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What are the First 1000 Days?

When it comes to child development, it is important to focus on the first 1000 days, as this is a crucial window for a child's holistic development (Karakochuk et al., 2018).

The first 1000 days covers the period from conception up until the child's second year (UNICEF, 2016).

UNICEF (2026) has split this into three stages, these include; pregnancy, infancy and toddler stage.

During **pregnancy** a mother's diet is crucial, and maintaining a balanced diet will have positive effects on the baby's development and brain growth (UNICEF, 2016).

Once a child reaches the **infancy** stage, they will be able to obtain colostrum from the mother's breast milk which will help with the baby's immune system (UNICEF, 2016).

And finally, in the **toddler** stage a child will start trying solid foods but can still be breastfed. It is important during this time that the care of the child is maintained, and their diet is full of nutrition to help protect them from lifelong diseases (UNICEF, 2016).



(KOKO plus Foundation, 2024)

With the correct care and nutrition during these stages, a child's holistic development will be positive and help them with their future (Thousand Days Organisation, no date).



(Bagus Prakoso, no date)

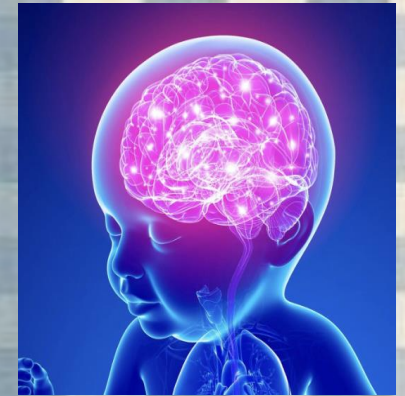
In pregnancy, a mother must maintain a nutritious diet including; folic acids, iron, zinc and iodine, protein and fatty acids (UNICEF, 2016). This will contribute towards the baby's brain development.

(Yorkshire Smokefree Service, no date)



It is important to state that any deficiency in micronutrients during pregnancy will have profound and irreversible effects on a child's brain (Karakochuk et al., 2018).

Why are the First 1000 Days so important?



(Trinity College Dublin, 2024)



(BSNA, no date)

Before birth, the baby's brain will develop the fastest it ever will at any time of their life (Thousand Days Organisation, no date). Thousand Days Organisation (no date) has stated that in the 4th week of pregnancy a baby's brain has 10,000 cells, and by the 24th week they will have 10 billion!



Why First 1000 Days are Important ?

270 Days of Pregnancy + 730 Days of First Two Years

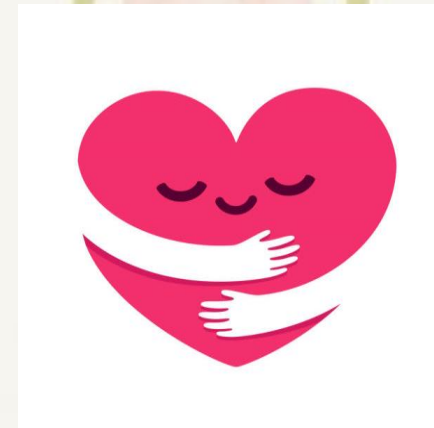
(Heltheotic, 2020).

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Another topic for practitioners to take in when providing care in the first 1000 days is exceptional caregiving. When the care giver can provide a safe and nurturing environment while also maintaining care for the child the learning outcomes will be more positive (Sagastui, J., et al., 2022).

The parents, specifically the mother, also have important roles to play. Earlier highlighted in this scrap book it detailed the care the mother must provide. Taking the correct nutrients, plenty of iron, iodine and fatty acids will benefit the child and help their holistic development (UNICEF, 2016).

A child will spend majority of their early years in educational environments that will contribute to their future, it is important for practitioners to encourage and provide exceptional care to help aid the children (Sagastui, J., et al., 2016). Although according to Rose et al., (2016) sustainable development does not only include their environment, but also their social and well-being development.



(iStock, no date).

Other themes that contribute towards providing care are regular risks assessments and observations (Pilcher, M., no date). A practitioner could also inform themselves on the policies that the practice instil.

- Fire safety
- Food safety
- Nappy changing and child hygiene
- Outings, such as trips ensuring the correct precautions are in place.
- Personal safety

Observations are equally as important! For example:

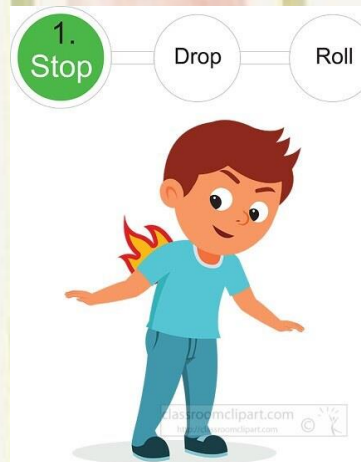
- How a child may interact with others
- How a child might express their emotions
- Equality in practice.



