



The First 1000 Days

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1 - UNICEF have tools online to help you test your knowledge ; [UNICEF; Test Your Knowledge](#)

The first 1000 days, from pregnancy to the age of two years old help set the foundations for the child's development (gov.uk, no date) These foundations help build their cognitive, emotional, and physical development. These 1000 days are a critical period for their growth and impacts the foundations of optimum health, growth and neurodevelopment (UNICEF, no date). It is important for the child to develop communication and physical skills as this sets a foundation for their future academic and social skills. According to a study by UNICEF (no date), by the age of 2, the child will

usually be able to walk unaided, kick a ball, say more than 50 or more words and be able to climb furniture. However, it is crucial that they are encouraged to learn these new skills by their parents/ carers. NSPCC (2019) suggests that healthy development in these 1000 days is supported by stable environments and loving/ nurturing relationships with parents or caregivers. UNICEF (no date) explains that good nutrition and a healthy environment that a child will receive during this stage will have a profound effect on their health and well-being.



2 - Here are some snacks and meal ideas for toddlers to enjoy! [Yum!](#)

According to Zelman (2019) good nutrition in the first 1000 days helps the development of organ structure, healthy tissues and life long health. Building and improving nutrition at this time helps safeguard children to be able to reach their full potential. Zelman (2019) explains that malnutrition in early stages of life can eventually lead to poor cognition and physical growth, it will then impact the child's ability to learn and explains that brain development is the most rapid during the last trimester of pregnancy. NSPCC (2021) suggests that healthy development in these 1000 days is supported by stable environments and loving/ nurturing relationships with parents or caregivers. It is important that we ensure every opportunity is taken to ensure normal development.

Piaget underpinned this by explaining that children's cognitive development is extremely important for them to understand the world they're in. In order to create an effective nutrition education for a child to develop, Piaget's theory is a useful guide to consider (ResearchGate, 2009).

Piaget brought to light how children progress intellectually through four stages of learning..

The Sensorimotor Stage.. Birth - Two Years Old



The Preoperational Stage.. Ages 2 - 7



The Concrete Operational.. Ages 7 - 11



and finally, the Formal Operational Stage.. Ages 12 and Up
(Susman, 2023).



Another influential figure in the field of child development is Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky believed that active involvement and curiosity from the child, plays an important part for them to learn. Vygotsky showed this theory through his categories of proximal development. These are a range of small tasks in which the infant can perform with the help of the caregiver. He also placed emphasis on the child's surroundings and culture (Susman, 2023). Susman (2023) explains that Vygotsky believed, a child's culture, the parents and peers play the biggest role in their development. McLeod (2023) states that Vygotsky believed that the crucial stage of development in the first 1000 days is social interaction and their surroundings. To enable the child to learn within their surroundings, it is important for the caregiver to be present in order to guide them. McLeod (2023) continues, if the infant has a supportive surrounding at home but also in the school setting, it will help allow the infant to succeed in all settings. However, Piaget believed it is solely fuelled from within.



3 - Here is a link to a video about Vygotsky & Piaget, relaying the information above.

What is Exceptional Care?

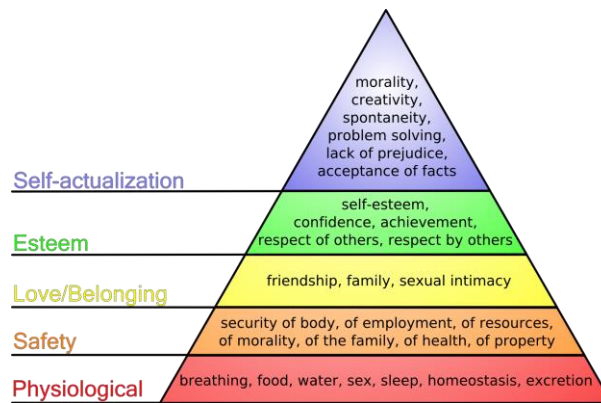


Care that is given to a child during the first 1000 days of their life, according to Calderdale Public Health Report (2017) has a bigger influence on a infant's future than any other time in their life. The care and infant will receive during this time will potentially enable or diminish the infants capacity whilst they grow into young adults (Parliament.UK, no date). The Early Intervention Foundation (2023) argued that it is crucial to avoid creating a narrative where the opportunities to help support a child's development are lost as they grow. Research began with the main focus on early nutrition, however research now shows there are multiple factors within the first 1000 days that play a pivotal role. Exceptional care in early years can help make significant improvements in their childhood outcomes. Gov.Wales (no date) explain that a child's development is heavily influenced by their environments, the experiences they encounter and by the adults that are around them whether it be at home, or in a learning setting.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs' theory explains how children are motivated based on their different level of needs. Maslow suggested that in order for a child to gain a higher level of the pyramid, they must have the lower lev

