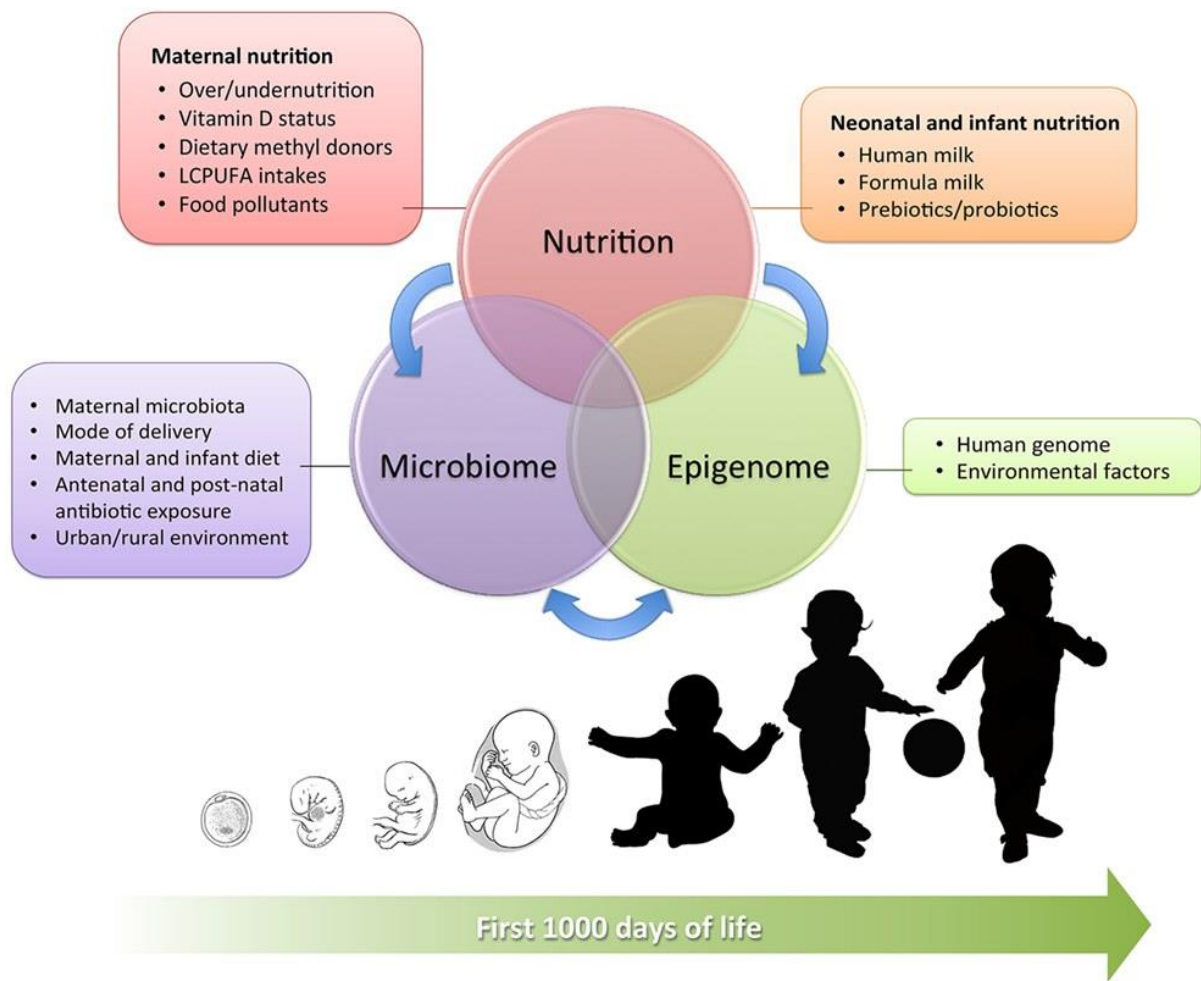




First 1,000 days

What is the first 1000 days?



1 Month	3 Months	7 Months
❑ Makes slight jerk movements ❑ Brings his or her hands within the range of eyes and mouth ❑ Turns his or hers head when called by a familiar sound and voice ❑ Focuses on near by objects (8-12 inches away) ❑ Responds to loud sounds	❑ Notices their hands by two months ❑ Smiles at the sound of a familiar voice by two months ❑ Follows moving objects with her eyes by 2-3 months ❑ Supports head when on stomach by 3 months ❑ Babbles by 3-4 months ❑ Attempts to imitate any of your sounds by 4 months ❑ Attentive to new faces, and is frightened by them ❑ Imitates some movements and facial expressions	❑ Rolls on to back and front ❑ Sits without support of the hands ❑ Supports weight on legs ❑ Responds to own name ❑ Babbles by 3-4 months ❑ Shows responses to "no" ❑ Responds to sound by making sounds
15 Months	15-24 Months	2 years
❑ Sits up without assistance ❑ Crawls ❑ Pulls self up to stand ❑ Walks by holding onto something ❑ Responds to "no" ❑ Uses simple gestures, such as shaking head for "no" ❑ Says "dada" and "mama" ❑ Tries to imitate words	❑ says single words (15-18 months) ❑ Uses simple phrases (18-24 months) ❑ Plays pretend ❑ Walks alone ❑ Looks at objects when told to look	❑ Begins to run ❑ Walks up and down stairs holding onto support ❑ Scribbles spontaneously ❑ Recognizes names of familiar people, objects, and body parts ❑ Follows simple instructions ❑ Points at objects when told its name ❑ Enthusiastic around other children

