



The First 1000 Days

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Introduction

The first one thousand days from conception to the age of two years are fundamental for the development of a child. For the Child's health, well-being, and success. The first one thousand days of life are paramount for the development of the brain. This is a significant time where the brain, body and immune system grow and develop. It is important the correct nutrition and care is given during the first thousand days of life. This determines survival and impacts the ability to grow and learn. Stress and malnutrition can reduce energy that affects the development of effective brain function. D Yates (2015) Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCscN4zuvd4> (Accessed 29th December 2023).

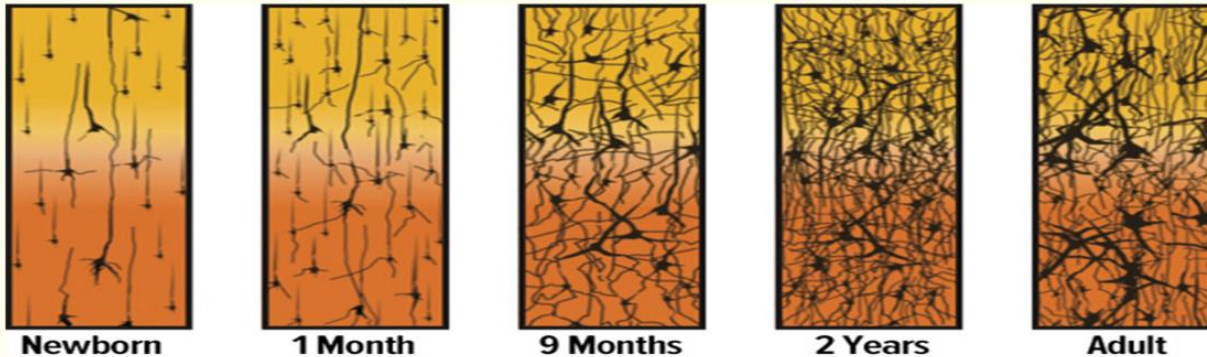


(Source: Bing)

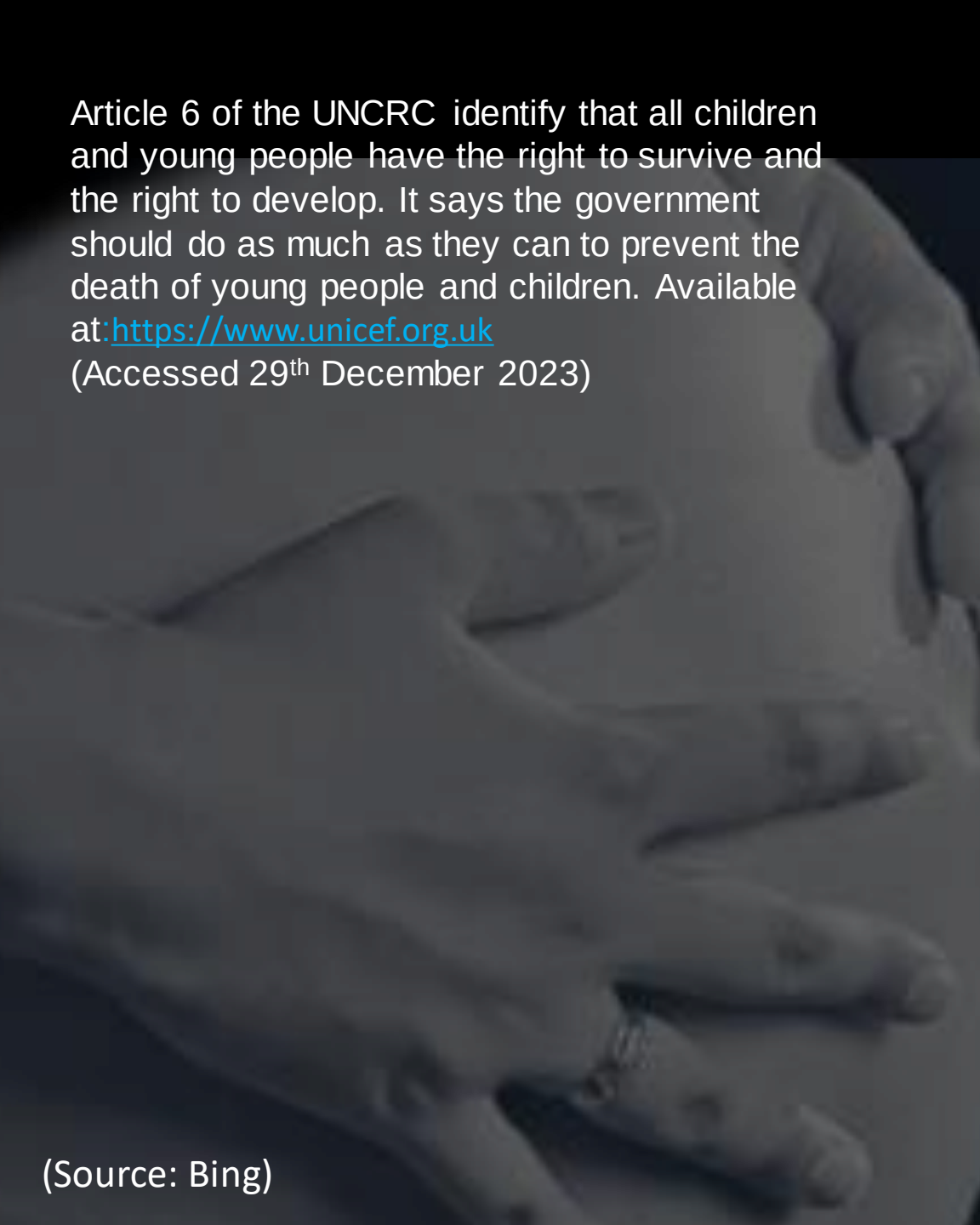
According to NHS Wales, the first 1000 days, starting just before the baby is conceived, during pregnancy and up to the age of two, are the most important. As well as being influenced by individual and genetic factors, economic, social and environmental factors have an impact on life chances for children, parents and families. <https://phw.nhs.wales.uk>

