



**1000 days of life**

## THE FIRST 1000 DAYS IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT

IMAGE:FREEPIK.COM

# What are the first 1000 days.

According to the existing body of research the first 1000 days start from conception up until the child's second birthday (Karakochuk et al., 2018, Page, Clare and Nutbrown, 2013). These first 1000 days are the most important for child growth and development and this period of growth is pivotal for children's physical, brain and emotional wellbeing, and is classed as the critical window for development. Public Health Wales (no date) suggest this is where factors such as dietary and environmental exposures can contribute to having an adverse effect on the outcomes for children and state that laying foundations for the future can shape or change the outcome. Unicef (2017) suggest that the first 1000 days is the unique period where foundations for the right care should be established and talks about how important this is to the development of children. This is consistent with the similar views of Brodie (2018) who talks about the first 1000 days as an explosion of learning, growth and development, she suggests that the first 1000 days are the most vital time for laying the foundations for development.



(Brodie, 2018)



# Why are the first 1000 days so important for children?

According to Gradovski *et al.*, (2020) and Gerhardt (2015) the first 1000 days are pivotal in how children develop physically, cognitively and emotionally, and there are many factors that contribute to this growth. NHS Wales (2023) state that giving exceptional care during pregnancy is of the greatest importance and say that prenatal care allows them to help detect any health issues with both child and mother. Furthermore, the NHS support the mother by making sure they are prepared for the child and offer prenatal care that involves, regular medical checks, ultrasounds, screenings, lifestyle and nutritional support, childbirth classes and emotional and mental health support.

The UK Government (2021) state brain development in these first 1000 days are fast and suggest this period is where the most rapid growth occurs and can set the foundations for how well the child does at school or in relationships. The Government also talks about how early experiences such as, being held, hearing language or being able to explore the environment can have an impact on how the brain develops. The Parent Infant Association (2024) state during the first year of life children's brains create 1 million connections. This is consistent with the data from UNICEF (2017), who suggest that 1,000 new connections are created every second and suggest using these connections to built blocks to help support the children to develop.

UNICEF (2018) state children need to be healthy and must have the right nutrition to grow, they believe good nutrition is the foundation for healthy children and suggest that getting the right vitamins can help build immune systems. They state that children who are well nourished will have more energy to play and interact with others. The National Institute of Health (2019) make a similar point and state that there are specific nutritional needs that children need to be healthy and say that metabolic rates are very high during these first 1000 days, stating that care givers and health professionals need to work together to ensure children are getting the sufficient calories they need to thrive. This view is supported by the HM Government (2021) who states age-appropriate nutrition is essential for growth and development.

Gerhardt (2015) suggests supporting children's emotional wellbeing can help them develop healthy relationships and create secure attachments. In the same vein the UK Government (2021) advise that children learn how to become emotionally resilient and socially confident during infancy and create secure attachments to help them. The government state that this development happens when the infant has at least one stable relationship with a trusted adult, allowing them to feel safe and secure. This view is supported by well known theorist Bowlby (2004) and attachment theory, his theory states children need to create secure bonds with a trusted adult and states these earliest bonds have the most impact on children throughout their lives and can affect the outcome.