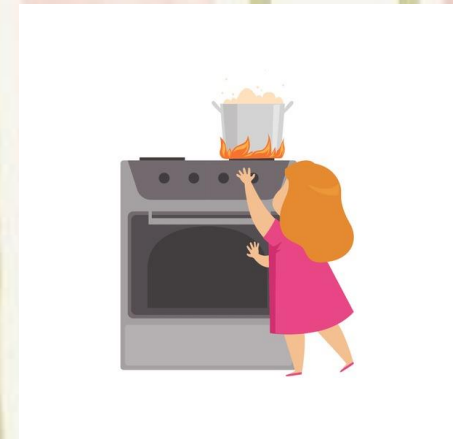
(Vecteezy, no date).



(iStock, no date).



(Classroom clipart, no date).



(Shutterstock, no date).

What theorists can be linked to caregiving?

The theorists that could be linked with caregiving are Pikler and Maslow. Stoyanov (2017, p.36) details Maslow's theory and how it links to exceptional care. Practitioners should remember to include Maslow in everyday practice to maintain high levels of exceptional care that will benefit the children positively (Stoyanov, 2017, p.36).

Abraham Maslow



(Very well mind, 2023).

Including Pikler's theory (Aspiring Beginnings, no date) in everyday practice is also beneficial as it highlights different principles that can affect a child. Including surroundings, poor care, no engagement and no support (Aspiring Beginnings, no date). All these principles combined with each other can make a child's life very overstimulating and difficult. It is important for a practitioner to ensure that every child is cared for holistically.



(ChildcareCareResourcesMT, 2021).

PROFESSIONAL
PARTNERSHIPS

(New Leaders, 2022)



What are Professional Partnerships?

And how to support children and families in the first 1000 days.

Another factor to consider when looking at the first 1000 days is partnerships, but more specifically professional ones. Practitioners working in early year practice can naturally create these partnerships with parents as they are working so closely with them and their children (Education Scotland, 2020).

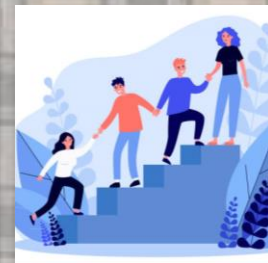


(Thomson, 2021)

Parenting can be complex and challenging, especially for first time parents, so creating that professional partnership can make parents feel supported (Education Scotland, 2020). Education Scotland (2020) also notes that understanding the individual challenges they face and being accommodating also contributes to a healthy partnership.

But partnership is not only with the parents, but with the children too and being good role-models (Education Scotland, 2020).

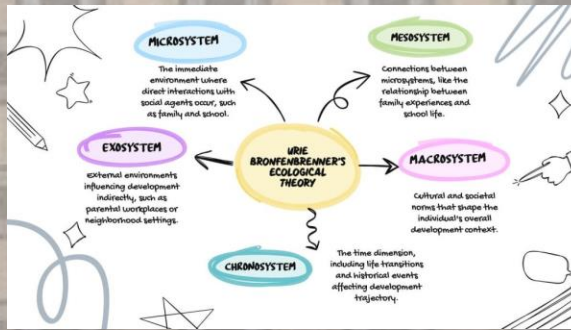
Creating professional partnerships does not only include the child but also looking out for the parents (Carmarthenshire Family Information Service, 2023). As mentioned, being a parent can be challenging and overwhelming especially with no experience, so it is important for a practitioner to support them with challenges and resources (Carmarthenshire Family Information Service, 2023). There are many websites, such as NHS pages, that parents can use to find local resources and services that will help them with the transition to parenthood (Carmarthenshire Family Information Service, 2023). Carmarthenshire Family Information Service (2023) believes that by sharing resources can help build a partnership and let them know you are there to support them and their child. This can also make the parent feel more trusting and know that their child is safe with the practitioners (Thousand Days Organisation, no date).



(Istock, no date)



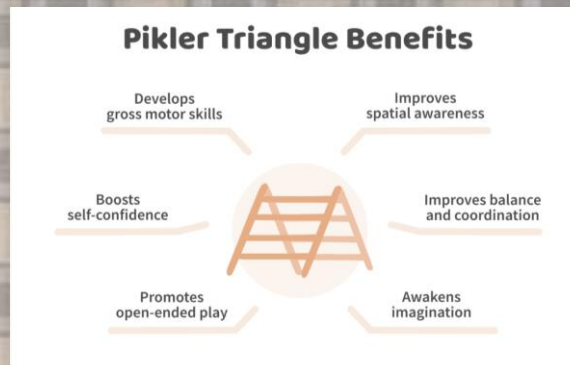
(Early childhood managing services, 2017).