Cysylltiadau

Connections



- Initially, a child's brain starts developing in the womb. An adult's brain has approximately eighty-six billion neurons in the information processing cells of the brain. Most of these are formed in the womb. Connections between neurons become stronger and larger. New connections will form. These will create the chain that reinforces a child's development.
- A child's brain can form up to one thousand new connections every second. However, these connections can only transpire when a child receives nutrition, stimulation, and protection. Breastfeeding for the first six months is the best option possible to give the infant the nutrients they require. Lack of love and care in the early years is a missed opportunity for brain development. Not receiving this can negatively impact a child's life. When parents or caregivers provide love and care to a child they will thrive. (Save the Children, 2016) Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yjgn2ZAepEo> (Accessed: 4th January 2024).



Article 6 of the UNCRC identify that all children and young people have the right to survive and the right to develop. It says the government should do as much as they can to prevent the death of young people and children. Available at: <https://www.unicef.org.uk>
(Accessed 29th December 2023)

Prenatal Nutrition

(Source: Bing).

During the first 1,000 days, the well-being of a mother and child are intricately linked. It is important that women have the correct nutrition, support, and care they need for the healthiest future for themselves and the child.

During pregnancy, diet, mental and physical health, environments, and lifestyle choices have a prominent impact on a child's future health. These elements influence how a child's immune system and organ functioning begin to develop. Prenatal nutrition is important. There is research to show that babies begin to develop food preferences in the womb which can impact lifelong eating habits.

Thousand days. (no date) Building Health. Available at: <https://thousanddays.org/why-1000-days/building-health/#1640053143777-46761c72-cb18cb07-6958>.
(Accessed: 16th January 2024).

(Source: Bing)

The image features three circular cutouts of hands holding hands, arranged in a triangular pattern on the left side of the slide. Each cutout shows a close-up of two hands, one slightly larger than the other, with fingers interlaced. The background of the cutouts is a soft-focus green field. The title 'Attachment' is centered in a green box at the top right.

