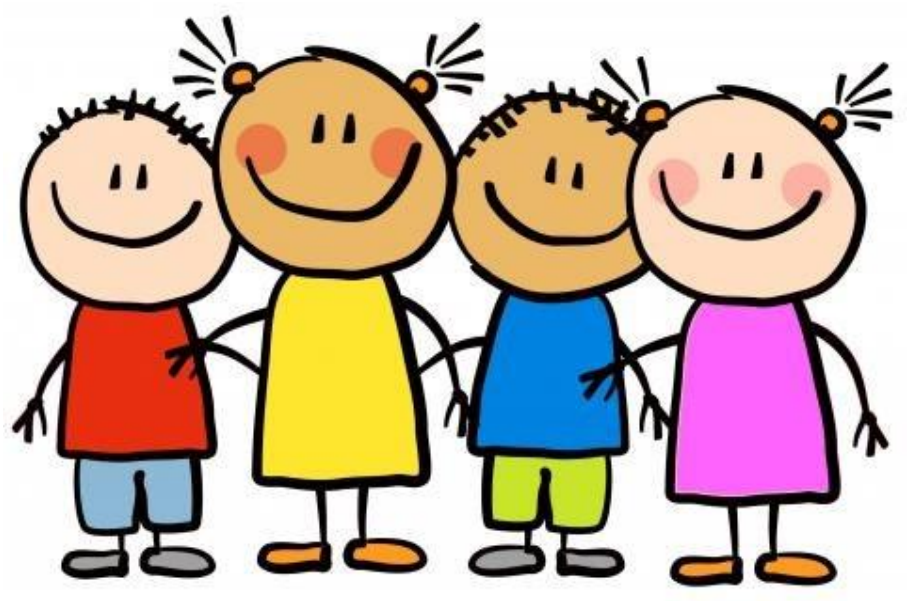


The *First 1000 Days: Importance of Respectful Care and Opportunity in Learning Opportunities*

What are the first 1000 days

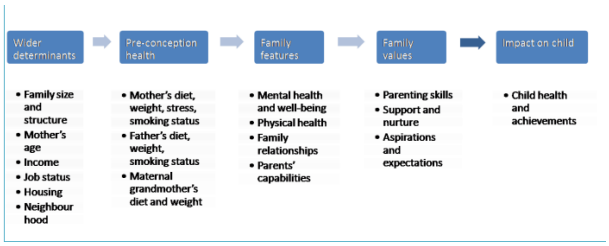
The first 1000 days is a referral to a child's life and development. **This timespan will occur within the conception of the child and will roughly span until the child's second birthday, reaching two years of age**. This is a period of growth, tremendous potential and extreme vulnerability for the child where growth and development are exponential. The development will primarily monitor the growth of the child's brain (cognitive) the child's body (physical) and the maintenance of their immune system will aim to be optimised and develop efficiently at a rapid pace. (Pregnancy Birth and Baby. 2022)

From conception, the baby's health and development is the immediate priority- alongside the health of the mother or the carrier's health. (UNICEF. 2017) During pregnancy and after birth, the consideration of the child's health, nutrition and environment when catered to correctly can and will promote a long-lasting positive effect within the duration and success of the child's first 1000 days. From birth, babies are born with a powerful and potent ability to learn and manevour their surroundings. This motivation instilled within babies up to the age of two, their brains develop rapidly and are prepared to make connections, and these remain prominent within their first three years of life, primarily through birth to the age of two. (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2005)

Why are the first 1000 days so important?

The first 1000 days are so significant to a child's development as this period is fulfilled with rapid development and this development requires an attentive holistic approach. The importance of children's physical, emotional, and psychological well-being is emphasised in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum's holistic development approach to learning and the support for young children. It enables young children to interact with their environment and learn in a way that differs and defers from traditional means. The importance of children's physical, emotional, and psychological well-being is emphasised in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum's holistic development approach to support learning and development. It empowers children to engage with their surroundings and learn in a way that differs from traditional support of young children's development. (Twinki, no date) This framework supports the idea that children should receive a holistic approach within their 1000 days of life. A holistic approach to children developing within their first 1000 days seeks to simultaneously address the physical, emotional, cognitive, intellectual needs and support needed to progress and stimulate growth by providing respectful and attentive care.

