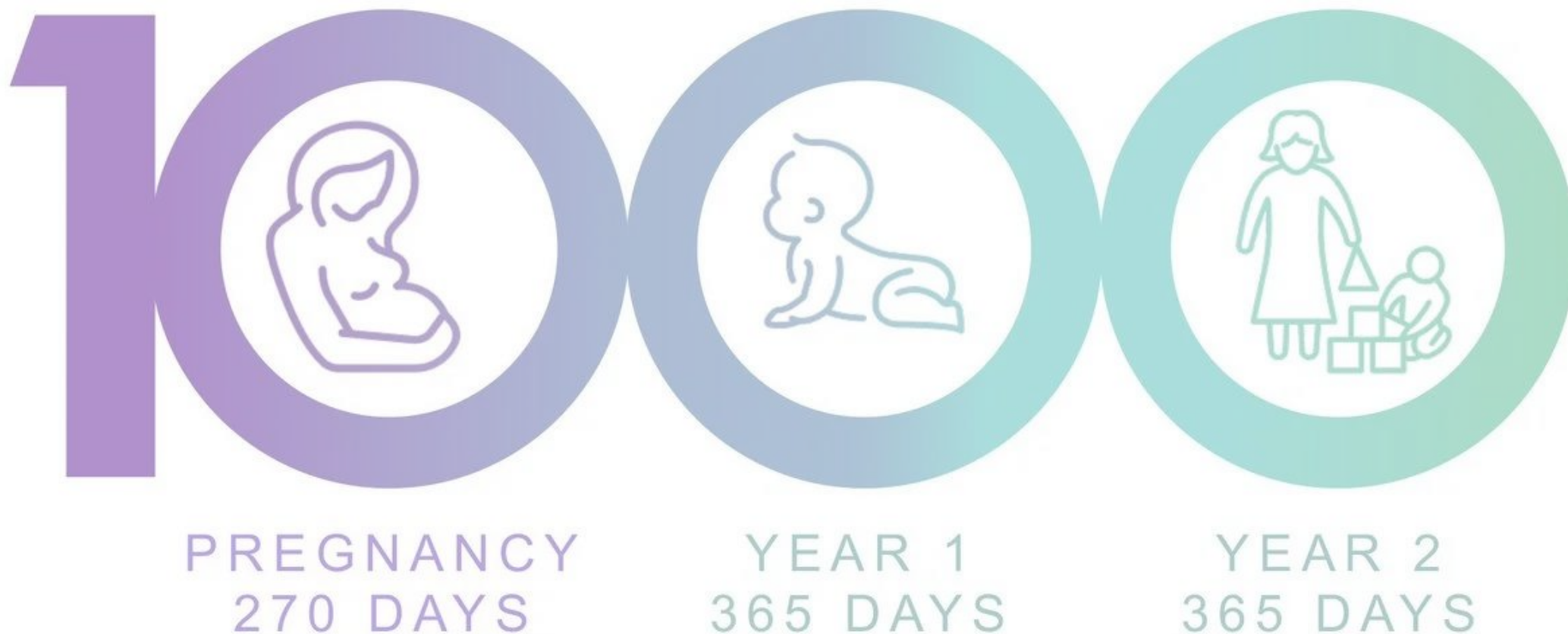


THE FIRST 1000 DAYS



Koko Plus Foundation (2024)



Nosyrevy (2020)

WHAT ARE THE FIRST 1000 DAYS?



iDSMED (2019)

- The first 1000 days of life begin from conception, right up until the age of two. It is a vital period during a child's development that lays the groundwork for their future (House of Commons, 2019).
- According to Green *et al.* (2018) The first 1000 days of life are a crucial period characterised by rapid growth and brain development.
- NHS Wales (No Date) suggests that every child in Wales deserves a great start in life, enabling them to be happy, and healthy, and to receive the care and attention they need for development and growth.
- Ensuring things are done correctly from the beginning establishes a strong foundation for the future. This approach can disrupt cycles of disadvantage and is the most effective way to foster a happier, healthier and fairer future for Wales. (NHS Wales, No Date)
- Likewise, Pregnancy Birth & Baby (2024) explains that during the first 1000 days, a child's immune system will also develop significantly and that during pregnancy, a mother's health, nutrition, and stress levels can impact the baby's future. After birth, factors such as the baby's physical environment, nutrition and relationships can have lasting effects on their health and well-being.