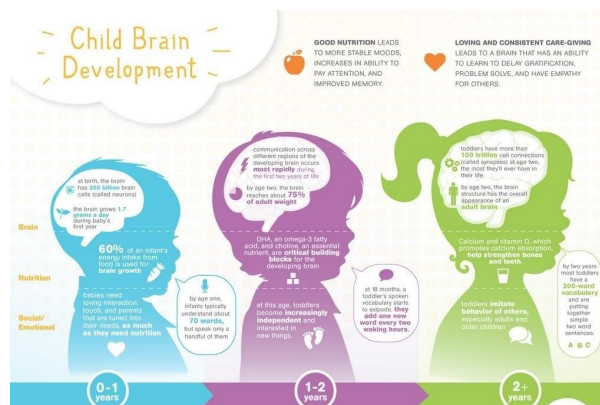
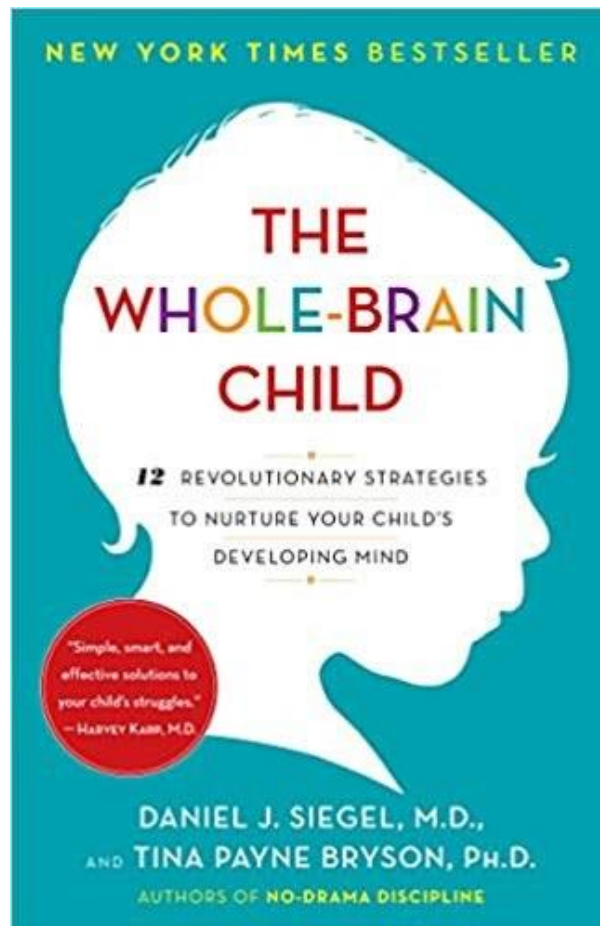


The first 1,000 days represent a period in which foundations of brain development are established. Brain development begins before birth, progressing rapidly in early life, with over one million new neural connections forming every second during a

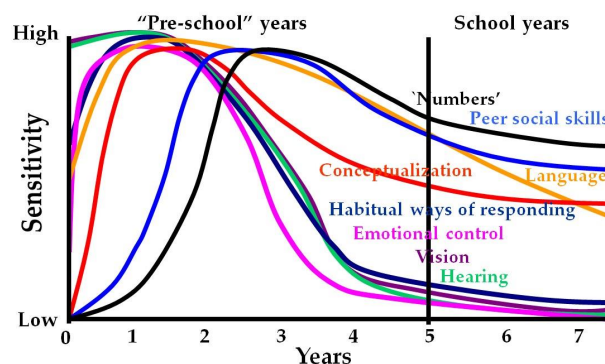
baby's first year. During this peak period, sensory pathways such as vision and hearing develop first, followed by language acquisition and higher cognitive functions that support thinking, learning and behaviour (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021). During pregnancy, the brain develops rapidly as brain cells multiply dramatically. However, many neural connections are formed after birth through experience (Thousand Days, 2018). Early interactions, including touch, movement, communication, play, stimulate neural pathways that support learning and information processing later in life (Stead, 2024). Nutrition is vital, as the developing baby relies entirely on the mother's nutritional intake during pregnancy. Key nutrients like folic acid, iron, iodine, zinc, protein and fatty acids support brain structure and function, while deficiencies increase the risk of developmental and cognitive difficulties (Thousand Days, 2018). After birth, the postnatal period remains a window of development. Breast milk provides essential nutrients and immunological support that adapt to the baby's needs and promote healthy brain development (Karakochuk et al., 2017). From around six months, the introduction of appropriate foods becomes increasingly important, as food quality influences nutritional adequacy and supports ongoing neurodevelopment (Karakochuk et al., 2017). Together, prenatal and postnatal processes define the first 1,000 days as a foundational period for lifelong development across the child's life cycle.

Why are the First 1,000 Days Important?





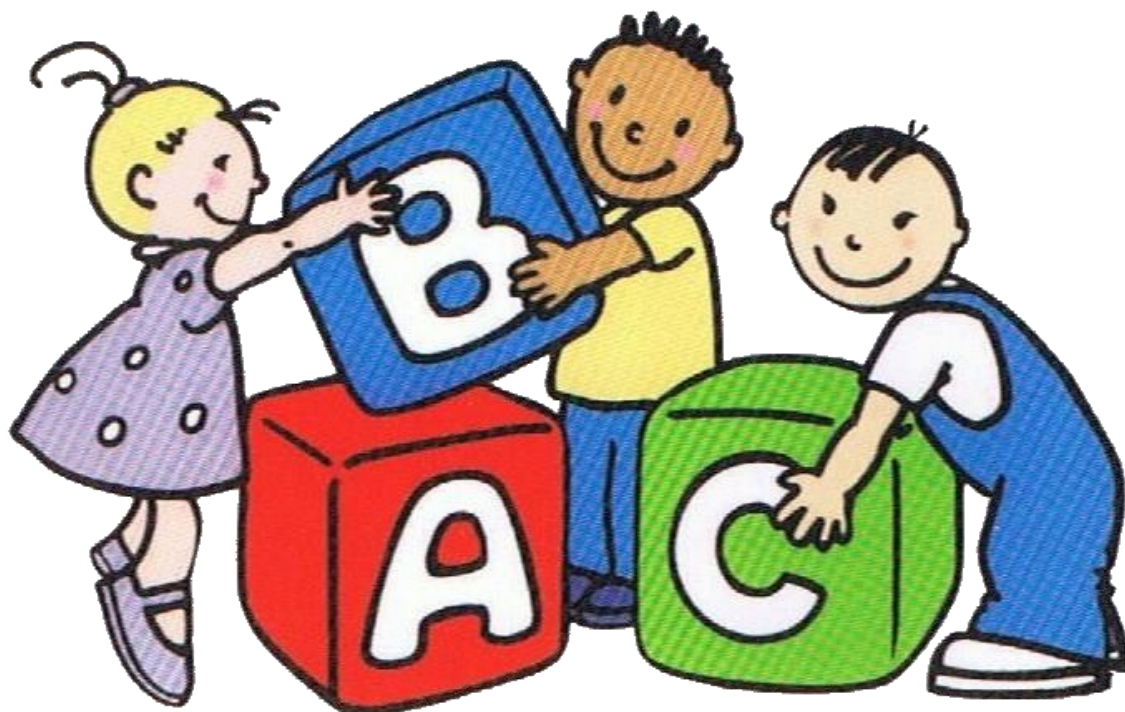
'Sensitive periods' in early brain development



