

The First 1000 Days





What is the first 1000 days?

The first 1000 days is the time in a child's life from conception to 24 months (GOV.UK, 2024).

Why is the first 1000 days important?

The first 1000 days of a child's life are crucial for their lifelong, holistic development. The foundation for children's emotional well-being, cognitive development and overall health begins from conception to 24 months old. The first 1000 days are important as they are when a child is most at risk and defenceless as they cannot communicate their needs. This means that they require exceptional care from care givers. The first 1000 days are also important as trauma and stress children experience during this time can have a detrimental effect on their development. However, it is important children experience a small amount of stress to support their development whilst repeated subjection to high levels of stress can have a negative effect on their health and mental well-being (GOV.UK,2021).



Caregiving

Image - (Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, (2021).

What is exceptional care?

Exceptional care means to take excellent care of something or someone. It means exceeding expectations, being careful, precise and detail orientated (Lsd.law,2024) In the early years providing exceptional care in the first 1000 days includes inclusive practice, enabling environments,

Enabling environments

Brodie (2018) suggests that an enabling environment is an environment that promotes and encourages children's learning. A good quality environment is essential for a child's growth, education and wellbeing. An enabling and high-quality environment will be appropriate for children, meet all their individual needs and help them to develop holistically. To create an enabling environment, it is important for practitioners to provide quality, accessible resources. Practitioners should provide open ended and authentic resources as they encourage independence, support fine motor skills, problem solving and promotes holistic development. Reggio Emilia also highlights the significance of quality resources in the early years and refers to a child's environment as its third teacher and encourages the use of loose parts and open-ended resources. The Reggio Emilia approach suggests that an environment enriched with quality resources will develop children's confidence. Including children's interests when planning and setting up learning environments will help to create authentic and purposeful learning experiences (Pittam, 2021).



Inclusive practice



Knowles (2010) states that being inclusive in the early years means that children are able to access learning, resources and their environment and that factors such as poverty or additional learning needs should not become a barrier to learning or be the reason children face prejudice. An inclusive environment should meet children's needs and activities should be differentiated and tailored towards children's ability and their interests. Children should also be able to make decisions about their learning and environment. Excellent inclusive practice is crucial as it can enhance children's learning experience and have a positive effect on their well-being (Knowles, 2010)

Inclusive practice links to Maslow's hierarchy of needs as inclusive practice allows children to feel safe, a sense of love and belonging and will promote children's self-esteem. Similarly, inclusive practice is also promoted through recent legislation such as The Equality Act 2010 which ensures children do not face discrimination regarding their age, gender or disability and The Children And Families Act 2014 (Knowles, 2010).

Professional love and creating positive attachments

For children to flourish and develop holistically it is crucial that they form secure, reliable and healthy relationships with the adults around them. Exceptional care giving and relationships are crucial to a child's emotional development and wellbeing. Practitioners in the early years can create positive attachments through a key person. The key person in the setting will be committed, demonstrating love, care and emotional support to the children in their care. If positive attachments are not created by the age of 5, a child may struggle throughout their life to form connections with others. Bowlby's attachment theory supports the good practice of a key worker and professional love (Brodie, 2018)

Bowlby suggests that secure attachments need to be made during the first months of life or by three years old to help them to form healthy relationships in the future. This is important as children with healthy, positive attachments are likely to have better self-esteem and feel more content (Conkbayir and Pascal, 2014, p.110)

In addition to this, the government are recognising the importance of secure attachments in the early years and policies such as The Children And Families Act 2014 which supports 12 months of leave for parents to support creating secure attachments and the Looked After Children policy which supports secure attachments within education (Hayes, 2016)



Professional partnerships

What is the role of an early year's practitioner in supporting children and families in the first 1000 days?

An early year's practitioner will support children in the first 1000 days by developing their social skills including their ability to communicate and take turns. They will encourage this by modelling social interaction, organising social and collaborative activities and demonstrate how to overcome conflict. Practitioners will improve their resilience and well-being by creating strong attachments and providing a safe and positive space where children can express themselves whilst practitioners support them to understand their emotions. Practitioners will create routine throughout the children's day helping them to feel safe and provide stability and also know what to expect. Practitioners will tailor the child's learning environment to support cognitive development by providing learning experiences and activities that develop their problem-solving skills such as games and puzzles. Practitioners help to support both fine and gross motor skills in the early years. Practitioners support children's fine motor skills by doing craft, using a scissors, writing tools and proving blocks and loose parts to play with. Practitioners develop children's gross motor skills by having enabling, outdoor environments and doing physical activities. Practitioners promote children's independence by encouraging their personal care and hygiene such as hand washing, dressing themselves and using the toilet independently (Care Learning, 2024).