Young children during this time span of their first 1000 days are susceptible to significant influence. These influences entail include individual and genetic factors, coinciding with social, environmental and economic factors within their life. These factors will combine; and possibly positively or negatively affect the base foundation being built for the young child. These foundations will then influence the circumstances and experiences they will be exposed and experience varying from their conception, birth up until the age of two years old. (NHS Wales. 2012)



What is Exceptional Care?

The term exceptional care can be defined as the provision of care that is free and devoid of harm, enables parents and children's access to accessible services, adheres to policies and practices to protect and support the child and parents. Exceptional Care takes the needs of the child into account and recognises the child's vulnerability during their first 1000 days. Exceptional Care prioritises with

the sole focus of promoting the child's development and growth safely and efficiently. (Stewart, L. et al. 2022)

The informal care given by family members of a person with an impairment is called to as exceptional care duties. Intense physical, emotional, and intellectual resources from families are essential for this kind of care, and these resources may fluctuate over time as the member of the family with the handicap passes through critical developmental phases. The need for the carer of the child or young person to have in-depth understanding of the serious condition, continuous collaboration with medical practitioners, and the development of specialised residential care skills are additional difficulties linked with providing exceptional care, ensuring children are treated for more than their disabilities. (Stewart, L.M., 2013)

Why is it so important to promote Exceptional Care?

Exceptional Care can be met through the revision of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a developmental psychology theory that provides the basic requirements of needs. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a prominent theory within the satisfaction of needs of children within early years and psychology. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory operates within a hierarchal basis level styled within a pyramid. Maslow (1943) suggested that some needs are met based of a motivational basis, and other needs are met based on the demand and precedence over other needs. According to Maslow's theory an infant or a young child must have these requirements fulfilled to accommodate growth and development in the most optimal way. (Huitt, William. 2007) These requirements are split into deficiency and growth needs and separated into five levels of needs; psychological, safety, belonginess, love, self-esteem and self-actualisation. As you progress through each individual need, the next need within the hierarchy becomes the focus of attention and immediate cause of action. (Simons, Janet. A, et al. 2009) A child requires every psychical need to be constituted and met before focusing on fulfilling cognitive and intellectual needs and development. Maslow proposed using this theory states, that caregivers or individuals must satisfy the 'lower deficits' of needs before working up the pyramid to cater to more operative and prominent needs.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs provides a basis for the needs of children that need to be met in order for the child to function. Having these needs catered will enhance and ensure that the childs development is guarded and promoted.

Maslow considers Psychological Needs as a fundamental requirement in order to survive. Maslows describes these needs as air, water, shelter, sleep and warmth. Maslow considers these psychological needs as the most central to survivial. These must be met to ensure human function.

Maslows presents the need for security and safety as the next immediate priority. It is a childs right to feel safe and protected in any environment. A child has a need to be safe, secure and happy within an home environment, as well as an education setting,

Maslow continues by describing how a child has the need to be loved and to belong. After these previous needs have been met, a child should have access to forming and creating friendship, bonds and have a sense of belonging- directly corrolating to a childs self esteem and how the view themselves within the world.

This transistions into esteem needs, where a child has a right to be validated.

The last need within the hierarchy is Self Actualisation. All of the previously mentioned needs have to be met accordingly in order to provide a child with the best foundation within life in order to succeed within their early year academics.

However, Maslow's Heriarchy of Needs can be critiqued by utilising other opinions and theories. (Trigg, A.B, 2004.) critiques Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and describes the theory to be impossibly measure through emprical means. This suggests the theory produced by Maslow has no definitive way to hollisitcally satisfy and support the needs with Maslow's hierarchy before the next need becomes as equally prominant and requires completion of the operative need.

