

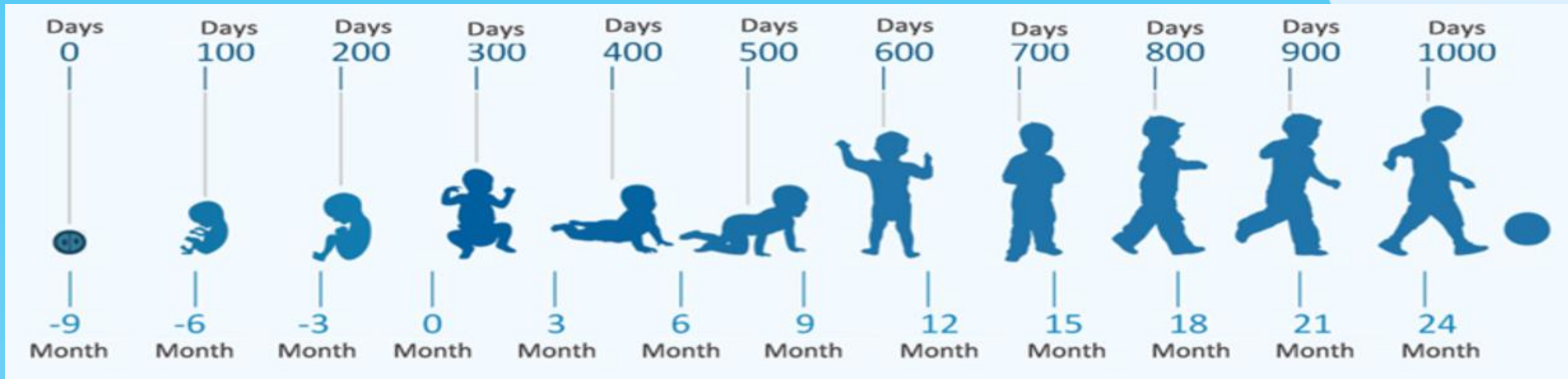
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The First 1000 Days



(IDSMed, 2024)



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What are The First 1000 Days?



The first 1000 days refers to the period from conception to a child's second birthday, spanning approximately 270 days of pregnancy and 730 days of early childhood (Australian Government, 2021). According to Karakochuk et al. (2018), during this period a child's brain undergoes rapid growth and development. The first 1000 days is categorised into three periods which are Pregnancy, Infancy and toddler years:

- As stated by NHS (2023), pregnancy also has three developmental stages which are called trimesters. During the first trimester is when baby is conceived and the foetus' circulatory system and heart starts to form, while later on in this trimester baby starts to develop their arms and legs NHS (2023). Moving onto the second trimester, this is when baby is starting to settle, and mother could start feeling the baby move (NHS,2023). The third trimester is when baby is about ready to be born according to NHS (2023).
- . Infancy is once to baby is born to about one years old (Nationwide Children's Hospital, 2022). According to Brodie (2018), in this period, an infant begins to develop cognitively, physically and emotionally. For example, at 2 months old a baby begins to develop physically by being able to briefly hold objects once placed in their hands. Which later develops to chewing on objects and recognising their own hands when they reach about 4 months (Brodie, 2018).
- . Finally, the toddler years is the period between infancy and early childhood (Karakochuk et al. , 2018). According to Brodie (2018), this period is the most important period for a child's development. In view of the fact that at this stage, children develop memory, language, imagination and fine motor skills. While also seeking independence and developing strong bonds with loved ones (Brodie, 2018).

Why are The First 1000 Days so important?



According to Australian Government(2021), the first 1000 days are considered an extremely crucial timeframe for a child's development, with profound impacts on a child's future health.

According to Australian Government (2021), factors such as stress management and avoiding harmful substances are key aspects of pregnancy, as it allows mothers to build a strong foundation of their child's health and development. For example, by ensuring proper nutrition and care during pregnancy and early childhood, the mother is reducing the risk of obesity or type 2 diabetes (Likhar and Patil 2022).

According to Brodie (2018), it is vitally important to engage with children at all stages of their first 1000 days. Brodie (2018) explains, this is when emotional development begins, while forming attachments and learning to manage and recognise feelings and emotions. Agreeing with Brodie (2018), Bowlby (1979) believes a secure attachment provides children with a sense of trust and stability, enabling them to explore the world and build healthy relationships.

