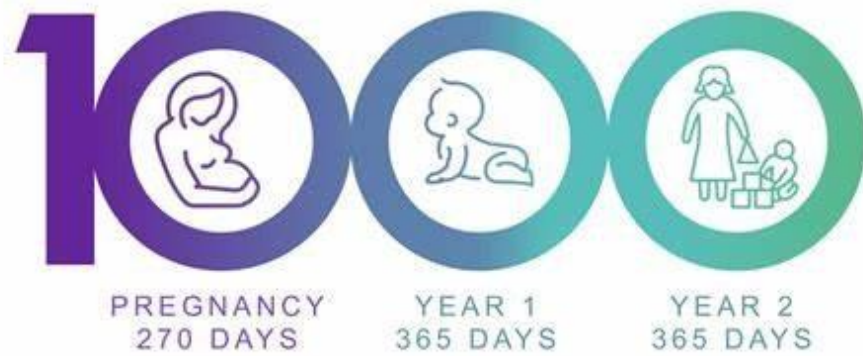




The first 1000 days

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Introduction

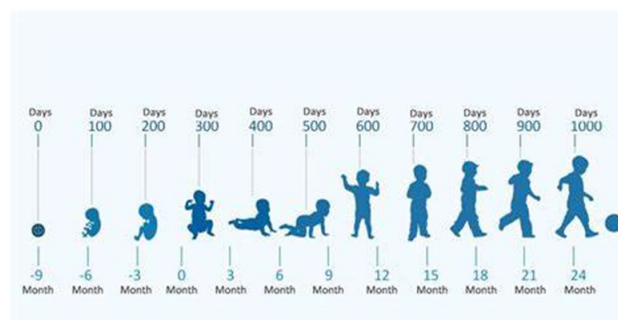


What is the first 1000 days?

To begin it is important to understand what the first 1000 days is. Karakochuk et al., (2018) states that the first 1000 days begins as soon as the mother conceives until the child turns two. Throughout this time the child will develop in various ways, this includes: brain development, physical growth and emotional well-being, it is also important to understand that not all children will reach their milestones in the same timeframe.

Why is the first 1000 days important?

The first 1000 days are a vital time within a child's life, throughout this time the child will develop in various ways, this includes: brain development, physical growth and emotional well-being. The first 1000 days are split into three stages, beginning with 270 days of pregnancy, during this time it is important that the mother receives the right care and intakes the correct nutrients to support the growth and development of the baby, lack of nutrients can impact the development of the child mentally and physically (Unicef, 2015). The second stage is 180 days, the baby will be 0-6 months, during this time the baby will receive goodness from breast milk and their vaccinations to protect them from diseases. However the child will also start to find their voice by making babbling noises, recognise and become alert to noises around them whilst familiarising themselves with their surroundings (Speech and Language UK no date). The final stage is the toddler stage, this lasts 550 days, the child will be 7-24 months, this is when the child will begin to explore new nutritious foods. It is necessary for the child to receive the right care and nutrients to allow them to fight any infections and life threatening illnesses but also to set them up for success academically. During stage two and three the child will develop their physical, cognitive, emotional, social skills and language development. Interestingly the human brain is an area that develops most during the first 1000 days, 80% of the brain growth happens by the time the child turns two years old, however, when the baby is first born the brain is one of the very few organs that has not fully developed, the baby can only control basic things such as, breathing and sucking reflex (BC Foster Parents Association, 2018). Although the first 1000 days are the most important time, it is vital that the basic needs such as nutrition, healthcare, a safe environment and a secure attachment are met within the child's first 1000 days or their development may be impacted significantly.



Source: IDSMed (2019)

Caregiving



What is exceptional care?



Exceptional care is being able to provide a child with various components that can support them to shape them as individuals but also their future. The components to enable the child throughout their first 1000 days include, Good Health, Safety and Security, Secure Attachment (being responsive), Adequate nutrition and finally opportunities to support their learning (nurturing-care, 2018). Here it is relevant to explore each of these components and understand how they can contribute to supporting the child during their first 1000 days.