Graph developed by Council for Early Child Development (ref: Nash, 1997; *Early Years Study*, 1999; Shonkoff, 2000.)

The first 1,000 days are important because experiences during this period shape lifelong health, learning and wellbeing. Brain growth is faster than at any other time in the child's life cycle, making development sensitive to positive and negative influences (Thousand Days, 2018). The first 1,000 days [responsive](#) "serve and return" interactions between babies and caregivers helps shape brain development strengthening neural connections. These back-and-forth exchanges support early language and social development, providing a foundation for higher-level cognitive skills and learning later in life (Harvard University, 2024). Equally important is adequate nutrition, providing biological foundation for cognitive abilities, motor development and socio emotional skills linked to later educational achievement and economic opportunity (Stead, 2024). In contrast poor nutrition, neglect, prolonged exposure to stress during this period disrupt brain development, effects being long-lasting or irreversible (Thousand Days, 2018). It also according to Karakochuk *et al*, (2017) influences development of the immune system, metabolism and vital organs affecting vulnerability to conditions like diabetes, cardiovascular disease and obesity later in life. According to House of Commons (2019) evidence suggests that early adversity including poverty, parental conflict, abuse is associated with increased risk of poor physical and mental health outcomes in adulthood particularly for children exposed to multiple adverse childhood experiences. It goes on to suggest these early harms contribute to cycles of disadvantages that extend across generations (House of Commons, 2019). Although development continues beyond early childhood the first 1,000 days represent a uniquely sensitive window, early intervention significantly improves long-term outcomes (Thousand Days, 2018).

What is Exceptional Care?





True North Quality
→ Dec 2016:

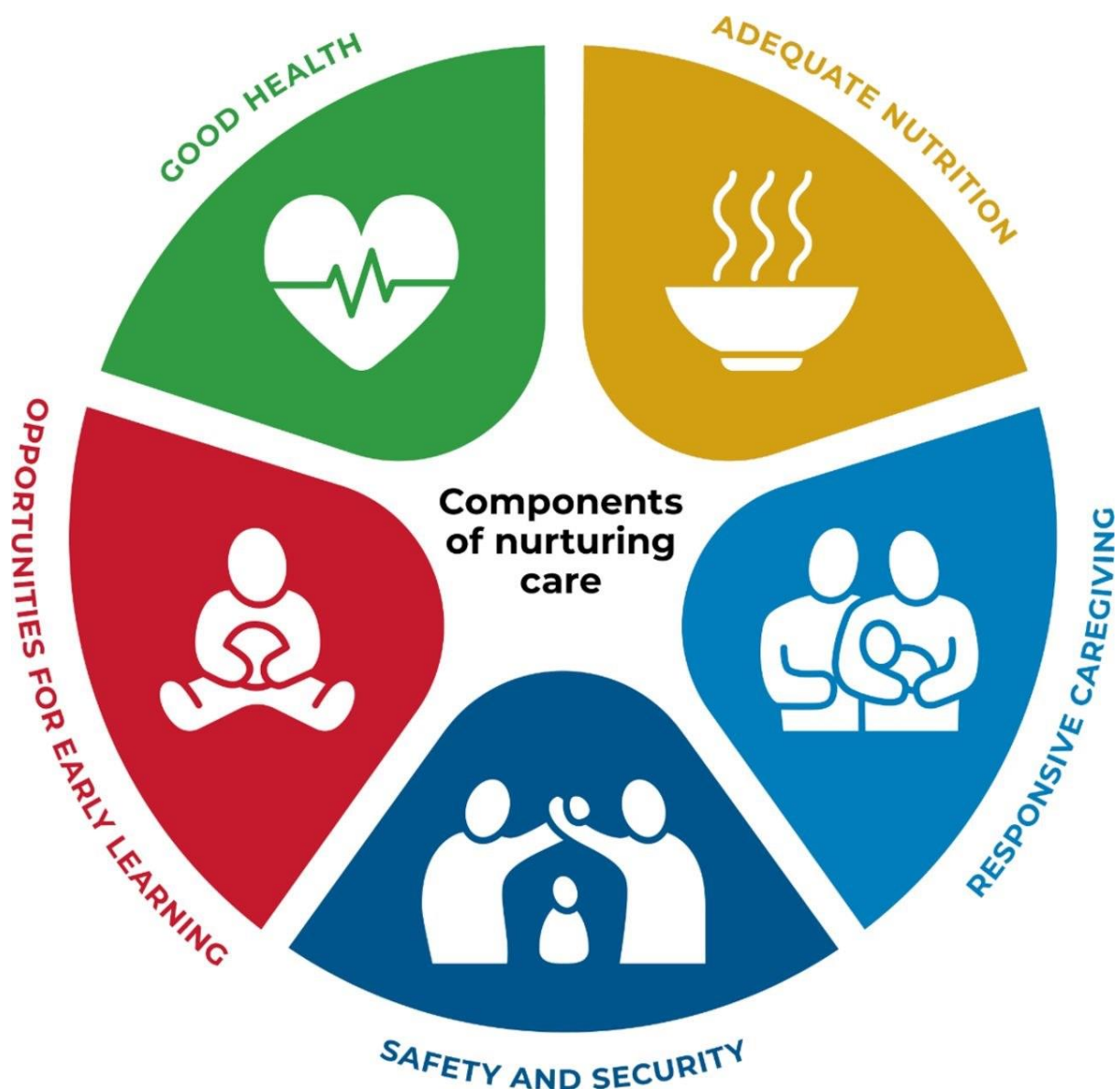
- **Hypertension**
- Asthma treatment
- Prenatal care in 1st trimester
- SBIRT
- Obesity counseling