As a practitioner, it is highly important to ensure babies and children receive positive experiences within the setting. While also working along side parents to ensure children are given the best possible start in life. Because this sets a foundation for success in beginning school and building relationships (Brodie,2018).



Caregiving

(IDB Improving Lives, 2023)

What is Exceptional Caregiving?



According to Bayat (2017), exceptional care giving in an early years and educational setting refers to practitioners ensuring and providing high quality and responsive care in which supports the holistic development of children. Going beyond basic needs, practitioners must focus on building secure relationships while also creating an enabling environment where children feel safe and valued through providing inclusive practice (Bayat, 2017).



Opportunities for learning

According to Johnson and Watts (2019), providing learning opportunities and exceptional care giving go hand-in-hand, both significantly contributing to a child's holistic development. Opportunities for learning in an early years setting consists of a variety of experiences, activities, and social interactions in which contribute to the development of a child's essential emotional, cognitive and physical skills (Johnson and Watts, 2019). These opportunities could include play-based learning, for example role play or building blocks. According to Johnson and Watts (2019), play-based learning is fundamental in early childhood as it allows children to explore the world around them, allowing them to express themselves and experiment. Agreeing with Johnson and Watts (2019) is Bayat (2017), as she believes children with additional learning needs benefit greatly from opportunities like play-based learning, as it maximizes the potential for independence by giving them an opportunity to make their own decisions. Another learning opportunity for young children is story-telling and conversational exchanges. According to Bayat (2017), experiences like this allow children to further their language and communication skills by widening their vocabulary and developing comprehension and imagination. As a practitioner, it is vital to ensure inclusive and diverse learning experiences by creating stimulating environments that promote discovery and to support children with their individual needs and interests, tailoring activities to each child's developmental stage (Johnson and Watts, 2019).



Being Responsive

According to Dickinson and Morse (2019), being responsive refers to caregivers having the ability to appropriately respond to a child's individual needs and interests. Exceptional caregiving builds on these principles through providing a high level of sensitivity and trust by understanding cues and observing. An example of being responsive to a child or baby is active listening. According to Dickinson and Morse (2019), being fully present and paying full attention to what a child is saying or trying to express, both verbally and nonverbally, shows them that their feelings and ideas are valued. For example, reciprocating a child's excitement when showing a drawing or something they have made gives a child a sense of accomplishment. Dickinson and Morse (2019) also mention the importance of encouragement of independence. As a practitioner, it is important to recognize children's verbal and nonverbal signals such as crying and babbling (Johnson and Watts, 2019). An example of a practitioner being responsive while being an exceptional caregiver, is understanding that a child clinging to a parent or caregiver may need reassurance in a new, unknown environment. Therefore it is up to the practitioner to comfort this child to show trust and build a secure and safe relationship (Johnson and Watts, 2019). This example connects to Bowlby's Attachment Theory, as it emphasizes the importance of children and infants receiving positive experiences and building secure attachments. According to Brodie(2018), a responsive and exceptional caregiver allows children to be in tune with their emotions by creating an environment that makes them feel safe to express themselves without fear of judgement or rejection.

What are the challenges in providing high quality care?



(Shutterstock, 2021)

Factor	Influence
Poor Leadership	According to Peill (2022), lack of leadership and poor management can result in a lack of clear objectives for a team. Therefore a lack of leadership can lead towards confusion and inconsistency in an early years setting. This could also lead to practitioners feeling unsupported in the work place due to leaders failing to provide guidance or professional development (Peill, 2022). Snowballing from the previous factors, lack of support can also cause staff dissatisfaction which can lead to high staff turnover (Peill, 2022). These factors can significantly affect and disrupt the quality of care for the children, because the children are not receiving consistency therefore it is difficult to build secure attachments. There are many ways to address these poor practices according to Peill (2022). For example, a setting could provide leaders with training. Through developing specific skills in early childhood management, leaders will be able to ensure the children are provided with high quality care. And to improve the dissatisfaction of staff, leaders could arrange team building activities. This promotes collaboration and could possibly build and improve morale amongst staff (Bigham, 2014). Another solution suggested by Bigham (2014) is a feedback mechanism. Encouraging open feedback from staff to management can improve work life and communication between staff, creating a smooth running work space. Solutions like this can positively impact children's experiences in early childhood settings as they are receiving high quality care from happy and confident practitioners (Peill, 2022).
Cultural Differences	According to Maryville University (2021), it is extremely important for practitioners to build an understanding and respect when cultural differences are introduced to a setting. As there are many challenges that arise also, including language barriers and diverse practices and beliefs. According to Maryville University (2021), communication can be challenging when faced with a child or family that speak a different language. For example, practitioners may find it difficult to engage fully with a child or family who have limited vocabulary in the local language therefore both parties may miss out on vital information and updates, this could affect the child negatively and may disrupt the chance of receiving high quality care (Maryville University, 2021). Maryville University(2021) also mention that high quality care could be disrupted by diverse practices and beliefs. For example, different families have different practices around child-rearing and discipline that may go against a practitioner's norms or policies. This could include dietary preferences and attitudes towards gender roles. According to Maryville University (2021), there are many solutions to overcome these challenges. One being, cultural competence training- this would include providing staff with the opportunity to learn about diversity and inclusion, while possibly working with translators and diverse community groups to widen their knowledge about a variety of cultures. Another solution may be creating an inclusive environment by ensuring that classrooms and activities reflect a wide range of culture and experiences (Maryville University, 2021).

