



The First 1000 Days

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Word Count: 3311



Welcome, this document aims to explore the first 1000 days and how practitioners, parents and society may care for, develop and support children through this period. It highlights the challenges involved in providing quality care within a setting. There are examples of theories and research into

child development and how to link these to practice. It provides examples of engaging environments, enabling adults and effective experiences and briefly looks at the Te Whariki approach to early years care.

“Science tells us that a child’s experiences from conception through their first five years will go on to shape their next 50. It tells us that the kind of children we raise today, will reflect the kind of world we will live in tomorrow.”

Jason Knauf, Ipsos MORI report 2020, p4.

The first 1000 days starts at conception through to a child’s second birthday. During pregnancy the health and wellbeing of the mum should be considered as poor nutrition and stress may have an adverse effect on a baby’s future. Once born, a baby requires good nutrition, loving, stable relationships and the opportunity to play and discover their surroundings safely (Australian Government 2022).



The importance of the first 1000 days

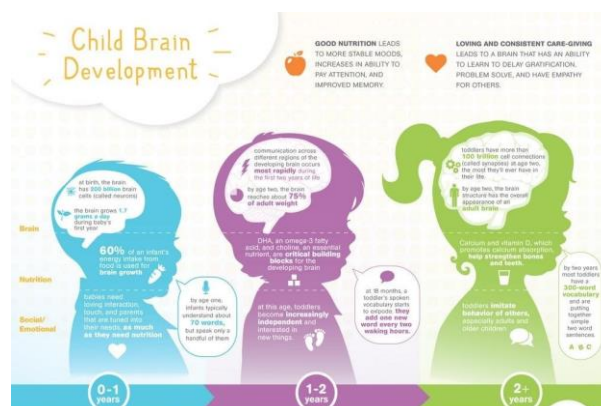
Brodie (2018) argues that the first 1000 days is a period of explosive development, in learning, growth and progression. This is the period when babies develop at their most rapid in all aspects and as parents, practitioners and society, supporting that development could be vital to ensuring the best start for a child. Each child is unique and will develop at different rates, dependent on several factors, even children from within the same family will develop in their own unique way.

Home Start (no date) argue that the first 1001 days is the period in which a baby’s brain is shaped by their environment and experiences. Relationships that are sensitive and responsive to their needs can make all the difference for their future. A child that is supported by having those effective relationship, where parents and surrounding communities nurture their early years will be better placed to take advantage of opportunities and challenges in the future. They also argue that

children that lack supportive relationships may not develop to their full potential and struggle, emotionally, socially and economically.

Cusick and Georgieff (2013) argue that the first 1000 days represent the brain's window of opportunity to develop to its full potential and highlights the importance of good nutrition to ensure optimal development of the brain. They suggest that the brain lays down the foundations needed for a person's entire lifetime and that the first 1000 days represents a vitally important period to establish optimum health, nutrition and neurodevelopment for life.

By placing great emphasis on how we support the early stages of development of our children in the first 1000 days of life, we are giving every child the best chance of developing to their greatest potential. Brain development is at its most rapid during this period and as parents, practitioners and society, we should strive to ensure that every opportunity is utilised to aid this (Save the Children 2016).



Pregnancy

Crystal *et al.* 2018 suggest that studies show 23% of children under the age of 5 are stunted which can be a result of poor or malnutrition, caused by poor nutrition of the mother during pregnancy and or the poor nutrition of the child once born.

The NHS recommends women eat a varied, healthy diet during pregnancy, keep to their antenatal appointments to allow the health of mum and baby to be monitored throughout the pregnancy. Mental health is also highlighted and the advice to talk to others and not compare your pregnancy to that of others (NHS 2020).

[Keeping well in pregnancy - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/keeping-well-in-pregnancy)



Current challenges of caring for an infant

Practitioners should bring a holistic approach to the care of the infants and children within a setting, this can be very a challenging proposition as attitudes to the early years within the UK has changed and developed as more infants are placed in childcare to allow for changes within the home environment.

The Ipsos MORI report (2020) looked at the public's attitudes to the early years, focusing on the importance of the early years, the role of the parent and the role society plays.

The report highlighted differences in perceptions of parents on the nurture versus nature argument. Some parents from disadvantaged backgrounds did not recognise the importance developmentally during the early years. It also showed that many parents across the study believed that every age range was of equal importance for a child's development and did not recognise the rapid rate of development during the early years.

The report states that many parents feel judged for their decision to work, recognising that this could influence their own mental health which could have adverse effects on their children. Parents also felt uncomfortable asking for help, with childcare, nutrition or health and felt they only had a small network of support they could turn to in times of stress.

