 DAYS

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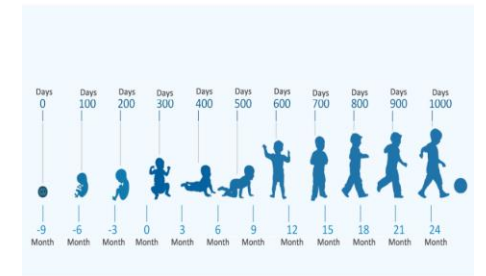
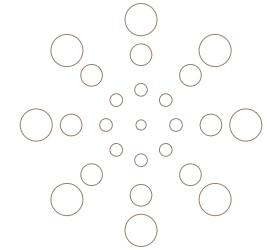
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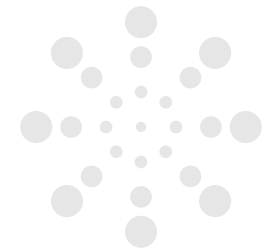
# INTRODUCTION

The period between conception and the child's second birthday is known as the first 1000 days. During this period, the quality of care and nutrition provided to both mothers and babies has been proven to have an impact on their growth and learning. This period is essential for cognitive development as the child's brains begin to grow, and they are starting their wellness journey.

(Thousand days) 2018



(kanekin, 2019)



# PREGNANCY



(The Food Balance, 2025)

For a mother to be healthy it's essential she has a well-balanced diet, feeding herself with the best foods to care for herself and the growing baby, filling both with all the nutrients they need.

Though a healthy diet is recommended from the (NHS)2020 when carrying a child, there are some supplements that women may need to further support the development of the growing baby, these are typically, folic acid, vitamin D and occasionally iron supplements. Women are advised to start taking folic acid during the time they are trying to conceive a baby or as soon as they find out that they are pregnant. (The Food Balance,) 2025 has the idea that folic acid is beneficial for cellular division and production of red blood cells.

# MENTAL HEALTH IN PREGNANCY

## 1,001 Critical Days Manifesto

*"A pregnant mother suffering from stress can sometimes pass on the message to the unborn baby that the world will be dangerous, so that as a child he or she will struggle with many social and emotional problems"*

**– The 1001 Critical Days – The Importance of the Conception to Age Two Period, cross-party 'manifesto', 2013, revised 2015 and 2019.<sup>20</sup>**

(the department of health and social care 2021)



From inside the mother's tummy, babies take in sounds, tastes and can even feel the feelings of their mothers, they are receptive to the world around them; it is essential that the mental health of mothers is considered and taken care of during pregnancy to ensure the best outcomes for the babies, this starts with the baby in the womb. According to (the department of health and social care 2021)

Fun fact:

by 18 weeks of pregnancy babies are starting to communicate with the brain to say that they can hear

By week 23 they can hear unclear sounds from the mother and week 24 they start to send responses back!

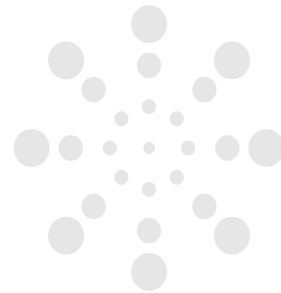
(BBC Tiny Happy People, n.d.)

# THE FIRST 6 MONTHS



During the first 6 months of life, mothers and babies are offered health checks to ensure both are doing well. (nhswebsite, wales) 2020 states that within 72 hours of birth, babies are offered health checks, a physical examination allows doctors to check for any abnormalities with eyes, heart, hips and testicles. This helps detect any abnormalities. These tests are also carried out around week 6-8.

(Tommys.org,) 2022 explains how heel prick tests are carried out between days 5-8 of life, the blood test is used to screen for 9 important health conditions. These tests are carried out by a health practitioners creating a small heel prick and collecting a droplet of blood from the baby, although it can be rather unpleasant it can be done quickly and can be essential for detecting illnesses early on.





