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Exceptional care- The first 1000 days

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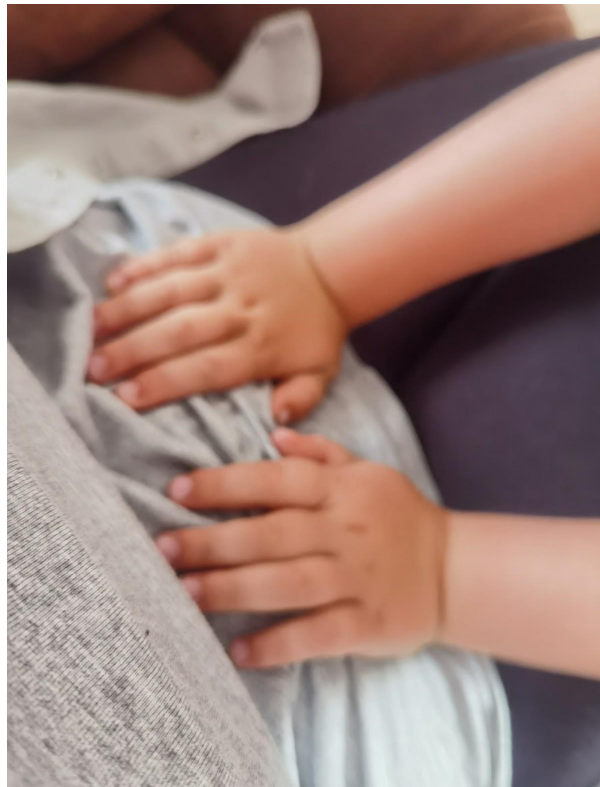
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What is the first 1000 days?



The first 1000 days of a child's life begins from conception up until twenty-four months. During this time a child's brain, immune system and their body will develop and a significant rate. (Pregnancy, birth, and baby. 2022). During pregnancy by the gestation period of twenty-four weeks a baby's brain will already contain 10 billion cells, these cells will thrive on a mother's nutrition. The baby's brain will not form correctly and could cause delays and birth defects if the mother is not consuming

enough calories or maintaining a nutritious diet (Harris, 2018). The theorist Bronfenbrenner believes a baby's brain development is shaped depending on their experiences and the environments they are exposed to after birth. This includes the relationships that they form (Lorina, 2022). A baby will need sensitive and responsive care, this is a vital element of emotional well-being and development (Home start, 2020). According to Early years careers (2015) the importance of a child's emotional development will strongly influence the person they become and their behaviour. Children learn through observing and imitate the person they spend majority of their time with, this has the biggest impact on their emotional development. When a Baby is able to develop a sense of love and belonging in the first 1000 days of life it helps to avoid anxiety, depression, and mental health complications later on in life (Cherry, 2022). As stated in the United Nations convention on the rights of the child (UNCRC, ND) Article three, adults should always do what is best for children, children are entitled to this right from birth and it is something we implement early on in settings by following their individual routine and needs of an infant (Kelly, 2015)). Another vital right in infancy would be Article twenty-four, this states that children have the right to a clean, safe environment. These rights can link to Maslow's Hierarchy of needs and the importance of fulfilling the basic needs before moving up the pyramid to meet social, wellbeing, safety, love and belonging, enabling the emotional development of a child (Cherry, 2022).



1 - Keire Mcalinden (2022) Early pregnancy.



2 - Keire Mcalinden (2022) scan.



3 - Keire Mcalinden (2022) Bump



4 - Keire Mcalinden (2022) Birth.

