



The first 1000 days

According to ConcernWorldwideUs (2023) a child's physical, cognitive and social development are all most at risk during the crucial first 1000 days. They state that the term "The First 1000 Days" describes the timeframe from conception to the child's second birthday. The capability and structure of a child's brain develops at an exponential rate throughout this period; the first 1000 days see the development of eighty percent of the brain. A child's learning abilities, capacity for memory, visual and auditory sensory systems, and information processing systems all develop throughout this time. The first 1000 days are a very delicate period. A child's brain could suffer permanent and lifelong consequences if they don't receive the right care and needs, especially in terms of nutrition. A healthy diet during pregnancy and the early years of life is critical to your child's long-term health. It's not only about your baby but your weight and lifestyle choices during pregnancy can also have a great impact and affect the development of your unborn child's organs, immune system and metabolism. This also is backed up by HM Government (2021) as they believe that while a child may benefit greatly from good nutrition during this crucial stage, a child may also suffer from poor nutrition. This is due to the fact that a child's first 1000 days determine a large portion of their lifetime epigenetic traits.

Early in a child's development, within the first 1,000 days, medical and public health interventions may be more successful than those made beyond this time. This is why it is important that children develop the right care in their first 1000 days as Parliament (2019) claim that a newborn is far more likely to fall even further behind in later years rather than catching up with individuals who have had a better start in their life if their growth falls behind the norm during the first year of life. The first 1000 days are vital, and the UNICEF (2013) claims that the development of the foundations for optimal health, growth, and neurodevelopment across the lifespan occurs during this special window of opportunity. However, unfortunately poverty and malnutrition impair this foundation far too often in underdeveloped nations contributing to early mortality, serious morbidities including poor health and more subtly, a major loss of neurodevelopmental potential. This is an important period in a child's life because children who experience difficult childhood often carry the consequences for the rest of their lives. This stage is of the utmost importance since it is currently that the basis for the body's and the brain's growth is laid; if this foundation is solid, the likelihood of success in life is great. If, however, children fail during the first 1000 days, their prospects have already been severely damaged. (Teachearlyyears, 2019).

The first 1000 days



The image above portrays a baby's early development between the ages of 0 and 2. It also illustrates what newborns might be capable of when they get to be a specific age. Remembering that each child is unique and develops at a different rate is vital; this is only an overview of what newborns might be capable of distinct. For example, some babies may start crawling around 7 months however others may not crawl until 10 or 11 months or its possible some babies skip crawling entirely and begin walking later instead.

According to the Welsh Government (no date), connections form in the first few years of life quite quickly. Your baby will make 700 new connections every second from birth to age two. Your baby will learn to grip a toy, crawl, take their first step, and pronounce their first words as these connections grow which is shown in the image.

Exceptional Care

Green et al (2018) believe that exceptional care in the first 1000 days entails a holistic strategy that puts the child's growth and well-being first. Parents, medical professional, and community support systems must work together to achieve this.

The main factors include:

Support for Families:

Meeting each family's specific requirements and offering social services and other resources to establish a supportive network that fosters a caring atmosphere for families.

Holistic Development:
Acknowledging the connections between the development of the body, mind, and emotions. Putting into practice strategies that assist the child's holistic development throughout this time. (Twinkl. No date)

Parental Care:
Giving mothers the right kind of care so they can have a healthy pregnancy and delivery.

Early Childhood Education-
Age-appropriate play and exploration that cultivates a love of learning.

Responsive Parenting-
Promote constructive parent-child relationships that result in stable attachments.

Nutrition and Health:
Stressing the need of a healthy diet for the mother and child during pregnancy and early childhood. Additionally guaranteeing immunizations and access to healthcare services.
(1,000 days, No date)

Continuous Monitoring and Guidance:
Keeping a close eye on the child's growth and advising parents on developmental milestones. Providing parents with continuous assistance and knowledge to enable them in their duty as carers.



(Source: eMedihealth, 2021)



(Source: Abacus Ark, 2024)



(Source: Campaign for Action, No date)

Professional Partnerships

Gaspar (2010) states that, since the turn of the millennium, partnership cooperation has been a fundamental idea at the center of social and educational policy. Working in partnerships offers chances to satisfy requirements on an individual and a collective level, allowing the needs of the newborn and the family to be taken care of cohesively. The foundation of a successful collaboration is the belief that families, communities, parents, and children should have access to a variety of development and support services. This will benefit the unborn kid in many ways, including helping them identify their requirements and obtaining the assistance they require from all the agencies involved. Furthermore, they think that professional organizations should strive to enhance how they organize, design, execute, and evaluate their job together as team members, each with a distinct perspective and set of skills that operate well together as a single organism. For the baby's growth, professional partnerships are essential during the first 1000 days. Parental, medical, educational and community resource collaborations can offer comprehensive support for a child's physical, mental and emotional health. This comprehensive approach aids in establishing a strong basis for a child's learning and health throughout their lifetime.