Good Health

Use of health services, ensuring both mother and baby are up to date with vaccinations to protect them from diseases and illnesses. Good health will also include the basic human needs, this would include a regular sleeping pattern, a warm, cosy home, nutritious foods and vitamins (NHS, 2023), it is also vital that the mother attends all medical maternity appointments to keep monitor on the babies health and their own.

Opportunities for learning

Setting up enabling play environments could help support the child to activate their imagination to support brain development, the child can also begin to interact with others during play and this will also support the child within their social development and also their language development.

Adequate nutrition

Adequate nutrition includes mother and baby/toddler containing a healthy diet to support immune system and to allow the body to grow and develop in a healthy manner. NHS (2023) states that adequate nutrition begins when the mother conceives, the mother is advised to intake vitamins, fruits and vegetables to support the pregnancy, then when the baby arrives it is again suggested that the mother breastfeeds to provide the baby with goodness.

Being responsive

Being a responsive caregiver can support the child's wellbeing and their learning, being responsive can include babbling, facial expressions, modelling how to use a toy and so much more! NHS (2023) states that providing the child with your one to one attention will be a starting point of building a positive relationship and boost the child's confidence.

Safety and Security

A child feeling safe and loved is key to a bright future, for a child to be enabled to develop and grow it is vital that they feel safe within their environments but also have secure attachments to their adults. When the child feels safe they will begin to explore their world, this leads them on to becoming eager to learn and confident around others (Sage Journals, 2022). A theorist Maslow believes that for a child to become self actualized they will need to fulfill their hierarchy of needs and Safety is a part of the pyramid.

Exceptional care is important because it scaffolds brain development, emotional security, language development and physical growth (VNS Health, No date), each of these areas of development contributes to supporting the child's holistic development and enables them to become a healthy and confident individual.



1 - nurturing-care (2018).

Enabling Environments and Inclusive Practice



Learning Knows No Bounds

Consideration should be always given to enabling environments and inclusive practice not only within the child's first 1000 days but consistently throughout their time of development, showing consideration and respect can build a positive picture for the child and family to begin their journey.

Inclusive practice is important during the child's first 1000 days, inclusive practice is being respectful and respecting everyone for who they are and adapting where necessary to support

each individual (Knowles, 2018). Inclusive practice will support the child to gain an understanding of their world and purpose and set them up for a bright successful future by reducing barriers they may have faced without the inclusive practice in place (Whitters, 2020). If inclusive practice is not used the child will not feel safe or happy, this will then impact them on building their confidence to participate in learning experiences, explore or even build relationships with others around them. It is important to add the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 2, states that the child is to be accepted for who they are, no matter their sex, ethnicity, religion, language or any other status (Unicef, no date).

Engaging experiences will vary for each individual, this may be because they have additional needs, physical disability, additional language etc, to ensure the activities are accessible for each child it is within the practitioners role to set up a range of areas, each area should be inclusive to disregard any barriers for the child, this could also include displays and resources being diverse (Welsh Government, 2024), again this is ensuring the practice that is being delivered is always inclusive.

An enabling and engaging environment will need to be nurturing and warm, this will help the child to feel calm and confident to begin exploring. It is always good to be well equipped with resources, this does not need to be costly, it can be loose parts, recycled objects and toys. Although lots of play is done in setting, outdoor play is still very much essential, creating more opportunities for children to explore nature and risk-take whilst problem-solving and reach their limits intellectually, physically and emotionally (The Education Hub, 2020). An enabling environment is also needed for the mother during the early stages of the 1000 days, it is important to put privacy into consideration for when the mother is needing to breast feed, having areas where they can do this can also promote socialisation between mums.

A theorist called Loris Malaguzzi created a theory called 'Reggio Emilia' approach, Malaguzzi believed that it was the child's role to guide practitioners throughout their learning experiences and lead how their engaging environment should be set up (Reggio Children, 2022).