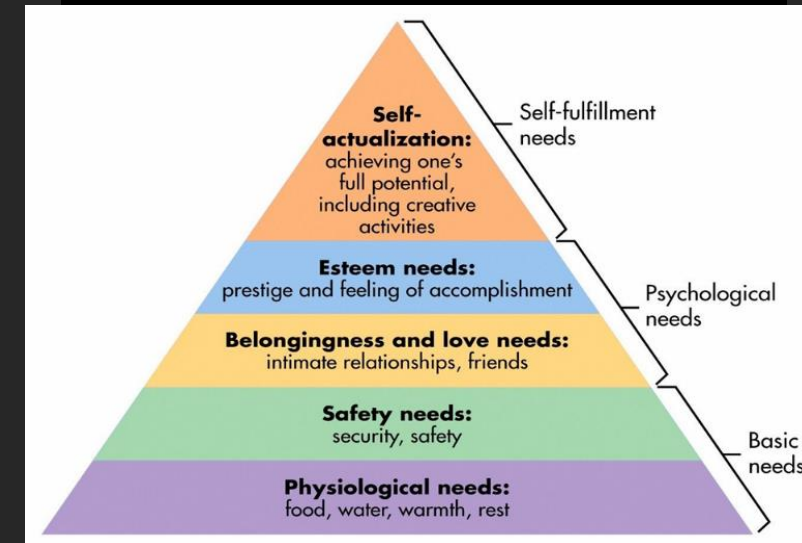
Attachment

Once a child has formed a bond with the caregiver which includes trust, they have begun to form an attachment. (Bowlby,1953) proposed that a physical attachment between parent and child (usually the mother) declares a sense of physical and psychological security. This is known as the attachment theory. On the other hand, lack of response or rejection from the caregiver, can lead to the child feeling insecure, anxious, and rejected feeling no self-worth. When a child has experienced a positive form of attachment, this may help them establish healthy bonds during their childhood into their life as an adult. This is apparent when working as an early year's practitioner, behaviours and time scales will vary. Techniques and strategies need to be adapted to accordingly, during a child's initial settling in period through to routine transitions and beyond. As early year's practitioners, primarily incorporate each child's individual needs, be understanding show empathy, be supportive and inclusive throughout each child's individual journey.

(Source:Bing)

Needs

(Maslow, 1943) supports this evidence with the hierarchy of needs. Maslow argued to progress to the higher level of needs is not possible until the lower level of needs is met. The lower end of the hierarchy pyramid is food, water, warmth, and rest, followed by security and safety, which the caregiver should provide. These needs are especially important during the first 1000 days of life for the child to feel safe, secure, to form a level of trust with the care giver. For example, a crying infant usually has a need and will express this from birth, such as hunger, tiredness, or they need changing. The caregiver responds to this by fulfilling the need of that child, thus retaining a form of trust. This can be reflected in practice by a childcare practitioner through a keyworker system. This process is where the child is allocated a primary carer from the time, they start their journey at the setting.



