



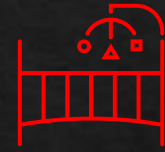
The First 1,000 Days ECEY4005

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What is the first 1,000 days?



Raising Children, no date

According to, 'Raising Children', the first 1000 days of life is from conception up until 2 years.

These 1000 days are broken up into 3 stages of life. These stages include the mother and the child.

The first stage is known as the pregnancy stage. The second being known as the infancy stage and the final stage being known as the toddler stage.

Each stage lasts for a different periods of time throughout the 1000 days. Pregnancy typically lasts up to 270 days, infancy being 180 days and toddler being 550 days.

Referencing, 'Pregnancy, birth and baby', the first 1000 days is a period in life where the body, brain and immune system grow and develop substantially.

The first 1000 days of a child's life have a long-term effect on them for their later life. In this period the brain is developing. It develops at its quickest speed in the first 1000 days.

A child's physical and emotional development is also happening at this time and will go on to shape them in their adult life.

Linking to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, it is vital that during this time the child receives, healthy food, loving relationships, a healthy environment and safety and security, (Pregnancy, birth and baby, 2024)

Early experiences that children witness will shape their development for life.



Why are the first 1,000 days important?

Pregnancy

The first stage of the 1,000 days is known as the pregnancy stage which lasts up to 270 days. This is the time where the mother's health comes into play massively in regard to the baby's health.

The focus for this stage is primarily on the mother. Health, stress and nutrition are going to have an immense impact on the baby.

The mother's diet and nutrition affects the baby directly which is why it is so crucial to have a healthy and balanced diet during pregnancy. Foods that contain protein such as meat and other foods such as fruit and vegetables are ideal choices for nutrition.

Prenatal care is seen to be beneficial with helping to forestall complications relating to weight and developmental delays.

According to, 'Women's health', mothers who do not use prenatal care are three times more likely to face complications during and after pregnancy.

Prenatal care may include:

- Regular medical checks
- Nutritional support
- Emotional and mental health support
- Ultrasounds and monitoring

Infancy

This stage lasts up to 180 days. In the 180 days a lot of change will come into play both for the mother and child.

The brain of the child will grow at a rapid pace.

In the first 3 months they will be able to smile as a response to your smiles, grip objects and track objects with their eyes, (WebMD, 2024).

Essential nutrients at this time are beneficial for physical and mental growth.

Speech and language begins.

As well as their brain which is developing rapidly, their immune system is also still developing at this time.

This is also the time where secure attachments form, whether that is the mother or caregiver. These bonds that will be made during the stage of infancy will go on to shape how they view relationships and attachments in their later life.

Toddler

This stage lasts up to 550 days and will end on the second birthday.

This stage is the building bridge between infancy and early childhood.

Skills and qualities such as relationships and health is further reinforced.

Brain is still growing at a rapid pace.

By 18 months a single words will be formed, can drink from a cup and able to help undress themselves, (Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement and Potential, no date).

By 2 years, a sentence with up to 2-4 words will be formed, can kick a ball and identify different colours, (Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement and Potential, no date).

Nutrition is still extremely important during this period.

Continuing on from the infancy stage, bonds and relationships will continue to be made and will grow stronger.



What is exceptional care?

Exceptional care supports the development of skills and presents a unique window of opportunity to shape a child and their future.

The 5 different components of nurturing care are:

- Good health
- Adequate nutrition
- Responsive caregiving
- Safety and security
- Opportunities for learning

The type of care that is associated with exceptional care is the "delivery of outstandingly high-quality care that is effective, safe, efficient, child-centered, timely and equitable", (Neocare Health, 2024).

2 examples of exceptional care are, enabling environments and inclusive practice. Enabling environments are designed in the best interest of the child. An environment that includes water is an example of this. It gives the child the freedom to learn and play with objects in the water. This would come under opportunities for learning.

Inclusive practice is the acceptance of diversity both in and out of the classroom. This is one of the most important lessons as it teaches the child and shows the child about different cultures. This lesson will 100% be taken with them throughout their life. An example of inclusive practice can be using books, posters and other forms of material to represent diverse identities.



Raising Children, no date



Why is exceptional care important?

There are multiple reasons as to why exceptional care is seen to be important during the first 1,000 days. Some of these being:

- Brain development
- Emotional security
- Language development
- Physical growth
- Holistic development
- Improves a child ability to learn and solve problems
- Helps children manage emotions and form healthy relationships
- Lowers risk of health issues such as stress, anxiety or developmental delays.

Exceptional care can help children to develop to their full potential. Not only this but it can also benefit a child's social and emotional development.