Also, parental care is provided in collaboration with healthcare professionals during the first 1000 days of pregnancy throughout the birth to ensure a healthy outcome. Working together with early year educators promotes age-appropriate stimulus, which helps with cognitive development. (Early Education, 2021).

An essential component in helping the baby and families during the first 1000 days is an early year's practitioner. According to Brodie (2018), practitioners depend on parents to provide information about feeding schedules, soothing techniques, and routines for caring for their newborns. Given that parents spend the majority of their time with their children, professionals must possess two complementing skill sets: the ability to care for and educate children as well as the ability to interact with parents in an effective and sensitive manner. Also, according to Pacey (no date), engaging with parents is highly valued in both the National Minimum Standards for Registers Childcare (NMS) in Wales and the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in England. It is crucial that caretakers and parents recognize you as the primary carer for their child, as this demonstrates how vital the relationship between the practitioner and the parent is.

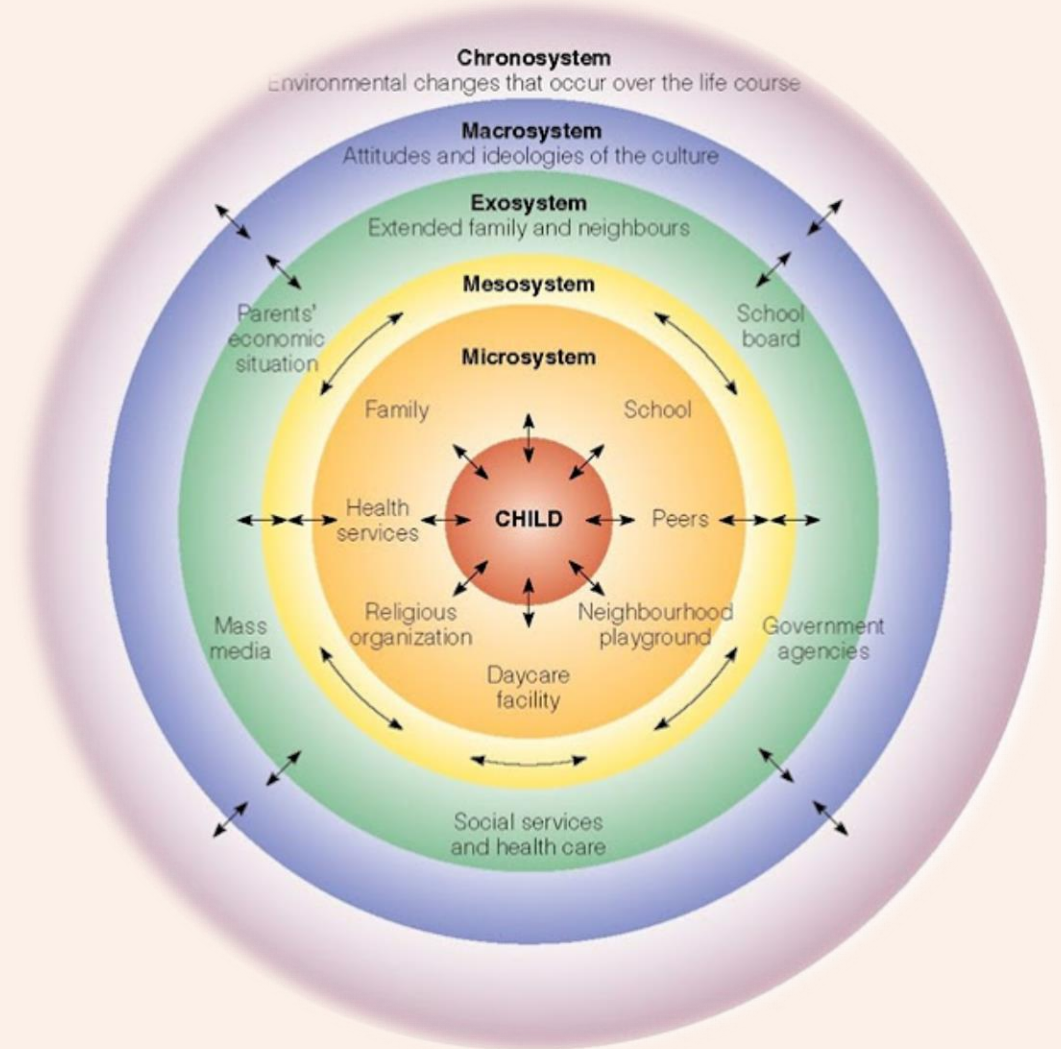
Overall, they play a critical role in establishing a supportive and stimulating atmosphere that allows babies and toddlers to flourish over their first 1000 days.