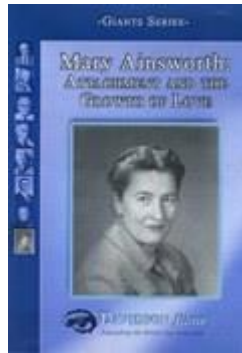


Exceptional care in early childhood education a pedagogical approach giving importance to emotionally secure, respectful, responsive relationships between caregivers and children. Enabling environments are designed to be calm, predictable and flexible, allowing caregivers to adapt routines to individual children rather than expecting children to conform to fixed practises. Inclusive practice ensures that children's cultural backgrounds, family structures, languages, individual needs are reflected in the physical environment and daily interactions (Early Years Coalition, 2021). Pite (2025) states inclusive practise involves listening to children's voices, valuing diversity, removing barriers to learning, adapting teaching strategies and environments for individuals need. Practitioners have high aspirations for all children, work collaboratively with families, who are children's first educators and essential contributors to inclusive enabling care. Furthermore Hargraves (2018) states research shows eight key features in quality caregiving and are consistent with the Pikler Approach (Hargraves, 2020) are: **Key teaching:** A primary caregiver builds secure attachment, trust and smooth transitions while supporting individual care and wider relationships. **Continuity of caregiver:** Consistent caregivers reduce stress, strengthen learning and support emotional security over time. **Effective settling process:** Gradual, parent involved transitions help children feel safe

and confident. **Adapting to the child:** Flexible routines respond to each child's preferences and cues. **Attentive responsiveness:** Sensitive respectful interactions value children's communication and support development. **Partnership:** Shared decision-making balances children's needs, safety and independence. **Maximising learning:** Daily care routines create rich opportunities for language, cooperation and shared meaning. **Widening the relationships with others:** Secure attachments enable children to confidently form relationships with others.

Why is this Important





Caregiving forms an important component of pedagogical practise for practitioners working with children. Neuroscientific research demonstrates early brain development is closely linked to physical care and emotional experiences indicating caregiving routines actively support learning and development (Hargraves, 2018). Continuity of care, effective settling in processes is important in supporting emotional wellbeing, as repeated changes in caregivers can be distressing for children. Collaborative partnerships with parents further strengthen inclusive practise, ensuring consistency between home and early years setting. Collectively exceptional care within an enabling, inclusive environment supports holistic development, where children feel valued, secure and capable during their most formative years (Early

Years Coalition, 2021) Evidence consistently shows that children who attend very good quality early years care setting between the ages of two and four achieve improved educational outcomes across later stages of schooling. These benefits are strongly linked with the quality of early years environments and relationships formed within them. [Secure attachments](#) developed through consistent caregiving enable children to regulate emotions, build resilience and engage confidently with others (UK Government, 2025). By offering sensitivity, emotional availability and time caregivers enable children to develop a sense of self, form trusting relationships and explore their environment safely (Weber, 2003). Inclusive and enabling environments supported by strong partnership with families promote equality, belonging and wellbeing, practitioners must reflect on their own practise and actively challenge discrimination to ensure that all children, families feel respected and valued. Together, exceptional care and inclusive practise support holistic development during a critical period of early life (Pite, 2025).