Serve and Return

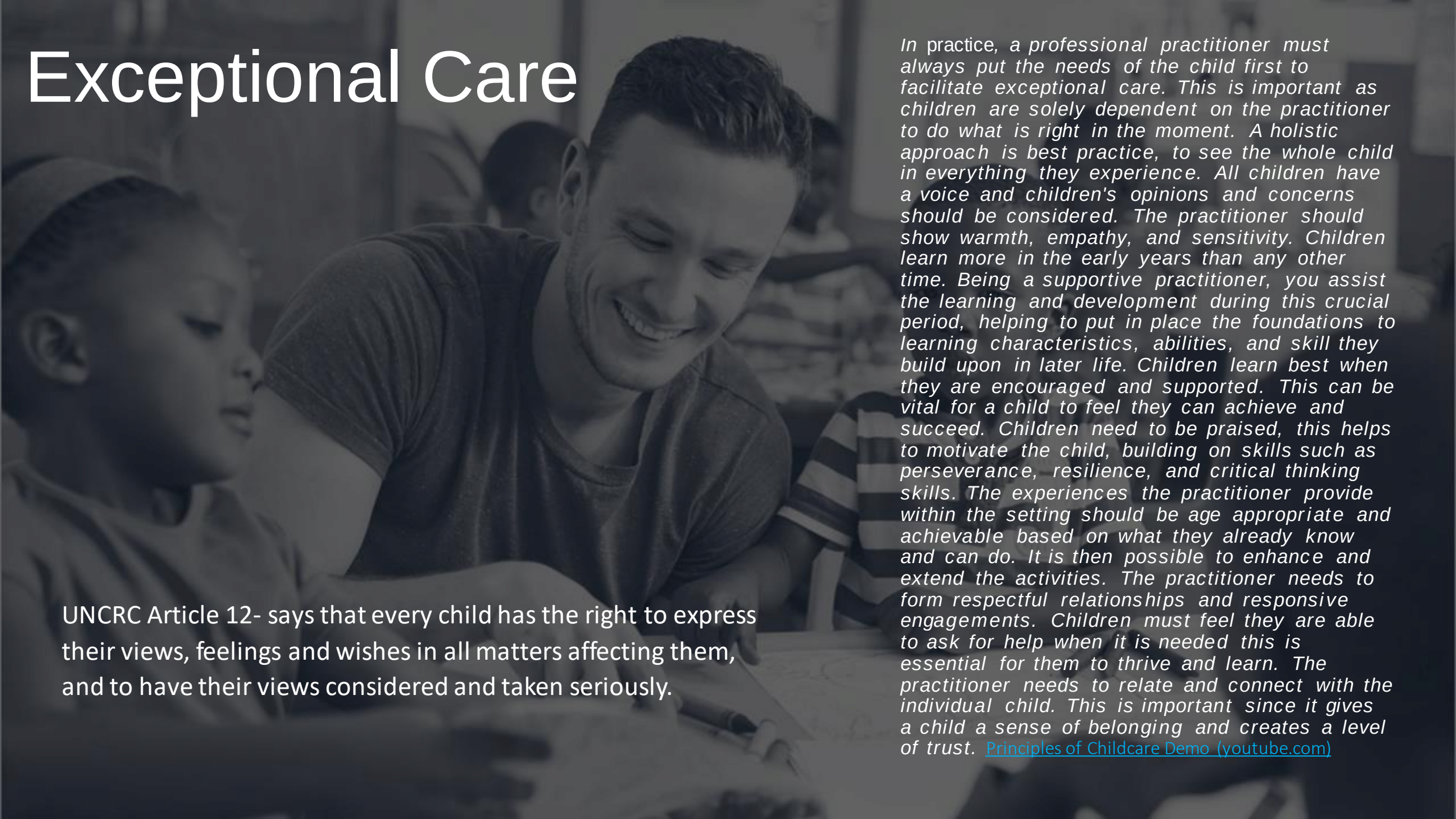


[Serve and Return Interaction Shapes Brain Circuitry \(harvard.edu\)](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/keeping-them-healthy/serve-and-return-interaction-shapes-brain-circuitry/)

Shaping the construction of the developing brain through serve and return is an important process of back and forth, which is essential to the wiring of the brain, during the first 1000 days. Babies look for interaction mainly through babbling, gestures, and facial expressions. Adults respond with similar sounds and actions. Each stage builds a foundation of what came before. Consistent serve and return to action will build foundations in the brain. As a caregiver or early year's practitioner, it is essential to recognise the serve, engage and share the child's focus and experiences. Returning the serve with support and encouragement. Name what the child is doing, feeling, or seeing. This will assist connections of language in the brain. This happens even before the child can talk or understand words. Keep the interactions going back and forth by taking turns. For example, when a child shows interest in a book the caregiver or practitioner should observe wait and listen. Then attentively wait for the child to initiate a serve, this can be through eye contact, by gesture such as pointing, babble, sign or the use of language. The caregiver or practitioner responds with a return, for instance naming something the child is pointing too. Overtime, the serve and return dialogue will grow. NSPCC supports the serve and return process. They agree interaction between a child and an adult is like a game of tennis. When adults 'return' the child's 'serve' with a positive response, a 'rally' is created. Good rallies between children and adults strengthens the developing brain and improves cognitive skills, developing resilience (Shonkoff et al,2004; Shonkoff et al, 2015).