Understanding the concept of exceptional care

Good Health	Opportunities for learning
Responding to daily needs	Effective body language
Regular checkups	Play
Monitoring physical and emotional health (mother and baby)	Enabling environments
Use of health services	Reading books
Responding affectionately	Modelling and imitation
Managing medication	Guide exploration

Exceptional Care - Theorists



Exceptional care can be related to theorists such as, Maslow, Pikler and Bronfenbrenner.

Maslow:

Maslow's theory was the Hierarchy of needs. He believed in order to grow and develop into a physically and mentally healthy adults, there were 5 different components which made up this hierarchy. These being, physiological,, safety and security, love and belonging, self-esteem and self-actualisation.

An example of relating Maslow with exceptional care is the reason of emotional security and the ability to form healthy relationships. They tie in with safety and security and love and belonging.

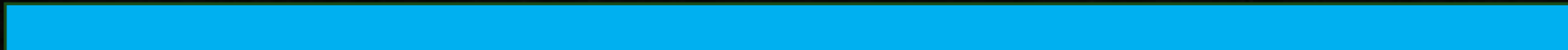
How a child is shown love and relationships during the early years of life will go on to shape how they see relationships in their adult life.

Pikler:

Pikler had a slightly different approach when it came to this topic. Pikler did agree with attentive care, and one way they believed in portraying this was physical touch. As it is known a new born baby cannot feed, dress themselves or look after themselves. This means that physical touch is illustrated immediately after birth, (Sprout, no date).

How these actions are shown towards the child will then go on to shape their futures. Whether that be in their toddler phase, teenage phase or even adult phase. Those first few moments of life and the lessons it teaches, is what is remembered by a child.

Children pick up on everything!



Professional Partnerships

Supporting the parents / carers:

According to 'Department For Education', there is evidence that shows that working with parents and carers for the best of the child's interest is the most important factor in regard to benefitting the child to the best of their ability.

Communicating with the parents/carers is the best and most efficient way for a child to succeed. By learning about their likes/dislikes, background and interests, the practitioner is able to paint a picture of the child. They will also be able to quickly work out what is best for the child.

There are many other ways in how a practitioner can work with the parent/carer. These being:

- Phone calls home
- Daily chats with a key person
- Parent/carer joining in on trips
- Documenting personal histories
- Attending workshops on different areas of learning

Supporting the children

The child's health and well-being is the number one priority in practice. Children should be made to feel seen, heard and respected. Despite their brains still developing during the first 1,000 days, they are still able to pick up on very detail that they are shown/taught.

Supporting children in practice can look different depending on the placement/practitioner. Despite this, the typical components for supporting children are:

- To ensure good health
- To provide meaningful learning experiences
- Supporting adequate nutrition
- Being responsive
- Providing safe and secure environments

Doing the simple actions, such as asking the child how they feel, asking the children what they want to learn, teaching the children about healthy food are all ideal ways in supporting the children and teaching them to their best ability.

The importance of effective partnership working

Working with professional partnerships is designed to create the best possible outcome for the children that are the priority.

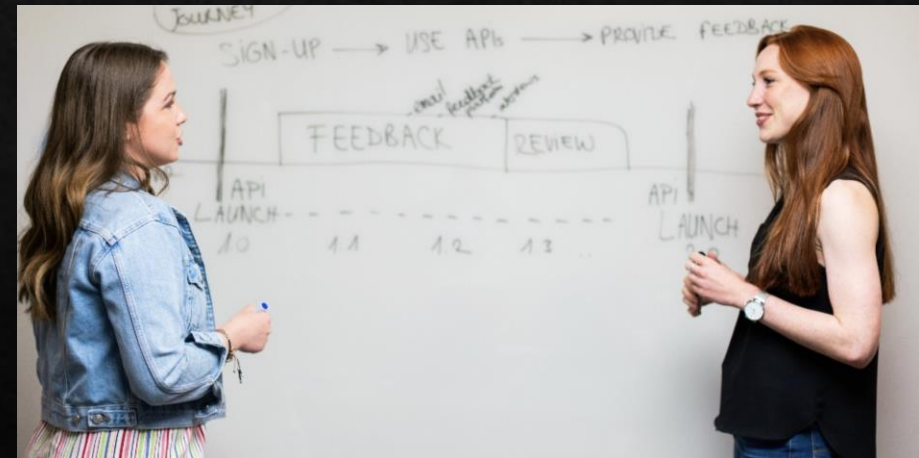
By working in partnership, the practitioner is able to share a knowledge and understanding with the parent/carer. Any information that the practitioner may need, or parent may need, will be openly and freely discussed and the feeling of comfortability will be there between them. They are also able to share this knowledge with the child. Even more importantly they are able to understand their child, what they need and what feelings they are trying to express.