The role of the Practitioner

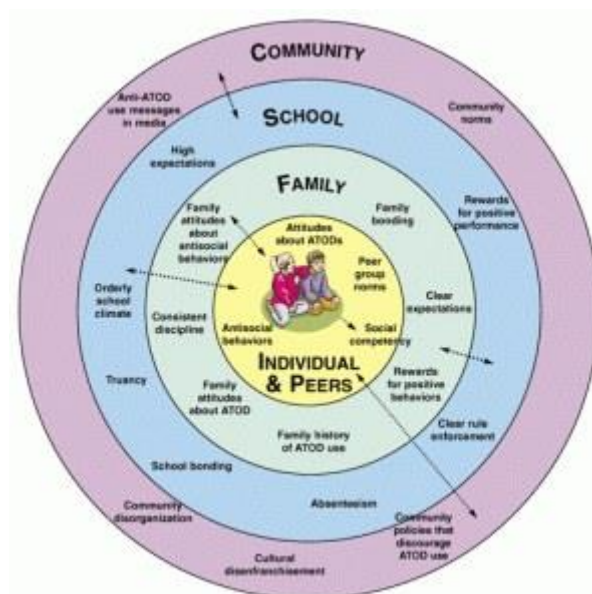


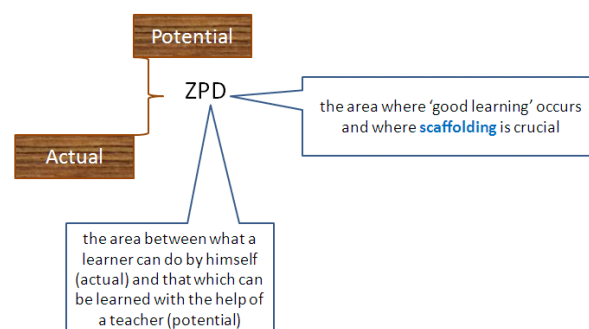
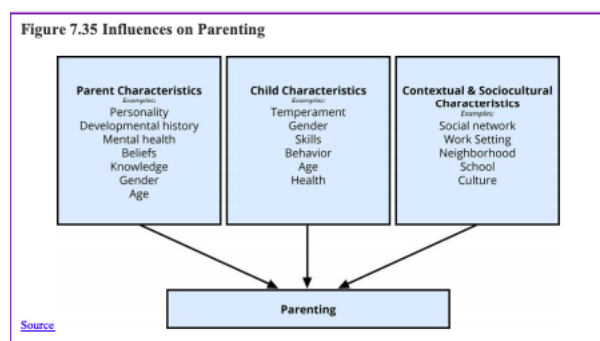
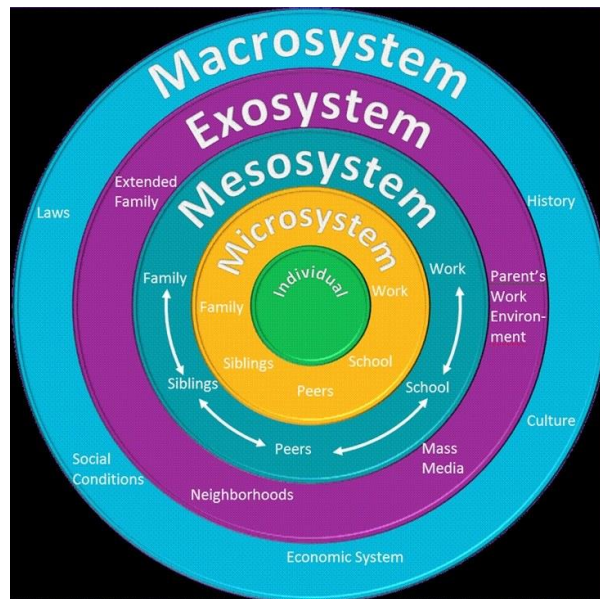
Developmental Scale	GENERAL OBSERVATIONS		
	'Doing' question	'Understanding' question	'Saying' question
	Does the child take part in nursery activities?	Does the child already?	Does the child have conversations with adults?
Early development (approx.24 months)	Playing mostly on own ☐	Learn to understand several new words per week ☐	Attempting ☐
Intermediate development (approx.36 months)	Joining in play with other children regularly ☐	Understand what/where questions ☐	2-3 turns and learning to recognise when conversation goes wrong ☐
Later development (approx.48-60 months)	Asking permission or apologising when necessary ☐	Recognise and understand a few letters/numbers ☐	Initiates and maintains topic of conversation ☐

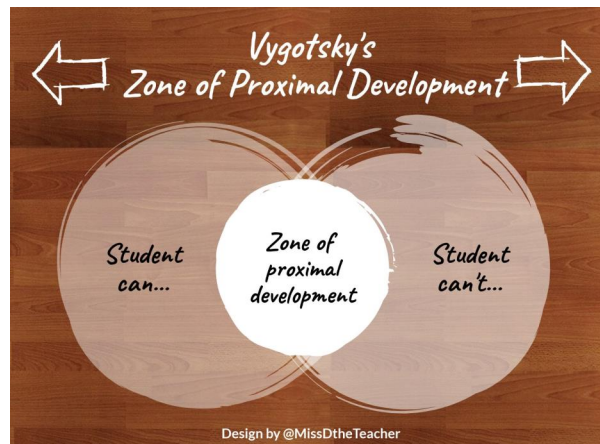
[Early years practitioners](#) play an important role in supporting children's learning, development and wellbeing during the vital stages of growth. Early childhood is a key period for brain development, and the experiences children gained during this time strongly influence their future outcomes. By providing a nurturing, safe and supportive environment practitioners help children develop emotionally, socially, and cognitively laying a strong foundation for later learning and life skills. Through positive interactions and planned experiences children develop key skills such as communication, problem solving and emotional regulation. A key responsibility of practitioners is supporting holistic development by recognising children's physical, emotional, social and cognitive needs. Practitioners promote inclusivity and diversity by creating environments where all

children feel valued, respected and included regardless of background and ability. Practitioners also work closely with parents and carers sharing information and collaborating to support each child's individual needs while respecting family values and aspirations (Manchester University, 2025). According to Inspire London College (2025) Early years practitioners carry out a range of duties that contribute to children's learning and safety across all areas of learning by providing play-based learning and hands on activities. Practitioners ensure that the environments are clean, secure and welcoming by following health and safety as well as safeguarding procedures. They observe, record children's progress to identify strengths and areas requiring support, sharing this information with parents, carers and other professionals. Additionally, practitioners support emotional and social development by encouraging positive behaviour, confidence, friendships and routines that help children develop success in life.