el, for example, food, water and safety. Maslow stated that the child's mind and body cannot function optimally if the lowest stages aren't yet met (McLeod, 2023). All five basic human needs must be met in order to gain self-actualization. On the other hand, Pikler's approach to children in childcare is mainly focused on creating and maintaining a secure attachment between the child and the caregiver (Witty, 2019). Matthew Lieberman (no date) also agrees that food, shelter and warmth are not the foundation of human needs but our social bonds are the most essential (Vivienne, 2018). Lieberman claims that babies are helpless and that they must rely on others for survival, he agrees that we do need food, shelter and warmth, however we wouldn't have these three things without first belonging to an individual that we can receive these from (Vivienne, 2018).

While all theories amplify the importance of meeting the child's needs, they differ on the approach and how it will progress.



4 - Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.



What is the Pikler approach?



Pikler is an approach to childcare that was developed by Dr Emmi Pikler (CareforKids, 2020). Pikler stated that children will only truly learn if they are emotionally satisfied. This then will lead onto a trusting relationship with the child and caregiver. Pikler then explains that certain conditions have to be in place in order to enhance their development. Witty (2019) explains that Pikler believed that it was extremely important to establish a respectful relationship with infants. He continues, that the development of motor abilities only happen when the infant is allowed to pace their own physical efforts. Pikler also explained how important it is that giving respectful care, especially when the practitioner is giving bodily care to the infant is one of the most important tools to build a secure attachment (Marlen, no date).

There are seven principles that Pikler developed for childhood development:

- Carers must give full attention - 100% of their focus should be on the child as this focus could bring a peacefulness to hectic lives.
- Slow Down - babies develop better in relaxing environments, over-stimulation can cause babies to be on edge, calming and peaceful environments allow babies to relax and feel comfortable.
- Trust & relationships - caring activities (feeding, dressing and nappy changes) are bonding moments.
- You must work with babies - don't underestimate babies abilities. Interact with the infant, give them time to respond and the relationship will build.
- Free movement - allow the child to move as it please, avoid 'trapping' them into a position they couldn't achieve themselves.
- Uninterrupted play time - playing allows them to learn skills independently and helps build their confidence. Allow them to play & explore.
- Lastly.. Pikler explains that babies send verbal and physical cues all the time. Carers should tune in respectfully to the babies cues in order to gain mutual respect.



Professional Partnerships



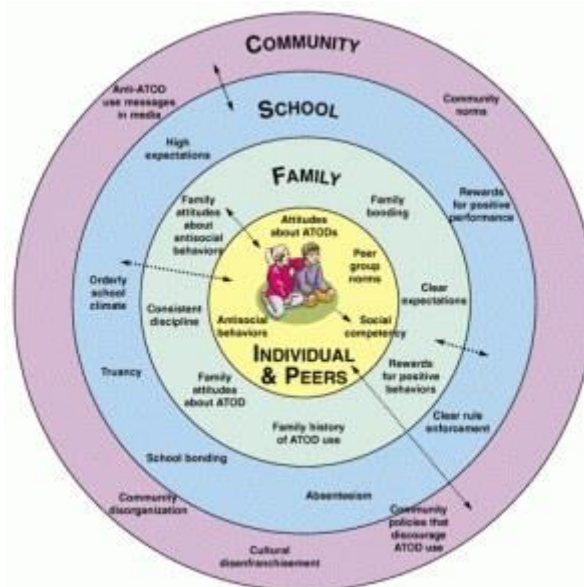
Early interventions may help solve early problems that may occur during the children's early years. According to the Department of Health and Social Care (2024) development will continue throughout childhood and into adolescence. Problems that arise later on in childhood, for example; bullying at

schools or conflicts at home, can prove detrimental to their development and future health. In a supportive and encouraging setting, a practitioner should be continuously updating the carer. All aspects of the day should be planned and prepped accordingly, if support is needed for additional needs, adjustments should be made and support should be put in place by the practitioner (Department of Health and Social Care, 2022).