This Image shows an enabling environment allowing the babies to explore freely using their own imagination without adult interruption.

Professional Partnerships



What is the role of an early years practitioner in supporting children and families in the first 1000 days?

Working with children and families is not a one practitioner job, it requires mostly partnership, partnership working is two or more individuals doing actions and piecing them together to achieve a purpose for the child or family (Community Change, 2010). It is important to add, practitioners are the trusted adults to enable families to aim for the best they can be/do rather than instructing them on how they should do things (Public Health Wales, 2023). The role of an early years practitioner is to support the child during their first 1000 days by ensuring they have many meaningful opportunities for learning experiences, HM Government (2021) states that this will support their brain development to be successful academically and build healthy relationships. It is important that the practitioner is responsive to the child, this is also known as 'serve and return', this meaning the child having interaction with the adult in various ways, this can be done through facial expressions, touch, eye-contact, music and voices, this will build an understanding and interest for the child (Harvard University, 2024). It is also a practitioners role to be a nurturing adult to support the child through their transitions but also provide them with a safe and secure environment to enable them to explore the environment whilst providing them with the correct nutrients within their safe environment.

Effective partnership and keeping the child at center can be the most important factor to begin the child's development, this can start at the very early stages when dealing with health visitors and then moving onto childcare settings. A simple positive start can be inviting the caregivers

and child into the setting whilst accommodating their needs to begin building a positive picture for both the child and family. It is important to show interest in the child's background and put early plans in place for the child if necessary (Department for education, 2021). A theorist called Bronfenbrenner has a Ecological model that shows the child at center and outer layers of caregivers, healthcare and other agencies that support the child during their development. Throughout these layers it helps professionals to understand the child's surroundings and relationships but also how to support the child and family whilst taking their environmental factors into consideration (Rachelle Tannenbaum, 2018).

Here are some different ways of communicating and involving caregivers to keep them involved in the child's journey and to support them to engage with professionals and the child:

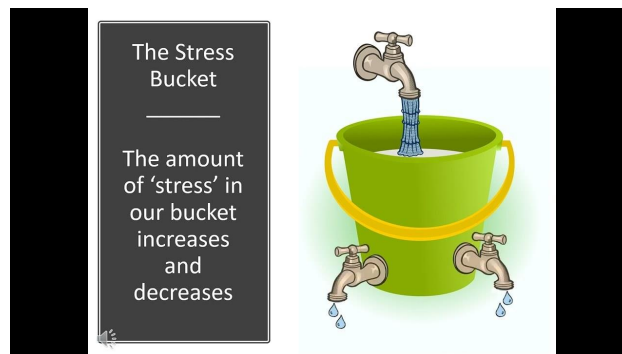
- Talk to key person at dismissal time.
- Parent and baby/toddler groups.
- Phonecalls/messages home.
- Home visits.
- Attending school trips with their child.
- Progress meetings.

Each of these ways of communication or involvement will help to build positive and trusted relationships enabling the child and caregiver to feel happy and content whilst understanding the support around them.

It is important that professionals are aware or are able to recognise signs of any maternal problems, this can be a range of things such as health issues during pregnancy, financial issues, post-natal depression or ongoing mental health issues. It is then the professional practitioner's role to plan and provide the correct consistent support in order to avoid barriers of development for the child. During pregnancy, mothers are closely monitored and given vaccines to support the development of the child, however, it is also the mother's responsibility to ensure she is looking after herself during pregnancy and providing the baby with the correct nutrients when it is born, healthcare professionals advise mothers that breastfeeding is the best start for the baby as it provides them with the best nutrients, this is an example of a factor during the early days that can cause stress to the mother and baby if the baby does not latch on (Gov.uk, 2018).