From the moment a baby is born they will begin to communicate their physical and emotional needs with their main care giver (Freud, ND). Mothers can begin to form a relationship with their baby to create a sense of belonging and love through skin-to-skin contact, this will then lead onto supporting a baby's brain development through the first 1000 days. Studies have shown that when a baby is provided with skin to skin, they have a higher level of oxytocin, the babies brain also appeared different to those who didn't have regular skin to skin. The baby's brain showed more activity when needing to regulate emotions, higher-order thinking, and a more curious approach to their surroundings (Marshall, 2020). This links to the importance of the first 1000 days as from day one care givers are able to aid brain development and begin to form attachments and positive relationships that are part of exceptional care, including Stimulating hormones that link to maternal instincts (UNICEF, ND). Infants should develop secure relationships and dependence with care givers before entering into unfamiliar environments (Salter, 2015).



5 - Keire Mcalinden (2020) Mothers first skin to skin

Challenges when caring for an infant.



Attachment challenges.

Turner (2018) believes that when you care for an infant one of the biggest challenges could be attachment, it is important that children form healthy relationships from the start, and this is why most settings assign key workers to children. NSPCC learning (2021) agrees and states that attachment can be a challenge in a setting with babies because any child can have or develop separation anxiety or difficulty forming relationships (Freud, ND). Erick Erickson highlights that as educators we form attachments with children by responding warmly, tuning into an infants needs and responding in a way that offers support but also allows the space for infants to attempt things for themselves (Lorina, 2022). In order for practitioners provide support to parents and care givers we must develop our own level of understanding of attachment. (NSPCC learning, 2021).



Bowlby (1997) described attachment as 'a lasting psychological connectedness between human beings.' Bowlby's attachment theory highlights that children that are separated from care givers or placed in an unfamiliar environment will react in different ways-

- Secure attachment

- Anxious resistant attachment
- Avoidant attachment (Akerman, C. 2018).

In order to overcome attachment difficulties is setting we can set in place some policies and procedures to ensure exceptional care is provided to suit individual needs of parent and children.

James (2015) suggests:

- Offering a lengthy settling in period so babies have the opportunity to build relationships with key workers in the presence of their main care giver before they are left in an unfamiliar environment.
- Children who are struggling to settle, parents should be advised to arrive earlier to the setting. This will allow time to provide comfort and reassurance before they are left by the care giver.
- Making goodbyes quick and firm. Parents should be encouraged to leave promptly once they have said goodbye. Allowing the departure to be reassuring but no fussing and lingering once parents have said they are leaving (James, 2015).





Additional learning needs challenges

According to Snap Cymru (ND) approximately one in five children have additional learning needs in Wales. This means we should consider some challenges practitioners may face in settings for any ALN. Additional learning needs can have an impact on a young person's ability to develop and learn. As practitioners we should meet individual needs that will prevent or help support challenges infants may face. These challenges may include –

- Behaviour
- Understanding
- Communication
- Socialising
- Concentration
- Physical development (Aisling, 2021)

Parent club (ND) states that all children have the rights by law to additional support this is backed up by UNCRC (ND) article 23. As practitioners we should aim to identify infants individual needs to help provide the exceptional care each child is entitled to (Parent club, ND).

Walker (2021) suggests ways in which we can identify these individual needs and provide ALN support, these could include:

- Clear policies which are reviewed regularly.
- Regular training for staff.
- Transition planning.
- Visual aids
- Effective communication with care givers
- Encouragement
- British sign language implemented into sessions.



6 - Sign language





Infant safety

NHS (2022) statistics show that thousands of infants are admitted to hospital each year, with a high number of preventable accidents. In a nursery setting we must take standard precautions to help prevent accidents and make the environment safe for infants (Lavery, 2014). There are a certain number of safety measures that a nursery setting should have in place as standard.

- Security- ensuring no strangers can enter the property.
- Fire safety and policy
- Ratios – correct staff to child ratio to ensure children can be monitored and look after children effectively.
- Radiator covers.
- Finger guards and door stoppers.
- Secure environment to prevent children escaping.
- No choking hazards such as small toys (O'Carroll, 2015).





The importance of activities in practice.