The Role of Effective Partnership



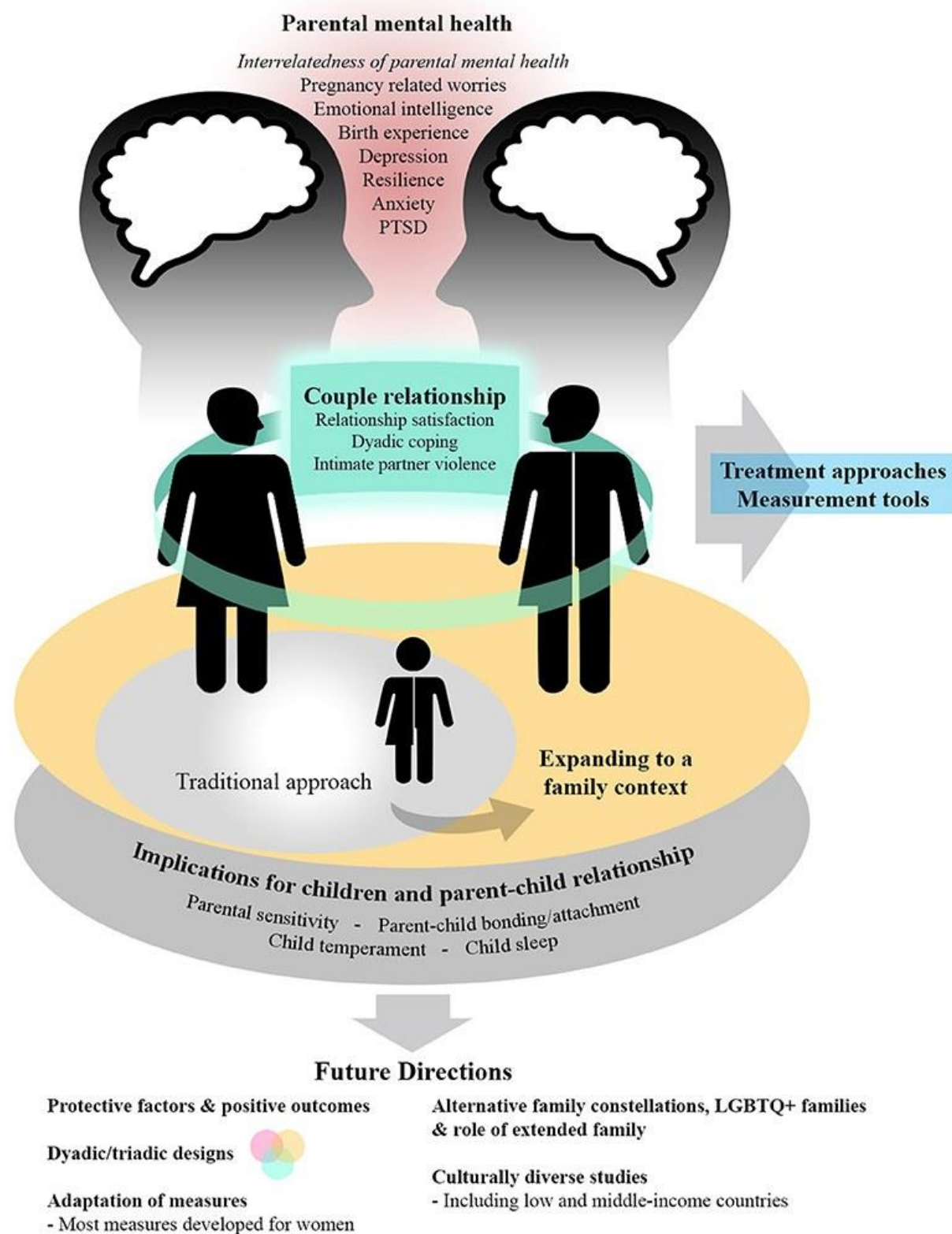


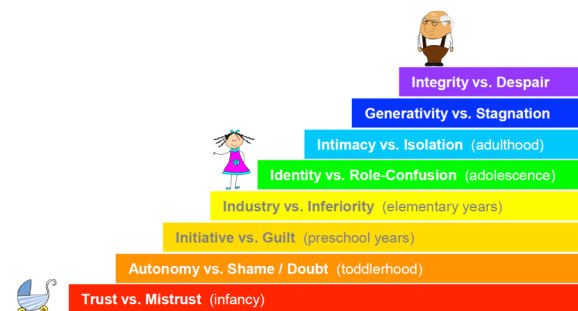
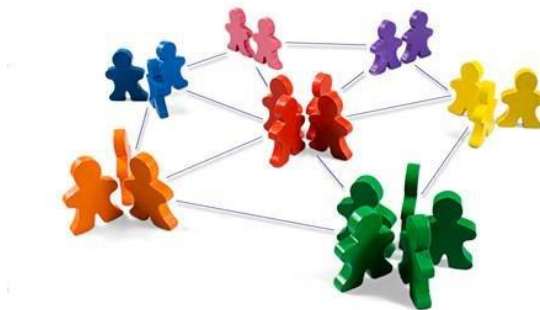
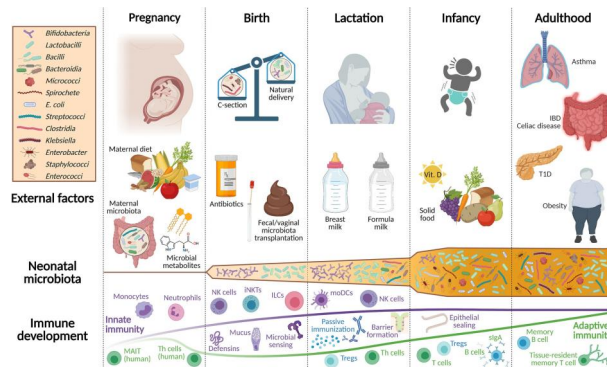
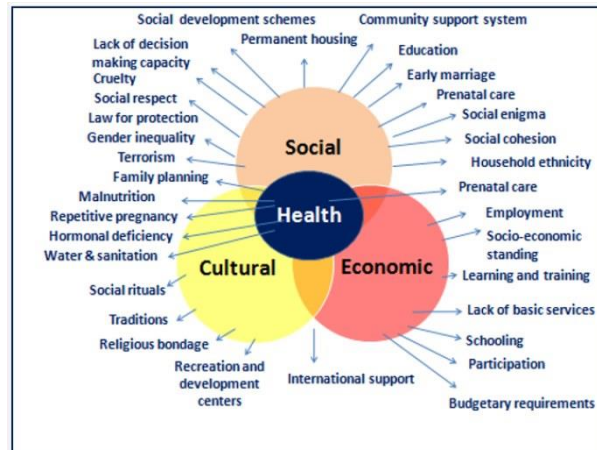