Professional Partnerships



(Asquith, 2021)

What is the role of an Early Years practitioner in supporting children in the first 1000 days?



The role of an Early Years practitioner in supporting children within the first 1000 days includes creating a safe and stimulating environment through providing high quality care, while also taking consideration towards a child's holistic development (Brodie, 2018). According to Brodie (2018), practitioners work with families to encourage positive relationships and health practices. And by following an understanding each child's individual needs, they facilitate experiences that inspire to explore and learn. As enabling adults, practitioners also follow observation strategies to identify developmental delays, so they can accommodate that child with the services they need sooner (Brodie, 2018). Early Years practitioners work alongside families, helping to guide and educate them to develop homes as secure bases from which a child will continue into their future.

What is the role of an Early Years practitioner in supporting families in the first 1000 days?



The role of an Early Years practitioner in supporting families and caregivers within the first 1000 days includes offering a warm and welcoming environment, which encourages trust and creating an open door policy (Brodie, 2018). According to Brodie (2018), it is an early years practitioner's role to value a parent's opinion and involving them in the process of planning and decision-making, as this can build trust and respect between both parties if done effectively. An example of involving parents in the process of planning is to work with parents to mirror what they are doing at home such as having the same thing for breakfast or reading at a certain point in the day (Brodie, 2018). It is also vitally important as a practitioner to listen to what parents/carers have to say and accommodate any concerns that arise, so that everyone feels valued and included (Brodie, 2018).

What is partnership working?

Partnership working involves collaborating and effectively communicating with families and other professionals to ensure the children receive the best care possible (Chu and Jhuo, 2022). For example, phoning home regularly to update parents on any progress and observations. According to Chu and Jhuo (2022), professional partnerships also include multi-agency collaboration such as speech and language therapists or perhaps physio therapists if a child has a physical disability. Chu and Jhuo (2022) suggest that all professionals must share information appropriately to ensure coordination and effective interventions.

Why is it important to work in partnership during this period?

According to Open University (2024), partnership working allows practitioners to share knowledge and understanding with one another. This being important as practitioners can then individualize activities, targeting individual needs and interests of the children. Therefore allowing children to develop cognitively at their own pace (Brodie, 2018). It is also exceedingly important to collaborate sincerely with families as this can be an extremely stressful time for both parents and children. Being sincere and allowing parents to share concerns builds trust and positive relationships, therefore parents will feel more at ease when leaving their children at the setting.

Maternal factors and support strategies available



(Novikov, 2023)

Maternal Factors	Support Strategies available
Mental Health issues	According to Naaz and Muneshwar (2023) mothers that suffer from mental health issues during pregnancy and after child birth can potentially influence a child's emotional development, that could potentially lead to behavioural issues or possibly developmental delays. Naaz and Muneshwar (2023) have many suggestions of support strategies for mothers suffering with mental health issues, such as: - Therapy and/or support groups. Giving mothers the chance to connect with others going through the same experience. - Postpartum depression screening and early intervention programs.
Nutritional Deficiencies	According to Liverpool John Moore University (2021), a mother with poor nutrition can lead to possible low birth weight or birth defects, this can due to the lack of vital vitamins and minerals such as iron or folic acid. LJMU (2021) also suggests that a mother's poor diet could potentially lead to a child not receiving proper nutrition or possibly inheriting unhealthy eating habits. According to LJMU (2021), there are many strategies to overcome or support poor nutrition, such as: - Prenatal vitamins and education on ensuring a balanced diet. - Non-profit programs like advocacy groups that focus on maternal and child health. As provided by the British Government.
Maternal Age	According to Gebreegziabher et al. (2023), adolescents and older mothers can potentially face unique challenges, such as a higher risk of complications or possible lack of adequate support. Adolescent mothers may face difficulties completing their education or secure stable employment therefore potentially leading to economic instability (Gebreegziabher et al., 2023). Increasing the likelihood of a child develop developmental delays or behavioural issues partly due to socio-economic stressors. Some support strategies are: - Community organizations often offer parenting workshops tailored to younger mothers. - Prenatal Care: Early and regular prenatal visits to monitor the health of both mother and baby.