(Brodie, no date)

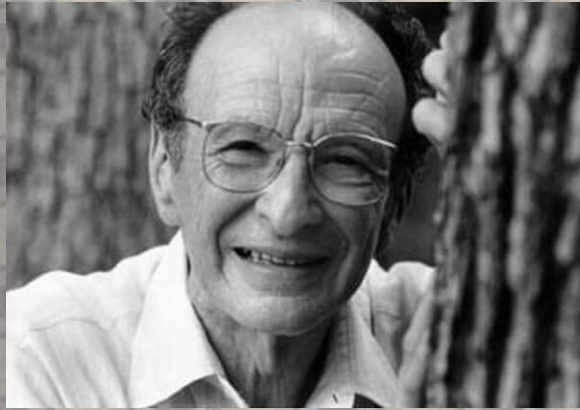
When thinking of theorists Bronfenbrenner and Pikler are prominent here. As Bronfenbrenner deep dives into different factors that influence a child's development, his theory can also highlight the sense of belonging and how practitioners can create those strong partnerships with the children and their families to value and promote people and learning (The Education People, 2021). Compared to Bronfenbrenner, Pikler's theory investigates multiple principles regarding a child's holistic development and not only on their environment (Aspiring Beginnings, no date). Aspiring Beginnings (no date) emphasises the belief that babies develop through free movement and at their own pace. It is important for the practitioner to promote this in practice as it has positive outcomes such as establishing a stronger, secure and more trusting relationship between the caregiver and child (Aspiring Beginnings, no date).

(Natalie, 2022)



(The voice of Early Childhood, no date)

Urie Bronfenbrenner



Bronfenbrenner looks into 5 different systems of a child's development. These include Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem and Chronosystem (The Education People, 2021). As all of these systems are important to remember, the Mesosystem and Chronosystem are more suitable for the first 1000 days. When looking at Mesosystems' it describes how a child's microsystem can build partnerships to benefit the child such as a parent's being active in early years settings and engaging with the practitioner to discover new approaches they can implement at home (The Education People, 2021). A Chronosystem includes how a child's patterns can change over time with the environment and how negative things they witness at home can have a larger effect on their development (Thousand Days Organisation, no date). The Education People (2021) outlines that it's important for caregivers to ask the parents about issues and build that communication level to help understand the child.

(PS Family NYC, no date)

Dr Emmi Pikler

Pikler's theory, as mentioned in Aspiring Beginnings (no date), highlights different principles that effect a child. When relating Pikler to everyday practice, there are many factors a practitioner can take in to benefit the child (Aspiring Beginnings, no date). Aspiring Beginnings (no date) say's that building a cooperative relationship with a baby requires you to work on tasks together, providing children with 100% attention, creating calm surroundings at a slow pace, promoting free movement and being understanding are key parts to a positive partnership. Including the child and making them feel safe and valued is priority in practice, it also helps the parent feel more reassured that their child is safe and included (Education Scotland, 2020).



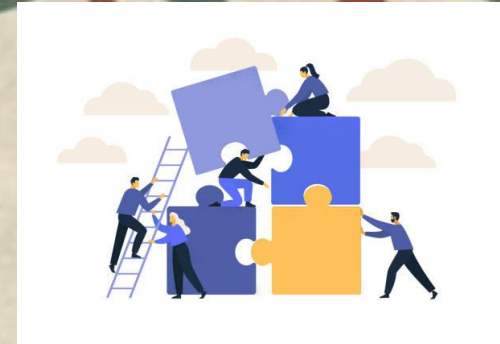


C *H* a *l* L *E* n g E s

"When we fail to nourish strong beginnings, we feel the consequences" (Thousand Days Organisation, no date).

(iStock, no date).

For practitioners, having good partnerships and support around them will help them become great role models (Education Scotland, 2020). Challenges aren't always between the child and their family, if a practitioner is struggling with personal issues, their work can slip, and a child could be missing out on the care they deserve and need (Education Scotland, 2020). Parents without outlets for extra support and knowledge will also affect the child and their development (Thousand Days Organisation, no date).



What are the Challenges in the first 1000 days?

Challenges in the first 1000 days can be a broad spectrum, but practitioners must ensure that all challenges are dealt with to help the child have the best experiences (Thousand Days Organisation, no date). As a parent or a caregiver, your role in the child's life is essential, and everyone has a big part to play especially in the first 1000 days (Public Health Wales, no date). Public Health Wales (no date) has also explained how a good mental well-being and a strong support system can effectively help as a buffer against challenges practitioners can face.