Current Challenges: What are the current challenges that practitioners have to overcome when caring for young babies in early years settings?

Curriculum/ Influence EFS has on practitioner's everyday practice

An Early Years curriculum follows a heavy curriculum of play-based learning. Early Years learning is methodocial, multi-sensory and proactive. The whole curriculum and Early Years teaching is viewed holistically rather than through a linear or through singular patterns. EYFS sets the standards and expectations for the learning, development and care of children from birth to five, including non-compulsory early childhood education and care (ECEC) provision and compulsory schooling, and the challenge is how to provide the learning and support within these span of age ranges and maintain equality and diversity. (BETA Education, 2021)

There are limitations in play-based learning within Early Years curriculum surrounding play. A large limitation is the consideration that play-based learning may not expose the early years children directly to concepts other than play. Focusing solely on implementing a play-based education will separate and limit the exposure young children will receive regarding scientific concepts, alphabetical learning and numerical exposure. (Wonder School, 2020)

The EYFS frameworks are criticised by some practitioners: The 'developmental guidance (Development Matters) within the EYFS was not considered to be used holistically by Early Year Practitioners. Although some practitioners felt it was useful to assess children against the guidance and identify their developmental level, through play-based learning, more practitioners voiced discontent with the decision to attach age-phases, and progress, to the EYFS framework and guidelines, the 'labelling' of young children is in direct contradiction to the principle of the Unique Child which is for many the most fundamental principle of the EYFS. (GOV UK. 2010.)

Activity Ideas

Loose Part Play

In the loose parts play theory, infants have greater choice and development for creativity and engagement when supplied with a multitude of 'loose parts' as they rearrange, redesign, and interact with the components, generating and beginning the understanding patterns and new

objects as they familiarise themselves with objects of a smaller magnitiude. (Casey, T., and Robertson., 2016) Loose Part Play will entail the progression of the childs pyshical and fine motor skills. As the objects are smaller, more intricate use of the hands and fingers will be developed.

Loose Part Play allows children to enhance and boost their natural, progressing curiosity regarding the activity and the environments around them. Loose Part Play will help the child to lead the play and develop their own narrative, concentration, experience and agenda and imagination from experiencing this type of play and cognitive and intellectual stimulation. (Gibson, et al. 2017.)

Water Play

Water Play is play that simply involves the inculsion of water, or activities surrounding water. (Gross, C.M,. 2012.) Usually within Early Year settings the water is within a large, shallow tub or supervised activity. Water Play is a wide, diverse activity that will allow the children to explore new textures and resistance. (Chukwbikem, P.E.I., 2013) Water Play is pivotal to allowing children to develop their gross and fine motor play, while enabling children to strengthen their balance and strength.

Messy Sensory Play

Messy Play or Messy Sensory Play is a style of play-based learning in which the children lead, and primarily use their hands to explore this type of play. Messy Sensory Play is a hands-on, stimulating experience for young children, especially within early years education. With Messy Play the range of sensory experiences will promote children's understanding of their own different senses and stimulating sensations and materials. (School House Daycare, 2023.) By exploring a variety of sensations and textures, a children's imagination and sense of exploration will expand. By utilising different sensory experiences, children will develop cognitively and intellectually through expanding their curiosity. This play coheres an increased understanding, self-discovery (Fillingham, S., 2019) and extended awareness of the environment the child will be situated upon.

Reading Stories

Young children's minds are stimulated, their creativity and interest are inspired, and their wonder is piqued by early reading. Regarding a child's emotional development, storytelling is an activity that could further progress into adult-led or child-led roleplaying. When children listen and engage within stories, they increase their ability to concentrate on what they are hearing, stimulating their cognitive and language abilities. Reading stories to young children aids and promotes emotions and will encourage children to differentiate and recognise theirs and others' emotions. (Beck, I.L. and McKeown, M.G., 2001.) They will become susceptible to recognise basic emotions; happiness, excitement and sadness, while also gaining an understanding of other psychological feelings like empathy and problem solving, which can be translated into social situations. (Mason, J.M 2017.)