(Source: Earlyyears-careers, 2016)

Professional Partnerships

The biological theory of human development was first put forth by Bronfenbrenner, and it was first known as an ecological model or approach, according to Journal of Family Theory & Review (2013). The influence of setting was the focus of the idea. According to Bronfenbrenner's theory, a child's growth is impacted by a range of factors throughout their lifetime, such as biological, interpersonal, social, and cultural aspects. Additionally, as suggested by Jorna de Pediatria (2023), the Bronfenbrenner ecological model acknowledges the significance of contextual elements and environmental factors for the explanation of phenomena, rather than concentrating solely on individual aspects in the understanding of growth and development processes. His theory offers a thorough framework for comprehending how the interactions of different systems affect a child's experiences and development during the crucial first 1000 days. It highlights how crucial it is to consider the larger context and interdependencies of different systems to have a comprehensive understanding of early childhood development. For instance, peer relationships, the home environment, carer relationships, parental influence, and family dynamics are some of the variables that can impact the microsystem within the first 100 days. This is the reason it is critical to identify the direct effects that mold a child's early experiences.



(Source: Simply Psychology, 2023)

Current Challenges

According to Gasper (2010) early childhood educators face numerous obstacles in their efforts to give newborns and infants the best care possible.

Some challenges include:

1.

Staffing Ratio- Sustaining proper staff-to-child ratios is an ongoing challenge that affects the capacity to provide the individualized care that is crucial for early development.

2.

Training and Professional Development- It is essential that practitioners get ongoing professional development and training, but they frequently encounter barriers to enrolling in comprehensive programs that address the complexities of early childhood development

3.

Parental Involvement- Collaboration and effective communication with parents become critical, but creating and sustaining these relationships can be challenging, which can impact the smooth transition of care from the environment between the home.

4.

Inclusive Practice- Another challenge is inclusivity, which calls for specific skills and resources to meet the varied needs of the babies and toddlers in the care.

5.

Resource Constraints- Financial and material limitations can make it difficult to create stimulating conditions that are essential for early learning.

The Welsh Government (2021) points out that a child's first 1000 days, from conception to their second birthday, were made more difficult by the COVID-19 pandemic. Healthcare systems around the world prioritized responding to pandemics, which have caused disruptions in the prenatal care and may influence the health of mothers and the early development of the fetuses. Pregnant women's and newborns' general health may have been impacted by limited access to necessary immunizations, routine checkups, and dietary support.

It also has had an impact on social interactions which were restricted by lockdown and restrictions, which are important for cognitive and emotional growth. Lack of these experiences may have an impact on a child's development of social skills, communication abilities and attachment patterns.

Furthermore, the pandemic economic effect could have put a burden on family finances, limiting access to food, secure housing, and educational opportunities. All these elements work together to create a complicated web of effects that can affect how a child develops.

Recognizing that every person's situation is unique and that some families may have overcome these obstacles with fortitude and assistance.

Being Inclusive

From conception until age two, a child's first 1000 days are crucial for their development. During this time according to Cologon (2014), inclusivity guarantees access to healthy food, medical care, and mental stimulation, establishing the groundwork for long term physical, mental and emotional health. By promoting equal chances for each child's optimal growth and development, it helps alleviate inequities.

Believed by Abbott and Langston (2007) for both the children and their carers, inclusive behavior throughout the first 1,000 days are crucial to the development of a strong social relationship and a sense of belonging. In the long run, inclusion fosters resilience and lays the groundwork for a more just and supportive society by addressing a range of needs as well as circumstances.

(Source: Pinterest, 2014)



As states by Rose, Gilbert and Richards (2016) the first 1000 days may also provide challenges with inclusivity, such as differences in early childhood education, nutrition, and access the health care. Inadequate support networks, cultural disparities and socioeconomic issues can all be barriers to equitable opportunity for the best possible growth. In order to address these issues and guarantee inclusion for all children at this crucial time, extensive policies and interventions are needed to ensure that the child's needs and well-being is always put first, and they are made paramount in the situation.