(iStock, no date).

According to Brodie (2018, p.169) children with learning difficulties or behavioural issues also contribute towards everyday challenges, especially in practice. A practitioner needs to be flexible and supportive, as children who face these difficulties require extra attention and care (Brodie, 2018, p.169). A practitioner who is flexible will also see positive results from communicating with the parents or carers to understand the child's needs better and be able to cater to their needs better (Thousand Days Organisation, no date).

Malnutrition, disease, stunted development and inequality are the most common challenges met in the first 1000 days (Thousand Days Organisation, no date). If a mother is not providing the baby with the correct nutrients during pregnancy it can lead to long term effects on the baby's holistic development (UNICEF, 2016). The first 1000 days of a child's life shapes their future, and any challenges not faced or dealt with poorly can have negative outcomes on the child and their development (Karakochuk et al., 2018).

Examples of Challenges



(Ofsted, 2024)

Other factors to consider when facing challenges are living standards, financial struggles, social problems, lack of support, health problems or stress (Public Health Wales, no date). By practitioners being flexible and ensuring they are tailoring to challenges parents face, the children's well-being won't be impacted (Public Health Wales). By being adaptive and forthcoming of the challenges, practitioners will help create a collaborative environment which will positively affect the child's holistic development (Thousand Days Organisation, no date).



Handwriting practice paper featuring vertical lines and bows. The lines are green and blue, and the bows are pink. The text is centered on a white background.

a c t i v I t i e s

Why activities important in the first 1000 days?

The Welsh Government (2024) has noted that all the experiences a child will experience in practice has to be hands on, and meaningful. It is also important for a practitioner to encourage independence, variety, enjoyment and experience for better holistic developments (Welsh Government, 2024).

(Shutterstock, no date).



In the first 1000 days, engagement and play is a crucial part in a child's development (PLASP, 2024).

Engagement is when a child is genuinely involved by the task they are doing, and children tend to have better learning outcomes by being engaged (PLASP, 2024).



(Adobe Stock, no date).

Gaining experiences helps a child's brain architecture to develop (Harvard University, 2011). A child's brain in the first 1000 days is vulnerable to its surroundings and is often referred to as a sponge as they take everything in (Education Scotland, 2020). Connections in the brain are what shapes the architecture, by some being used less and some becoming stronger which eventually contribute to a child's motor skills; visual, emotion, behavioural control, language and memory skills (Harvard University, 2011).

To aid in a child's holistic development, specifically during the first 1000 days, The Curiosity Approach (2024) explains that's engaging activities that target motor skills, hand-eye coordination, spatial awareness, creativity, social skills and cognitive development is important and that practitioners should keep this in mind when selecting activities in practice.

(Hello parent, 2024).



(Little big artists, no date).



A well organised and decorative environment contributes to a child's engagement also. Virtual lab school (2023) explains by providing a dependable and warm environment children tend to have more positive learning outcomes and imaginative skills.

A good example of an activity that will benefit a child is sensory exploration with safe objects.

As Good start learning (2018) has noted, sensory play activities can stimulate their brain and holistic development , gross motor skills, interaction in social settings and problem-solving skills.

Good start learning (2018) has included some resources practitioners can include in practice when doing this activity with children. It is also noted that this activity is perfect for the first 1000 days, as it can be inclusive and flexible to fit the correct age of the child (Good start learning, 2018).



(Dreamtime, no date).



(Growing heARTS, 2015).



(Brain Rich kids, 2022).

- Textures, shapes, colours, sounds.
 - Resources that stimulate sensory development, encourages curiosity, adaptable and engaging without being too challenging.
 - Help to build nerve connections.
 - Helps language skills, by expressing emotions perhaps with interactive flash cards.
 - Helps both fine and gross motor skills
 - Create a calming environment, especially with children with ALN. By having sensory tasks that can help them focus and regulate their emotions, this will have positive outcomes on their communication skills.
- (Cleveland Clinic, 2022).

SENSORY PLAY ACTIVITIES



(Therapy with Dr. Prabhjot, 2022).

Practitioners can also refer to international approaches in practice, and compare and contrast. For example, Reggio Emilia which is an Italian approach introduced by Loris Malaguzzi (Reggio Children, 2022).

This approach is child centred and goes into depth on the importance of the environment and the impact it can have on a child (Reggio Children, 2022). Loris Malaguzzi wanted children to learn from real life experiences and not from a fixed-curriculum (Sprouts, 2020).

A video provided by Helpful professor explains (2024) goes into depth on the theory, and how effective it in practice.

REGGIO EMILIA APPROACH



(Helpful professor explains, 2024).



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