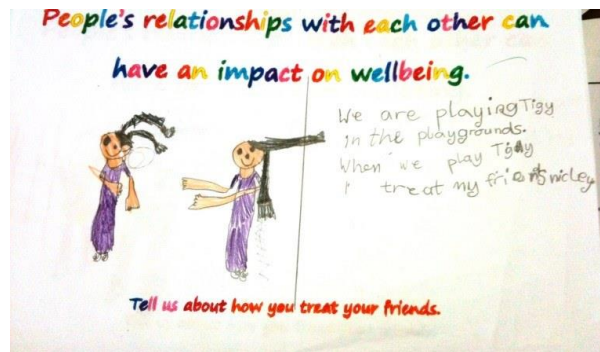
Effective partnership working is important to children's development and learning, it is strongly supported by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory explaining how development is shaped through interactions within multiple, interconnected environmental systems (Main, 2023). Main (2023) further explains this theory emphasising that children's outcomes are influenced not only by individual abilities but by relationships across home, school, community and wider society. The Mouse Club (2024) highlights the Ecological Systems: The **Microsystem** which refers to the child's immediate environment including home, community and school, where parental involvement plays a crucial role in supporting social, emotional and cognitive development in preparation for school.

The **Mesosystem** highlights links between these settings particularly the relationship between home and school where consistent communication supports positive behaviour and learning. The **Exosystem** includes wider influences such as community services and parental access to support which indirectly effect development. The **Macrosystem** reflects cultural values and societal attitudes towards education. When schools adopt strong community engagement strategies and support parents as educators, they promote collaboration, lifelong learning and improved outcomes for children. Main (2023) also states the **Chronosystem** which focuses on how development is influenced over-time which considers individual life changes as well as wider social and historical events. Main (2023) further elaborates that practitioners can apply Bronfenbrenner's theory by strengthening classroom environments that foster effective home school partnerships and consider wider influences on behaviour. Strategies include family engagement initiatives, responsive teaching approaches and community collaboration. Furthermore, Vygotsky's ZPD highlights social interactions, scaffolding, cultural context in shaping children's development ([Childhood Education Zone, 2025](#))

Maternal Factors that Impact Development and what support could be offered







Maternal factors play a critical role in shaping children's development. The Welsh Government highlights that positive parenting is strongly associated with improved outcomes for children while negative or stressful early experiences, have a long-term effect on health and wellbeing. Exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) parental mental illness, substance misuse, domestic abuse or family breakdown results in toxic stress, negatively influencing a child's emotional, social and cognitive development through life (Welsh Government, 2017a). According to NHS England (2016) maternal mental health effects early development and one in five mothers experience mental health difficulties during pregnancy or the postnatal period and suicide remains a leading cause of maternal mortality. NHS England (2016) further states that it can disrupt bonding and attachment and is associated with poorer developmental outcomes for children. Wider social factors, including poor housing conditions further increase stress, anxiety and depression for both mothers and children. To address these risks, the Welsh Government (2017b) suggests that structured parenting and early years support are essential, programmes such as Flying Start aim to promote secure attachment, improve maternal emotional wellbeing and support families creating, safe and nurturing environments enabling children to meet developmental milestones and prepare for school. Public Health Wales (2023) emphasises family-centred, preventative approaches with health visitors, midwives playing a central role in early identification of need and access to support. Consistent evidence-based parenting support, continuity of care and targeted interventions to address stressors such as poverty, housing and relationship difficulties are crucial in reducing inequalities and improving outcomes for families.

Chain of effect

**Parent/carer
interaction changes**

leads to

**Change in child's
interaction with
their parent/carer**

leads to

**Improved child
interaction with
others – symptom
reduction**

PACT, 2017





THE VALUE OF HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

MOST FAMILIES CANNOT AFFORD THE TRUE COST OF QUALITY CHILD CARE.

- Quality child care for children birth to age 3 costs as much as **\$13,000 per year**.
- This cost breaks down to a little over \$6 per hour for child care for a 40-hour work week, which is still too expensive for most families.
- The costs of high-quality care can force families to seek out lower quality care, which has detrimental effects on children.

LOUISIANA EARLY EDUCATORS ARE CREDENTIALLED PROFESSIONALS WHO DESERVE PROFESSIONAL WAGES-BUT DON'T GET THEM.

- Teachers are trained to facilitate the cognitive, social, physical, and emotional development of children and keep every child safe.
- Over one-third of early educators have a bachelor's degree or higher.
- The average wage for Louisiana child care teachers is **\$9.77 per hour**.

HIGH-QUALITY CHILD CARE CENTERS PRIORITIZE CHILD SAFETY AND LEARNING, MAXIMIZING RETURNS ON OUR INVESTMENTS IN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION.

Recommended Number of Children Per Adult in Child Care Centers to Support Safety, Care, and Learning

Infants	1-Year-Olds	2-Year-Olds	3-Year-Olds	4-Year-Olds
3	4	4	7	8

QUALITY IS ABOUT SAFETY & LEARNING

Quality centers have more teachers per classroom and smaller classroom sizes, supporting increased child safety and learning.

PERSONALIZED CARE

The return on investment of early childhood education can be 13% to 18% for high-quality programs. To get those returns, we must invest in centers with smaller class sizes where teachers can provide personalized care.



The challenges in providing high quality care have various factors, with child poverty remaining a significant factor, children growing up in low-income household's experience disadvantages that continue into adult life. Poverty restricts parent's ability to provide learning resources and enriching activities, which negatively impact parenting behaviours. Employment conditions affect family wellbeing, where a secure and fair wage can provide security, health, a low pay, inflexible hours, poor conditions can damage family life. Health and Social services play an important role in supporting families, as early identification of need and timely intervention prevent difficulties from escalating. High quality early childhood education, childcare create positive learning opportunities for families who struggle. Wider social justice and equality, access to services encourages mutual support, while safe clean and connected environments promote physical and mental wellbeing (Public Health Wales, 2023). Despite all this, the sector faces persistent workforce challenges, recruitment, retention and training difficulties make it hard for many settings to meet qualification requirements. Although guidance allows providers to develop action plans to achieve compliance, progress depends on staff willingness to undertake further training. Many practitioners are reluctant to pursue higher level qualifications because pay does not reflect responsibility or workload. Qualified staff are often employed in managerial roles, limiting their availability for direct work with children. Time for planning assessment, continuing professional development is constrained and not always reflected in funding rates. While local authorities offer training and professional learning, staff shortages, lack of cover make attendance difficult, increasing pressure on overworked staff (NDNA, 2021).