Montessori and Piaget believed that children learn through play and by doing things themselves. Practitioners should encourage experimentation and independent thought. Both theorists believed that the environment we provide our children with is the main teacher (Robinson, 2018). According to Piaget if children are given many facts about a situation or object this doesn't aid their learning effectively. Children and infants learn through discovering, and through their senses, they need to be given opportunities to see, feel, taste, touch, smell and explore what they are learning about themselves. However according to Vygotsky children learn more through interactions and relationships, he states that it is important that children are given one-to-one interactions to assist their learning. As practitioners we should bear in mind both theories when planning activities as there is a level of importance to both, John Dewey backs this up with his theory, which is somewhere in-between Vygotsky, Piaget, and Montessori. practitioners need to combine these theories in order to aid development. It is our role to teach skills and knowledge but also to give children the tools to live and exist effectively in our society, this is done through activities, play and support (Lorina, 2022). Activities for infants are essential, activities allow us to support infants in mastering new skills, boundaries, and taking on new challenges. Understanding a baby's development can enable practitioners to provide to right activities that will aid development (New health visitor, 2014).



The curiosity approach.

Lyndsey Hellyn and Stephanie Bennett co- funded The Curiosity Approach, this is an approach that aims to open up children's imaginations and create thinkers and doers in a setting. Children are able to lead their own play and activities in an environment where modern toys and technology are removed and replaced by open ended resources that can encourage, curiosity, exploration, creativity, and imagination (Berg, 2021). According to NI Direct (ND) freely chosen activities and play is proven to have a positive impact on children's health, well-being, and development. Play is important as it improves developments such as, cognitive, physical, social, and emotional.

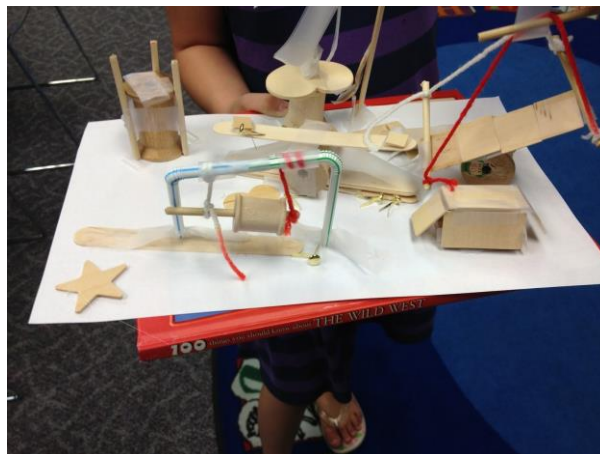


Loose parts play

In loose parts activities children are able to use parts open-endedly, enabling exploration and experiments. Evidence shows that loose parts play provides opportunities to:

- Concentrate.
- Use imagination.
- Develop fine and gross motor skills.
- Develop language and communication skills.
- Develop emotionally and socially.

During loose parts activities, practitioners can contribute by exploring on their own or play alongside infants to encourage play but without intervention (Ilinca, 2020).





Sensory play.

Sensory play plays a vital part in an infant's development from birth right up until early childhood. This is an activity that contributes to the nerve connections in a baby's brain. Sensory play can contribute to, language skills, fine motor skills, gross motor skills, cognitive development and have a calming impact on infants.

Types of sensory activities can include:

- Water/ bath time
- Messy play
- Music
- Outdoor play (health essentials, 2022).

Singing and stories

Mcilroy (2022) believes that music is important in an early years setting. Singing is something that can be done right from conception, throughout pregnancy and continued from birth. This is an activity that can improve mood, vocabulary, well-being, gross motor skills and listening skills.

Stories have a huge influence on infants learning and throughout their lives. The benefits of reading to babies lasts a lifetime. Reading to a child can:

- Enhance literacy skills.
- Promote understanding.
- Improve focus and concentration.
- Open up imagination and creativity.
- Provide bonding opportunities (Baby sparks, 2019).



Water play.