# Caregiving



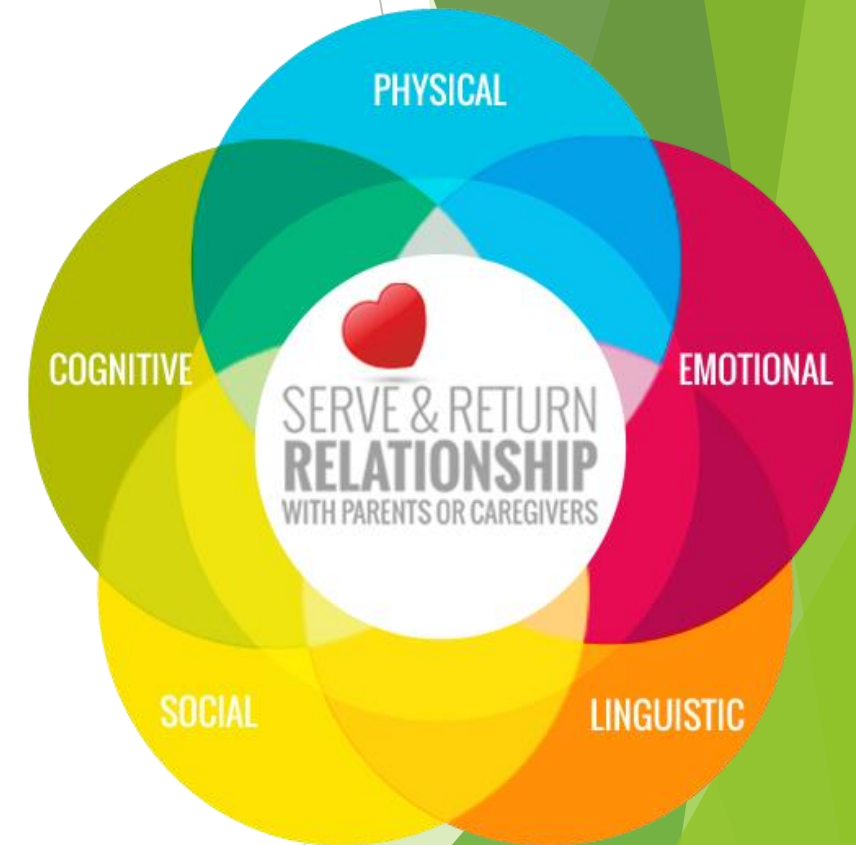
# What is exceptional care?

Exceptional care is defined as providing love and a sense of belonging for children. It is about keeping children safe and secure whilst creating opportunities for learning and growth. Exceptional care is supporting children to be healthy by providing them adequate nutrition and creating opportunities they need to thrive (Nurturing-care,2018).



# What needs to be done in the first 1000 days to achieve exceptional care?

According to Gerhardt (2014) and Save the children (2016) early experiences have the greatest impact on a baby's physiological system and they rely heavily on adults to provide them with comfort and safety, stating the outcome for children will have links to the kind of care they received as babies. Emmi Pikler (Sagastui *et al.*, 2022) would support this view as she suggests that daily care activities such as, nappy changing, mealtimes and getting dressed are opportunities to effectively communicate all the while being respectful. Pikler explains when changing nappies caregivers can smile, talk or sing to the child creating nurturing care. Gerhardt (2014) talks about how a mother or caregiver responds to the child, communicating with facial expressions, tone of voice and touch. She believes that these interactions help create a bond and form a secure relationship between the baby and mother. She talks about how a mother responds to the baby crying by being attentive, mirroring the sounds and rocking the baby, all the while using non-verbal communication to help soothe the baby and create a sense of calm and comfort. An example of this is serve and return. Harvard University (2024) suggest that serve and return is a positive interaction where babies respond to voice, closeness, eye contact, touch, music and facial expressions. These interactions are crucial in the first 1000 days and can help cognitive, physical, emotional and social development. In the same vein Save the children (2016) state early interactions such as, give and take are stimulating to the brain. This simple back and forth between parents and their children can help create bonds and deepen communication.



(<sup>6</sup> Pinterest, no date)

