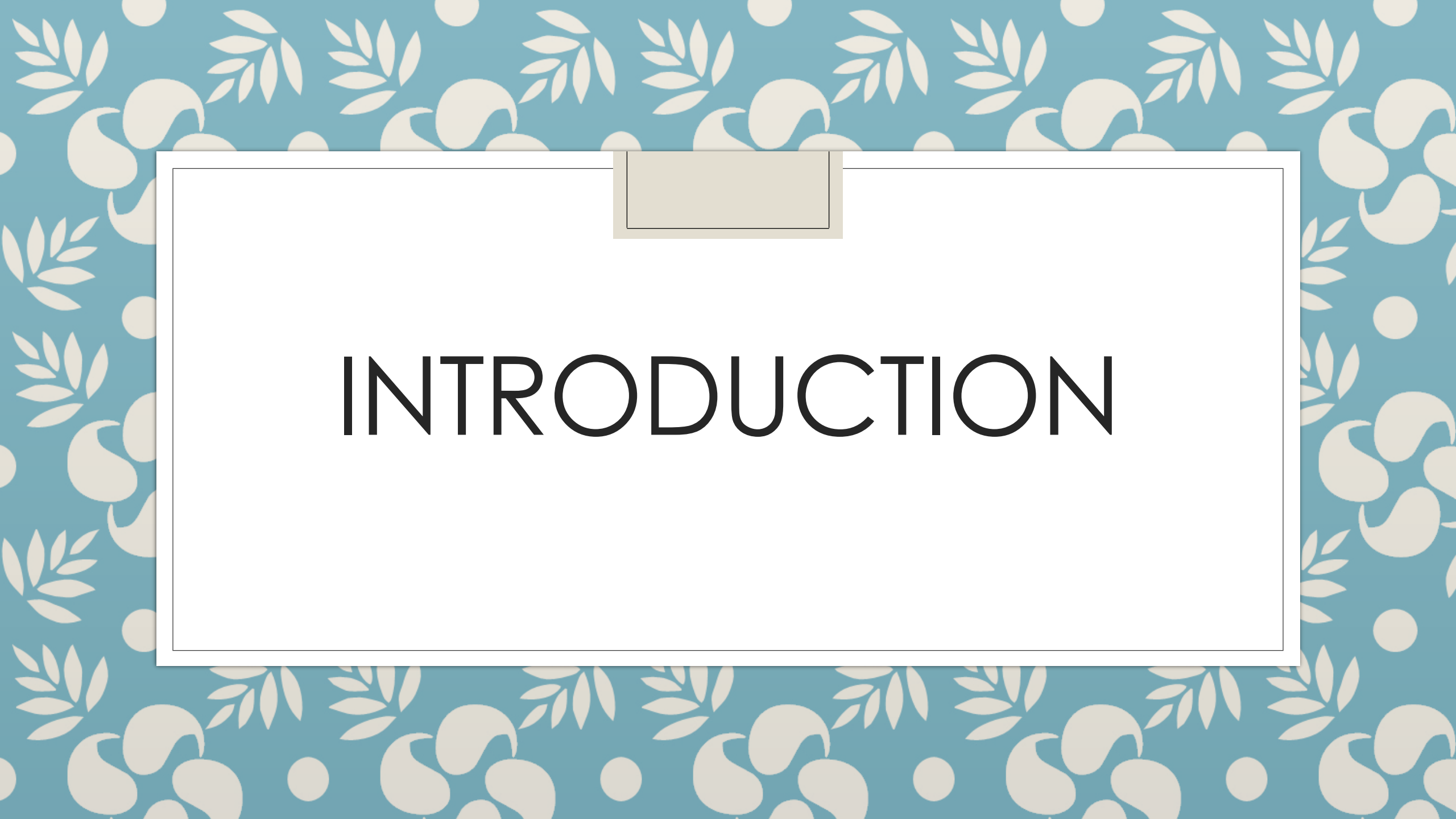


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EXCEPTIONAL CARE IN THE FIRST 1000 DAYS



INTRODUCTION



Source: Pexels 2024

The first 1000 days of a baby's life are vital to development. The first 1000 days begin from conception. From birth to age two the brain undergoes a stage of rapid growth and development. Over the course of the first 1000 days, a child's brain displays an impressive quantity to adapt to their surroundings, as well as absorbing information (Save The Children, 2016).