The report also shows that most parents believed that the responsibility for bringing up children aged 0-5 years was that of the parents, not as a joint role between society and parents, however, when asked to break it down, wider family, schools and nurseries were at the top of the list for who parents felt played the biggest role in providing children the best chance of health and happiness.

The effects of COVID19 and how the prolonged break from school, work and society in general has highlighted areas where parents felt isolated and ill-informed to cope. A report by the parent infant foundation spoke to organisations and families to try and better understand the challenges parents had faced during lockdown and how to come out it the other side with more effective and improved services for families (Parent infant foundation 2020).

There are many challenges that parents, carers and early years providers face, the current cost of living crisis, emerging post-covid challenges, the need for nurture and nature and how best to care for a child holistically. Practitioners should be aware of these challenges to allow them to understand and empathise with the families they support.

[Ipsos MORI report \(scot.nhs.uk\)](https://scot.nhs.uk)

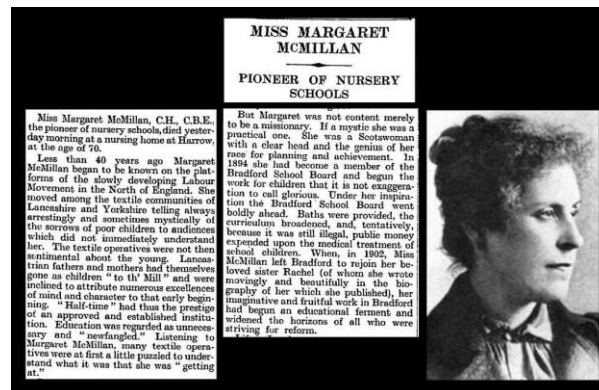
[Babies in Lockdown - Parent-Infant Foundation \(parentinfantfoundation.org.uk\)](https://parentinfantfoundation.org.uk)

A holistic approach to childcare

A practitioner should take a holistic approach to caring for the children within their setting. Holistic meaning to look at something as a whole, even if it can be broken down into separate areas, for example, health, learning and development (Brodie 2018).

Page, Clare and Nutbrown (2013) argue for respectful relationships, how we look at each child individually and being inclusive of each child, respecting them for who they are, their background, culture, abilities and needs and developing those relationships through the building of healthy and respectful relationships between child, parent and practitioner. As a setting, these can be discussed and everybody's uniqueness celebrated by studying dates within a religions calendar, talking about

different family makeups and the diversity of Wales. This can be linked to Margaret McMillan who campaigned for free school meals and medical inspections insisting that she could not teach tired, dirty children and called on the government to care for those children holistically (Jarvis 2013).



The importance of good nutrition in the first 1000 days

The World Health Organisation (2023) suggests that good nutrition, particularly within the first 3 years of a child life, is of greater significance in reducing mortality and morbidity and promoting good mental and physical health throughout life.

Children within childcare settings should be encouraged to eat healthily as eating a well-balanced diet is an importance aspect of good childcare provision (Department for Education 2017), healthy snacks should be provided within childcare settings and schools. As previously mentioned, the current cost of living crisis might mean that families are struggling to provide sufficient meals for their children. A study carried out by Barnardo's showed that 1 in 4 children in the UK are now living in poverty and they recommend an extension of free school meals and wrap around care to support those most in need (Barnardo's 2022).

Organisations such as home start could help support families with basic needs where families may be struggling or in crisis, support with financial difficulties and the climbing cost of living being relevant at present (Home Start no date).

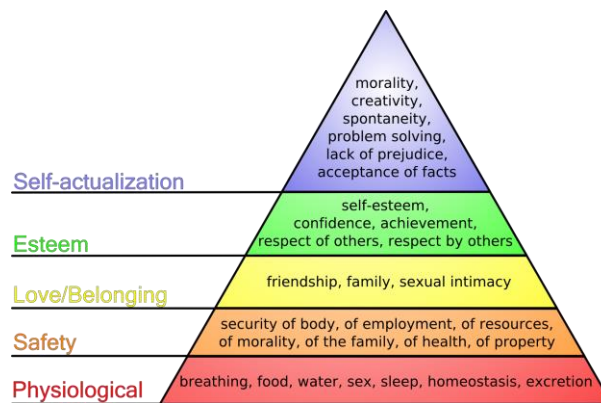
Welsh Government (2018) suggests that a childcare setting is ideally placed to demonstrate and encourage lifelong healthy eating habits for children and their families. It identifies that some families don't have access or may not be able to afford good quality produce and a setting should facilitate this and encourage children to eat a wide variety of foods.