# Building positive relationships in the first 1000 days

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Child Development

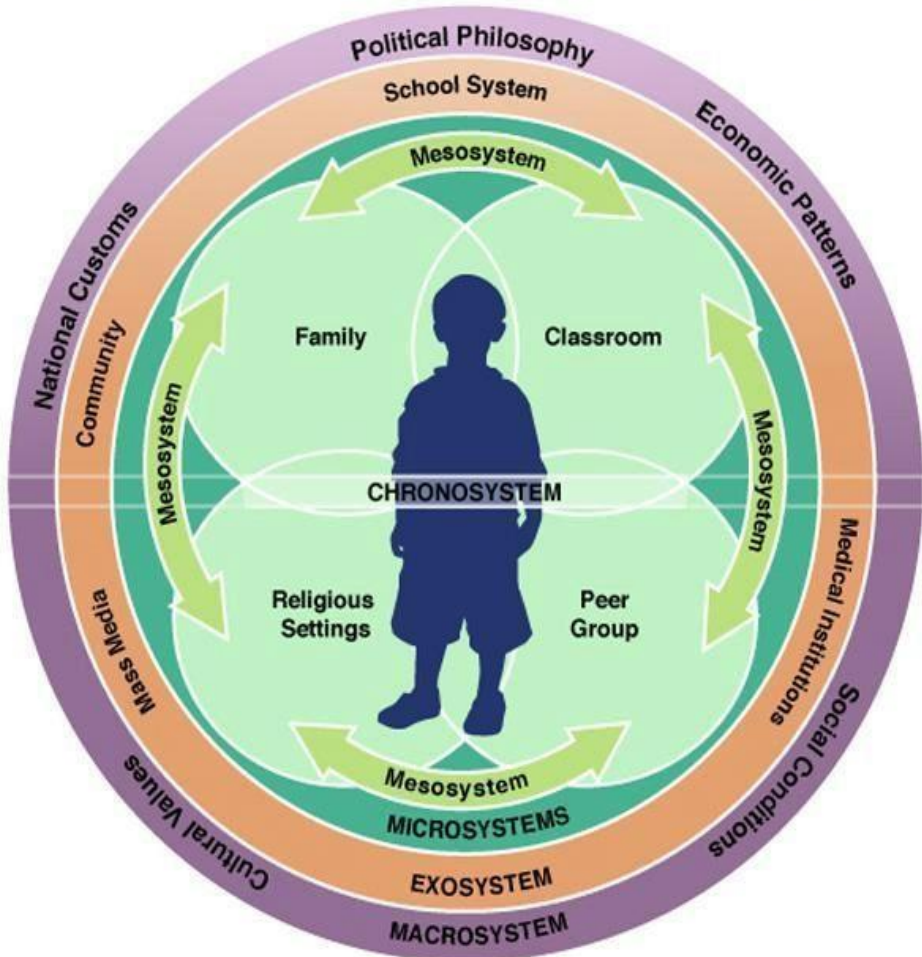


Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner Ecological Model (Pinterest, no date)

Public Health Wales (2023) reported building positive relationships are important in the first 1000 days and can impact on how a child develops, suggesting positive relationships contribute to exceptional care. Maslow (1943) suggests that children need love and belonging and have a natural need for closeness and relationships, he talks about how children get their sense of belonging from parents or caregivers. In the same vein, Bowlby (2004) highlights the importance of attachment and building relationships, he suggests children naturally want to form such relationships and state that the most important attachment is from the mother. He believes that much of how a child develops has direct links to these bonds (Holmes, 2014). Public Health Wales (2023) document supports parents in the first 1000 days and discusses the importance of caregiving, sharing a wealth of information that can be accessed by parents who may need support. The link for this document is <https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/the-first-1000-days-programme/resources/a-public-health-approach-to-supporting-parents-summary-report/>

Save the children (2016) state when looking at relationships to provide exceptional care, it is important to consider the relationships parents or caregivers have with teachers, health care professionals and any other outside agencies, this is because parents or caregivers have the biggest influence over children's learning in the first 1000 days. Figure 1 shows Bronfenbrenner (1977) ecological system shows that close relationships within the microsystem and mesosystem are key towards how a child develops and believes that children are affected by their surroundings (Weinberg, 2011). The early years strategy (2025) claim working with such professionals can be beneficial for spotting poorly children or those with learning difficulties and suggests Welsh Government strategies such as flying start are beneficial to this. They suggest some families may need extra support, especially those who have children with additional learning needs and believes such strategies to be effective in building relationships between parents and practitioners. Similarly, Public Health Wales (no date) state that strong social support through collaborative groups can be important for families to help them with challenges and improve relationships and mental health.

# How enabling environments help with development

The Welsh Government (2024) suggest children are influenced by their environment and adults surrounding them. This is consistent with Reggio Emilia (2022) approach which suggests children should be an active part of creating their learning environment and lead the practitioner. The Welsh Government (2024) state they have a responsibility to ensure children develop positively in an accessible, inclusive and enabling setting. They advise that enriching environments should include diverse and authentic resources whilst removing any barriers to learning. This view is supported by Piaget (1980) who's international approach proposes that children must be free to play and explore in a safe environment whilst providing opportunity to learn. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child article 29 states that children have the right to an education whereby they can develop their personalities, talents and abilities, whilst encouraging the children to have respect for human rights, respect for parents and environment (UNICEF, 2022).

Gascoyne (2019) and Early Years Alliance (2019) both state that babies and toddlers need stimulating environments to explore that offer equality and inclusion to all children. By providing children with an environment full of sensory rich materials and loose parts, physical development will excel, and children will receive the best possible start in life. Offering these rich sensory objects to children will allow them to use fine and gross motor skill movements, in turn stimulating cognitive development. Emmi Pickler (Sagastui *et al.*, 2022), explains children become active when there is an influential adult present and encourages families to see babies as being an active part of what happens to them.