Water play is a simple activity with endless opportunities to expand. Practitioners can add tools, such as colour, glitter, brushes or even animals and under the sea toys to the water. There are four developments that water play encourages, these are, social, emotional, cognitive, and physical. Skills that can be developed through this activity would include:

- Gross and fine motor skills
- Concentration
- Communication
- Problem solving (Mcilroy, 2022).



Environments.

The environment which an infant is placed in, influences well-being. The environment should be well organised in a way which enhances infants' developments (Telgurus, ND). The environment should be influenced by the needs of the infant and adaptable to support individual needs. It should offer opportunities for growth and a safe, nurturing space (Pennstate extension, ND). When we create safe spaces, we are providing enabling environments where risks are minimal and manageable. Infants should feel protected and safe (Early years alliance, 2019).

According to Kable (2023) providing a child with a loose parts environment will give them endless opportunities to create their own play and enhance imagination. Playing with loose parts can increase, physical activity, cognitive skills, engagement, curiosity, and problem solving. Montessori believed that children have the innate desire and motivation to learn, his theory was based on

organising an environment filled with specific objects and materials. The space would be child orientated with furniture and workspaces that are appealing to a child (Montessori children's house, 2022). Froebel agreed with Montessori's approach on environments as he believed play in childhood is about free expression of what the child has in their soul, he also believed that practitioners should create physical play spaces both indoors and outdoors (Early Education, 2021). The emphasis Froebel had on playing in nature resonates with how, as practitioners we think and see the outdoors as a powerful environment in setting, undertaking observations we will notice the importance of indoor and outdoor play to children (Thomas, 2020). Froebel's approach was to provide children with open-ended objects and materials such as, sticks, scissors, paper, shells, chalks, and stones. He focused on the importance of practitioners showing an understanding of observation, being open-minded and seeing the world through the eyes of a child and offering guidance but mostly freedom (Early Education, 2021).

Risks of loose parts environments

Joe (2020) describes the risks in loose parts as small associated risks. As practitioners we should be aware of what risks we may encounter and how to manage them. Loose parts is a world of make-believe meaning infants are in control and anything could happen.

The main risks to infants in a loose parts environment could be:

- Choking.
- Objects being thrown.
- Falling off outdoor structures.

These risks should be at the forefront of our minds and practitioners should be prepared to intervene when needed and prevent or manage the risk.



Being inclusive



Lee (2021) describes inclusive practice as an aim to remove or minimise the barriers that we may find in support and learning to enable the rights of success to all children. An inclusive practice aims to ensure that throughout education children are given equal access to learning opportunities. UNCRC (ND) Article 28 states that every child has a right to education and Article 29 adds that their education should be adapted to a child's individual needs whilst respecting parents, their cultures, and other cultures.

Inclusion in setting can be seen as enabling children from diverse backgrounds such as:

- Those from other countries
- Religion
- SEN
- Disabilities
- Unique learning styles
- Different abilities (Lee, 2021)

Challenges practitioners may find in a nursery setting regarding inclusion could be:

- Lack of awareness- are staff aware of the children's needs, are there regular training opportunities
- Partnership – having everyone on the same page, parents, health visitors, community.
- Lack of support – no having funding or staffing to apply one-to-one support for infants, or parents not being on board with suggested support methods (Hoque, ND).

Professional partnerships/relationships

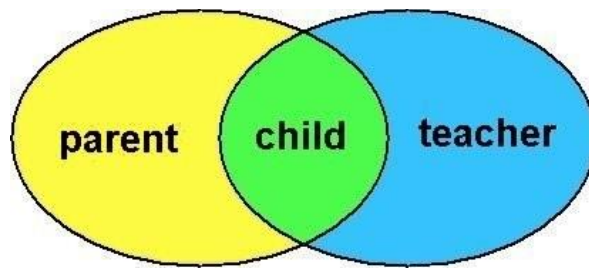


Professional partnerships is a network of support. The most successful partnerships are those who see each partner as their equal. In early years a professional partnership can include teams from different disciplines such as, health, education, and social teams. These partnerships will work with families to meet a child's individual needs (Williams, 1997). When practitioners work in partnership it means they are working with a network of support to meet the child's needs. Working alongside those who work with or care for a child will enable continuity to everyone involved (Banerjee, 2019).