In the first 1000 days of life, a baby will need:

- ✓ Healthy food
 - ✓ Loving relationships
 - ✓ Safety & Security
 - ✓ Time to play
 - ✓ A healthy environment- including in the womb
- (Pregnancy Birth & Baby, 2024)

WHY ARE THE FIRST 1000 DAYS SO IMPORTANT?

Astoundingly, according to Unicef (2017) in the early years of a child's life, neurons in the brain create new connections at a rate of 700-1000 per second, a pace that will never be repeated again!

The connections formed during early childhood are essential for a child's future success. If these connections are weak or incomplete, it can profoundly hinder a child's development, often with irreversible consequences (Unicef, 2017).



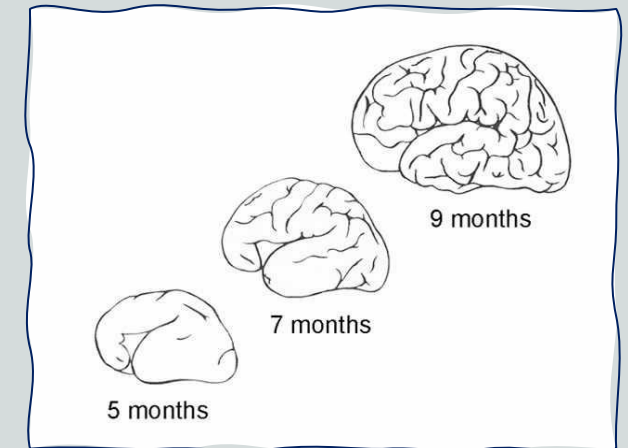
Tes (2018)



Early Moments Matter.

(Unicef, 2018)

This is similar to that found in (1,000 Days, No Date) who writes: During the first 1000 days of life, a child's brain develops more rapidly than at any other time. This growth starts very early in pregnancy, progressing at an astonishing rate. By the fourth week of pregnancy, the brain contains approximately 10,000 cells, and by the 24th week, this number increases to 10 billion.

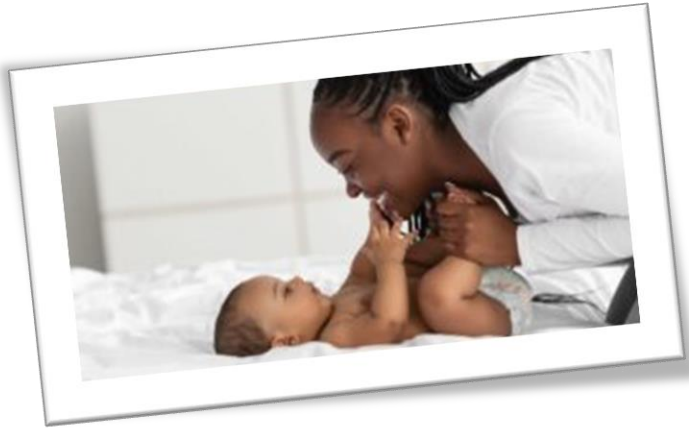


Neurologic Exam (The University of Utah, 2020)

Lawler (2023) explains that during this crucial period, a child's auditory and visual sensory systems, learning abilities, memory functions, and information-processing skills are definitively established and formed.

WHY ARE THE FIRST 1000 DAYS SO IMPORTANT?

- Explaining the importance of early brain development, HM Government (2021) believe the experiences that significantly shape a baby's brain development primarily come from their interactions with the important adults in their life.



Safe Wise
(2023)

- Babies instinctively seek interaction through babbling, facial expressions, and movements. In response, the adults caring for them engage with similar sounds and gestures. This back-and-forth exchange, known as '**serve and return**' is crucial for developing the brain's wiring. (HM Government, 2021)

- Similarly, Nursery Management Show (2024) suggests that every interaction with a baby, whether touching, singing or playing, invests in their future. These moments form and strengthen neural pathways critical for how they will absorb and process information.



BBC Radio 4 (2016)

- The first 1,000 days are essential; robust pathways developed during this time enhance a child's readiness for learning. Positive experiences like cuddling or playtime build the brain's architecture. The stronger these pathways are, the better equipped a child will be to understand and navigate the world, unlocking their potential for growth and learning. (Nursery Management Show, 2024)

CAREGIVING

Birth to 5 Matters (No Date) strongly believes that being an Early Years Practitioner means being part of a caring community that focuses on the well-being of babies and young children, from birth and beyond. The role involves having a genuine feeling of concern, affection and responsibility for babies and young children, as well as engaging in nurturing behaviours.