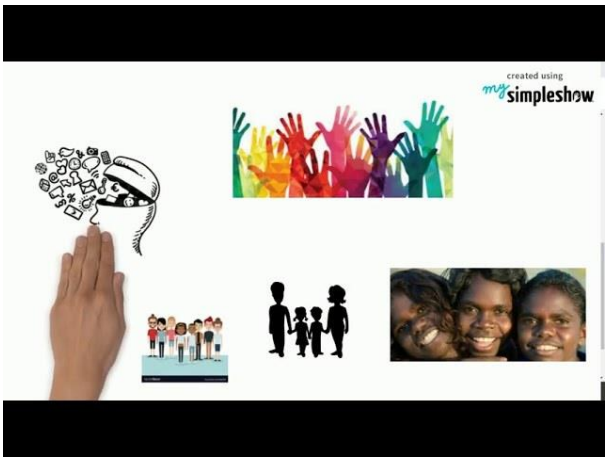
Environments

The environment of a child has arguably the most important role in providing meaningful care while promoting a child’s development and learning. Providing an enabling environment will encourage the children attending the setting to feel safe and comfortable. (Selbie, P. and Wickett, K., 2010.)

When a child feels secure within their environment their confidence will soar and encourage progress to be made through the comfort and manipulation of their environment. If an environment enables exploration, curiosity and is enriched with stimulation and meaningful learning, the child will begin to respond with healthy and consistent development from a holistic perspective.

Being Inclusive

Ensuring an inclusive environment is an approach that ensures any young child isn't discriminated or subject to any mistreatment regarding race, ethnicity or beliefs within the most influential years of a young child's life. Being an inclusive setting ensures all children are welcomed into a setting with equality, equal opportunities and treated with respect. (Hodgman, L. 2012.) An inclusive approach provides every child with the equal opportunity to access meaningful and fulfilling learning, regardless of a child's background. An inclusive setting facilitates a proactive learning environment for the child, professional partnerships and welcomes the parents as an active figure within the learning environment.



Professional Relationships

Being able to work harmoniously within a professional partnership is an essential need when guiding and influencing a child's care and development. Working and communicating within partnerships in reference to the child's progress, needs and interests, working together to create and devise a clear and appropriate plan involving a child's care and safety. The ability to work in partnerships, will allow for the relevant and appropriate progress to be staged and carried out successfully in the best interests of the child.

All individuals involved within professional relationships, including early year practitioners will understand that the child is the central focus and route of all communications regarding their care as the child's care is the integral point of professional relationships. (Woods, P. et al. 1999.) It is imperative that these professional partnerships learn and gather as much detail as possible to facilitate and provide a successful and meaningful learning signify the importance of the child's development and learning. By acknowledging minute details, the child will feel involved and have feelings of significance improving their self-concept and promoting their own emotional and social development. Vygotsky reiterates and recognises that a child's experience, perceptions and developments are moulded and defined by their parents and educational support. Vygotsky's prime

conclusion is social environment where the child feels included will promote and stimulate the childs social, emotional and cognitive development. (Hausfather, S.J. 1996)

International Approach- Forest School

Forest School is an approach and a philosophy of learning where learning takes places outdoors rather than inside of an educational or early years setting. Forest School will primarily be conducted within a natural environment and will be encouraged to be a child-led activity to accommodate a child's connection with the outside world and outside environments in order to promote a child's holistic growth. This approach has a unique benefit to which a child can ultimately benefit from. (O'Brien, L,. 2009) From interacting with a natural environment, a child can increase their confidence by asserting a level of independence, by inspiring awe and curiosity exploring their surrounding under supervision. By ensuring a child has access or is provided an opportunity to participate in a 'Forest School activity.' Forest School offers children a vital opportunity to learn from direct experiences, as it encourages a child to expand their learning and become involved within an environment, they have never explored prior or is not familiar to the child, inspiring their self-confidence and self-esteem. (O'Brien, L. and Murray, R., 2007.)

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