Activities that provide meaningful learning



(Harding, 2015)

Activities to support a child in the first 1000 days

Sensory Play



(Team Lovevery, 2020)

Sensory play may include engaging an infant with their sense, this being sound, sight, smell, touch and many more (Johnson and Watts, 2019). Some activities enhancing these senses are:

- Visual play such as providing colourful toys and mirrors.
- Auditory Play, by providing shaking rattles or playing music.

According to Johnson and Watts (2019), by filling a shallow basin or tub with lukewarm water with safe floating toys such as rubber ducks, cups and boats is exceedingly stimulating for infants. Possibly adding food colouring or bubbles could enhance their sense of smell and sight (Team Lovevery, 2020).

How does this support a child's development within their first 1000 days?

According to Johnson and Watts (2019), water sensory play supports the development of a child in their first 1000 days, as it stimulates their auditory input by the splashing sounds, therefore developing auditory development. Johnson and Watts (2019) also suggest that water play develops an infant's hand-eye coordination through grasping toys and pouring water, this helping with the development of their fine motor skills. This activity could possibly help an infant's vocabulary due to them describing actions such as "splash" when splashing the water. (Johnson and Watts, 2019). Water sensory can also develop an infant's emotional well-being, as it can act as a stress- reliever while also being a safe environment to explore and build a sense of independence and curiosity.

Activities to support a child in the first 1000 days

Reading aloud with a caregiver



(Harding,2015)

According to Dickinson and Morse (2019), reading aloud with a caregiver involves a parent or teacher reading an age appropriate book, possibly with repetitive structure which are ideal for Toddlers. While reading aloud the caregiver pauses to ask questions, so that the children engage. The care giver could also mimic sounds from the book and point out objects. An activity that Dickinson and Morse (2019) suggests is story with a sack. This activity includes a caregiver preparing a sack filled with items relating to the story. For example, if a teacher was to be reading a story about the Three Little Pigs, they could possibly provide hay, sticks and perhaps small pieces of bricks. According to Dickinson and Morse (2019), this is an extremely good way to allow the children to engage.

How does this support a child's development within their first 1000 days?

According to Dickinson and Morse (2019), reading with a caregiver in those first 1,000 days of a toddler's life is very important for language development, while also enhancing vocabulary, comprehension and listening skills. Dickinson and Morse (2019) suggest that the caregiver's tone and interaction provides models of social cues through mimicking sounds and pointing out objects in the book. Dickinson and Morse (2019) believe it also enhances the bond between the caregiver and child, lending a sense of security to emotional development. Reading, singing, and talking with children helps establish their love for reading (Dickinson and Morse,2019). Through reading aloud Toddlers also come to recognise emotions and feelings, as they are shown by the care giver while reading(Dickinson and Morse,2019). Reading aloud helps a child's development in their first 1000 days as it expands their imagination, while also understanding the world around them.

International Approaches



Reggio Emilia

According to Bayat (2017) Reggio Emilia is a child-centered approach characterized by its emphasis on experiential learning and viewing the child as curious and capable. In those first 1,000 days, it nurtures growth by encouraging exploration, creativity, and critical thinking. Bayat (2017) suggests, the environment is designed and serves as a “third teacher,” with stimulating spaces that are organized to enhance sensory and cognitive development. Peer and caregiver collaboration reinforces social-emotional skills, and ongoing documentation promotes learning that is personalized to support each child's growth and development (Brodie,2018). When parents and educators partner well together, they provide regular and reinforcing support that occurs both at home and in places where learning happens. This strategy lays the groundwork for cognitive growth as well as emotional and social growth (Brodie,2018).

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