Maslows Heierarchy of Needs

Maslow's theory of self-actualisation can be put into practice when supporting children. He argues that everybody needs to satisfy the needs of each level before moving up the pyramid, a child needs their basic physiological needs met, food, water, shelter, appropriate clothing before they can move onto building relationships with those around them (Aubrey and Riley 2017). In a setting, these basic needs can be met through snack time and lunch time, water bottles being readily available, ensuring that children are properly clothed to play outdoors or allowing them to play indoors if they are cold.

Maslow's pyramid shows the love and belonging step where children build relationships. Bowlby's theory of attachment can be linked to this step. He suggests that a baby that has a secure attachment with their primary carer can then go on to build stable attachments to others within their environment, for example, other family members and caregivers. A child that has a secure attachment will feel more confident to explore their environment, be it a parent in a playgroup setting, or a practitioner or sibling within a setting (Conkbayir and Pascal 2014).



Curriculum for Wales

Education Wales (2022) sets out the guidelines that should be followed to ensure each child is treated individually with a holistic approach to their health, well-being and their development as a lifelong learner and valued member of society. The need for enabling practitioners who are aware of the need to listen to the child and support them in the learning they choose to engage with. The importance of valuable and authentic experiences and activities that have meaning to the child and are of interest to them and the impact of effective environments, the importance of setting the right scene, giving the child the right tools to learn and develop to their full potential.

Settings should have indoor and outdoor environments that immerses the child in textural and sensory activities. A child who can play freely and experience learning through using all their senses to explore the world at their own pace will naturally create their own style or direction of learning. Froebel viewed children as naturally creative and given the tools to explore their environment they would learn through being active and through play (Gray 2015).

The Pikler approach encourages free, unaided movement to allow a child to learn and understand how to move their own body. Pikler suggests allowing children free time in an appropriate setting, on a blanket, for example, or on the grass outdoors if the weather allows and giving them the freedom and the time to explore their own capabilities. Pikler encourages practitioners to slow down, allow the child to progress at their own rate. The approach encourages the building of a respectful relationship during care activities, always talking to the child, listening or picking up on their cues and responding appropriately (Duncombe 2019).

If a child wishes to brush their teeth independently at the sink at home, provide a stepping stool so they can reach the brush, the tap and the toothpaste, giving them the time to learn how to dress themselves without rushing the activity to move onto something else.

Education Wales (2022) also encourages practitioners to allow the child to take the lead on play activities, being the enabling adult, helping if the child asks or invites the adult into their activity and

observing and understanding where their play is leading them and what they are learning or hoping to achieve through it.

Piaget's work also suggests putting a child at the centre of learning, allowing them to take the lead in their own way, developing their own ideas, learning from peers and adults and growing in their understanding at different developmental stages (Halfpenny and Petersen 2014).

[A curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings \(gov.wales\)](http://gov.wales)



Serve and return

The centre for the developing child Harvard University (no date) argues that the interactions that a baby may have with their primary care giver or any adult will aid the building of the brains' emotional and cognitive development. When a baby coos or babbles, the adult reacts with soothing

or appropriate sounds, directing their gaze towards them. The baby learns that by making these sounds, they will receive attention from the adult and will continue to develop these interactions if they receive consistent responses from the adult. By learning these cues, parents and caregivers can more effectively support babies, understanding when they need attention, if they are distressed or uncomfortable or when they are eager to move, play or needing rest.

<https://youtu.be/pjoyBZYk2zl>



1 - Mother Baby Wallpaper (no date)

The Enabling adult

Education Wales (2022a) suggests guidelines for the role of the enabling adult within a childcare setting. The adult should be responsive to the child's needs, understanding and knowing when to intervene and when to allow the child the independence to have a go. The enabling adult should build effective and trusting relationships with the child, the family and the wider community and create a communication rich environment and model these skills to demonstrate and encourage the child to participate. It also suggests enjoying being in the moment with the children they support and recognise the teachable moments on their progression as lifelong learners.

Looking at a child holistically can be an important factor when supporting a child, knowing the influences that surround a child, their family, culture, socioeconomic factors may help achieve this. Bronfenbrenner suggests the ecological model to aid this. The child's major influences that impact on them come into the microsystem, their families and school environments. He also suggests that the wider community plays a part in a child's learning, that they learn things that society deems important (Gray and MacBlain 2015).