Bronfenbrenner (2009) believes that outside influences that do not have relationships with a child can also impact their lives, their upbringing and development. This is known as the 'macrosystems'. Koller (2019) names another system Bronfenbrenner relates to partnership and relationships as the 'microsystems', this is the direct environment a child lives amongst, it includes influences from care givers, nursery practitioners and other people who appear in the child's daily life. These are people who are able to make decisions based on the child's welfare, as they have relationships with the child and shape the environment, they are brought up in. Bronfenbrenner believes that multiple influences can shape how a child develops, even if a parent does all they possibly can to positively aid development, negative influences could still impact the parents' accomplishments. Bronfenbrenner's theory indirectly suggests that it takes a village to raise a child (HRF, ND).

Challenges in professional partnerships

The challenges in professional partnerships could be that professionals aim to be helpful and provide support, services and solutions in the best interests on a child but parents or care givers can begin to feel overwhelmed by all the support and solutions professionals may present. These concerns are often more relevant in the early stages of needing support and in infancy (The play project, 2022).



Respectful care and meaningful learning.



During the first 1000 days infants are beginning to develop positive relationships with care givers (Alba, ND). McIntyre (2018) believes that respectful care is not just respect but we must demonstrate respect during every interaction with infants, treating even the very young as unique and not as an object. We should allow all infants to feel secure, appreciated, listened to and made to feel we are really interested. Respectful care can influence infants' personalities and their outlook on life (McIntyre, 2018).

Emmi Pikler described respectful care as an important attachment that contributes to the well-being and physical and emotional development of an infant. Pikler believed that care giving moments such as, feeding, nappy changing, story time and nap times are opportunities where we should apply respectful care (Church, 2023). Following tender routines Pikler noticed babies forming secure attachments, understanding their capabilities and a healthy self-image. We are able to apply tender care by using soft tones, giving undivided attention, talking about what we are doing and responding to an infant's cues and communication attempts (The Pikler approach, ND). Providing respectful care can benefit an infant as it enables interaction with the world around them, leading them to form the skills they require throughout their lives (The Pickler approach, ND).

According to Kelly (2016) challenges we may face when providing respectful care could include:

- Lack of time – for example a high number of nappy changes
- Ratios
- Paper work and not enough time spent with children
- Staff knowledge
- Staff training



International approaches.



Forest schools – These are nature-based environments where trained early years workers lead play based interactions through discovery, meaningful experiences and exploration. These communities can give a child lifelong positive impacts, recognising holistic growth over time. In forest school challenges are embraced allowing children to blossom, showing resilience, empathy and connection to nature and their futures. Unlike Montessori's theory of being completely child led, practitioners base their environment on interactions with each other, leaders introduce new exploration methods which will allow the learners to take risks and challenge themselves, whilst still focusing on individual needs (Forest school, 2023).



Reggio Emilia – This approach was founded in Italy, the village around Reggio Emilia still follow this approach. It is based on the following principles:

- Children must have input to what they learn.
- Children engage with their senses to understand and process things.

- Interaction with other children, exploring materials and relationships.
- Children should be given opportunities and be encouraged to express themselves (Rock, 2020).

The difference in Reggio approach is that children are exposed to curriculum concepts but have the opportunities to explore their own interests (study.com, ND).



Te Whariki – This New Zealand based approach is not set on developmental milestones, it focuses on developing knowledge and skills to become resilient learners entering school.

The Te Whariki approach focuses on:

- Well- being.
- Age-appropriate activities
- Respect for cultural values

These principles recognise the Maori heritage and is unique to the nations historical social contents, acknowledging the spiritual dimensions of a child. The inclusion of families and children transforms relationships. Similar to Reggio, Te Whariki approach is driven by young children (Kamini, 2018).



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