# Professional Partnerships

( E school News, 2019)

# What is the role of an early year's practitioner in supporting children and their families in the first 1000 days?

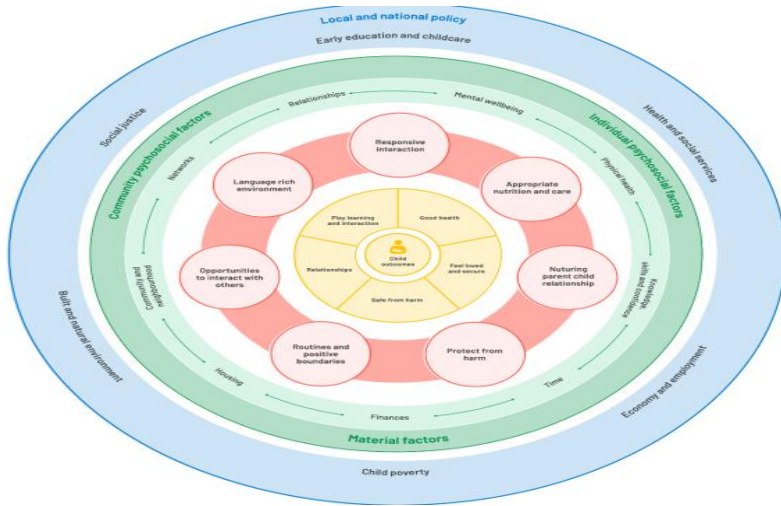


Figure 1 Model of parent support (Public Health Wales, 2023)

Wilson (2016) explains early years practitioners must work with parents to better support the child in their setting and suggests that creating established meaningful relationships with parents can help children achieve their goals. Similarly, Public Health Wales (2023) suggest practitioners must help enable families to thrive by giving them tools to help rather than telling them what to do. Public Health Wales (2023) put together a model of parent support, the model, shown in figure 1 shows parents how they can work together with the wider community to give children the best possible start in life. They believe that relationships between parents and the practitioner have an influence on development and claim building strong relationships is key as the practitioner will be better suited to offer help or support. Practitioners can do this by having informal chats with parents and make sure they are aware of any local community groups that can offer support. Carmarthenshire Family Information Service (2023) state it is important for the practitioner to be able to recognise any needs the children may have and be ready to offer support to families, liaising with other professionals in the community to help. They have implemented framework that allows practitioners to be able to identify how much support a family may need. This framework is also used by early years strategy Wales (2025), the framework shown in figure 2 shows the different levels of support, and Carmarthen family information service (2023) suggest any identified needs will need to be met with targeted support to help the families who meet that criteria.



Figure 2 (Carmarthenshire Family Information Service, 2023)

# The importance of effective partnership working

According to Community Change (2010) using a multi agency approach to help support families in the first 1000 days is crucial, creating professional partnerships and partnership working proves effective when different people or organisations work together to achieve purpose. The Open University (2024) would agree with Community Change (2010) approach and state working together allows practitioners to share any knowledge and understanding they may have with outside agencies. They will be able to engage and support families, help plan, share workload, with the hopes of improving outcomes. The childcare Act (2006) states professionals working in partnership must ensure that every family receives the holistic support that they need (Crown Database, 2011). Gasper (2009) suggests partnership working creates opportunities and can help the practitioner identify needs, access the appropriate help from outside agencies and help increase confidence and self worth. He believes that practitioners in early year settings can share goals and expertise to help families thrive. He goes on to say that effective partnership working will help those families who need to be heard, by having their needs listened to and to be acted upon with the right support. Getting this high level of support can contribute to high self esteem and confidence, both of which affect development. Gasper (2009) model shown in figure 1 shows the child and family at the centre whilst being surrounded by the local authority and early years education. The model shows how co-ordinated services have the greatest impact. According to Weinberg (2011) Bronfenbrenner's ecological system shown in figure 3 shows how all aspects of children's development are influenced by this system and believes that the different environments have direct implications for the children and their families. Bronfenbrenner (1977) ecological system shows similarities to Gasper (2009) model, both show the child at the centre surrounded by a system of support, showing that partnership working is essential to child development in the first 1000 days. Public Health Wales (2023) support Bronfenbrenner (1977) theory with the route of influence. The diagram shown in figure 2 shows how the social, emotional and material resources impact children's earliest experiences and outcomes, and highlight the link between psychosocial factors, showing the importance of these earliest partnerships and how important they are to development in the first 1000 days.