(Tommys.org,)2022 explains that around 6 months + there are many developmental milestones being reached and explored by babies. from rolling from belly to back, to sitting up and even becoming more physically active in the form of crawling, pulling themselves up to their feet and even taking their first steps, building on gross motor skills.

Communication skills are continuing to develop with sounds and babbling; babies and toddlers start to show more understanding of communication and enjoy rhymes and songs.

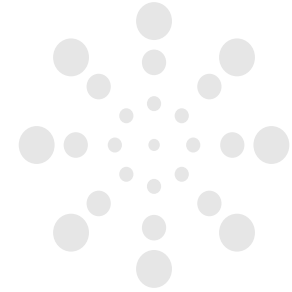
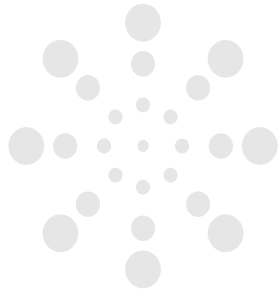
Leading up to 2 years old babies turn to toddlers, who continue to grow in independence and keep meeting milestones such as being able to feed themselves, form simple sentences and manoeuvre objects such as pushing and pulling toys.

## 6 MONTHS +

# WHAT IS EXCEPTIONAL CAREGIVING?



Children are entitled to feel like they belong. Enabling environments provide a child with a safe, secure and stimulating environment allowing them to learn, grow and achieve. Birth to5 matters (n.d.) argues that children need enabling environments to explore discover and investigate. It is known that children like to take control of their play and learning, there is importance in reinforcing the likes and interests of children, allowing them the confidence to explore and wallow in the environment. Access to both indoor and outdoor environments are of equal importance with the opportunity to fully engage and immerse themselves in all that's available, encountering challenges and exploring capabilities and delving into the natural world.



- It can be seen to be rather like the Froebelian approach, *“Children need environments that allow them to explore and experiment. Environments which promote independence and autonomy are led by educators who respect what children can do and support them to reflect upon their learning.”* (Adams and Short, n.d.) It can be argued that Froebel valued the importance of environments in which children accessed. He believed they were fundamental to supporting learning and gaining independence.

- Jean Piaget also believed that children were active participants in their own learning and having the opportunity to learn through doing and experiencing the world around them for themselves. This leads us to believe that a rich learning environment is essential for growth and development. (Celinska, 2025)

The role of the adult is key for exceptional care giving. Childcare practitioners are responsible for creating strong, secure attachments to children within their care, allowing them to feel safe, secure and full of self-esteem to investigate and discover.

According to Mary Ainsworth, building strong attachments with children enables them to feel secure and as though they have a safe base to return to if they so need it. Children are likely to explore and then return for any comfort they may seek. Children without this safe base and without a secure attachment may feel less confident to explore and then display the opposite kinds of behaviours such as lack of affection, comfort and stability.

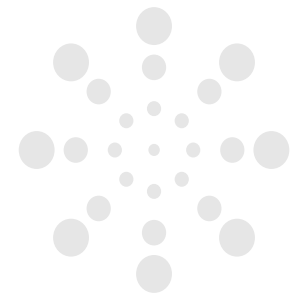
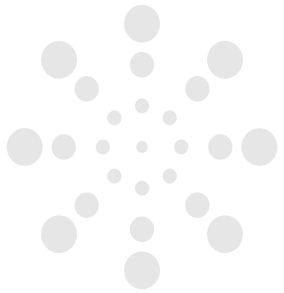
Mary Ainsworth also believed that attachments are not just part of childhood and go with a person throughout their lives, these can interchange from positive to less positive depending on the person these attachments are formed with. However, she believed children that did not establish secure attachments as children are less likely to form these later in life and it could lead to less emotional dysregulation, whereas children that had developed secure attachments went on to experience more fulfilling relationships. (The Attachment Project, 2024.)