Furthermore, parental awareness of government funded childcare is generally high but understanding of how to access it is inconsistent, practical barriers include limited local provision, transport difficulties, the cost and disruption of moving children between settings limit the availability for parents to access these services. However, in some areas, insufficient childcare provision restricts parents' employment options whilst inflexible provision is challenging for parents working shifts or irregular hours. Moreover, administrative barriers also reduce uptake especially for parents with insecure work or self-employed who struggle to provide the required documentation, the application process is often viewed as a complex, intrusive or difficult to complete and a lack of funded childcare for under three further limits

affordability for families with more than two children (Gov.Wales, 2021). Whilst most parents' value early education for socialisation, language development and school readiness and view childcare to support their own employment, they are of a belief that care should be within family as children are too young for formal provision, another barrier is language choice with limited Welsh medium provisions restricting access in some areas (Gov.Wales, 2021). Equally certain groups face additional barriers, including low-income families, rural communities, single parents, families with children having additional needs, and those living across local authority boundaries. At the same time weak leadership and management can undermine quality, where safeguarding and children's rights are not prioritised (CIW, 2025). Furthermore, variation across Wales in access and funding has resulted in inequitable provision with disadvantaged areas receiving insufficient support overall (Estyn, 2025)

Activities







Practitioners applying Pikler's approach slow down everyday care routines, treating them as learning opportunities than tasks to be completed. During nappy changing, feeding or dressing practitioners maintain eye contact, talk through what they are doing, waiting for the child's response before continuing. This creates a respectful, reciprocal interaction, where the child is an active participant. The activity itself is the learning, supporting emotional security, early communication and body awareness while reinforcing the child as competent and capable (Hargraves, 2020). Furthermore, babies, young children learn through self-initiated movement, repeated physical exploration. In early years settings practitioners support this by providing safe floor spaces where babies, freely roll, reach, crawl, shuffle or cruise without being restricted by seats or equipment. Simple activities like placing interesting objects out of reach encourages children to practise grasping, balancing and coordinated movement. Practitioners act as attentive companions rather than instructors allowing children to repeat movements for pleasure and focus. These activities support physical development, spatial awareness, perseverance and confidence reinforcing the child as an active, capable learner who learns through doing (Lindon, 2022). Similarly, practitioners introduce treasure baskets for babies sitting independently but not yet mobile. The basket contains safe everyday objects made from natural materials, encouraging exploration through touch, sight, sound, movement. As children grow becoming mobile these materials support heuristic play where children fill, tip, post and transport objects. Practitioners observe without interruption allowing children to investigate freely, building early scientific, mathematical understanding through self-directed activity (McTavish, 2023).

Additionally, practitioners create outdoor activities that immerse children in nature, drawing on Froebel's philosophy on value of nature and exploratory play allowing children to explore the natural environment and be adventurous. Practitioners provide outdoor experiences such as digging channels, climbing trees, building dens from sticks or collect natural materials like stones and leaves. Practitioners observe, support rather than direct, allowing children to explore forces such as water flow or balance through play. These activities provide freedom, imagination and encourages creativity, storytelling, music and movement while valuing children's curiosity and self-initiated learning (Tovey, 2022). In addition, practitioners can also implement activities based on Forest School providing long-term, outdoor learning opportunities where children explore, take supported risks and solve problems. Activities may include shelter building, fire lighting, tool use or free exploration of natural environments. Practitioners prioritise relationship building, emotional security and child led exploration over outcomes. These experiences foster resilience, confidence, creativity and holistic development through hands-on, learner inspired activity (Plymouth Marjon University, 2024).

In line with the Reggio Emilia approach practitioners create environments rich in learning materials and encourage children to direct their own projects. Learning journals are used to document children's ideas, conversations and creative processes. Activities emerge from children's interests rather than predetermined outcomes. Practitioners act as co-learners, supporting collaboration, reflection and problem-solving while recognising children as strong capable contributors to their learning community (Learning Journals. 2021).

Likewise, practitioners applying the Montessori principles prepare the environments where children independently choose activities such as pouring, sorting, cleaning or using sensory materials. This provides open-ended play and child directed learning. Children work for extended periods without interruption, allowing deep concentration, focus and independence. Activities are self-correcting, enabling children to learn through experience rather than adult instruction. Practitioners offer guidance only when required thus promoting children's autonomy and self-directed learning this builds confidence and intrinsic motivation reinforcing the child as a competent learner. (Nancholas, 2024).

Moreover, practitioner can plan multi-sensory activities using puppets, modelling clay, pipe cleaners, sticky notes and food-based materials. For example, children may retell stories using puppets, form letters with pipe cleaners or create models using clay. These activities involve touch, movement, sight and sound, supporting memory, communication and engagement making learning joyful and accessible for diverse learners (Nyman, n.d). Furthermore, another powerful tool for early years practitioners is Loose parts where materials such as bottle caps, cardboard tubes, shells, twigs can be provided in accessible areas, allow children to combine, manipulate and explore. Practitioners support learning by offering time, space and thoughtful observation rather than instructions. This allows for open-ended learning, to observe and respond to children rather than

directing every action. These activities promote problem-solving, collaboration, creativity and sustained engagement, reinforcing the idea that children are capable thinkers who direct their own learning experiences (Brodie, 2024).

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