Some would agree that there different support strategies available for families to overcome or help their problems and create open opportunities for the child's development. Some may use 'The stress bucket' as a guide to seek support and help professionals to understand what the

individual feels helps them during tricky times. The stress bucket indicates a category of 'normal', 'relaxed' and 'stressed', each of these sections have triggers, the relaxed section would be things that help the individual to regulate and seek support, this could be talking to someone, doing activities they enjoy. The stressed section would be things that make them dysregulated and out of character and this is what may cause negative behaviours causing their bucket to overflow which can then impact the child and their development (Mental Health UK, 2018).



3 - Here is a video explaining how the stress bucket is used and how it fluctuates throughout each day.

Challenges in providing high quality care

It is generally considered that there are many challenges recently causing barriers for professionals and caregivers to provide a high quality care. It is necessary that professionals keep monitor and recognise signs of negativity to be able to offer support to families in need, however, the challenges do not just happen at home, they happen within the professional settings too which can cause negative impact to the child's development as they are not receiving the high quality provision and interactions they need to enable them to develop (GOV UK, 2024).

Here are some challenges that are faced daily by many families and settings:

- Financial struggles - cost of uniforms, lunch, trips, celebrations.
- lack of funds - educational funding, causing deduction on staffing, resources and learning opportunities.
- Stress and burnout - challenging behaviours, ALN.
- Lack of understanding - lack of parental engagement, social structures.
- Lack of support/staffing - No flexible work, no cover from agency staff due to funding.
- Health issues - Long-term illnesses, injuries or mental health.

- Lifestyle- poor time management, poor organisation skills, unreliable, poor communication, no empathy, poor diet.

Activities that support the child's first 1000 day development



It is important to begin explaining that activities to support children in their first 1000 days do not need to be adult led, they can be child-led and independent, however, this can only happen if the child is in an engaging environment, providing them with open ended resources and is accessible to enable to child to feel safe and comfortable (Birthto5matters, no date).

A theorist called Emmi Pikler believes that even during common daily activities such as nappy changing, feeding, wash and dressing times are to be slow paced, fun and time for bonding, whilst interacting with the child during these activities Pikler believes that it is vital to ensure the baby is an engaged partner and has consistent respect throughout, this may be the way they are handled or allowing them space for movement (Aspiring Beginnings, no date).

It is relevant here to introduce some activities that could support the child through their first 1000 days:

Treasure baskets - A treasure basket holds different types of materials for the child to explore, these will give the child an understanding of different textures, sizes and shapes whilst supporting their fine motor skills. The materials could be anything from, fabric, wool, sponge etc.

Sensory play - Sensory play can support stimulate the child and supports their well-being, there are many activities and resources that can be used for sensory play. Some examples of what may be used for sensory play could be spaghetti, sand, slime, play-doh, water and much more.

Tummy time - Tummy time will support the development of the child's muscles and building strength for them to enable themselves to move around, tummy time also enables the child to explore the environment around them.

Story time - Story time enhances language development and provides opportunity to use their own imagination.

Singing and dancing - supports language development, well-being, gross motor and listening skills.

Role-play - Supports imagination, well-being and social/language development.

Painting - Creativity and fine motor skills.







What are loose parts?



Loose parts are a variety of objects that can be found, and moved around to various areas during their play, the loose parts can be used in any way they wish, that may be building by putting them together, taking them apart, lining them up, stacking them or can even be used independently. A child can use their own imagination and use the loose part as they wish (EYR Team, 2020).

Loose parts may include things like, stones, shells, sticks, logs, bricks and children can also pick things up like leaves during their outdoor exploring time. It is also good to have things like sand and water accessible for them to use to expand their available resources and keep the setting engaging.

It is believed by a theorist called Simon Nicholson that loose parts are a way of children shaping their learning, and using their creative skills and imagination with random loose parts, children may use the parts to create their own stories, pictures and even to use during role play (Learning in the leaves, no date).

Using loose parts during child-led activities can benefit them and create a meaningful experience for them, they can gain an understanding by making connections between new things whilst activating their prior knowledge, the child will also work on their problem-solving, language and relationship building skills, all whilst they explore and understand the world around them.

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I have not used AI throughout my assignment.

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