What are the Qualities That Make an Exceptional Infant Teacher?



(TECTA, 2022)

The Education Hub (2018) suggests that whilst caregiving plays an important role in the pedagogical work of practitioners, it involves more than just completing tasks for the child's well-being. Neuroscience has shown that, especially in early life, the development of the brain and body are closely interconnected. This has been previously discussed in detail on slide two by (Unicef, 2017).

The NLM (2021) states that in early infancy, caregivers play a vital role in providing comfort and protection.

Likewise, The WHO (2015) suggests that the survival of children during the first 1000 days of life, heavily relies on the caregivers who care for them.

Caregivers play a vital role in meeting the various needs of a growing child. In addition to physical care, children need love, affection, and appreciation from the caregivers in their lives, benefitting from those who spend quality time playing and communicating with them (The WHO, 2015). Through these interactions, caregivers can help children learn the skills necessary to become competent, happy, and caring individuals in the future.

“Every interaction a practitioner has with a child is an opportunity for teaching and learning.”

ENABLING ENVIRONMENTS

An enabling environment is created to encourage a child's physical, emotional and mental health and well-being (Hodgman, 2012). It is also an emotional environment that provides warmth and acknowledges each child as unique. A truly enabling environment should support a child's learning across the six areas of learning within the Early Years Foundation Stage, such as:

- ✓ Personal, social and emotional development
- ✓ Physical development
- ✓ Literacy
- ✓ Maths
- ✓ Expressive arts and design



The Little Play Village (2020)



NosyRevy (2020)

Using Bronfenbrenner's theory to ensure an enabling environment.

In the Early Years, Bronfenbrenner's work outlines five critical points for promoting positive human growth (Bradsbury, 2023)

This includes:

- Formation of strong attachments: Consistent patterns of shared interactions over an extended period allow a child to develop strong emotional bonds with one or more individuals (such as a parent, caregiver, sibling, or grandparent) who demonstrate unconditional care for the child's wellbeing.
- Environmental responsiveness: These shared interactions enhance the child's responsiveness to other elements of their immediate environment.
- Supportive care: Another person should encourage and support the intimate care provided to the child, demonstrating love and affection.
- Family and community: Family members and nursery staff link to the unique history and circumstances of the child and their family.
- Policies for Stability: Public policies and practices are essential to ensure stability, respect, and support for entire communities, particularly during the first 1,001 days of a child's life.

Understanding Pikler's approach to inclusive practice.

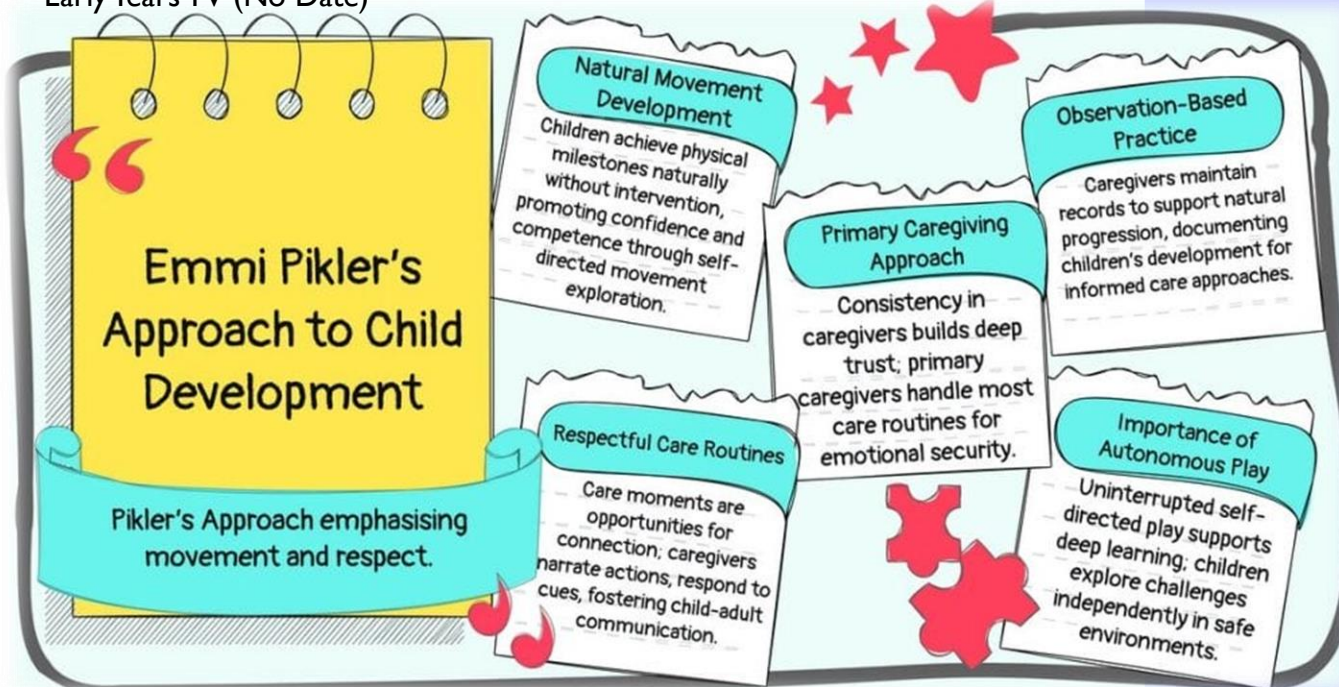
- Whitty (2019) states that Pikler strongly believed in the importance of building respectful and peaceful relationships with infants. Pikler also believed that the development of motor skills occurs best when children are given the freedom to move freely and are allowed to control the pace of their physical efforts.