Another beneficial outcome of effective partnership working is the ability of being able to learn from each other. When a child first joins a setting the practitioner has the job of getting to learn about the child. To learn about their hobbies, their likes and dislikes and their homelife. Not only this, but the parents/carer has the job of learning about the setting and the people involved in working there.

Another example of learning from each other is if there is an situation with the child. For example, the child will not eat what the practitioner has made for them as they are very fussy when it comes to food. The practitioner then has to communicate with the parent/carer and learn about what foods they are/are not comfortable eating.

There are many out benefits of working in partnership, these are:

- Be consistent
- Individualise planning
- Engage with and support families
- Learn from each other
- Share workload
- Consider diverse perspectives
- Improve outcome



Learning Journals, no date

Enabling Adult

Being an enabling adult in childcare is important because they support a child's learning and development in a variety of ways. Not only do they think of a child's physical development, but also, their well-being.

They are able to create an enabling environment which is created to make the child feel happy and safe, which is exactly how they should feel in a setting.

By being an enabling adult, it provides the children more opportunities to learn which links back to the exceptional care. A lesson outside in the woods, finding different leaves and sticks. This is an example of an opportunity to learn and an example of an enabling environment.

The other pointers as to what makes an enabling adult are:

- Providing safe and nurturing environments
- Responding to the child's needs
- Supporting brain development through interaction
- Encouraging physical development
- Supporting social and emotional growth
- Prompting healthy habits and nutrition
- Encouraging curiosity and exploration

If we were to link this to a theorist, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs would be the perfect one. In the list about you can see, safety and security, self-esteem, self-actualisation, all being portrayed in order to be enabling adult.

This is a perfect example of how practitioners still use theorists such as Maslow today in a setting.



Raising Children, no date

Challenges

Despite high quality care of a child being one of the most important jobs, there are many challenges that come along with it.

One of the most noticeable challenge is the financial struggles. The average hourly rate for someone working in a childcare setting is, £13.99. Annually this will give them, £26,111. Although that may seem like a lot of money when you look at the number, in today's society where the prices for everything go up what seems like every day, this is nearly impossible to live off of. It is even harder for those who have children of their own.

The issue of lack of funding for the staff then ultimately leads to lack of staff. Even if they may love their job, they would have to sacrifice that in order to earn more money for their own families. The lack of staffing in the setting will then lead to a higher level of stress and burnout for the remaining staff.

Lack of funds can also mean not having the finances to buy everything they can in order to support the children. This could be food, activities, appropriate furniture.

Burnout to a staff member could be detrimental to them. It could severely affect how they give effective care to the children. In 2018, a survey was carried out by, 'Minds Matter' asking childcare staff members what the effects of working in a childcare setting had on their mental health and looking at the impact. They had more than 2,000 responses. Results of the survey showed that, workload, funding and stress had all be factors in affecting their mental health. Results also showed that a quarter of the 2,000 were thinking on leaving working in a childcare setting in order to benefit their mental health, (Early Years Alliance, 2019).



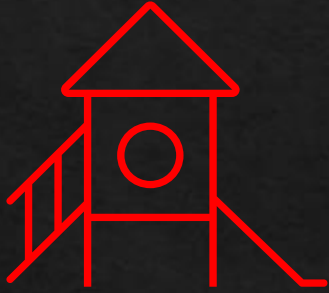
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On the contrary, there are solutions on how challenges can be lessened and improved upon in a childcare setting.

These being:

- Government grants
- Parent donations
- Online courses
- Mentorship programmes
- Monthly skills building
- Fundraising
- Health and wellness support
- Lunch and learn sessions
- Supervision session
- Low-cost learning materials
- Flexible staffing arrangements
- Working together.





Activities

Activities are also known as play. Play for a child is seen as important as it is a natural way to explore and learn at the same time.

Play and activities benefit a child's physical and brain development. The brain develops the quickest and most rapidly in the first 1,000 days so it is crucial that they are learning in the best way for them. Overall, play supports the holistic development of a child.

A child's self-esteem can be improved on during activities. This can relate to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs as one of his sections was self-esteem.

Activities can benefit many skills. For example, social skills. During play and activities, the children are encouraged to either speak and share knowledge, depending on the activity. They are also encouraged to interact with other children. A group activity is a great example of this.

A simple activity such as catch for a toddler can profit the skill of hand-eye coordination.

The activity of treasure baskets are designed for the exploration of different textures by using fabrics, sponges and rattles. These can benefit a young child's cognitive development.

Play and activities can be done anywhere and in the easiest ways. It offers opportunities to learn, communicate, explore and good health.

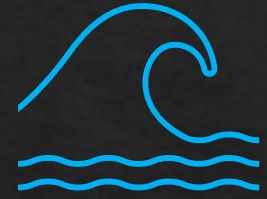


Learning Journals, no date





Sensory Play



Sensory play may include, sand and objects that make sound.

