



the first 1000 days

Contents.

- What is the first 1000 days? Why is it important?
- What is exceptional care? Why is it important?
- What is the role of an early years practitioner in supporting children and families in the first 1000 days? What is the importance of effective partnerships?
- What are the challenges in providing high quality care?



The first 1000 days of a child's life refers to the period from conception to the age of two years. This is an important time in a child's life and a crucial time for their future development (Bellieni *et al* 2016). Martorell (2017) wrote about the growth and development of a child and how it is more rapid during gestation and infancy than any other time in a child's whole life which makes the first 1000 days quite a vulnerable time. What a child experiences in these first 1000 days can have an impact on

their lifelong health and wellbeing. Providing your baby with a safe, secure, and loving environment with good nutrition is especially important during the first 1000 days. This is supported by Blesalski *et al* (2016) who wrote about the importance of good nutrition in maternal and the infant which is linked with the child's physical growth, the brain development, and a certain multitude of certain health related concerns. Although Einziger *et al* (2019) suggests that while nutrition in the first 1000 days is one of the main focuses there are also several other factors within this time for example cognitive stimulation which is linked to the child's language development, mathematical and problem solving and mental disorders. The first 1000 days have a significant impact on a child's future, on the child's developing brain, the health, happiness, well-being of the child and the child's ability to learn. The importance of the right food, stimulation, and the opportunity to play and the love and care a child receives early on are essential to a baby's brain development. Children that experience a poor start in life can feel the repercussions throughout their whole life. For example, experiencing violence, substance abuse within the family or separation from the parents may result in poorer health or a lower social status. (UNICEF no date). During the woman's pregnancy her health, stress levels and nutrition can affect the developing baby's future. A baby's brain develops more quickly in the first 1000 days than at any other age. A baby's brain adapts to its environment which contributes to the sort of person the baby will become in the future (Pregnancy birth & baby no date) The importance of a well-formed brain and body will give the child a good chance at life. A child's cell growth can be inhibited or changed in some way from the results of the mother smoking, drinking alcohol or taking drugs but there are other factors to consider for example, an unhealthy increase in stress levels can also affect the cellular development of the foetus which can result in miscarriage, premature birth, or postnatal issues Poggi-Davies & Sandman (2006). Having an environment that is safe and secure with loving relationships, healthy food, and the opportunity to play and learn is vitally important for a child's development including in the womb. A healthy pregnancy is important for setting the unborn baby up for a healthy life. As the foetus grows inside the womb its environment around the mother for example, the foetus hears what the mother hears, what the mother eats, drinks impact the foetus and the foetus can also react when the mother is feeling stressed Cross-party manifesto (2013,2015,2019).

Caregiving



During pregnancy, the care and support the mother receives is vital for the best start for both the mother and the baby. There are several different services available for the family that can help support them throughout the pregnancy, the birth of the baby and in the months and years that

follow. An example of some of the services available include midwifery, health visitors, the general practitioner, and the NHS 111 service. Although there are some additional services available that would help the family for example, breastfeeding support, mental health support and parenting support (HM Government 2021). Becoming a parent or carer can be an emotional and overwhelming time although the arrival of a newborn is an exciting and special moment. High quality midwifery support during pregnancy and childbirth is essential. Health visitors provide crucial support in the transition to parenthood. These two services work alongside the general practitioners who are often the first point of contact that the parent would reach out to for advice. (The best start for life 2021). A baby's brain development starts in the womb and the earliest experiences can shape the baby's development. During the first 1000 days of life the baby's brain shows an exceptional capacity to adapt to the baby's surroundings and can absorb information. It is important that the baby's experiences are positive which are essential to ensure that the child is ready to learn and ready for school to give them the chance of a good life. The child's parents are the biggest influence for early learning. For example, when the parents talk to the baby or read stories that can help to build language skills from as early as birth. Language skills are crucial to a child's development of cognitive skills, reading skills and memory which will prepare the child for future learning. When parents have contact with early years professionals before birth and after they are more receptive to offers of advice. Early support for all families is crucial and early intervention can identify families that may need extra support or families at risk (UK government 2016). Murray and Andrews (2000) wrote about why the adult is important in the development of the baby and child. From as early as the birth a baby is programmed to recognise the human face. Research has shown that a baby will imitate facial expressions of the adult as early as a minute old. Theorist (Piaget 1945-1962) backs this by writing about a baby's facial imitation is regarded as an achievement and a particularly important milestone in a baby's development. A baby's best way to learn is through interaction with adults. The early years practitioner has a key role in the development of the child. The knowledge and understanding of how a baby develops is crucial for the developing child. It is important for a practitioner to show love, patience and enjoy being with children and helping them to learn and develop but another crucial quality for the practitioner is the initiative to follow practice and encourage the child to learn through their experiences and allow the children to take the lead in how they learn. All practitioners need this quality. The baby room of a nursery is where the foundations for future development and learning starts so the placing of high-quality practitioners in this room is important. (Creating a learning environment for babies and toddlers 2012).