The first 1000 days are a crucial time for not only development but it is also the time when babies are their most vulnerable (GOV.UK, no date). In some cases, a baby may have a developmental need that will likely require special provision. Some may have a physical disability that is diagnosed. For others, it may take longer to be identified. In this time, babies do not have the ability to speak for themselves, therefore their parents/carers must advocate on their behalf (GOV.UK, no date).

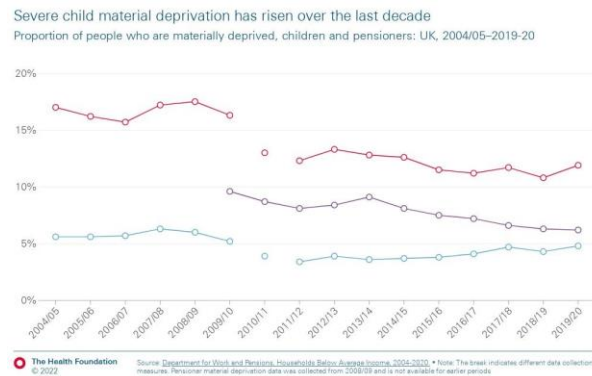
It is crucial that a practitioner will explain to the caregiver their options and to simply explain throughout what you can do to help and where they can find additional help. It is extremely important that the practitioner identifies the children or families that will need any additional help and to consider the diverse needs and vulnerabilities of the child and families (West Sussex County Council, 2023).

Bronfenbrenner (1977) ecological system theory believes a child's development is heavily governed by the four interconnected systems. The system shows how it begins with the immediate surrounds; close family, parents and siblings. It then leads onto a wider environment, such as policies, social and economical surroundings (McLeod, 2023). Bronfenbrenner (1977) continues to explain that the environment said infant experiences will have a profound affect on all outcomes of their life. Bronfenbrenner (1997) ecological theory clarifies the importance that we should continue to follow, these steps will not only help the practitioner but will help support the caregiver and allow them to understand how they can support the infant (Santa Clara University, no date) .



The roles and responsibilities of an early years practitioner in supporting children & families must include the ability to look after children's physical needs, for example; feeding and nappy changing (AllAboutChildren, no date). The ability to develop close attachments and gaining trust with the children is crucial. Welsh.Gov (2022) states we must ensure that safeguarding is a priority and to report any concerns. Children's development and progress must be observed and a record must be kept in order to communicate and share with the parent/ carer.

Maternal deprivation and poverty both play a crucial role in the development of the first 1000 days and have a significant impact on the infants physical needs and mental health (The Health Foundation, 2022). As stated by the Health Foundation (2022) almost 1 in 8 children in the UK live in a low income household and experience maternal deprivation, The study also identified evidence that families whom live in low income households were significantly associated with increased risk during pregnancy and adverse pregnancy outcomes.



5 - The Health Foundation, 2022.

Challenges in providing High Quality Care

During the first 1000 days, providing high quality care is paramount. It is crucial in order to gain good development and the infants well-being. To provide the high quality care will ensure that the child has the best start in life, however there are many aspects that will be challenging.

According to NHS England, some of the challenges include;

- Gaining data and monitoring all aspects; to collect data and monitor the setting can help identify any issues that are raised or not raised and help improve the environment
- Organizational cultures; the culture and capacity of the setting can heavily impact the quality of care provided
- Lack of communication; it is essential for practitioners and caregiver to communicate any issues risen, with communication help from practitioners and caregivers will allow high quality care
- Leadership; in order to ensure local systems are in place, it is vital that good leadership is shown throughout the setting and during challenging times (Mills, 2018).



Activities



During the first 1000 days there are multiple factors within the setting that play a pivotal role. During this time period, cognitive stimulation have been linked to mental disorders, the development of language and the ability to solve problems (Zilberman, 2019; et al).

As taught by Dr Maria Montessori, "Play is the work of the child" (Edwards,2020). Montessori believed that children learn best and can be educated successfully through play. To help encourage children to explore their natural abilities through play could help their problem solving skills and creativity, not to forget their imagination (Pediatrics, 2007).

Montessori proposed using real tools would help teach the infant the importance and understanding of risk assessment. As shown below in a Montessori classroom, all items would have a kept place and all would be organised.



6 - This way of planning will help the children gain respect for all items available and understand that items have to be returned to their home.

