

The First 1000 Days

Introduction

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In this digital scrapbook we will be discussing the first 1000 days of life, what it is and why it is important. It will be sectioned into different topics such as caregiving, professional partnerships, challenges and activities. Firstly, what do the first 1000 days mean and why is it important?

According to HM Government (2021) every experience throughout the first 1000 days helps to shape the brain, some examples of this are hearing spoken language, being held and exploring environments. Healthy brain development can set the foundation for success in relationships and school. According to Care (2021 p. 1) the first 1000 days is a period of unique opportunity where the foundations for leading health are developed. This period is between a woman's conception and her child's second birthday. UNICEF (2017 p. 1) also supports Care's claims that the first 1000 days window has great influence on the child's ability to learn and grow as well as survive during the most vulnerable time of their lives. As the first 1000 days are from the moment of conception, how well the baby is looked after in the womb is considered the most crucial, for the best start to life. According to Lau and Hutchinson (2020) a father's engagement in parenting over the last 50 years has changed. Today most expectant and new fathers have more involvement in the pregnancy of their partner. A father's involvement with their child is reflected in Government policies. In the year of 2003, the UK Government had passed a law allowing new fathers to have 2-week paternity leave after the birth of their baby. According to Yogman and Garfield (2022 p. 2) in the past decade, there has been major policy developments in several states in America where men can take up to 8 weeks unpaid leave for the birth or adoption of a child. These policies were put into place to help new fathers bond and support healthy attachments to their newborns. Yogman and Garfield also state that positive involvement with a father has been associated with academic achievement, behavioral adjustment and emotional wellbeing.

Enabling Adults and Environments



An enabling adult is someone who supports the child's development and needs by creating the right environment for the child to thrive. Dickinson and Morse (2019) say that it has been recognised that the nature of a child's early relationship with their primary caregiver, has a

lasting impact on how they engage with others and how they are able to handle the challenges of everyday life. This is understood as attachment theory, which was first introduced by Bowlby in 1969. However, according to Music (2011) Bowlby faced harsh criticism as readers of his theories interpreted his ideas of attachment as mothers belong in the home with their children. This interpretation can be argued as Music also says that non-parents have always looked after children. Humans have a history of evolutionary cooperative breeding. An infant requires more physical and emotional resources than a mother alone can provide. Music looks at something called alloparenting. Alloparenting is when an individual provides any form of parental care that isn't directed towards their own offspring. For example, close relatives such as aunts, uncles, grandparents and siblings. According to (Welsh Government, 2024) we have the responsibility to influence children's development positively through creating accessible and inclusive environments within early years settings. We know that children are influenced by their environment and the adults around them, they learn from everything they see, do and hear. Brodie, K. (2018 p. 191-192) believes that practitioners and managers of early years settings should be aiming for the highest quality. These types of settings should also allow for practitioners to adapt and reflect on the needs of the children. Brodie also believes that enabling environment should also allow for creativity, where children are able to express their originality through using their imagination, exploring and risk taking. Hodgman (2012 p. 2-3) supports Brodie's claims that enabling environments is important for children to develop. Brodie says that enabling environments should provide children with spaces that are accessible, stable and have high quality resources for those who have access to it. Brodie suggests that indoor and outdoor environments help children develop physically and emotionally. Indoor environments allow for free flow play, where children can set their own rules to the games they play. They should have quality resources such as paper, pencils and scissors to allow for creativity and is child led.

Caregiving



The right nutrition and care have great influence over the child's overall health and wellbeing. According to Likhari and Patil (2022 p.1) research indicates that a pregnant woman's diet, wellbeing and stress levels is likely to affect the development of the unborn child. An unborn child's ability to grow can be affected by maternal nutrition and health. Patrick (2017) says that aside from the passing of a sequence of DNA, a mother's lifestyle for example, diet and exercise can help shape a child's neuro-cognitive development and metabolism. Patrick explains the importance of micronutrients during pregnancy such as iron, zinc and vitamin D. She explains in depth how Docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) found in fish and fish eggs is the marine omega-3 fatty acid and can be found in a form called phospholipid. For example, fish has DHA however 1% of fish have DHA which is in phospholipid form. Fish eggs DHA has up to 40%-70% DHA which has been shown when taken orally, it stays in the body's blood stream which travels into the developing fetal brain ten times better than DHA in non-phospholipid form. In the days of pregnancy, it is important to optimize a mother's nutrition to ensure that the unborn baby has optimal brain and health development giving it the best possible start in life. To be able to care for babies and toddlers, they need the right environment around them Chahin (2008 p. 41)

believes that based on Pikler theory, caregiving should be done with respect. Consistency is also a very important aspect of Picklers's approach. A routine gives them a sense of order and predictability that allows them to develop trust that their needs will be met. Pikler also says that caregivers should hold infants in a way they feel comfortable and can anticipate what will come next. This way the adult has her own freedom to interact in a natural way. This could involve constantly talking to the infant, using a voice that is soothing and reassuring voice.