As suggested by Bronfenbrenner, parents, nurseries and schools play a major role in how a child learns, by putting the child at the centre of their own learning, allows them to have a greater influence on those around them, also looking at how society influences children's ability to learn. The Welsh Government (2022) has protected children's rights by law ensuring that any law-making decisions must take into consideration the effects it may have on children.

2 - French 2023a



3 - French 2023c



4 - French 2023b

Play and Effective Experiences

Play and movement is an important part of every child's life, it allows them to feel more relaxed, to build friendships and to overcome stress and build resilience. Play also helps a child to develop core skills for life, by planning an activity in their imaginative play, they are visualising how they see the game developing. They may need to work parallel to or cooperatively with others, for example, in a game of catch or building a tower of blocks (Harvard University no date).

Allingham, Maude and Whitehead (2019) argue that play and movement should be encouraged in children as a lifelong concept by nurturing their own natural eagerness to move and be active as described earlier in the Pikler approach.

The Welsh Assembly Government (2002) believes that every child has an instinctive need to play, the natural desire to learn about the world around them and their place in it. Play allows a child to freely direct their own learning and as a part of healthy development they should be given every opportunity and encouragement through creating the right environment conducive to play. The policy also states that every level of government should take into consideration the impact on a child's opportunities to play when any decisions are made. This links to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems as discussed earlier.

A parent or practitioner can encourage the child to lead a more active life by providing opportunities to climb, such as utilising a Pikler climbing frame, climbing logs in a forest school area or discovering new ways to move through dance. At home, parents could take the opportunity to go for a walk, play in the local park or explore the area around the home, for example, doing a home-made treasure hunt, searching for a certain colour car, a number on a house door, or collecting an item that is green, doing a leaf rubbing. For babies, use the items around the home, place a blanket on the floor and put items just within grasp so the baby needs to stretch or move to pick up the item, for example, a wooden spoon, a sponge or a homemade rattle.

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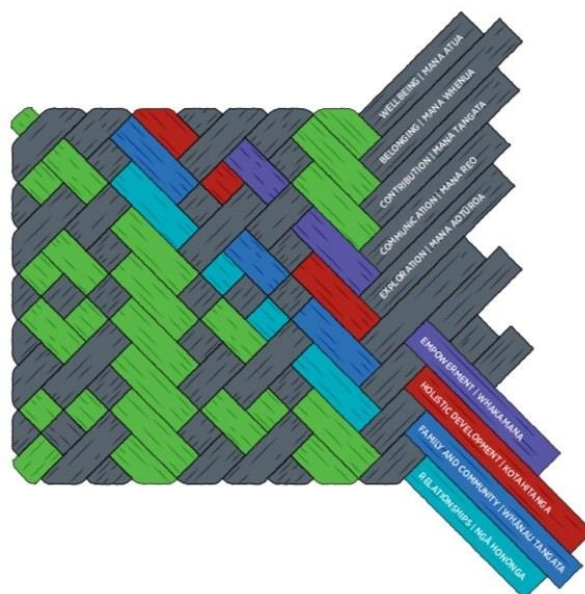




Te Whariki

Te Whariki in New Zealand is aimed at specifically at the early years and the importance that all cultures, particularly Maori, place on the child. In Maori culture, children are valued members of society and are instilled with a sense of their own importance. A whariki or woven mat is used to symbolise the interwoven approach to this curriculum, made of four principles (empowerment, holistic development, family and community and relationships) and five strands (wellbeing, belonging, contribution, communication and exploration). One of the aims of the curriculum is to bring together the many cultures found in New Zealand and the Pacific Islands they have strong ties with. Te Whariki looks at a child holistically, describing a child as bringing gifts of their culture and ancestry, understanding their diverse communities and the values they hold. It encourages practitioner to see the families, cultures and beliefs surrounding and supporting a child and building communities and relationships with them at the centre (Ministry of Education 2017).

There are many similarities between the new curriculum in Wales and the Te Whariki approach, such as the importance of celebrating each child's individuality, understanding and approaching childcare holistically. It is, however, the norm in New Zealand for children from their first year to attend childcare settings and many will visit a number of settings before entering formal education whereas in the UK, as was highlighted in the Ipsos report, many parents had feelings of guilt for placing their child into a care setting to enable them to work.



Exceptional care has many aspects to consider, relationships, health, wellbeing, opportunities to play and societies part in supporting families, particularly those in need. Practitioners should be aware and empathetic to the needs, hopes, aspirations and concerns of the families they support, and they should always be looking at ways to improve and build on what they know and the care they provide.

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