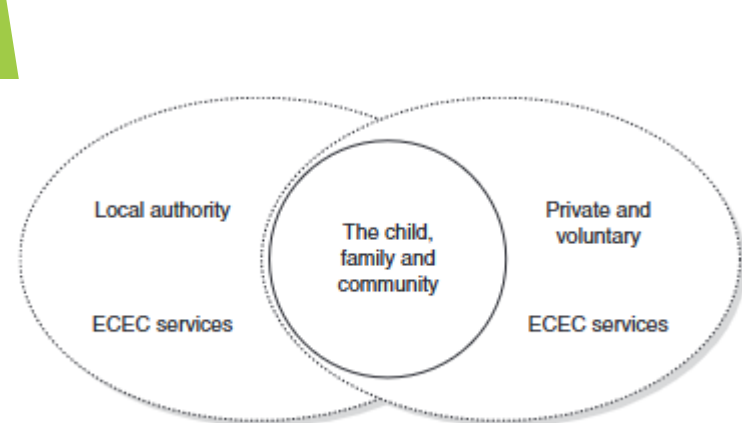


Figure 1 Model (Gasper, 2009)

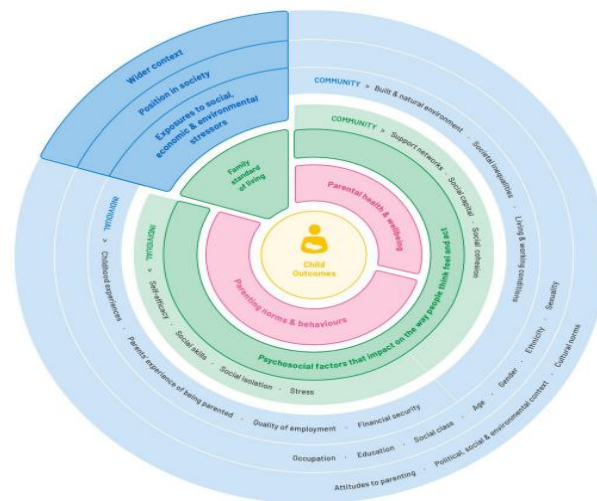


Figure 2 (Public Health Wales, 2023)

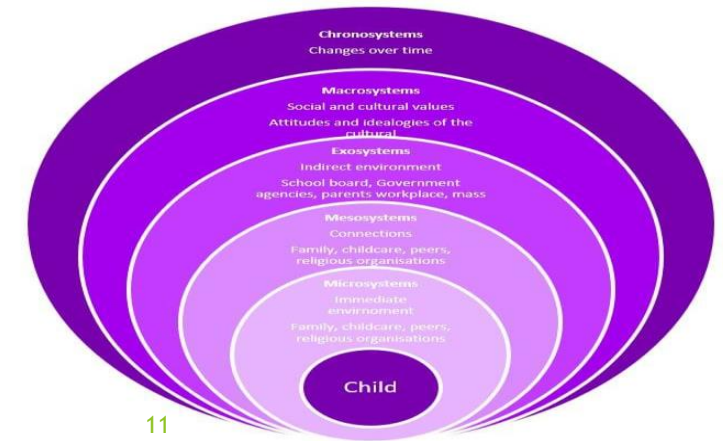


Figure 3 (The education People, 2021)

# Maternal Factors that can impact development

Public Health Wales (2023) suggest parenting is not easy for everyone and can be difficult, especially when the family may not have what it needs to thrive. Having children is a significant life event and can be overwhelming. The organisation talk about how good mental health and social support groups can act as a buffer for families, helping parents to manage difficult challenges they may face.

According to The Maternal Mental Health Alliance (2018) more than 1 in 10 women suffer antenatal and postnatal mental health issues in the first 1000 days. The organisation suggests that this has a direct impact on the development of the child and states that strong partnerships need to be formed to recognize and meet the needs of the family.

Public Health Wales (2023) talk about how intergenerational cycles can be present in some families and believe that those families have an unfair difference in the resources they have, they believe this may be because of where the family are positioned in society. For example, the area they live.