Professional Partnerships



There are other support systems that can be put in place for parents/caregivers such as multi-agencies. Social workers are one of many multi-agency workers that will work with families and their children. According to Durrance and Atkins (2024 p. 2) parental substance use such as drugs and alcohol, can result in harm to both the mother and child. Conditions such as, fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, fetal death and preterm labour can occur when mothers abuse drugs and alcohol. However, beyond negative health outcomes for the mother and her child, substance abuse during pregnancy has an increased risk of child welfare involvement. HM Government (2023 p. 44-46) says that early help support is set out to improve a family's resilience and reduces the chance of a problem getting worse. HM Government (2024) states that partnerships have the greatest impact when they work together with children and their

families, at the earliest of opportunities. It is a system delivered by local authorities to provide the right provision in their area. Examples of early help include parenting support, housing support, employment services and mental health support. This is a voluntary approach, requiring the family's consent to receive the support and services offered to them. With consistent communication, practitioners should know when to share information with other practitioners to support early identification and to be able to recognise abuse, neglect and exploitation. According to Hayes, Halpenny and O'Toole (2017 p. 81) children that are part of families and communities will grow up with traditions and different ways of life. Practitioners should be aware of the family's background, cultures and communities in which they are growing up in. Lepkowska, and Nightingale (2019 p. 72) says that parents evenings are a good starting point to parent involvement and that they should lead to more meaningful interactions between parents and teachers. According to Platt and Horwath (2019 p. 320-321) there are a range of health professionals that are involved in assessing children's health needs, that are linked to key points in their lives, assessing health needs is part of providing good healthcare, which all children have a right to. UNICEF (2025) Article 24 states that every child has the right to the best possible health care, governments must provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food, and a clean environment and education on health and well-being so that children can stay healthy. All organisations should work closely together to address these challenges. To make sure that the benefits are felt by each child that relies on this crucial support.

Challenges



There are many challenges that can occur when trying to provide high quality care to babies and toddlers. Firstly, what is high quality care? High quality care is when settings provide enriched and stimulating environments for their children. To provide high quality care, setting need to provide high quality staff who can meet the needs of each child. According to Hyson and Tomlinson (2014 p. 24-25) providing professional development is a key role in improving quality of care. However, despite the urgent need for quality care, early year childhood degree programs often fail to provide in depth knowledge and skills. Graduates may not effectively support babies and toddlers' development because of the teaching strategies and curriculum being taught is more effective with older children. No child is the same therefore staff need to be able to identify how to meet every child's individual needs. Early years setting is populated with children who are on a journey from one key development milestone to another, with challenges coming from more additional learning needs children it is becoming more difficult to meet the challenges of every child's needs. According to Russell (2020 p. 16) and her research, autism has risen year on year. She states that in 2014 there was an 15% increase from 2 years prior (2012), when 1.7% of children had autism and a 150% increase since the year 2000. Estyn (2024) says that their finding shows that leaders and staff at many schools and settings started to develop inclusive practice. However, inclusive and purposeful teaching aimed at meeting the

needs of every child, were not effective enough. There had been an increase in the number of children who needed additional learning needs provision (ALP), special education provision (SEP) and individual development plans (IDP). All of which plans what action must be taken to support that child's individual needs. Another challenge schools and early years settings face is sufficient funding. According to The Local Government Association (2023) many councils' early year teams work on a small budget with increasing needs from providers. There should be a greater flexibility in what local authorities can retain from the early years national funding formula to be able to provide essential services to children. According to HM government (2022) due to the 2020 Covid pandemic, children's personal, social and emotional development has been negatively impacted. Some early years practices continue to notice delays in babies' physical development and have started to increase the amount of time they spend on physical activity to develop their gross motor skills. Kreyenfeld, M. (2020) says that survey data shows that a large fraction of children experience parental separation or divorce before they reach adulthood. Kacenelenbogen (2018 p 6-8) supports Kreyenfeld claims by saying that a cross-sectional study carried out showed that 10% of children under the age of 2 experienced parental separation. Disruption to the family unit can cause emotional harm and distress to children who are affected. Myra, Grøver and Axberg (2024 p. 11-15) says that systemic practitioners can play a part in the protection and promotion of children's wellbeing as they go through the most challenging transition of their lives. Family therapies, mediation for example are where systemic practitioners meet separating families. Parental conflict even for a very young child can produce a level of anxiety.