- Learning Journals (No Date) suggest that it is through careful observation, that practitioners can interpret a child's body language, gestures, and cues to gain insight into their feelings.



Golftyn C.P (2022)

Early Years TV (No Date)



- Practitioners should also be mindful of each child's pace of learning and should slow down the process if necessary. In an Early Years environment, it is essential to listen to what the child wants, and respond accordingly (Learning Journal, No Date).

PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

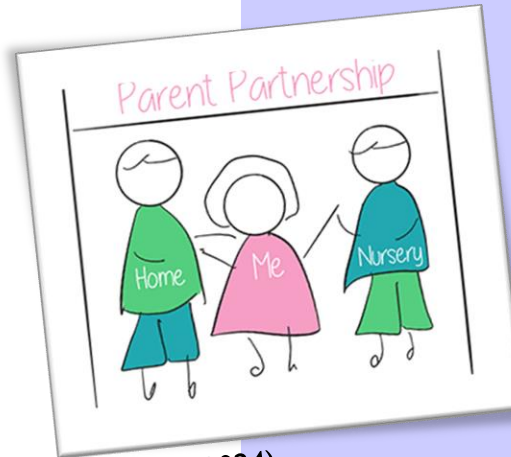
The role of the Early Years Practitioner when supporting children & families during the first 1000 days.



Parent Information Centre
(No Date)

- The DfE (2024) explains research shows involving parents and caregivers in their child's early education, is vital for success, regardless of background.

- In the Early Years Foundation Stage, working with parents/caregivers is essential. Parents/caregivers can be invited to the setting to help with settling the child and understanding their needs (DfE, No Date).



Dan dans (2024)

- Similarly, Nursery Management Show (2024) believes that engaging parents in their child's early learning and helping them to understand their role in shaping their child's outcomes is critical during the first 1000 days of life. Early Years Practitioners have a unique opportunity to support and educate parents about attachment, brain development, and age-appropriate learning activities. By helping parents/caregivers to understand the significance of play for the child's growth during the early days, it can enhance vital learning experiences that occur at home.

PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

How can Early Years Practitioners support children & families?

- According to Action for Children (No Date), Early Years Practitioners can support children and families if problems arise. This can include but is not limited to: Parenting support and advice, play and activity groups, emotional health and well-being support, and communication and language assistance.

- An Early Years Practitioner should also understand that it is essential to welcome and pay attention to each unique family- it is crucial for all families to feel a genuine sense of belonging within the Early Years setting (Birth To 5 Matters, No Date). This inclusion is fostered through the attitudes of Practitioners, how they communicate, and the type of environment that is cultivated. A Practitioner should recognise that each child and family brings unique perspectives, personal experiences and cultural values, all of which contribute to the richness of the Early Years environment.