Development in the womb is equally as important as development outside of the womb. There are many resources available to pregnant women to help their baby's development. There are some women who may struggle to give up habits such as smoking tobacco and drinking alcohol, which in the long run will have a negative effect on development. According to L. Akanksha and P. Manoj S (2022), the child's health is affected when both the mother's health and diet are poor. Although due to poverty, some services may not be available or may be difficult for individuals to gain access to.

A child's ability to thrive, learn, and develop is impacted significantly by how well or how poorly mothers and children are cared for and fed during this period. This is due to the fact that a child's brain is continuously growing and developing rapidly throughout the first 1000 days. L. Akanksha and P. Manoj S (2022) state that research indicates that a pregnant woman's diet, stress levels, and well-being have a chance to affect the development of the child in the womb. They also say that specialists point out that a child's developing brain and growing body suffer damage that cannot be repaired because of poor nutrition in the first 1000 days of their life.

[Early moments matter | UNICEF](#) Here's a link to more information.



Source: Pexels 2024

The first 1000 days are important because a child's first 1000 days of life are the most delicate and vital for laying the foundation for their healthy growth and development (L. Akanksha and P. Manoj S. 2022). The House of Comms (2019) claim that if a child's brain and body develop well then this improves their life chances. Although, exposure to adversity or stresses during this period can result in falling behind their peers during a child's development. This is why practitioners need to ensure that they are providing children with the correct nutrients to help their development and growth.

A holistic approach is required to meet the needs of the child. According to NSW Health, a holistic approach means to provide the appropriate support that looks at the baby, not just one aspect of needs. The support that is provided should also consider the emotional, social, physical, and spiritual wellbeing of a person. That is why practitioners must focus on the whole child, rather than just one aspect of their needs. It should be considered that all children and parents are different.



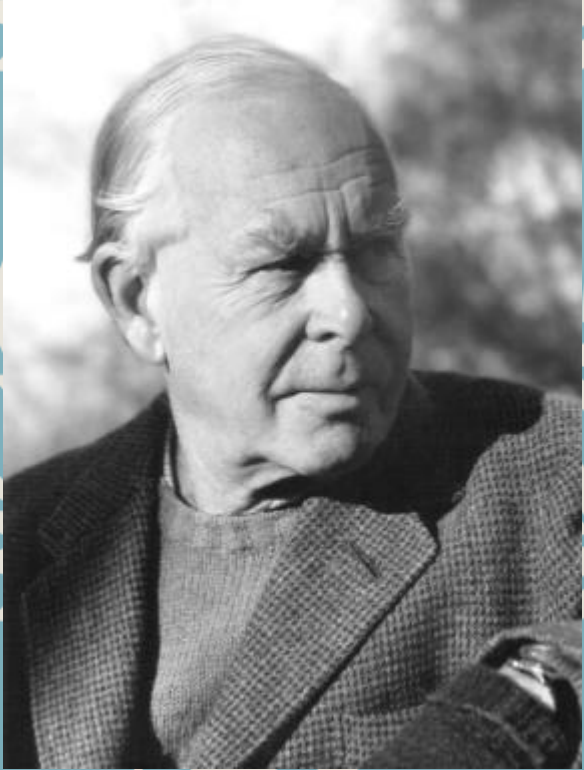
CAREGIVING



Source: Pexels 2024

Caregiving is needed for children during the first 1000 days. This is where holistic care takes place. According to K. Brodie, in every aspect, children's development from birth to three is an explosion of growth, progression, and learning. Getting it right at the very beginning lays the good foundations for subsequent development, as this is a vital time in a child's life. Practitioners must ensure that they are caregiving effectively to help children's development during the first 1000 days.