Activity Ideas

(Source: Pentagon for Play and Learning, 2017)



Tummy time

(Source: Cosy, 2021)



Loose parts play

(Source: Artful parent, 2022)



Messy play

(Source: KidsClub, 2024)



Water play

(Source: TheMomFriend, 2021)



Singing and reading

Benefits

1. Promotes better head control.
2. Strengthens neck and shoulder muscles.
3. Supports development of motor skills.

1. Open ended play
2. Sensory stimulation
3. Fine motor skills
4. Promotes problem solving
5. Encourages creativity

1. Sensory development
2. Emotional regulation
3. Language development
4. Cognitive skills
5. Environmental awareness

1. Physical exercise
2. Imagination and creativity
3. Scientific exploration
4. Risk taking
5. Confidence

1. Rhythm and coordination
2. Visual and auditory discrimination
3. Bonding and attachment
4. Routine and predictability
5. Language skills

According to Montessori Apprentice Academy (2022) loose parts play is an essential component of the Montessori method, which supports the ideas of encouraging self-reliance, curiosity and creativity. For a child's holistic development, the first 1000 days of life are crucial, and the brain develops quickly at this age, and several fundamental abilities are established. These are multiple ways in which Montessori's loose parts play methodology can be connected such as for sensory development, improving fine motor skills and supporting a child in growing their sense of independence.

Understanding and fostering these many types of play is essential to supporting a child's overall development, which encompasses their physical, social, emotional, and cognitive maturation.

(Play Scotland, 2023)

Respectful Care

Emmi Pikler

A child's development depends critically on receiving respectful care in the first 1000 days, from conception to age two. It entails fostering relationships, giving attentive care, and creating a safe space to encourage the best possible physical and mental health.

Recognizing and addressing each child's and caregivers' individual needs is a key component of respectful care. A nurturing environment is facilitated by access to healthcare, supportive parenting and the promotion of the mental well-being of both the child and caregiver. The strong parent-child link that is fostered in this holistic approach is crucial for the babies to have healthy emotional and cognitive development.

The Pikler approach is based on the idea that care for babies and infants should be child-led, respectful, and responsive. The nurturing relationship between the carer and the child, as well as the child's autonomy and individuality, are highly valued components of Pikler's respectful care methodology. It is distinguished by a strong regard for the child's independence, the establishment of a safe atmosphere, and a dedication to identifying and meeting each child's specific needs. According to Montessori Up (2022) Pikler aimed to establish a cozy setting that promotes freedom of movement and lets kids grow in a natural way.

Environments

The Welsh Government (2022) believe that children's genuine experiences should be centered around the environments that adults provide for both indoor and outdoor activities. Exploration of the surroundings is a major factor in the early development and focused upon within the curriculum for Wales and can connect to the ideas of other theorists.

Maria Montessori

Mendoza et al. (2021) claim that a child's natural environment can be facilitated by carefully planned environments according to Montessori's theory. The Montessori method, her unconventional teaching strategy, emphasizes fostering pupils' sense of freedom and personal development while they are in the classroom. Among its unique features are mixed-age classrooms, three-hour time slots for activities, and specialized curricula and learning resources. Overall, Montessori classrooms are designed to respect and nourish each child's individual development, developing independence, curiosity, and a lifelong love of learning.

(Source: Montessori Children's Garden, No date)



(Source: Shining Stars, No date)

Friedrich Froebel

Applying Froebel's philosophy to the first 1000 days, it recognizes their developmental needs and designing environments accordingly. Even while Froebel is more frequently linked to kindergarten aged children, his focus on play, nature and personal growth may be extended to the early years. According to his theory, a child's environment plays a crucial role in fostering their overall growth.

"The experiences we have as young children shape the rest of our lives. We believe in the importance of play, learning through nature, practical hands-on learning and nurturing a child's connection to their community."

(The Froebel Trust, 2024)

International Approaches



(Source: Forest School, 2014)



(Source: Circle of Life, 2022)



(Source: Mead Primary, 2017)

The Scandinavian educational method, known as ‘forest school’ emphasizes outside natural learning. Forest school’s basic tenet is frequent, ongoing, hands-on learning in natural environments.

The concept of Forest School have found widespread adoption in a variety of educational contexts. The methodology can be implemented in early childhood education, primary schools and other educational settings without being limited to any age range. (Forest Research, 2024).

While there are some commonalities between the way children learn in the UK and with the Forest School approach there are major differences.

Although the Forest School approach places more emphasis on experimental, child-led, and outdoor learning, the UK education system focuses more on official evaluations, classroom-based learning and a standardised national curriculum.

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