MDoE (2019)

- **Enabling Environments-** Environments and routines that promote teamwork and allows for special time in small groups are important for children. These settings help children to make new relationships, friendships, and to feel safe and secure after the transition to the Early Years setting (Teach Early Years, No Date).

- **Effective Pedagogy-** Play based approaches that extend thinking and develop ideas are essential for successful learning in the Early Years (Teach Early Years, No Date). Adults act as co-thinkers and partners in play, providing the support and challenges children need to initiate their own learning.

Giving examples of other support practitioners can provide, Care Learning (2024) suggest:

- ✓ Practical support
- ✓ Emotional support
- ✓ Social support
- ✓ Building trust
- ✓ Encouraging partnerships
- ✓ Health support
- ✓ Financial support
- ✓ Informational support
- ✓ Transitioning

THE IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP WORKING

- As explained by Early Education (2024), the small amount of funding available for each child makes it important to work in partnership, to use the funding efficiently. Collaborating with others can help to arrange tailored training to meet professional development needs.
- Partnerships can be for single events or long-term efforts to help children and families who attend more than one setting. This collaboration can provide consistent support and advice. Settings can also support each other and share ideas to improve teaching methods (Early Education, 2024).



Explaining The Healthy Child Wales Programme to guide Practitioners in their care, Maternity & Early Years (No Date) suggest that the programme outlines the strategic approach for the Health Boards in Wales, focusing on delivering early intervention services to help children achieve optimal health. This is done through collaboration with families, partner agencies, and service providers who work with pregnant women and families with young children. The programme provides a comprehensive framework that is universally available to all families with children under 7 in Wales.

Interventions are tailored based on assessments conducted by Health Visitors or Specialist Community Public Health Nurses, who evaluate family resilience and vulnerability (Maternity & Early Years, No Date). Using this programme, Early Years Practitioners should aim to:

- ✓ Support families in making healthy, long-term choices
- ✓ Promote positive relationships between parents and children
- ✓ Enhance the emotional health of mothers and families

- ✓ Facilitate the transition from home to school
- ✓ Ensure a commitment to safeguarding

PARTNERSHIPS IN WALES

Partnership Working



(Education Scotland, 2021)

Examples of partnerships in Wales, explained by The Welsh government (2024) include:

- Social Care Wales (SCW), the main partner for improving social care and childcare in Wales.
- Local Authority Play and Childcare teams and the Welsh Local Government Association.
- CWLWM partners, representing five key childcare organisations in Wales.
- Play Wales, the charity focused on children's play.
- PETC Wales, a forum addressing play work education, training and qualifications.

MATERNAL FACTORS THAT COULD IMPACT DEVELOPMENT AND HOW EARLY YEARS PRACTITIONERS CAN HELP

Factors

Solutions

Nutrition



The Welsh Government (2024) states that children and families that attend the Early Years setting may be eligible for the Healthy Start Scheme, which supports low-income pregnant women and families with children up to 4 years of age, as well as pregnant women under the age of 18. The Healthy Start programme helps them to purchase healthier foods, including cows' milk, fresh, frozen, or tinned fruit and vegetables, and infant formula. Vitamin drops containing vitamins A, C, and D are also available under the programme.

To assist families who may not be aware of the Healthy Start scheme, it is beneficial to display or share information about it in the Early Years setting (Welsh Government, 2024). For more information, families can visit www.healthystart.nhs.uk/how-to-apply/

Smoking & Substance use

**STOP SMOKING
WALES DIM
SMYGU CYMRU**

FREEPHONE / RHADFFON

0800 085 2219



Bevan Foundation (2012)

Supporting parents/caregivers who smoke, and or have substance misuse issues, involves communicating in a sensitive, client-centred manner, especially since some may find it difficult to disclose any issues due to fear of stigma (NHS Wales, 2024). According to NSPCC Learning (2023), if Early Years practitioners believe that a child, young person, or family could benefit from additional support around substance misuse or smoking, it is vital to document any concerns and speak with the designated child protection lead. The child protection lead can utilize their knowledge of local support services and collaborate with professionals to identify sources of support. However, if there is suspicion that a child may be at risk of abuse or neglect, the Early Years settings child protection procedures should be immediately followed. Additionally, practitioners can reach out to the NSPCC Helpline at **0808 800 5000**

CHALLENGES IN PROVIDING HIGH QUALITY CARE

What challenges often arise in the Early Years setting ?