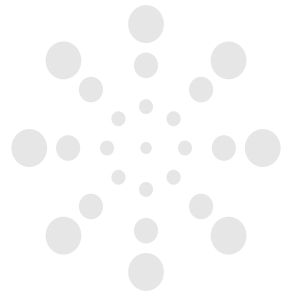
(The College of New Jersey,  
2019)

Mary Ainsworth

Therefore, creating secure attachments with children can be seen to be extremely important within the first 1000 days in order for children to progress to further successful relationships, but also for children to explore environments and experiences with their whole self and without holding back, enabling them to successfully fully engage and immerse themselves within it.



# PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS



Within the first 1000 days of a child's life, the role of the practitioner is to help facilitate and support parents and carers in providing growing babies with the best possible start into life.

Initiatives have been put in place to enable early years practitioners and health professionals to work holistically with children and families to improve outcomes and provide a Flying start to life, the following video explains the Flying Start initiative in Wales.



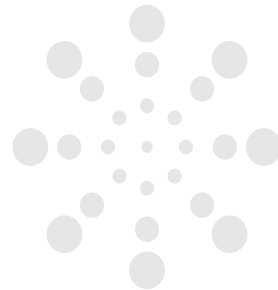
# FLYING START



(Flying Start Cardiff, n.d.)



(Carmarthenshire Family Information Service, 2019)



As reported by ([www.newport.gov.uk](http://www.newport.gov.uk), n.d.) the Flying Start initiative was created to help children and families in deprived areas of the city with the best possible start in life.

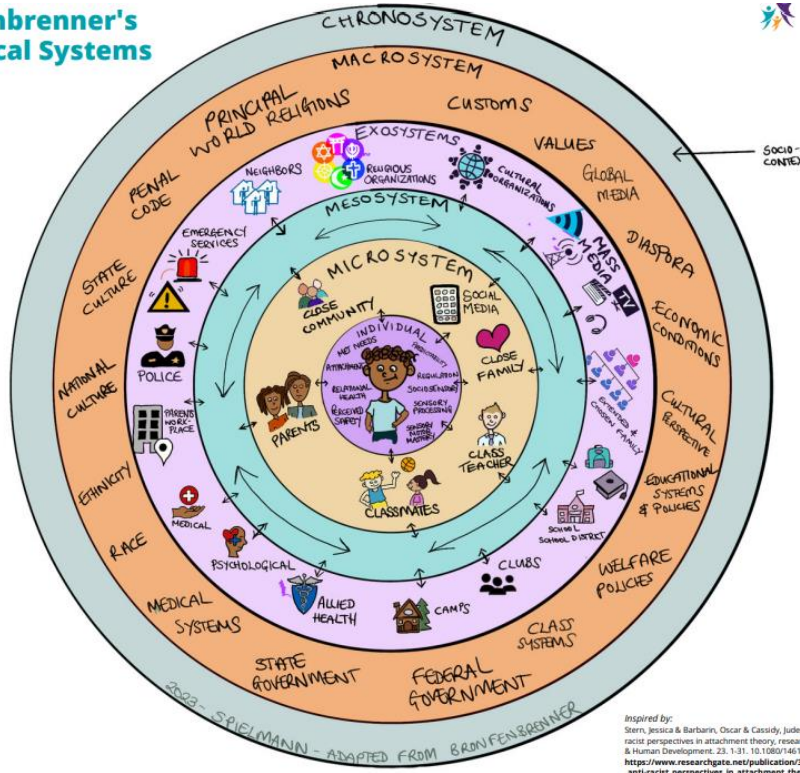
Flying Start offer childcare for children for 2 and a half hours a day 5 days a week, allowing children to access quality childcare and providing high quality childcare practitioners to support and facilitate the children's needs, enabling them to thrive and develop in many areas.

As well as access to quality childcare, families can access a range of supportive services through Flying Start, there are professional teams in parenting support, Early language support, extensive health visiting support as well as midwifery.