Professional partnerships



An early year practitioner's role in supporting children and families in the first 1000 days is a rewarding role as well as a challenging role. An early year's practitioner works closely with the babies, toddlers and pre school children which means taking care of their day-to-day needs, for example, changing nappies, clothing, feeding the babies and organising the daily activities for the babies and children to help keep them entertained, and stimulate their educational, physical, and emotional development. The practitioner can build strong relationships and develop close attachments which builds trust for the child and the family. The practitioner is responsible for safeguarding the children and reporting any concerns they may have. The practitioner alongside all these duties will also be monitoring the child's progress and reporting it back to the parents. Early years practitioners work with different age groups and each age group will be different from the

other, a baby's needs will be different from a four-year-old child that is ready for school, or some children may have special needs so some practitioners will specialise in working solely with the child with special needs (All about the children Ltd, no date). Building good relationships with the parents and carers is just as important as building a relationship with the child. It is important for the parents to know the practitioner who is their child's key person. Involving the parents and carers from the beginning through transitions, to settling in sessions and daily chats so the practitioner can share with the parents and carers information about their child's development and to check that you have the parents correct parental permissions in place this will make sure that the way you communicate works for all of you. Parents can feel like they are missing out on their child's day so it is important to have excellent communication and the opportunity to have regular chats with the parents can be reassuring for them. Another clever idea is to create a learning journal where parents and practitioners can communicate and share thoughts, ideas, or concerns. A practitioner should be considerate of the parent or carers feelings when trying to build a good relationship, for example think carefully about how you communicate especially if what you need to talk about may be difficult. (PACEY 1977). The first experience of being away from home for some children will be when the parent or carer returns to work after maternity leave and the child begins their journey into education in a nursery setting. It is the practitioner's responsibility to work in partnership with the parents and carers and acknowledge that each child is different and has had different experiences of early education. The practitioner's role is important as they enter into a new and exciting chapter in the child's life and development. It is important to create a space that recognises the needs of each child and promotes listening and understanding each child's rights. Being a practitioner that has the skills to be observant and engaging is a key skill for promoting a holistic and meaningful learning environment. Planning exciting and engaging experiences that the child is interested in is important for helping the child to settle in and encourages the child's development. The early years practitioner has the responsibility of making strong connections with the child, the family, and the community this helps to strengthen the child's sense of belonging. The practitioner's joyful approach to learning and supporting the child's curiosity and creating an environment that's safe emotionally helps the child to regulate how they feel and behave in a positive way. (Education Wales no date). Reggio (1963) supports this by writing about early years education and she describes the children as the ones in the driver's seat and seeing them as curious little individuals with the potential to learn and develop from the relationships they build and the enabling environments. Children should be viewed as strong and intelligent and be given every opportunity to develop and reach their full potential. The practitioners collaborate closely with the parents and observe the children to understand how the child learns. The practitioner can then plan and adapt to the child and use resources that will interest the child. (The Reggio Emilia approach to early years education 2024).





Challenges

Working in the childcare sector is an extremely rewarding role but it can also have some challenges that can cause some barriers to get through. It is perceived that working in childcare is easy, but the fact is the complete opposite. Some of the biggest challenges for the practitioners when working in childcare settings are not enough time to complete everyday tasks, there can be a lot of paperwork which leads to the practitioner feeling like there's not enough time spent with the children. There could be difficulty in recruiting staff who have the correct qualifications, some practitioners may have difficulty communicating with parents and the pay scale does not reflect the dedication and hard work done by the practitioners. Some of these challenges are common so the importance of communication and working as a team can help resolve some of these challenges. There is a rising demand for high quality childcare in the UK which places considerable pressure on the childcare providers as they are trying to accommodate more children while simultaneously continuing to provide high quality care and education that they offer. Finding and maintaining high quality staff, facilities and resources can be challenging. Government funding plays a significant role as the impact of rising costs and other challenges are put before childcare providers. Policies that support families are crucial for helping the families afford the childcare costs. Early education is crucial and builds a strong platform for future learning. It provides children with the cognitive stimulation that will promote their development and prepares the child for the opportunity to thrive in education. Despite the positive benefits of early education there are some challenges that can negatively affect the process. For example, the lack of funding is a significant challenge without adequate funding some children especially those from less advantaged backgrounds could miss out on the access to an early education. Investment in early education provides more opportunities and better learning outcomes. Also challenges such as a shortage in early childhood educators or inadequate training for the practitioners can affect the running of the early year's settings. All these challenges can result in negative effects on children's cognitive development. For example, a child that does not experience early education may enter school being unprepared and fall behind their peers in language skills and physical skills. Or a child who grows up in a low-income family or community and has limited chance of early education may lack crucial skills such as communication or the skills to interact which will lead to social and emotional challenges. Adequate funding to enhance early education and with government support and policies this will ensure that every child benefits from high quality education.