Montessori education highlights the use of real tools in the classroom. According to Spring Stone Montessori Preschool (no date) Montessorians encourage the use of real materials and wood and metal utensils as an alternative to plastic substitutes. Montessori believed the child's imagination is the natural inclination of the child (SpringStoneKids, no date). Montessori education encourages children to handle breakable materials in order to experience skills needed to for care when handling these objects. They strive for children to experience real life through real life experiences.

Introducing these real tools into the classroom will allow the child to explore new feelings, allow them to create and independence (Kimberley, 2017). Introducing these tools to the classroom have many benefits, however it is crucial to teach children how to safely use them.



7 - montessorichild.com

All practitioners must understand that play is the central part to how children will learn.

The Welsh Government (2002) definition of play ; which is **freely chose, personally directed and intrinsically motivated**.

There are 7 core aims for children under the Welsh Government's scheme, play is established as one under Core Aim 4 – Play, Sport, Leisure and Culture. (Welsh Government, 2012).



Forest Schools



Forest schools is an approach that originated from Scandinavia. This activity has been implemented both nationally and internationally (Knight, 2018). Forest schools are an excellent way to help engage children with the outdoor setting as well as nature..

Here are some way in which you can help children explore the outdoors;

Treasure Hunts..



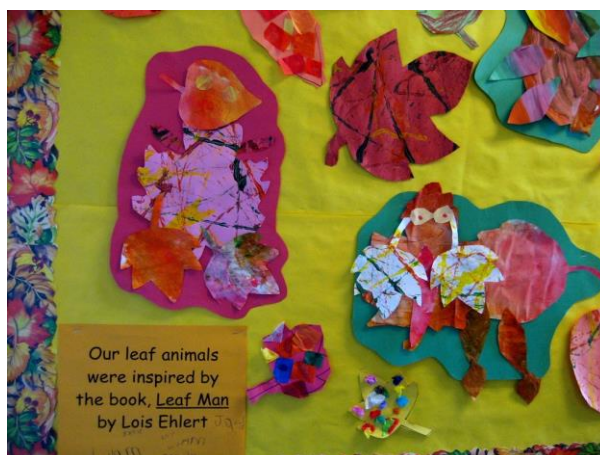
Treasure hunts are an excellent way to get children moving and exploring the outdoors!

Stick Activities..



Create a *magic* wand! or create a crown out of feathers, leaves and flowers!

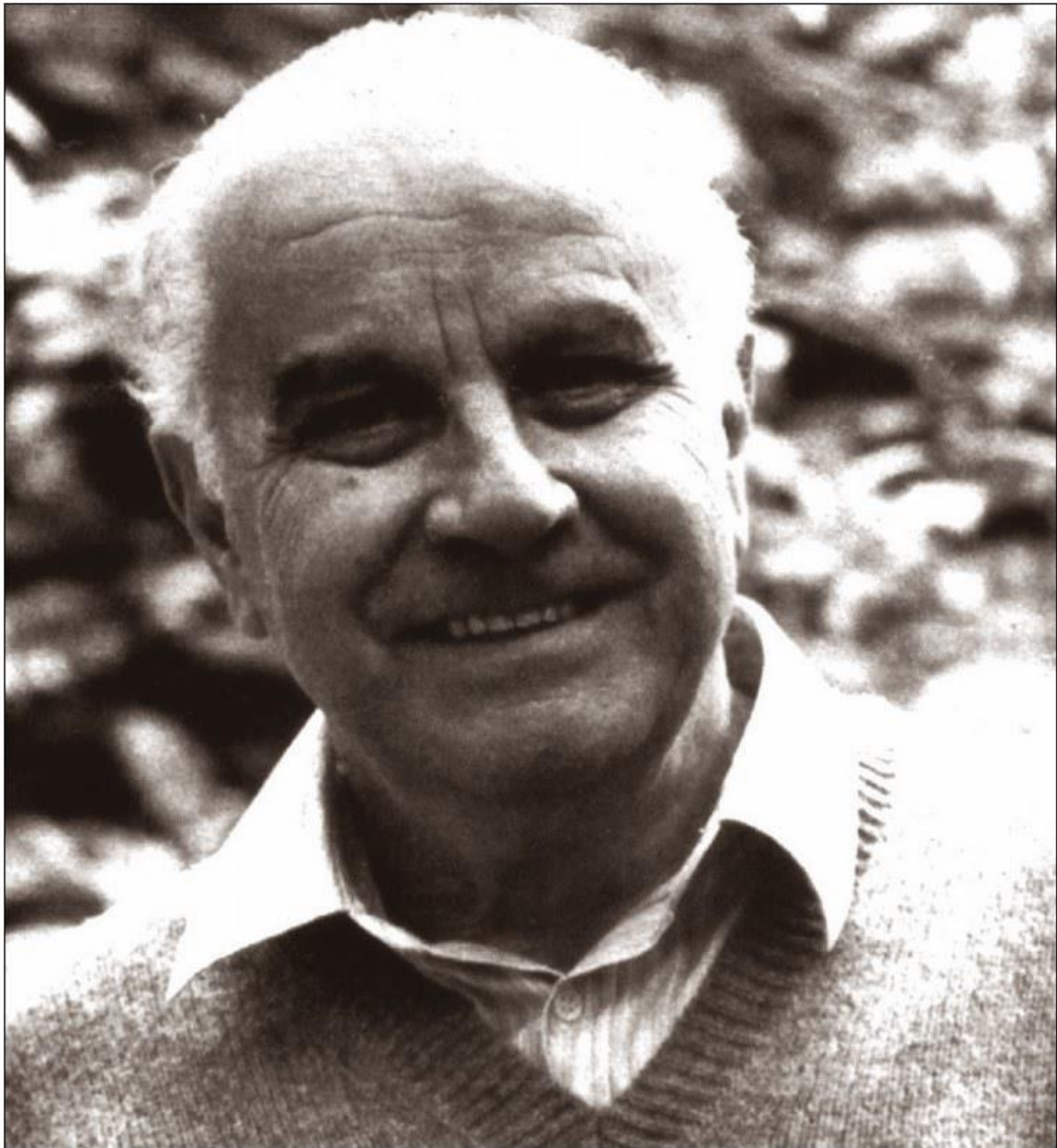
or Wild Art!