Activities



According to Vamos (2015 p. 3-6) Pikler's theory is a radical approach to a baby's motor development in the very early stages of infancy. She explains that it is fundamental that infants are left to move freely, caregivers should not intervene in the infant's physiological motor development. Pikler believes that unhindered movements in infants show a consistent appetite for actively seeking to discover the world around them. According to Sagastui, Herrán and Anguera (2022 p. 2) Piaget (1980) also supports Pikler's claims that infants should be left to explore movement by themselves to develop motor skills. Piaget states that in the first few months of life, infants perform movements and activities that can be described as play. During this process infants start to develop an understanding of objects and the relationship between things. With the ultimate result in conceiving the world as we know it. However, from a different standpoint, there are theorist that disagree with Pikler's views. For example, Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the importance the adult's role in children's experiences of play. Whilst Piaget's theory states that children construct their own knowledge through autonomous development, Vygotsky emphasizes that learning is mediated through others. According to Wright, M (2021) there are powerful things that adults can do to help shape babies and infants and the adults that they become. She explains that babies start to learn long before they are born and that their brains develop faster in their early years compared to any other time in their

lives. She explains that healthy brain development depends on these five things: connecting, talking, playing a healthy home and community. She also explains a term called serve and return, which means to connect, talk and play with children. She uses examples of play to demonstrate this. For example, copycat games. Copycat games build empathy and imagination and games such as peek-a-boo, build trust and memory. Children are hard wired to seeking meaningful connections, when connection is lost it cause stress and confusion for the child. These meaningful connections should happen early and often in the child's life to ensure healthy brain development throughout the first 1000 days of life. According to Gascoyne (2018 p. 18) sensory stimulation is a key part of how babies and toddlers learn about the world around them and helps support positive disequilibrium. She says that theorist such as Montessori, Piaget and Froebel were advocates for the importance of sensory rich environments. Montessori viewed 'mind and movement' as part of the same unity and children should be allowed to move freely, a view also held by Pikler. Rudolf Steiner advocated for the value of sensory environments and its importance of natural materials such as stones, wood, shells twigs and feathers. Says that children have used loose materials in their play for generations. Daly (2015 p. 16-18) says that when children play in environments such as the beach, it is filled with loose materials such as shells, plants, feathers, beach glass and rocks. Children genuinely prefer playing with loose materials and parts. Toys or objects that have a sole purpose, children often lose interest. Playing with loose materials or parts, helps to deepen critical thinking. Once children have exhausted all ways to manipulate a piece of material or object, they start to explore other possibilities and are encouraged to problem solve.

International Approaches



According to Brunton and Thornton (2007 p.6-9) Reggio Emilia is a prosperous city with a long history of banking and trade. In the city of Reggio Emilia, community has always been a big part of their culture. After the devastating effects of World War 2, a small village started to rebuild their lives by building a pre-school. In Reggio strong and positive relationships between people matter. Relationships between teachers and children, teachers and parents and parents and children should be a two-way relationship where everyone respects and listens to one another. Hall (2010 p.147) says that Reggio Emilia is synonymous with high quality provision for many in the field of early years education, which was discussed further in the enabling environments section. However, educators of the Reggio Emilia approach oppose the idea that their model can be used universally, as their practice is deeply embedded in their history and culture as well as their political development. They encourage educators around the world who wish to learn from their model, to ensure that their practice is rooted in their own cultural values. Similarly to the Reggio Emilia approach is the Forest school model. According to Knight (2011 p.21-22) Forest school allows for infants to have an enabling environment and follows its own curriculum. Knight (2011 p.87) believes that the outdoors allows for a lot of tactile play and infants can explore raw materials. For example, mud. Mud can be played with by hand, to gauge its texture and consistency. Knight also explains that forest school is an opportunity for creativity. Children can express themselves through using raw materials. For example, lining up stones or piling sticks. Children can find objects that communicate something special.

Conclusion

In summary, the first 1000 days is a unique period that helps to support a child health and development long term. From the moment of conception, it is the mother's responsibility to lay down the strong foundations to grow and develop a healthy child before they are brought into the world. As discussed by Patrick previously, during this period a child's brain grows rapidly, providing them with environments and adults that help their development is important for later in life and also provides them with the best quality of life.

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