Swansea Council (2023) have a dedicated early intervention hub where they offer support to families in the area that may be struggling. The local council aim to help families break down any barriers, supporting them to achieve desired outcomes by providing specialist teams to help with well-being, safeguarding issues or help with poverty. The local council also offer settings such as flying start to families that are in the area.

Swick and Williams (2006) suggest families may find themselves homeless due to poverty and recognise that families respond to this stress better with a network of support. They believe parents that have access to support Groups in the community will be better equipped to deal with these stresses.

The Welsh Government (2017) suggest there must be antenatal and postnatal support for women, offering support groups to families where they are taught about breastfeeding, well-being and how important those early relationships are for development. Furthermore, UNICEF (2022) Article 18 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states governments must support families by offering services to help them raise their children.

# What are the challenges in providing high quality care?

The UK Government (2024) state the early year sector and suggest there are issues such as low pay, challenging working conditions, lack of staff development, poor leadership and low levels of staff well-being. The government talk about safeguarding, stating that not all new members of staff have been trained and believe one of the reasons behind this could be a high turnover in staff.



## Issues surrounding staff

The UK Government (2024) state that challenges such as high staff turnover will have a profound effect on them getting to know the children and will infringe on the ability to create relationships. They suggest that a lack consistency in staff could be detrimental to children individual needs, especially when those children are going through time of transition. The government launched a recruitment campaign in 2024 to help support nurseries and early year settings by allowing more funds for staff



## Parental engagement

The Welsh Government (2019) state many parents underestimate the importance of child development in the first 1000 days and suggest that this engagement can sometimes lack. However, they suggest parents should be treated as part of the learning process and that settings should offer stay and play sessions to involve parent and support parents to become more confident creating good relationships. Similarly, Gasper (2009) explains that involving parents in the children's learning experience will allow them to feel included and equal, giving them the confidence to share ideas with the practitioner to support development. The Welsh Government (2017) has set guidance to support practitioners, sharing a core purpose. The purpose is to be responsive to parents needs and provide opportunities for partnership offering a range of activities where parents have the opportunity to become more involved in the development process.

A stylized illustration of a mother holding her baby. The mother is shown from the chest up, wearing a patterned top, with her hands gently supporting the baby. The baby is lying down, wearing a light-colored onesie. The background is a soft, watercolor-like wash of colors. The entire slide is framed by green geometric shapes on the left and right sides.

# Activities that support the first 1000 days

# Play in early years

According to Sagastui, Herran and Anguera (2022) free play in the first 1000 days is crucial for development, they suggest by learning through play babies will develop an understand of objects and the relationship between things. This view is supported by theorists such as Piaget (1980) and Pikler (Brodie,2025) who both believe children connect with the world around them using sensory play and movement, both theorists claim that allowing free movement will direct the children's learning allowing them to explore through uninterrupted play that will help create challenges and opportunities. PLASP (2024) suggest children learn best when they are given the space to explore and suggest activities can stimulate different areas of development. Home and on the way (2022) talk about the Pikler triangle and suggests that the frame can help promote gross motor skills and children's movements. The triangle can help support children with learning to stand and further develop their skills by climbing. The Welsh Government (2024) support free play and suggest children should have a variety of opportunities that encourage risk and challenge stating, there should be long periods of uninterrupted play to support active learning.



# Engaging Activities

The Curiosity Approach (2024) and Swansea University (2023) both highlight the need for play based engaging activities to target fine and gross motor skills, creativity, social skills and development and state the importance of allowing the child to engage in activities or be in the play cycle uninterrupted. The UNCRC (2022) article 31 states every child has the right to relax and play using a wide range of activities. The Welsh Government (2022) incorporate the UNCRC declaration and play in the curriculum for Wales, For example, play could be underpinned by the enterprising, creative contributor, one of the four purposes that make up the curriculum and suggest much of what children learn can be cross-curricular. Early years home learning collection (2020) suggest learning through play can be provided through a range of activities such as sensory play, tummy time, telling stories or by singing rhymes with the children.



# Reading in early years

Early Years Wales (no date) state that reading with children can create bonds and suggest by allowing the children to feel, smell and taste the books the children will become stimulated increasing levels of development. Children will begin to recognise words and link them to the pictures, also practitioners must animate the story by using actions to stimulate the children's cognitive and physical abilities, this can be done using scented materials, photographs and puppets. This view is supported by the Uk Government (2024) department for education who writes that a wide range of reading activities should be provided to create meaningful learning and suggest a well sequenced reading curriculum will help create lifelong passionate readers. They suggest creating a cosy reading area where the children can feel relaxed and talk about how questions and discussions around the book can help deepen understanding. The video to the right is from the Uk Government department of education (2024) and supports practitioners in early year settings with ideas and tips for creating meaningful reading environments.