What are the biggest challenges we face in the Early Years?



(Connect Childcare, 2023)



Behavioural Challenges- As explained by Leaf Complex Care (No Date), challenging behaviours in the Early years setting can make it hard for children to focus on their education and learning important life skills. This can slow their overall growth and well-being.

Discussing the impacts of challenging behaviour for Early Years Practitioners, Unique community Service (No Date) say that practitioners often face stress and burnout when frequently dealing with difficult behaviour. Consistently reacting to outbursts from the children they care for, such as, throwing, screaming, or shouting, can lead to both physical fatigue and emotional exhaustion for practitioners. It is essential for practitioners to adopt healthy coping strategies such as taking short breaks, and prioritising self-care, to safeguard their own mental well-being, to continue providing effective care.

Conflicts in Communication- According to Children in Scotland (2022), effective communication with parents, and strong home-school partnerships are essential in the Early Years settings, but disagreements or misunderstandings can still arise. These conflicts stem from differing opinions about a child's needs or varying ideas on how best to provide support, including the level and duration of assistance required.

Fortunately, most disagreements can be resolved through effective communication by responding promptly, engaging in open and respectful discussions, and actively listening to different perspectives (Children in Scotland, 2022).

OTHER POSSIBLE CHALLENGES AFFECTING THE QUALITY OF CARE

Funding	According to Parenta (2023), the impact of limited childcare funding in the Early Years is significant. Reduced funding has forced many Early Years settings to cut back on staffing, resources and maintenance. As a result, the quality of the care given to children has suffered. Settings are hiring less staff, which increases the number of children each staff member must care for, and fewer and lower-quality resources are being provided.
Caregiver Burnout	The Baker Centre for Children and Families (2025) states, without proper support and adequate staffing levels, caregivers are at risk of developing 'caregiver burnout', which can arise from chronic stress, and a feeling of being overwhelmed by the responsibilities of caregiving. This risk is especially pronounced for caregivers of children with developmental or mental health challenges.
Lack of Training (due to funding)	Explaining how a lack of staff training can impact the standard of care given to children, Sword (2021) believes that when children's developmental needs are not met, it can lead to future mental health problems and deeply rooted issues. Children who are unable to receive sufficient mental stimulation, due to a lack of staff training, are more likely to experience behavioural issues, low self-esteem, poor attention, and insecurities that can persist well into adulthood.

Dramatic Play

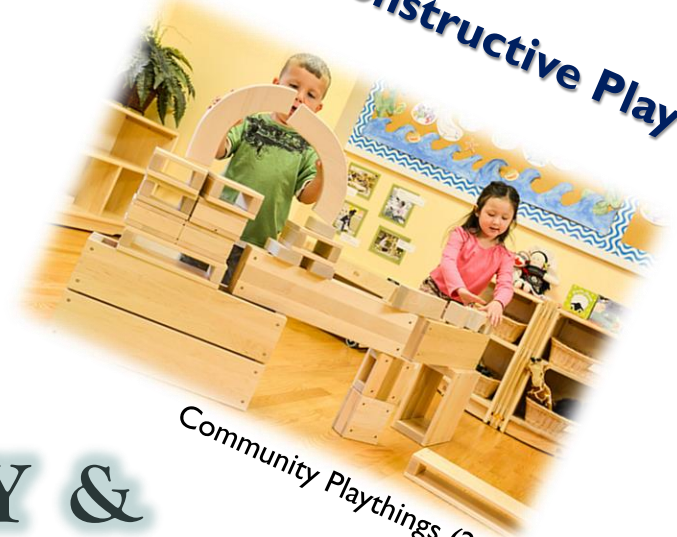


Rasmussen University (2022)



NosyRevy (2020)