From this we can see that the role of the practitioner is rather valuable in the first 1000 days, early access to midwives and health visitors enables parents to access help and support whilst pregnant, giving the best possible start for the baby and expectant mother. The Welsh government states that families in Flying start areas can access early support from 24 weeks pregnant, in the form of home visits. Checks can be completed and information shared regarding healthy lifestyles and general health. Interventions can be put in place from both midwives and health visitors to families within the Flying Start catchment areas are entitled to a more robust form of care and support compared to those that are not in a catchment area. (Welsh Government, 2017)



Bronfenbrenner's  
Ecological Systems



# LINKS TO BRONFENBRENNER

(Stern, Barbarin and Cassidy, 2021)

Bronfenbrenners ecological system explains how the child is influenced by the people and environment around them.

This system starts with the microsystem and describes the influence that close contacts have on the child's development. These close contacts will be people that are around the child daily, including parents, friends, teachers and practitioners.

It could be argued that the Flying start initiative has links to this system. From before birth, babies and young children that access Flying start have already had intensive interactions with a range of professionals to help support their progression and development. When a child starts playgroup, they attend daily, meaning the practitioner then becomes part of that ecological system and has influence over how the child develops and behaves. The relationships built and environments accessed holds great influence over the development of the child. (Tudge and Rosa, 2020)

Brenners ecological system expands to consider further external factors and circumstances that may influence the child, the mesosystem which expands on the interactions that the child has, the exosystem which goes further again to look at the more external family members, local government and the media, to the macrosystem which considers the influence of values, attitudes and ideologies and finally the outer circle which is the chronosystem and includes the influences of history and changes to the world. All these systems can affect one another, when the interactions and environments that the child connects with influence how they see and interpret the world around them.

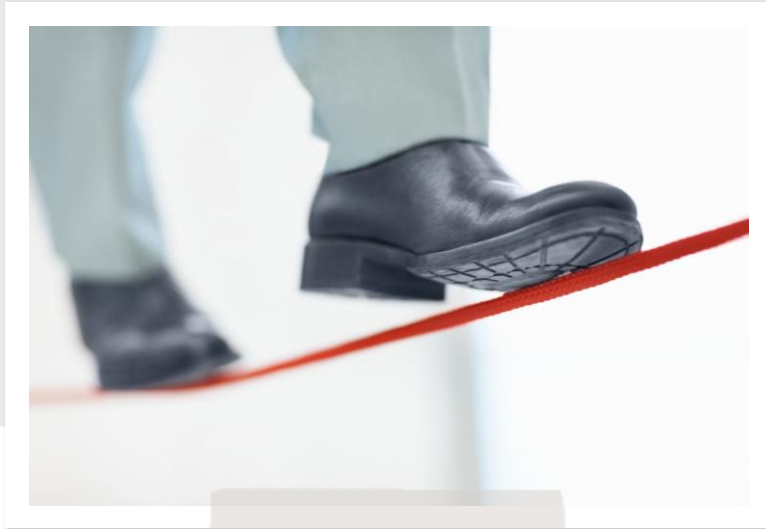
Attachment could also be linked to Brenners theory as positive interactions can have lasting impacts on the children at the centre of the system and influence other areas further down the line. Bowlby explains how attachments hold memories and those children that had positive experiences from caregivers in regard to relationship building and attachments were then able to feel worthy and accepting when their needs were being fulfilled as adults, whereas those with unsecure attachments were less able to rely on others and could find it difficult to build trust and gain a sense of self-worth.



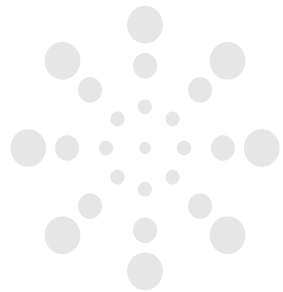
As explained in the The Welsh Government (2023) for babies to establish self-worth and to understand their place in the world they need to feel as though they belong. In order for those babies to feel like they belong they need to establish strong connections and bonds and build attachments to care providers, allowing them the confidence to explore and develop in a happy and content way.

From all this information it can be argued that professional partnerships and holistic care in the first 1000 days is essential for babies and mothers to enable them to receive the care and support they need to ensure they are able to achieve the best start.