Activities



A circular sensory bin filled with blue sand, decorated with various sea-themed toys like fish, shells, and a clock. The bin is bordered by a white net and contains the text "ONCE I CAUGHT A ALIVE".

The use of Tuff trays in the early years setting has become extremely popular and an ideal learning tool that is used to help children learn through play. They are a useful resource that children can use to play and engage in several diverse types of play. For example, creative play, sensory play, role play and many more. The Tuff tray has many learning and development opportunities. There is the opportunity for the child to play independently or play alongside other children and engage in social play. Emotional, personal, and social development is encouraged through free play and adult led play. The children will learn through exploring, interacting, and learning through language. Fine motor skills and gross motor skills can be developed by encouraging the children to touch, move items, pick up items, squeeze or use utensils to make marks. For example, using lollipop sticks or toy cars. There are so many benefits of the Tuff tray as the activities are endless. The children can develop maths skills, literacy skills and express themselves through messy play and art (Twinkle 2022).

Tap Tap box



The Tap Tap box is an activity which is a great activity for teaching children about everyday items from your home or early years setting teaching the child about words, colours, what its used for or make up a song related to the object. All that is needed for this activity is a box with a lid which is easily opened by the child. It can be decorated or painted by the children this can help the children feel more involved in the activity. Choose some objects to put in the box that you can talk about with the children. To make the activity more exciting you can create some excitement before opening the box and choosing an item. For example, you could tap on the box or make a drum roll or sing a song about opening the box. When the child opens the box encourage the child to choose an item to talk about, ask questions, think of a song that might relate. For example, if the item is a toy cow you can sing "old McDonald had a farm." Swap the items regularly to keep the activity exciting. The benefits of the activity would be the use of words, repeating words, learning an unfamiliar word, song or new sound. This will encourage language skills and cognitive development and help a child to recognise everyday words (Tiny happy people BBC no date).

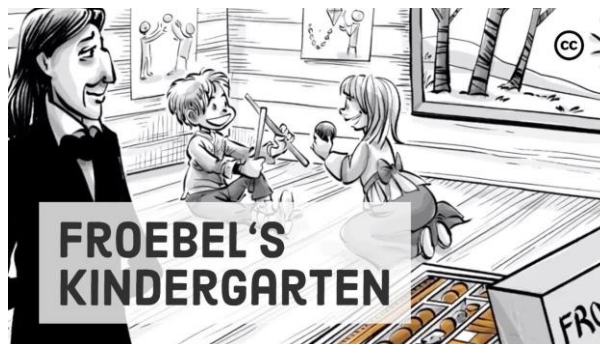
Sensory play



Sensory play is a simple but effective activity for babies and children. Sensory play is an activity that is used to help stimulate the child's senses. This could be touch, smell, or taste. It is also useful for the fine motor or gross motor skills as it involves movement. Some examples of sensory play would be playing with cooked pasta, play dough, making patterns in squirty cream, or mixing paints with your hands or something as simple as splashing in water. Babies and children are exploring their senses all the time it is something that has done naturally. Even in the womb the baby is using their senses and will recognise voices the time they are born. The benefit of sensory play is helping a child to explore and understand their senses, they will learn to develop their emotional awareness, they can discover what textures they might like or dislike. Sensory play encourages the child's attention span, listening skills and language skills. It is important to let the child explore rather than expect them to participate. Letting the children take the lead in sensory play is important. Let them get messy if that is what they want. The practitioner can help by talking about the experience, use words that describe the sounds or feeling (Tiny happy people BBC no date).

In Denmark and other countries an activity named Forest school has become an important part of the curriculum for pre school children. Documentation in Denmark shows that children that attend forest school have stronger social skills when they start school. They have shown to work better in groups, have more confidence and have higher self-esteem. Forest school encourages the children to learn from nature, exploring, risk taking, and it supports the holistic development in children. Piaget

(1920) suggests that children will go through stages of learning and at their own pace. Some children will take longer than others to move on to the next stage. Piaget's theory of cognitive development suggests that children in early years education will learn more effectively when exploring and using their senses. This supports the use of the popular activity of sensory play. Froebel (1782-1852) suggests that child led play is the basis for physical, intellectual, emotional, and social development. His belief is "play is the highest form of human expression in childhood." Many of Froebel's ideas on play and the importance of learning through nature continues to be used in early years education today. He believed that child led activities give children the freedom to explore. Free play encourages children to discover through hands on activities. Froebel valued movement and activities like finger play, movement of objects and dancing are key features in his approach.



Ellen nicholls 2312882