When adults do not respond or interact to a child's serve or they spend a long time on a passive activity –such as watching television this can break up the rally and interrupt development. Children learn more effectively face –face with a caregiver or practitioner more than watching a television. (Shonkoff et al, 2018). [Understanding child brain development | NSPCC Learning](#) (Accessed :15th January 2024)

Exceptional Care



UNCRC Article 12- says that every child has the right to express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously.

In practice, a professional practitioner must always put the needs of the child first to facilitate exceptional care. This is important as children are solely dependent on the practitioner to do what is right in the moment. A holistic approach is best practice, to see the whole child in everything they experience. All children have a voice and children's opinions and concerns should be considered. The practitioner should show warmth, empathy, and sensitivity. Children learn more in the early years than any other time. Being a supportive practitioner, you assist the learning and development during this crucial period, helping to put in place the foundations to learning characteristics, abilities, and skill they build upon in later life. Children learn best when they are encouraged and supported. This can be vital for a child to feel they can achieve and succeed. Children need to be praised, this helps to motivate the child, building on skills such as perseverance, resilience, and critical thinking skills. The experiences the practitioner provide within the setting should be age appropriate and achievable based on what they already know and can do. It is then possible to enhance and extend the activities. The practitioner needs to form respectful relationships and responsive engagements. Children must feel they are able to ask for help when it is needed this is essential for them to thrive and learn. The practitioner needs to relate and connect with the individual child. This is important since it gives a child a sense of belonging and creates a level of trust. [Principles of Childcare Demo \(youtube.com\)](#)

Being Inclusive

Practitioners can accommodate every child's individual cognitive growth stage when planning learning experiences. Planning in the moment facilitates adapting activities and can match the cognitive challenges that children are ready to attempt. The practitioner can also accommodate diverse cognitive growth rates and patterns. To develop and create hands-on sensory rich experiences which enable practitioners to consider each child's cognitive stage enriching this through exploration and play.



*According to (Piaget, 1936) cognitive development occurs from two processes equilibrium and adaptation This involves the child changing to and in different situations. Adaptation involves two sub-processes assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation applies to previous concepts to new concepts. Retaining and understanding ideas or information. Piaget's theory is significant to inclusivity, it gives a concise outline of how children at different ages and stages of development are and that we are all capable learners. **Therefore, the practitioner needs to be mindful when planning activities that they are accessible to all. This is important as each child may be at contrasting stages of development and have varied abilities.***

On the other hand, Vygotsky (1896-1934) also had a focus on a holistic-approach however, collaboration between learners and being able to learn co-operatively is at the core of Vygotsky's approach to children's learning and successful development.

This in practice meaning, working together, being a part of something, team building, being accepted and valued which is an enormous part of inclusive practice today.



(Source: Bing)

Working in Partnership

- The early years practitioner's role in supporting children and families in the first thousand days is about working together, to communicate openly with one another which can be reassuring especially for first time parents. Planning collaboratively, involving parents in this to promote continuity from setting to the home focusing on the child's learning and development.
- This process ensures that the child is offered the best possible chance to meet their full potential. Regular communication with parents is a prime opportunity to share information mutually, ensuring language is not a barrier. Approach things personably without making assumptions, whilst considering cultural diversity and inclusivity. Providing advice and reassurance, if necessary, while promoting families in difficulties or needing through the correct methods sharing information and working with outside agencies and other professionals.
- <https://www.earlyyearsmatters.co.uk/eyfs/positive-r>
According to early years matters the benefits of working in partnership are enormous, allowing all families to share information about their children's development or supporting those children with specific needs to receive coordinated support. This is particularly important within the first 1000 days for the development of the brain, body, and immune system as they grow and develop significantly during this time.
- The importance of effective partnership working is vital as it supports the child's learning and development. Agencies involved in partnership working will have specific training and are experienced in different specialised areas. We each, should recognise our preferred way of working and our thoughts and processes at work. It is only then; we can begin to understand how we approach issues and barriers. Realising the potential benefits provided by other professionals such as opinions, strategies, comprehension, and experiences can enrich our knowledge which is beneficial to the children and families attending the setting, it is also important for the practitioner's continual personal development plan during their career.

According to (Hayes et al.,2022). Bronfenbrenner (1979) also identifies three critical concepts that contributed to strong partnerships. 'Mutuality, reciprocity and shared decision making.'



