



The First 1000 Days
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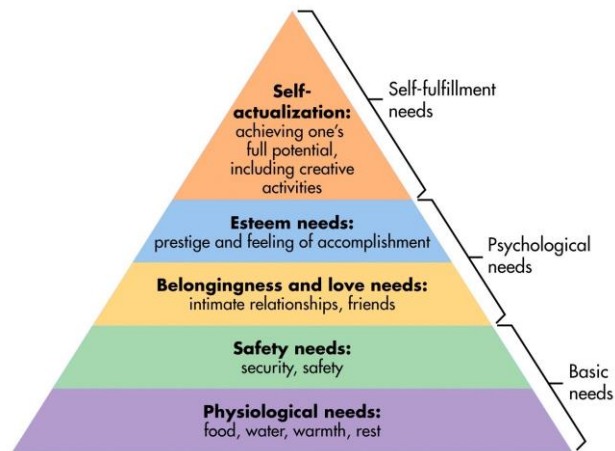
The 1st 1000 days of a child's life refers to the moment of conception until the age of 2. This is an extremely important time where many significant developments are taking place.

There are many important factors that can occur and affect a child or baby in the womb within this time including nutrition, relationships and the environment.

The pregnancy and birth website (2022) suggests that there are several things that a baby will need within its first 1000 days

- [healthy food](#)

- loving relationships
- safety and security
- time to [play](#)
- a healthy environment — including in the womb



1 - Maslow established his theory on the hierarchy of needs and determined that by ensuring these needs are met from the earliest possible stages of a child's life the better opportunity it provides the child of reaching their full potential.

For us to ensure that a child receives the best start within their first 1000 days positive and nurturing experiences are essential for the best possible chances of success for the child.

The Napier Family Centre of New Zealand supports these early experiences as being key to brain development and learning as the child grows supporting the development of the child in all areas from cognitive to socio emotional development.

A key part to the development of a child's brain function is the importance of positive, loving and trusting relationships. Trusting relationships provide the baby or child with the opportunity to explore familiar and new enjoyable experiences safe in the knowledge that they will be supported if needed.

Trusting relationships need not only to be with parents and immediate contacts in a child's life but also with the professionals who may be taking on a care role towards the child. The importance of these relationships between a child and professional will be further enhanced by a positive relationship with the parents. Open communication with parents is an important factor to supporting positive relationships.

John Bowlby found that nurseries where children felt heard and understood were more likely to have strong relationships with home as well as the child. (Pound 2011). Raising Australia.net (2021) agrees with this stating that when parents and educators both engage about the child it shows them that they are valued and important.

This is important to be aware of as children will not always be with parents, professionals will play a significant role for children in the development of their early brain function.

These different partnerships that are in a child's world all have relevance and importance in their development. Bronfenbrenner made links to the partnerships within a child's life and how each partnership may effect the other in a positive or negative manner. Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological

model shifted his focus to look more at developmental processes that are experienced as oppose to his ecological systems theory that looked at environment factors. Simply Psychology (2020)

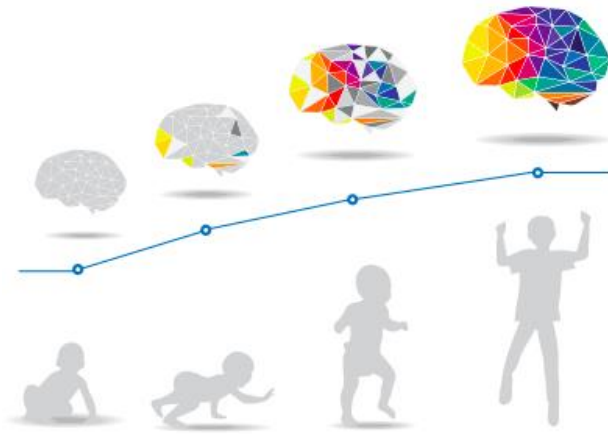
It is suggested that babies and children who have had the opportunity to foster positive and nurturing early relationships perform better throughout life than children who have not had these early experiences. A program called Nurture UK has been introduced to provide these children who have missed out with opportunities to develop crucial skills that they may have missed out on when younger through not being given the chance to build trusting relationships.