An early year's practitioner supports families by having open communication with parents and carers and having check ins regarding their child's progress and milestones. They will also talk through any concerns they may have and share information and tips with the care giver. Practitioners may also support families when preparing their child for transition such as starting nursery or school or transitioning from nappies to using the toilet (Care Learning, 2024).



How important is partnership working?

Practitioners may work in partnership with many professionals or organisations to support the holistic development of the child including parents, health visitors, social workers, other settings and schools. Effective partnership working is crucial as professionals can share information and knowledge with one another which will further support the children as issues can be identified quicker and professionals are able to gain a deeper insight of the child, creating a strong network of professionals to support them. Partnership working also helps to build positive relationships and trust between professionals which supports a child's holistic development as seeing the adults around them working together will help them to feel safe and understood. Effective partnership working is also important for practitioners' personal development as they will have access to more training opportunities which will better their practice and further support the children. Effective partnership working is also crucial for safeguarding children and an important part of inclusive practice to be able to provide the best outcomes (Care Learning, 2024).

Effective partnership working links to Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological systems. Bronfenbrenner suggests the importance of a child's environment on their development. A child's environment includes a microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. Practitioners need to be aware of Bronfenbrenner's theory to be able to provide a caring, encouraging environment that supports children to develop holistically and improve their well-being (Brodie, 2024).

Maternal factors that may impact a child's development

Nutrition

During pregnancy, a woman's nutrition is crucial to the development of their child as women's metabolism and energy expenditure increase as the baby is growing. Women should ensure they are consuming a balanced diet of fat, protein and carbohydrates. Carbohydrates are the main source of energy during pregnancy and women also require more glucose in their diet as this supports the baby's brain development. Women must also ensure they are consuming the correct vitamins and minerals to support their child's growth and development such as iron, zinc, iodine and calcium. Iron deficiency during pregnancy can cause anemia which can lead to a low birth weight and premature birth which may impact the child's overall development. An insufficient amount of zinc in a women's diet is linked to reduced growth, lower birth weight and premature birth and preeclampsia. Iodine is crucial as a lack of iodine during pregnancy can have detrimental effects such as a miscarriage, and cognitive impairments. Calcium is also vital during pregnancy as it is required for a baby's bone development. A woman's diet also requires vitamins such as vitamin A, vitamin D, folate and vitamin B12. A lack of these vitamins can have detrimental effects on a child's development. Women can access support with their diet during pregnancy through their midwife or GP who can offer advice about diet and supplements during pregnancy. (Karakochuk et al., 2018)





Maternal factors that may impact a child's development

Alcohol, smoking and drug use

Health care professionals suggest that pregnant women or women hoping to conceive not to drink alcohol as consuming alcohol whilst pregnant can be harmful to the fetus and have lifelong effects. During pregnancy alcohol consumption can increase the chance of premature birth, low birth weight and miscarriage. Alcohol consumption can also cause Fetal alcohol syndrome which can affect a child's behavior, organs, communications and social skills (NHS,2020)

Smoking is also detrimental to a child's development as smoking can decrease the baby's oxygen supply and contains harmful chemicals. Smoking increases the chance of stillbirth, SIDS and premature birth. Illegal drugs are also extremely harmful during pregnancy. Women can receive support and advice from their midwife, GP and treatment services (NHS,2020)

Challenges in providing high quality care

High staff turnover and staff shortages

One of the many challenges in providing high quality Care is high staff turnover. High staff turnover means that children cannot build relationships and secure attachments with practitioners and practitioners will not have a good understanding of the child and their interests. This can affect children's development and wellbeing and lead to poor interactions between the practitioner and child. Staff turnover will also affect the children's key person within the setting. This will have a negative effect on the children as their key person will help them to build social skills, deal with transition and create healthy attachments. These factors mean that staff turnover has a detrimental effect on children's learning, wellbeing and holistic development.