# CHALLENGES



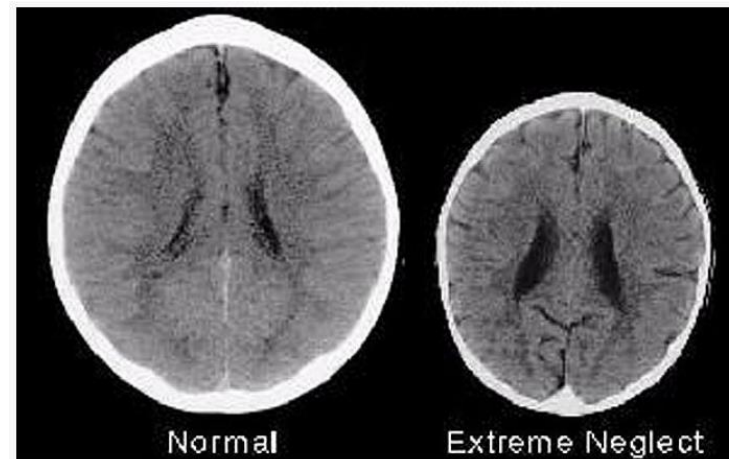
- Lack of passion with staff members and use of agency.
- There are several challenges that are compromising the early years sector. One of these is the decreasing passion of current staff members due to staff shortages and agency support staff being used to fill that gap.
- Currently there is a lot of pressure being put onto staff members due to the inexperienced and under qualified agency staff members that are being used to ensure ratios are being met. The pressure to provide quality care and enabling environments that meet the needs of the children all whilst trying to ensure agency staff are working to the demands of the setting is killing the passion and enthusiasm of staff within the setting. These staff members are being asked to take on a bigger workload, leading to burn out, frustration and a feeling of low self-worth.
- When using bank and agency staff, the member allocated are not always the same. This inconsistency can have a negative impact on children and young children as the level of care provided differs from one person to the next and bonds and attachments are not being formed consistently. Without this, attitudes to learning and development could deteriorate. (BREAKING POINT, n.d.) explains how staff shortages, and the use of unreliable and unavailable agency staff members are reducing the quality of care, safety and experience that settings are providing.



# THE BABY ROOM

- A second challenge early years face is the lack of experienced, and lower qualified staff members being placed in the baby room within settings. It is commonly known that younger staff members are placed within the baby room of childcare settings and the more experienced and skilled staff are utilised within the preschool rooms.
- (Croneri.co.uk,)2019 explains the first 3 years of a baby's life has a great impact on their brain development. Scans have shown that during birth the size of a baby's brain is 1/3 of an adult's brain and by the age of 3 the brain is 80% of the adults' brain Synapses are formed from genes from parents. These synapses need to be exercised for them to continue growing, building links and gaining and retaining information. Stimulating environments, professional practice and meeting babies' basic needs all help these links to be made and become embedded within the baby's brain, allowing learning to take place. If these links are not stimulated it is likely they will deteriorate and start to prune due to lack of interactions, trauma and lack of positive engagements.

The picture below is the scan of an average 3 years olds brain compared to the brain of a neglected 3 year old.



(Croneri.co.uk, 2019)



With all this knowledge being learned about the importance of the interactions and stimulation needed for babies to develop and grow, the impact of lower qualified and inexperienced staff members could be holding back the learning and exploration opportunities that are needed for babies to thrive in the first 100 days.

Babies could benefit from practitioners with passion to create stimulating environments, and engaging experiences, care and the willingness to learn and provide the best opportunities and desires to meet the needs of the children, this could be more impactful on the experience provided by care settings.

# ACTIVITIES

## Babies in the outdoors



(Starting out to play Discovering nature with babies and young children, n.d.) explains the importance of babies connecting with the outside world and the benefits of the natural environment of the human body when it comes to the fresh air that is used to breathe, to the water that is used to drink. There's also acknowledgement to the importance of nature in the first 1000 days and the benefits of exercise in the form of outside activities on the mother during pregnancy, with links to improved mental health.