In order to provide holistic care, practitioners should be there both physically and emotionally for a child. This means having interactions such as eye contact, cuddles, and talking. Having conversations with the parents/guardians of the child is needed to maintain effective development and is able to help identify any issues early on. Holistic child development is where every area of learning, growth, and development is connected with every other, according to K. Brodie (2018). This is shown in the New Zealand early childhood curriculum. This can be envisioned as a 'mat' woven with the different threads of learning and development (K. Brodie 2018).



Source: The Bowlby Centre no date

Attachment happens a lot during the first 1000 days. Bowlby's theory on attachment can be used to support early years practitioners during the first 1000 days. Babies need adults in order to survive as they are dependent on all those around them. Every experience a baby has is new to them as they are experiencing the world and the environment for the first time. A baby usually has a primary and secondary attachment. The baby's primary attachment is typically the mother, and the secondary attachment is typically the practitioner at the nursery. Practitioners must provide the correct care to children so that they will maintain good development during the first 1000 days.

[The Attachment Theory: How Childhood Affects Life \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...) A video to understand Bowlby's attachment theory.

Caregiving is important because children need to be receiving the correct care so that they are developing and growing as they should be. Needs must be met, so it is vital that practitioners are able to do so. Being part of a caring profession, at the core of which is caring for and about babies in the first 1000 days and beyond is what it means to be an early years practitioner means (Early years matters 2020).

According to Early Years Matters (2020), “babies and young children first come to understand themselves through their bodies and understand much of what others think of them and how much they are loved and valued through touch and physical interactions.” Practitioners should make sure that their setting is appropriate for babies as they develop an understanding of the world around them. The setting should include sensory toys, a safe space for babies to explore, and many more.

[Unlocking the Future: Nurturing the First 1000 Days of a Child's Life \(linkedin.com\)](#)

Some information on early intervention.



PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Professional Partnerships



Source: Nursery World
2020

Professional partnerships are needed in order to support children and their development during the first 1000 days. There are many different reasons why children may need additional support. This could involve working closely with professionals beyond the childcare setting. This is known as partnership working, where professionals support children and their families, together in a holistic way (Croner-i 2023). According to Croner-i (2023), it may often involve discussion, sharing information, and a commitment to working around the child as a team.

Practitioners play an important role in supporting children and families during the first 1000 days. There are many essential skills that practitioners need in order to maintain effective professional partnerships. One of these are, involving the children and parents as much as possible in partnership working and ensuring to keep the child's needs at the centre. It is important that practitioners commit to working in partnership with other agencies and professionals so that they can make parents sure that they are aware that it is their professional responsibility. Practitioners should also work to build positive professional relationships with children and families during the first 1000 days (Croner-i 2023).

Professional Partnerships

Children need enabling adults during the first 1000 days. Enabling adults are adults that are responsive to babies. Enabling adults also make strong connections with the child's home and community in order to strengthen their sense of belonging. Serve and return is an effective method in providing professional care to children. Babies will make a noise, and adults will respond to that noise. For example, if a baby were to cry, an adult will respond to that noise. The baby then becomes aware that if they cry, their needs are met by the enabling adult. Serve and return can be done by eye contact, touch, music, and facial expressions.

An effective environment is vital for development during the first 1000 days. An effective environment is an environment that practitioners create indoors and outdoors, and it should be central to children's authentic experiences. Practitioners should allow children to express themselves creatively, imaginatively, and physically. Effective environments should also provide an opportunity for children to develop their fine motor skills and their gross motor skills. They should also be responsive to the range of emotions a young child can experience. It is important to celebrate and value diversity, whilst also demonstrating inclusivity. If the setting is based in Wales, then practitioners should create an environment that is welcoming and promotes a Welsh ethos.