It has been proven to use all senses to create an understanding and improve upon the child's motor skills.

It allows the child to, experiment, explore, express and experience. This links in with exceptional care as sensory play offers opportunities to learn.

Relating to the child's development, this focuses on social and language skills. For example, a type of sensory play can be coloured pasta. The children would have to identify the different colours and different shapes of pasta. This offers conversation and curiosity.

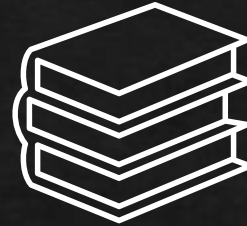
Another example of sensory play can be bottles filled with different objects such as, rice, oil, rocks, water and food colouring

As well as being extremely important for a child and their development it is also a fun activity for the children. It is just as important that the children have fun and enjoy what they are doing. If they are enjoying the activity they will be focused and will learn more.

For babies, a simple activity such as bubbles on the skin is enough to spark their interest. For toddlers, an activity as straightforward as chasing after bubbles and/or letting them pop on different surfaces is a brilliant example of sensory play, (Action for Children, 2022).

Sensory play is also seen as a great solution for calming children. It benefits the well-being of a child.

International Approaches



The Reggio Emilia approach is based in Italy.

The aim for them with this approach is child centered.

The base their learning techniques on play.

This approach recognises the importance of the environment, (Reggio Children, 2022).

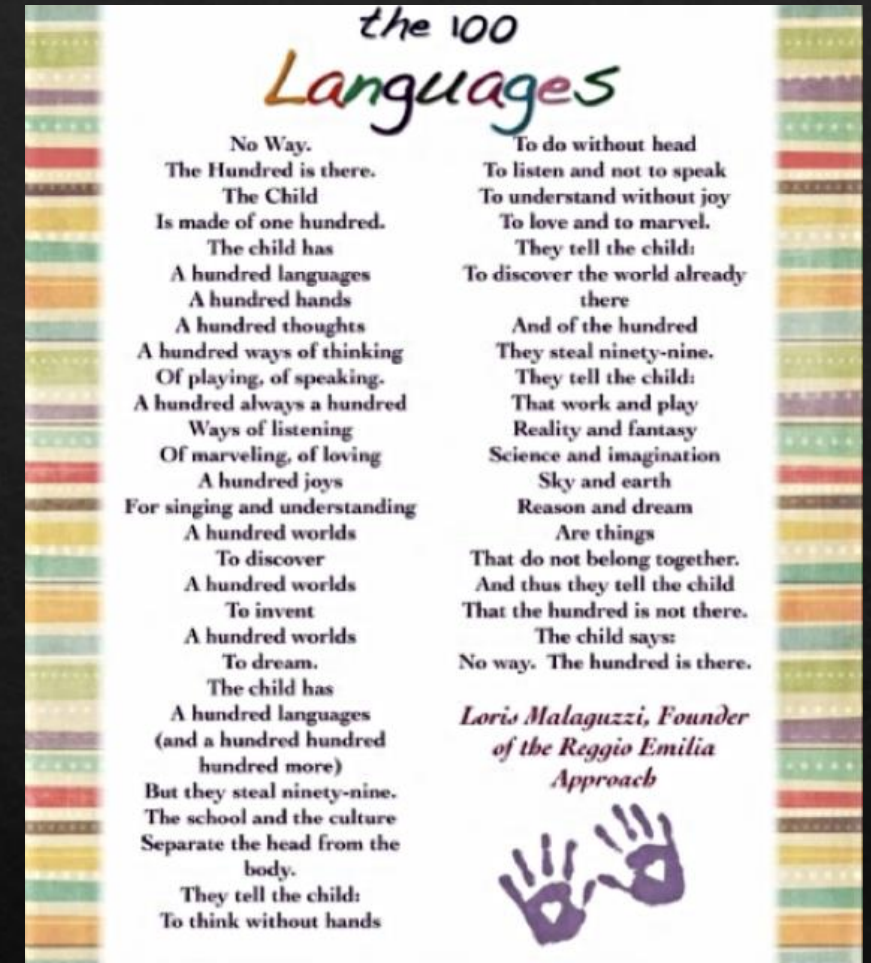
It is based on the child and the potential they hold.

They use the 100 languages, "belonging to all humans, and grows in relations with others".

They use collaborative ways of play and learning by working in small groups together. This is done for tasks such as problem solving.

All work and proof of learning done by the children is recorded by the teachers who show support to all of their students.

In simple terms, the Reggio Emilia approach promotes the image of the child as creative and capable. It has the desire to connect children with others, explore the environment using different materials and enlist in learning, (Lesley University, No date).



(Reggio Emilia, No date)

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