### Physical benefits of babies in the outdoors:

- Development of gross motor skills
- Risk and challenge
- Spatial awareness and acknowledgement of oneself

### Benefits to health:

- Source of vitamin D through access to sunlight
- Promotes oxygen levels
- A boost in serotonin promoting wellbeing and happiness
- Outdoor rest

'Play that involves risk and challenge lets babies and toddlers experiment with problem-solving. It gives them chances to discover their individuality, lead their own learning, and understand themselves in relation to their world.'

Cooper 2023, p.4

(Risk and challenge in babies' and toddlers' play A Froebel Trust early childhood research highlight by Dr Maria Cooper, n.d.)

### Links to other countries:

In Scandinavia babies and young children make use of the outdoors daily. It is believed that there are many health benefits to dressing for the weather and having children access the outdoors daily, even for sleep. (McGurk, )2019 he goes on to explain how illnesses are formed in the indoor and outdoor naps provided stronger appetites, an improved quality of sleep and more engagement in activities after napping.

# TREASURE BASKETS



(Williams, n.d.)

Treasure baskets are a basket of random and curious household items that are given to a baby to explore from around the ages of 5-12 months old. The treasure basket enables babies to explore and use their sense to explore any curiosities. According to (Hughes, n.d.) this type of play and exploration is rather solitary, allowing the child to explore without rules and expectations and the role of the adult would be to be nearby to support and occasionally model exploratory play. Froebelians believe that children oversee their play, it is their own right and it is intrinsically within them to play. It is believed that the items in the treasure baskets can provide rich stimuli just when the brain is ready to accept it. Benefits of the treasure baskets is that they are made up of household items, these are easily accessible and to hand for most families. There are endless opportunities for synapses to deepen and continue developing through experiences. (Goldschmied and Jackson, 2004)



Treasure baskets are considered to be Froebelian as they link to play is the highest form of learning. This could be linked to the (The Montessori Family)2018 who states that treasure baskets are part of heuristic play and this is the follow-on stage, where children explore similar objects and containers together, providing endless learning opportunities. The Montessori family believed that bright coloured toys were limiting for children, providing children with neutral items would be stimulating and interesting.

The video attached explains more about the use of treasure baskets and heuristic play.



TREASURE  
BASKETS FOR  
BABIES AND  
HEURISTIC  
PLAY

*The Montessori  
Family*

(Montessori Family, 2018)



# SERVE AND RETURN

During the first 1000 days, parents and carers are the significant factor in providing babies and young children with experiences and stimulation to encourage and sustain neurological development. A process named serve and return, where adults respond to cues given by the baby, in the form of babbling, smiling, cooing. Repetition of this process back and forth provides deeper links in the brain and embeds the skills that are being learned.



NSPCC, 2020

From the video link we can see that the skills acquired from serve and return support children further on into their childhood, where they are linked to other life skills such as turn taking and communicating their needs clearer as they grow. E.g. when dealing with conflict. During this process, the role of the adult is essential, observing and recognising these cues are essential for the activity to take place.

# LINKS TO EMMI PIKLER

1. Full Attention
2. Slow Down
3. Build Trust and your Relationship during Care Giving Moments
4. 'With' and not 'to'
5. Babies are never put into a position which they cannot get into by themselves
6. Allow babies uninterrupted time for play
7. Babies send us cues all the time, tune in respectfully



Xiha Montessori, 2025)

- Although there are many activities that provide stimulation, engagement and learning opportunities. Emmi Pickler explains the importance of slowing down and taking time to complete the everyday activities with the children, e.g. feeding and nappy time. Emmi explained how completing these routines with the children rather than to the children helped to build trusting relationships, which led to the formation of secure attachments and a more confident and happier baby. (Pikler UK Association, n.d.) continue to explain how caregiving could take up a large part of the day and using this time to help build a child's self-image provided them with the self-belief they needed to explore. During these moments, undivided attention is required, sharing information of what is about to happen and asking permission is important for the child to know they are valued.

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