Staff shortages is another challenge in providing high quality care. Staff shortages can be due to insufficient pay, poor working conditions, a lack of training and professional development. Staff shortages can have a negative effect on children's learning and development as it will affect staff ratios and safeguarding. High staff turnover is a safeguarding concern as important information regarding allergies or children with additional needs will not be shared between practitioners. Staff shortages and turnover can also influence staff and their wellbeing as they will be under more pressure and may be working more hours or increasing their workload to cover staff shortages (Owston, Jones and Stanley, 2024)



Challenges in providing high quality care

The impact and effects of covid in the early years

The pandemic continues to have a detrimental effect on children's speech and language. This has delayed children's progress and practitioners find they are making more referrals to specialists and the number of children with additional learning needs has increased. Practitioners also found that covid had a negative effect on children's social skills and their confidence. Practitioners found that children would not participate in group activities and found it difficult to separate from parents or care givers. There are also delays in children's gross and fine motor development and delays in children crawling and walking. To try to improve this practitioners now ensure children spend time outside doing physical activity to improve their gross motor skills and working on their outdoor learning environment. Practitioners have found that in the last few years children are having more screen time and throughout the pandemic didn't get to interact with adults and children outside of their home. Many children will not have read books, sang, danced or had conversations. During the pandemic less children went to childcare settings and this effected children who were disadvantaged the most as they missed many chances to learn new skills and develop their social, emotional and cognitive skills. There has also been noticeable decline in children's independence and ability to take care of themselves. Practitioners have found that more children need help to get dressed, toileting and blowing their nose.

(Ofsted, 2022)



Activities that provide meaningful learning

Mark making

Mark making is the marks and patterns that children make, usually on paper in a setting. Children can use many things to start mark making including their hands, feet, brushes and natural resources such as leaves or sticks. Mark making can be done indoors or outdoors and it allows children to be creative and express themselves. This activity provides meaningful learning opportunities and is crucial to children's development as it encourages children to start writing, improving their fine motor skills, grip and ability to hold writing tools correctly. Mark making also improves children's physical development and hand eye coordination. Mark making develops children's cognitive skills and language skills as they will start to use critical thinking. Practitioners will encourage mark making by creating an engaging, inviting learning environment, giving children different materials including natural resources and by modelling mark making and the use of the resources. Mark making can improve a child's confidence and wellbeing as they can express themselves and enjoy messy play. Mark making will develop their learning as they will learn about colours, shapes and texture (EYR Team,2018)



Activity 1

Reading aloud to children

This activity will include the practitioner reading a story of interest to the children. They may use expression in their voice and encourage the children to look at the pictures and engage with the story. Practitioners may also ask children to predict what may happen next. Reading to children has many benefits for children's holistic development and learning. Reading allows children to feel safe, secure and relaxed and is great for children's overall wellbeing. Reading has been found to boost children's confidence and self-esteem and can make reading fun giving children a better outlook on reading in the future. Reading to children exposes them to different words and improves their vocabulary. Reading to children can boost their imagination and cognitive skills and even contributes to children sleeping better through the night. Reading to children also helps to build strong relationships and attachments between both parent and child and practitioner and child. Children that are read to often as a child are also more likely to enjoy reading and carry on their love for reading into adulthood (David,2020).

Activity 2



Activity 3

Sensory play

Sensory play is an activity that requires children to use their senses. These senses include a child's smell, taste, sight, touch or hearing. Sensory play can involve any resources. These could include food items, dough, water, sand or glitter. Sensory play can start as soon as a baby is born. Baby's can explore sensory play through things like touch, hearing speech and conversations with care givers and massages. Sensory play has many benefits including supporting language and cognitive development. Sensory play develops children's social skills as it encourages interaction with their peers, parents and practitioners. Sensory play can also be comforting making children feel safe and secure in their environment. Sensory play can help to support children's self-regulation and help them to better understand and manage their emotions. Sensory play encourages children to try new things and learn new skills and can make learning these new concepts fun and engaging for children. This approach makes learning more





International approaches

The Reggio Emilia approach encourages children to be themselves and express themselves and how they feel through art, craft, building, drama and dance. This approach suggests that children have 100 languages and learn in many different ways (Berg,2024)

This approach can support children's development in the first 1000 days as it helps children to build relationships and secure attachments. Through this approach children develop their social, emotional and cognitive skills.

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