Professional Partnerships



Source: Austin Children's Academy 2017

Maria Montessori was a very influential theorist. The theory emphasises individualised instruction and self-paced learning. It is based on the belief that children are naturally capable of learning independently and are naturally curious (Rockingham Montessori School 2022). The Montessori Classroom is known as the 'prepared environment'. Maria Montessori was the one who developed the Montessori method. She believed that education should be bespoke to each child's unique needs and interests (Rockingham Montessori School 2022). Although on the other hand, a Montessori environment is very much prepared by the practitioner in order to promote learning opportunities and development. It should be considered that some children struggle in a Montessori setting, so this environment will not work for every child. Practitioners need to ensure that every child in their setting is comfortable and that their needs are being met no matter what.

[Maria Montessori School in London \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...) A video on Montessori Schools.

Professional Partnerships

Professional love provides practitioners with the language to appropriately describe the close, loving intimate and affectionate bond which over time is inevitably developed with the children in their care (UWTSD 2024 Lecture on enabling adults). But, when defining love in professional roles, it can be seen as problematic by some. This is due to the fact that there is no skill set that can be taught, measured, or applied. After all, it is not helpful to reject the existence of professional love, particularly when research has already shown that love matters during the first 1000 days. According to the University of Sheffield (2015), 'professional love is about adults' sensitivity towards the very young children in their care and "reading" what is needed to make a child feel loved at any moment in time.' Practitioners should make every child in their care knows that they are loved and that they can feel the emotion of love. Unfortunately, not every child experiences love at home, so it is our role as practitioners to look out for signs of abuse, and to provide love and care to each child.



CHALLENGES

Challenges

Challenges are something that practitioners face whilst providing care to children during the first 1000 days. These challenges include poverty, children with additional learning difficulties, and the environment. Although these challenges can cause difficulties in people's lives, it should not stop practitioners' ability to provide the best care they can to children during the first 1000 days.

Poverty is a rising problem across Wales. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2023), 'despite living in one of the richest countries in the world, around 3 in 10 children (4.2 million children across the UK) live in poverty.' Both children and adults suffer from poverty, and this in turn influences development and caregiving. For example, a child needs the correct nutrients to develop healthily. If that child lives in poverty, it may be difficult for parents/guardians to provide the things they need as it can be quite expensive. Fortunately, most settings are able to provide children with "snack time" so that they can still receive some of the nutrients they need for development. But there are some downsides to this, such as children who suffer from allergies. This could make it difficult for these children to receive the nutrients they need, especially if they live in poverty.

Being in poverty results in some families not being able to afford to send their children to a childcare setting. There are schemes in place so that these families are able to send their children to receive educational time in nursery. Although, there are some challenges such as transport for those who may live in rural areas or don't own a car, for example. This may result in children not even being able to arrive at an appropriate childcare setting, and this could have an impact on development. Poverty can also affect practitioners. If practitioners are unable to get transport to their setting, then they lose out on work, and children lose out on care. Poverty is a rising challenge that many face, so it is vital that practitioners do what they can to help children.

[The impact of poverty on early childhood - Centre for Early Childhood](#) An article about childhood poverty.

Challenges

The environment and children with additional learning needs can be a challenge during the first 1000 days. According to Gov.UK (no date), practitioners may turn their attention to the fact that children learn at different paces and notice that some may struggle to complete some of the things that other children may already be capable of. A good practitioner will take note of this and investigate this further so that they can spot if there are in fact any difficulties that a child may be facing. Gov.Uk (no date) also states that therefore it is 'important that early delays or difficulties lead to the right sort of help and are not necessarily regarded as an indication of a long-term special educational need or disability.' Children who suffer with additional learning needs but have not yet been diagnosed may suffer when there are changes in the environment, for example. If there is an unexpected change in routine, this can be distressing for some children. It is a practitioner's role to accommodate to each child's needs.