(Source: Bing)



Multi-Agency Working

It is crucial to work with multi-agency professionals to provide the correct pathways for all children and families within the early years. Particularly in the first 1000 days of life to support the child's well-being and development and to provide support and guidance to first time parents, as this can be a scary and unpredictable time.



(Source: Stock Images)

Early years practitioners will gain valued knowledge working with other professionals from different areas. This will enable practitioners to give the child and family attending the setting the best possible outcome.

Needs of the child comes first and practitioners can consider who is best able to deliver the service they require. (Gasper, 2009) *Multi Agency Working in the Early Years Challenging and Opportunities.*

- **Working with health visitors-** It is beneficial to communicate with health visitors concerning development such as SOGS (stage of growth scales).
- **To acknowledge family backgrounds and current situations.**
- **What services are involved?** such as social services, parents plus and special need health visitors and occupational health.
- **Working with Dietetics-**to discuss food and nutrition, healthy balanced diet advice, weaning and programmes and access to cooking courses and child-led weaning. Advice if parents have chosen to bring up the child as vegan/vegetarian or special dietary requirements due to intolerances and allergies. Options for alternative produce to maintain a healthy balanced diet.
- **Speech and Language-** for children who has speech difficulties. To collaborate to create strategies to follow at home and at setting to work in partnership with parents.
- **Inclusion and early years forum-** to discuss one-page profiles, that give an insight into the child's needs and developmental progress.
- **Primary School nursery team-** Liase with teachers at the chosen school of the child, for a smooth and communicative transition.

Challenges

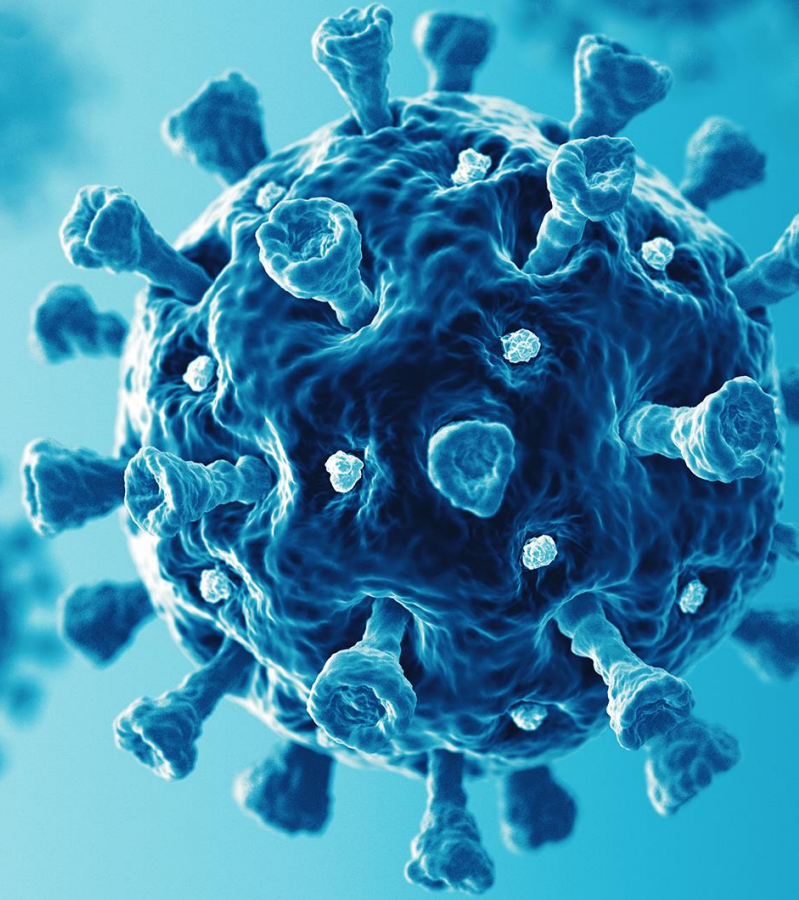
Within the role of an early year's practitioner, people can be faced with challenges that make the position difficult such as:

Financial difficulties- which include budget cuts, and the cost-of-living crisis.

Retention and recruitment, difficulties in maintaining an established quality team.