(Video :Department for Education, 2024)



17  
(deposit photos, no date)

# Activities and International Approaches

According to (Daly, 2014, Beloglovsky, 2014 and Montessori, 2018) loose parts play can help children's development by creating curiosity in items that can be found amongst everyday objects. For example, pegs, stones, feathers, scarfs or any object that can be found anywhere in the environment. The idea of this play is to promote stimulating experiences with objects where the children can free play creating new levels of learning. Issacs (2018) suggests the Montessori international approach lends itself well to the idea of loose parts play and supports independent learning, allowing the children to experiment in a safe and controlled environment creating independent learners. This approach is consistent with Reggio Emilia (2022) who's international approach offers similarities to the learning experience. Reggio Emilia approach is very much a child centred approach dedicated to learning through free play by supporting curiosity in the setting with objects such as mirrors showing light and dark, stimulating development. This child centred approach is underpinned by the Welsh Government (2022) and the curriculum for Wales (2022) which states the children's learning experience should be taught holistically and recognises that children's individuality and learning is celebrated. The image shown in figure 1 was taken from the Welsh Government (2022) curriculum for Wales and clearly shows the child at the centre of the approach, surrounded by five developmental pathways that can be taught through different learning experiences in the environment to create purpose. For example, children playing with loose parts whose pedagogy comes from a Montessori (2018), or Reggio Emilia (2022) approach would create more ambitious and capable learners supported by the environment created for them filled with objects and stimulating rich tasks.

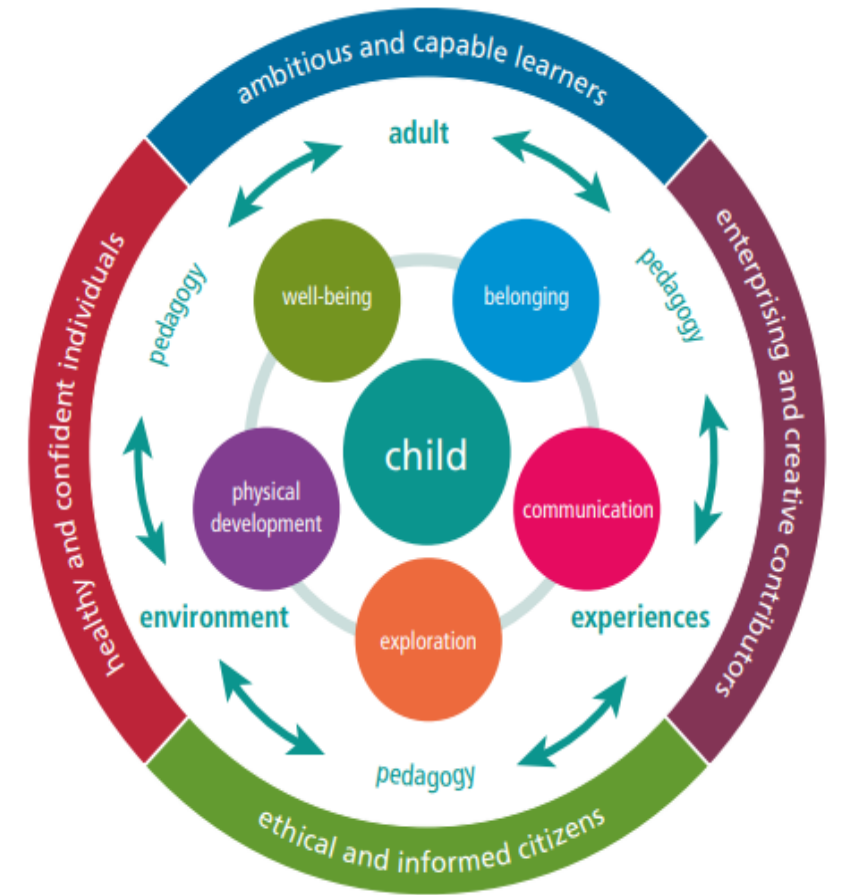


Figure 1 (Image: Welsh Government, 2022)

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I have not used any AI in this assignment.

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