Collect natural materials, such as; twigs, leaves, flowers..

you can paint the leaves or create some leaf animals. You can even create decoration using salt dough or clay!

The Reggio Emilia Approach



Loris Malaguzzi

A central figure in the Reggio Emilia approach is Loris Malaguzzi. Malaguzzi and local citizens contributed to the development of Reggio Emilia's network (Reggio Emilia Approach, no date).

The Reggio Emilia approach uses four key principles that helps focus on the children's natural development. According to Rock (2020) this approach is child-centred, that learning must make complete sense to the child in order for them to understand and for it to be effective.

The Reggio Emilia principles are..

Children must be allowed to have a say on what they will learn. Their senses play a pivotal role in the learning process, this allows them to fully process information

Children should be encouraged to interact with other children of their age and to be able to explore through different materials that will intrigue their interest

Children should be allowed to voice their opinion, encouraged to express themselves and given opportunities to allow this process. (Very Well Families, 2020)

Expanding on this approach, a major tenet of this philosophy is children should feel completely comfortable in their educational setting and allow them to feel at home. Explained by Rock (2020) a range of materials are used when it times to learn including, paint and clay.

The Welsh Government

The Welsh Government have helped develop a toolkit in Wales that helps enable and to strengthen their approach to the surrounding communities. There are five levels to this toolkit and the fourth level focuses on how we can help families actively support their children's learning (gov.wales, 2022).

Schools use parents'/ carers' evenings to help encourage families to help understand and support their child's learning process with the main focus on families who provide less support for the children and to those of a deprived background.

All education settings should have effective relationships between the practitioner and parent/caregiver. Staff should be trained on safeguarding issues and introduce the significance of multi-agency working to parents/ caregivers who are facing multiple problems at home (Gov.Wales, 2022).

Stated by Gov.UK (2021) there should always be multi-agency safeguarding arrangements in place. All practitioners should have a shared and equal duty in order to work alongside the correct agencies. The voluntary community sector is an example of agency which is important to consider as it will help support the safeguarding and welfare of all babies and children.

Wales' Quality Framework (ECPLC) allows babies and young children to have adult interactions, helps them explore indoor and outdoor environments and allows them different experiences. They are described as three enablers:

Enabling adults who:

- are warm, responsive, skilful and observant
- interested in young babies and their development
- have an understanding of child development in order to support all children
- use knowledge and understand how infants learn

(Welsh Government, 2022).



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