During the Covid-19 Pandemic this significantly impacted the early years sector in several ways.

Numbers reduced, children's attendance declined and parents communicating with practitioners decreased. Parents were very reluctant to use early years settings. Temporary closures affected children and families, having a profound effect on social and emotional development. Prior to the pandemic there were issues with recruitment and retaining staff, Covid-19 impacted this more. It affected maintaining ratios therefore, compromising the quality of early years provisions long term. Policy and procedures were changed or amended in line with government guidelines and regulations for things such as social distancing, reduced sessions, group bubbles, track, and trace. Cleaning schedules increased, personal protection equipment was introduced for all purpose and face mask were worn consistently throughout. According to <https://ChildreninWales.org.uk> Covid-19 had a negative impact on children's rights had been neglected. School is not just about education, for many children it is their safe place to access security, nurture, and food. It was a difficult period for all, but with strategic planning and communication, government advice and legislation implemented. The working in partnership with parents and other agencies made a difference.



Nurturing Respectful Relationships

It is important to respond to an infant's needs when they emerge during the first 1000 days, to facilitate space for the child to move and explore freely. To provide necessary support in a respectful environment where they can learn and grow. Especially during times of bodily care such as nappy changing, where the caregiver can give one-to-one interaction with the child throughout this opportunity. The child can be encouraged to communicate through speech, babble, physical movements, or facial expression. Eye contact will be made, the caregiver can explain what will happen next, allowing the child to process what is happening and this will enable them to feel comfortable and secure. Feeding, bathing, and dressing reinforces secure attachments also, these physical and mental attachments are formed between caregiver and child. (Pikler, 1946) developed a concept called the Pikler theory, that saw babies as active participants not passive recipients. She believed the caregiver needs to slow down, follow the infants' lead as babies will give cues and tune in respectfully. Interact mutually, whilst being patient giving the child ample time to respond.



(Source: Bing)

(Source: Bing)



(Source: Stock Images)



Activities



Loose Parts

This process of play will support and enhance a child's natural curiosity to explore the world around them.

- According to Daly (2014) during their study of loose parts on the playground, Jim Dempsey and Eric Strickland assert that loose parts encourage children to manipulate their environment (1993). According to Dempsey and Strickland, loose parts can be used any way that children choose. Jean Piaget's developmental theory emphasized the need for children to actively manipulate their environments, to experiment, and to interact with materials in order to learn Piaget (1952). While Piaget did not address loose parts, he believed that children create their own understandings only when they are actively engaged in working with people and objects
- Daly, Lisa, and Miriam Beloglovsky. *Loose Parts: Inspiring Play in Young Children*, Redleaf Press, 2014. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/trinity/detail.action?docID=1725438>. Created from trinity on 2024-01-21 16:07:53.
- Loose parts help support development through investigation, constructing ideas, reasoning about physical properties. Children gain knowledge of how things work, involving gravity, weight, force, and distance using a variety of materials. Items explored can be a multi-sensory experience that can be shape, size, and colours. Natural or synthetic materials encourage a symbolic way of play than can be explored indoors or outside. The benefits of this are that the learning experiences are endless. Resources are low in cost or recyclable materials that can be sourced freely and easily.
- Such items keep children in the present testing multiple ideas and possibilities for future use. Children can plan and communicate their ideas to other children and adults. (Bretherton 1998; Singer, Golinkoff, and Hirsh-Pasek 2006).

Messy Play

Sensory rich environments provide powerful motivation for movement. (Froebel 1837) believed play transforms first-hand experiences and physical movement into rich symbolic experiences.

Messy Play embraces all those elements, resulting in contrasting outcomes and individual experiences. (Montessori 1912) also supported the concept of messy play that it offered an invaluable sensory experience, which enabled the child in the preferred method of exploration.

The child can explore freely with the benefits of using fine and gross motor skills, free to move independently and explore at their own pace. Touch Using hands, feet, and other body parts to explore textures and temperatures. They can see the colours and patterns emerging. The child can smell and taste with no risk or harm. They can listen to the sounds they create when manipulating materials. Whilst taking in rich language, sounds, and engagement from others around them in a child centred environment.



(Source: Bing)

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