Nurture UK is based off 6 principals that it is thought children need to navigate life as they grow. These are

- safety
- language
- wellbeing
- behaviour
- learning
- transitions

Nurture UK (no date).





2 - Babies in recent years we have discovered know and are capable of things we were previously unaware of. Nutbrown (2006) suggests that babies are capable from birth. Simulating experiences and knowing this are now even more important from earlier ages. Maria Montessori believed that education takes place from birth. Pound (2011). During these early days babies are making brain connections that are vital to the success of them building skills that are needed to learn and grow throughout their life. When you read, talk and play with a purpose with children beginning at birth, you help shape their networks of neurons. Snow (N/D).



The Child's Needs

Nutrition

Healthy eating and nutrition is an important factor in the early stage of development for a child. This is not just important when a baby is born, healthy eating and nutrition is of vital importance for the pregnant mother and baby she is carrying.

The NHS (2020) suggests a varied diet that consists of fruit, vegetables, carbohydrates and protein rich foods as well as other healthy alternatives and suggestions to help support the health of the mother and baby.

As well as foods that the unborn baby will take nutritional value from mothers are also encouraged to take a range of supplements that will encourage healthy growth and development of her baby whilst pregnant.

Folic acid, Vitamin D, iron and omega 3 fatty acids are all noted as being of importance for the development of unborn babies. Vitamin D supports babies bone growth, iron ensures blood supply and

ensures oxygen and supplement supply. Omega 3 fatty acids such as salmon or mackerel should not be eaten in high quantities but help develop the babies eyes and brain. British nutrition Foundation (2015)

What an expectant mother puts into her body besides food is also of great importance to the overall health and development of her baby.

Smoking can have serious, damaging and long lasting effects on a baby and child as they grow and develop. Smoking can cause serious damages to the developing child. Tissue, lung and brain are all areas of the developing babies bodies that have been affected by smoking. CDC (2020)

Food for a baby and growing child is vital to the their health and overall development.

When we think of children and the importance of nutrition we may often be inclined to think of under nourished and hungry children who are not receiving enough food to manage a full day of learning, exploring, experiencing or living to their full potential. Save the Children (N/D) believes these are some factors that can contribute to a child being under nourished such as

- poor quality of diet
- mother's health and nutrition
- socioeconomic status
- war

Whilst for some malnutrition is still a barrier to fully developing and receiving the best possible start in life, in our new and modern world UNICEF (2013) notes that we are now faced with overnutrition and the effects of obesity and unbalanced diets. Through this lack of education and modern indulgences a child's best possible start is being impeded.

Within the first 1000 days/2 years of a child's life optimal nutrition is of vital importance as it reduces the risk of chronic disease and fosters better development overall according to WHO (2021).

In lower income countries the health and human rights journal (2020) has called the first 1000 days a critical window of opportunity. This statement alone shows how important a value has been placed on this short time frame within a child's life.

Whilst babies, many parents choose to breastfeed their child. Breastfeeding has been shown to support babies in areas such as stronger critical thinking and reasoning skills, better memory, early language ability and enhanced motor skills. WebMD (2021).

This as well as providing nutritional value and food for the baby also helps to continue developing those close bonds and relationships that are needed for the child to thrive within the first 1000 days and beyond. Touch is an essential part of humans feeling loved and cared for. This is also an extension of the skin on skin close contact that many parents opt to take part in straight after the birth of their child.

Article 24 from the UNCRC (N/D) states that all children have the right to health which includes the right to nutritious food. As providers we must ensure that this right is met so that all children are able to reach their full potential and explore the world around them becoming healthy and confident with who they are.

Relationships and Responsive Adults

When babies are born, developing a loving and trusting relationship with their parents is of great significance. As we know the brain is developing hugely during the first 2 years of life, this includes the development of social, emotional and cognitive skills. This growth and development can depend on factors such as loving bonds and attachments usually from a care giver such as a parent. Winston and Chicot (2016). It has been suggested that the lack of these early relationships can have a impact on a child throughout life.