ACTIVITIES

Activities are very beneficial and necessary for children's development during the first 1000 days. There are a variety of activities that help children's development. These activities include messy play, outdoor play, indoor play, loose parts, and many other activities.

Pikler was a very influential theorist in the subject of play. Her aim was to assure physical and psychic health in young children as well as infants. In the 1930's, she recognised that through creating secure attachment, this was the key to achieving this. She saw that giving respectful care was one of the main tools for achieving this, particularly during times of bodily care (Teach Early Years, no date). According to Istanbul Gelisim University (2021), Pikler believed that healthy babies are skilful, active, and they are in peace. This peaceful state also includes living with people around them in peace.



Source: Montessori in real life 2020

The Pikler Triangle is a useful tool for development during the first 1000 days. The Website Wood and Hearts Montessori Furniture (2020) provides families with information on this tool, which is also useful to early years practitioners. The aim of the website is to sell Pikler triangles to families. According to this website, 'the Pikler triangle is in line with the principles of play-based learning and is designed to help infants develop self-confidence, interact socially and establish a connection between themselves and the world around them.' The Pikler triangle promotes physical boundaries, gross motor skills, and fine motor skills. The Pikler triangle can provide children with an additional outlet for their energy and teach them about independence. This can be done by combining both recreational and educational purposes.

[Pikler's Triangles Safe? All you need to know is this – WoodandHearts](#) More information about the Pikler Triangle.



Source: Medium 2018

Loose parts are an educational form of play. Most settings provide children with plastic toys like blocks and hammers. Whilst this does provide children with imaginative play opportunities, children would prefer to play with real blocks and hammers. Maria Montessori was very influential in this aspect. According to Play Scotland (2019), 'a 'loose parts' toy is open-ended. Children may use it in many ways and combine with other loose parts through imagination and creativity.' They also state that loose parts bring an impression of excitement and adventure to children's play, as well as enhancing children's ability to see solutions and to think imaginatively.

[What is Loose Parts Play? \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...) Video that further explains loose parts play



Source: Twinkl 2023

According to Groen (2021), 'loose parts are basically any loose, tactile materials and found objects that children can move about during play and exploration. They're versatile, open-ended and can be added to any learning environment for children to adapt and to turn into anything their imagination allows.' Loose parts can be used to build, invent, experiment, and make. Some settings include areas with a 'tuff spot' which is filled with all sorts of loose parts. This is good for children to develop their fine motor skills as they are using their hands and fingers to explore the resources around them. It also allows children to develop other skills, such as communication as they will be playing with other children in these tuff spots.

Sensory play is also very good for development, especially in young children and babies. Elinor Goldschmeid's treasure baskets are very effective. According to Froebel Trust (no date), a Treasure Basket is a collection of many natural, household, and recycled objects. These are placed in a sturdy basket and is made accessible to a baby. Babies are then free to grab whatever item they wish out of the basket. This provides them with the sensation of sensory, and the opportunity to develop their fine motor skills.



Source: Play hooray! 2021

Messy play is useful for development during the first 1000 days. According to Head Start ECLKC (2022), 'Messy play is the open-ended exploration of materials and their properties.' Although some practitioners are not very fond of this form of play, it is great for development and lets children play freely as there is no 'set goal' after finishing. Some forms of messy play involve mark making in things like shaving foam, paint, water, and sand. Activities such as sorting stones, pouring sand, and squishing clay allow children to experiment and repeat as they like. Messy play engages children's senses at a developmental level that is appropriate for them, due to the fact it is well known that children are naturally curious. As they exercise motor, language, and social skills, children learn foundational cognitive principles. 'Messy play offers one of the best integrated learning experiences young children can have' Head Start ECLKC (2022).

[Messy play activities for early years \(mffy.com\)](https://mffy.com/messy-play-activities-for-early-years/) An article on messy play.

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