Constructive Play



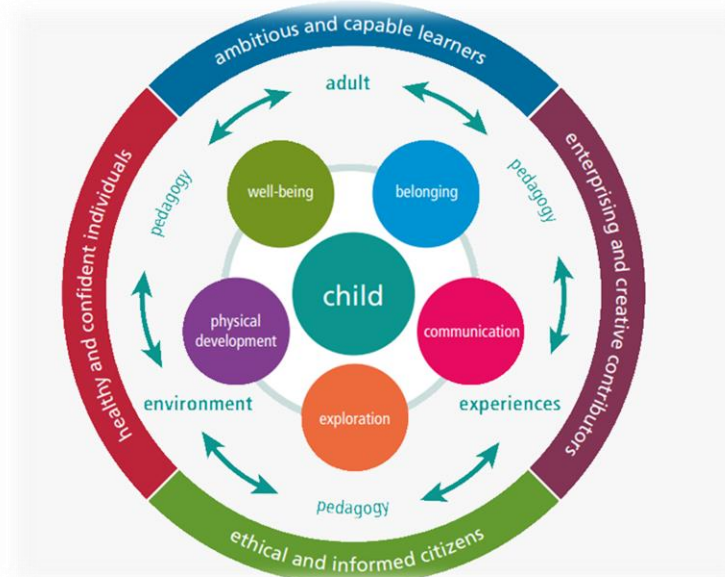
Community Playthings (2015)

DIFFERENT TYPES OF PLAY & ACTIVITIES

Fun At Home With Kids (2013)



Sensory Play



Early Years Wales (2022)

BridgeWay Family Centre (No Date)



Music & Movement Play

DRAMATIC PLAY:

According to Lucky Beans Childcare (2024), dramatic play is a vital form of imaginative play for children, that holds significant value for their development. Also known as 'pretend play' or 'role play', dramatic play is an essential part of early childhood education. This type of play typically involves children taking on different roles and acting out different scenarios, such as playing house, pretending to be an astronaut, or anything the imagination can create.

The benefits of dramatic play include (Lucky Beans Childcare, 2024)

- **Social Skills-** During dramatic play, children learn to negotiate roles, take turns, and co-operate with their peers.
- **Language Development-** Engaging in dramatic play encourages children to communicate their ideas, negotiate roles, and solve problems. They may also use technical terminology they have learned or heard about the topic, for example- Stethoscope.
- **Emotional Development-** Dramatic play allows children to express their feelings, manage their emotions, and understand the emotional responses of others.
- **Cognitive Development-** Dramatic play promotes problem-solving skills, abstract thinking, and the ability to distinguish between reality and fantasy.
- **Motor skills-** Dressing up and manipulating props can help children develop their fine motor skills.

Explained by Salma (2023), children learn best when they are actively involved. Dramatic play helps children practice empathy and social skills in a safe space. Children learn to manage their behaviour, control their impulses, and resolve conflicts peacefully, developing important self-regulation skills for their future emotional health.



Hair Salon



Pet Grooming Salon



Grocery Store



Clothing Store

Teaching 2 And
3 Year Olds
(2024)

FOREST SCHOOL & REGGIO EMILIA

According to Good2Know (2023), the Forest School curriculum emphasises hands-on learning through the exploration of nature. Children are encouraged to initiate their own playful learning while discovering the various sensations and textures of the natural environment around them. Messy play is welcome, allowing little ones to fully immerse themselves in the outdoors. Although practitioners are present to facilitate, support, and ensure safety, children are encouraged to engage in play that is interesting and comfortable for them.

Similarly, Pentagon Play (2023) speaks on the Reggio Emilia approach to play, suggesting that the Reggio Emilia approach emphasizes learning through connections with objects, thoughts, and experiences, which are fostered by interactions with others in the environment.



Forest School (2014)



Wide School (No Date)

In line with the Reggio Emilia approach, the Forest School philosophy emphasises the importance of allowing children ample time to immerse themselves in play, which is essential for nurturing their creativity (Wildlings, 2023). Forest School practitioners take on a supportive role by observing children closely and stepping in only when requested, thereby fostering independence. Furthermore, they engage children with thoughtfully phrased questions that serve as instructions to explore, encouraging a pressure-free environment that promotes deeper learning and discovery.

According to Sensorstory (NoDate), Forest School focuses on outdoor education and nature-based learning, aiming to promote a child's holistic development through regular, hands-on experiences in natural environments.

In contrast, the Reggio Emilia approach is rooted in the belief that children learn best through their experiences and self-expression. It emphasises collaboration among children, parents, and practitioners. Children are encouraged to recognise their personalities and needs, and to feel empowered to express their ideas and feelings in creative ways.

Whilst the Forest School environment is always outdoors, in any weather, Child Time (2017) explain that in the Reggio Emilia approach, the classroom holds significant meaning and is often referred to as 'the third teacher', and should always encourage exploration.

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