As professionals we may see barriers to these relationships growing and being nurtured. Mother's may struggle with periods of mental health during their pregnancy or after the birth of their child. Mental health issues can affect the bonding and closeness that needs to occur to provide the child with it's first experiences of healthy, loving and trusting relationships. Post natal depression is a common issue affecting 1 in 10 women in the UK. It is also important to note that fathers and partners can suffer also. NHS (2022).

The NHS in Wales (2012) found that mothers who suffered with mental health issues such as depression were less likely to engage with their baby when it showed interest in engaging. This then affected the bonding with the mother which in turn affected brain development, the failure to develop a close bond can lead to lower behavioral and development outcomes.



3 - Bonding between babies and parents should be fun and engaging with attention being on the baby to engage and excite them in what is happening around them. It is important for parents to be present with their baby and in the moment enjoying the happiness they are sharing with their child.

It is possible for parents to be unsure or unaware of the need for this type of engagement with young babies. As practitioners we can provide them with ideas and activities to begin engaging with their baby, providing support should they want or need it.

Baby massage, skin to skin contact, singing, talking and reading are all easy methods to use to engage and begin fostering positive relationships with babies. These activities show the baby that you are there and with them, engaging and providing for their needs. Through these games and activities a trust is building between the baby and parents, as stated by Campbell (2017) when babies trust the main care giver it provides the foundation to successfully move to the next stage of development.

When we engage consistently in activities and respond to those as previously mentioned we are initiating serve and return actions. These consistent interactions provide the child with a reliable response that is building their brain to expect a appropriate positive experience. When we as adults are inconsistent it can affect how a child relate to others due to the inconsistencies they have encountered. through the positive experiences during serve and return neural connections are being strengthened. Harvard (2020)

Strong and positive relationships between parents and professionals who will be caring for babies and children is of great importance to the transitional phase and development of the baby being looked after. Whilst babies may not necessarily understand conversations that they hear around them they are able decipher from these conversations whether they are positive or negative. Hearing adults converse and interact in a socially appropriate manner models the type of behaviour that is needed to navigate the world as they get older and progress through life.

For practitioners to provide the highest level of care to babies it is vital that there is an open conversation about the child and their specific needs. The more information provided to the practitioner the more of a positive developmental period of time it can be for the baby.

Dr Jools Page introduced us to the term professional love referring to the relationships that are formed within a setting. These relationships are entirely different from parental love as they different roles provided by different people. Davies (2021). Professional love is not there to replace or take over from the parent it is a continuation and supporting role to the parent. When at settings babies will look for the same or similar attentions they would do at home. Touching, crying and exploring to name a few. As the professional we can support these emotional needs in a way that the child is comfortable with and what they are looking for from the interaction however they need that to be. Barriers to professional love may be professionals or parents feeling they are over stepping the mark, men are still rare in this profession as it does tend to be female dominated profession. From a report by Dr Jools Page (no date) it was found that

- 10% of practitioners surveyed reported concerns over parents feeling threatened, jealous or uncomfortable about early years staff developing a relationship with their children.

Whilst building relationships with babies and young children it is important to practice respectful care. This can present itself in different ways throughout their time with you during the day. Top days nursery (2020) suggests there are 3 aspects to practicing respectful care.

The first being **Primary Care**. This is where a child might develop a relationship with a primary care such as a key worker and a smaller group of children under that professionals care. This process may involve talking a child through a routine or acting it out to show the child what will be happening.

The second step is **Freedom of Movement**. This step encourages children to be free in the environment around them exploring their bodies and what they can do. Babies are able to exploring reaching and grabbing, tummy time or lifting their heads.

The third step is **Respect for Confidence and Competence**. This step allows the baby to get involved with the processes of activities that will be taking place. Talking to children during the processes giving them an understanding of why they need to happen. Asking if its time to change a nappy and talking them through the process.

Environment and Experiences

Beginning from birth reading, playing, singing and engaging can help shape and develop a babies brain.

Environments that provide babies with the chance to explore new sensory experiences are crucial for the development of their brains within those first early years. Innovation District 2017 believes that boosting brain power can potentially come from

- exposing children to new and different objects as well as interaction with a number of playmates
- exposure to music to improve cognition, hearing and motor skills

Sensorimotor stage is described by Piaget as the stage where babies and toddlers knowledge and understanding are drawn from physical action and their senses. Pound (2011).

Piaget believed that it is now that a baby is learning through experiences. These experiences are from as young as when babies are newborn. Exploring new sensations through sucking and movement and are all encompassed in Piaget's theory. Once explored these actions become learnt and contribute to them being able to plan and respond. Raypole (2019)

Curiosity lies at the heart of children's learning – it is the spirit of enquiry. Moorhouse (no date). For children to continue being curious we need to provide them with the opportunities to engage this curiosity through stimulating environments and experiences that challenge and encourage enquiry through exploring the world around them.

Settings in Wales have been provided with a curriculum for funded non maintained nursery settings. The document believes in the idea of curiosity in the development of the child and baby during the early stages of life. Believing that curiosity is a strong motivator to explore within the inside and outdoor environments. HWB (2022).

Whilst providing the opportunities to be curious and explore there should also be appropriate levels of risk attached. Risky play looks different depending on the age of the child, risky play for a baby might be beginning to stand and take steps as it has at first an uncertain outcome for them. To be encouraged to try these risky experiences from a young age will through life give the child the confidence as they grow to push their limits and explore their potential in new and different situations.

The Curiosity Approach (no date) encourages us to provide not just beautiful play spaces but materials and resources that are loose parts the children can use together to explore. Giving them the time to play and not sticking to the confines of being on time within a curriculum, letting them lead their learning. The curiosity approach again also looks back to Piaget's sensorimotor phase of development meaning babies interact through there senses and that everything is new and exciting to them.



4 - The Curiosity Approach draws influences from several established theories and programs that are used throughout the world. Pikler believed that babies for example should not be taught to sit up until they are able to do so for themselves allowing them to freely explore their body, movements and surroundings uninterrupted. Pickler Association UK (no date).

Maria Montessori believed a classroom should support children of mixed ages. Pound (2011). Pikler designed the Pikler triangle which many believe to be in line with Montessori beliefs. This is child sized and designed to support babies at different stages of development when they are ready to progress in their own time. The Montessori family (2021).

Babies need a language rich environment which will encourage the development of language skills so that they are able to begin effectively communicating their needs and wants to familiar and unfamiliar people. It can also promote learning opportunities providing children are engaged with positive physical and emotional environments and responsive and receptive adults who interact and build on relationships to continually support the learning of the child. Teach Early Years Magazine (no date).

Early effective ways for practitioners to engage babies in language development is by using the serve and return approach. When a baby reaches out for interaction through babbling, eye contact or cooing a responsive adult will engage in mimicking, smiles and games to engage and stimulate the baby. As stated by the Alberta family wellness centre (no date) this is building early brain development and developing a wide range of skills.

The outdoor classroom is a huge resource that in recent years due to the Covid 19 pandemic saw it become used more by practitioners and educators in the return to settings in order to keep children and the spread of the virus low. The Outdoor classroom can have massive benefits to the professionals and children, benefits such as improved mental health and academic performance, better focus, behaviour and social interactions. Bauld (2021).

Outdoor experiences provide the opportunity for a more inclusive learning experience for all children, being able to access and explore through multi sensory activities. They have the opportunity to develop their own learning from the points of interest that they have whilst engaging with their peers. Harvey (2022) also suggests that from research outdoor learning boosts confidence, social skills, communication, motivation, physical skills, knowledge and understanding. It has also been found to boost children's self-esteem, self-confidence, ability to work cooperatively and positive attitude to learning. It isn't just a nice to have: it's a crucial and transformative part of childhood.

Conclusion

To fully support the child within the first 1000 days it is important to encompass all of these aspects of the child's development and growth that we have discussed throughout this document. We as practitioners can provide a holistic approach, meaning we are taking into account all aspects of developmental growth. When we talk about all aspects we mean social, emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing. Moving minds (2020) supports this thought by telling us balance of physical wellness, psychological wholeness, social support systems and emotional stability.

For the holistic approach to work practitioners should be invested in the child within their care and committed to supporting them to reach their full potential taking into account their likes and dislikes, previous experiences, home life and support systems. Children's growth and development is connected and each area links to the other by looking at all of these aspects and not solely focusing on one we can enhance the child's chances of success.

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