



Exceptional Care in the First 1000 Days

What are the First 1000 Days?

The first 1000 days is a period from the conception to the age of 2. This is seen as a critical period in a child's life as it is where the foundations of a child's health and development are established, and a path is formed for life (HM Parliament 2019).

Pregnancy birth and baby (June 22) state that experiences a baby has in the first 1000 days can have a lifelong effect on the health and wellbeing, and any stress, trauma, poverty, and violence experienced can have a long-term adverse health effect on the baby.

Pregnancy birth and baby (June 22) state that a baby will need to have healthy food, loving relationships, safety and security, time to play and a healthy environment (including in the womb) in the first 1000 days which will enable the baby having the best start to its life.

Save the Children (2016) maintains that in the first years of life the brain develops rapidly which is directed by experiences, environments, and genes. The research that they undertook stresses the

importance of experiences and environment as key role in the children's early language and brain development as well as genes. They acknowledge that parents are key to the child's learning but recognise that some children are accessing childcare more frequently, so early years practitioners are also key to a child's learning and development.

Brodie (2018) agrees with the Save the Children report that children's development from Birth to 3 is a significant time for progression. The children learn, grow and progress rapidly and stresses the importance of getting it right for future development. Brodie (2018) says that each child develops and learns uniquely which is dependent on circumstances, so for children to be cared for in a holistic way you need to view development from different perspectives.

Brodie (2018) also believes that babies and young children are influenced by close family and their social environment which links in with the Bronfenbrenner theory. She believes that a baby needs to have the best care to allow them to develop self-esteem, self-confidence, and resilience, so that if in the future they face any negative influences they are better equipped in dealing with it.



What is exceptional care and what are the challenges around providing it?

Exceptional care for babies and children, especially in the first 1000 days is important to get right but can be a challenge to implement in different environments.

UNICEF (no date) say that the first 1000 days are crucial for optimum health, growth, and neurodevelopment, but some babies are born into poverty which can lead to them becoming malnourished which weakens the baby's ability to develop properly. They also discuss "overnutrition"

which can also be a form of malnutrition as this is classed as poor nutrition which could also delay brain development. So, providing information on how to provide the best care for your baby is crucial, which is why there has been significant research into the importance of the first 1000 days by the UK Parliament. A review into the Start for Life 2012 initiative was undertaken with academics, health workers and agencies such as Barnardo's and NSPCC and families who have used the service previously. The review took place in September 2020 and six areas were identified for improvement to ensure that after the coronavirus pandemic parents can access the support and help that they needed. The six areas identified in the best start for life vision are:- seamless support for all families, a welcoming hub for families to access Start for Life services, providing information for families when they need it by designing digital, virtual and telephone access, providing an empowered Start for Life workforce who are able to meet the changing needs of families, to continue to improve the Start for Life initiative and lastly ensuring accountability and building an economic case for the vision (HM Government 2021). All of this will ensure that the parents are fully supported in the care for their baby as soon as conception, which in turn will enable the child to have the best start in life.





If a child attends a day care setting the Welsh Government (2022) devised a new curriculum which includes the non-maintained funded settings. In the new curriculum they recognised that high quality early education is crucial to a child's development and that giving children high quality experiences, knowledge and skills are basis for lifelong learning.

The curriculum also recognises that each child is unique and acknowledges that from birth to five development is rapid, so providing the individualised care for the children helps them to develop holistically and at their own pace. However, providing this individualised care for children could be difficult for early years practitioners to undertake due to lack of understanding or training, ratios of children to staff or disagreement with the new curriculum. There could also be financial implications to providing resources for the activities that will be provided.



1 - Holistic Development

Brodie (2018) believes that settings who want to provide exceptional care for children will need to have practitioners who can build stable loving relationships and interactions with the children in their care. They will need to have the ability to observe, provide activities and follow the children's individual interests and routine, which will allow the child to take the lead in their learning. They will need to support the children in their communication and language development and provide the children with opportunities for gross motor play.

Brodie (2018) says that the setting will also need good leaders who support the staff team and ensure that they are knowledgeable and capable for their role, the setting will need to have a low turnover of staff which will allow for continuity and security for the children. They will need to provide a safe and stimulating environment for the children to learn and involve parents in their child's day at setting.

Brodie (2018) also points out the importance of quality interactions. Reciprocity is important for young babies and children as it is how they begin to learn about the world around them and is vital to their holistic development. All of what has been discussed by Brodie (2018) can be a challenge due to National Minimum Standards (2022) as settings are guided by this and ratios for children from birth to 2 are one member of staff to 3 babies/children, which does not allow staff to always follow children's individual routine. Settings have set times in the days where children eat, sleep, and play outside, which does not follow the new curriculum guidance of following a child's interests or the child's own routine. In not following the child's needs you are missing opportunities for development and are unable to meet aspects linked to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (see diagram). A baby needs to feel a connection with a caregiver so that they feel safe and secure, this in turn allows them to feel that they belong and allows them to have the experiences of serve and return (see video) which over time enables them to develop a sense of who they are.



2 - Maslow's Hierachy of Needs





Environment



The Welsh Government (2021) produced a consultation document called Enabling Pathways to help support schools and settings plan for the new curriculum. This document discusses the 3 enablers which are enabling adults, experiences, and environment.

In the document they discuss each section and why it is important to get right. When they discuss the environment in the document they talk about indoor and outdoor experiences being as important as each other. They say the environment needs to be open for the children to explore, which will allow

them to connect with the local community and beyond. This will give the children a sense of belonging and appreciation of the world around them.

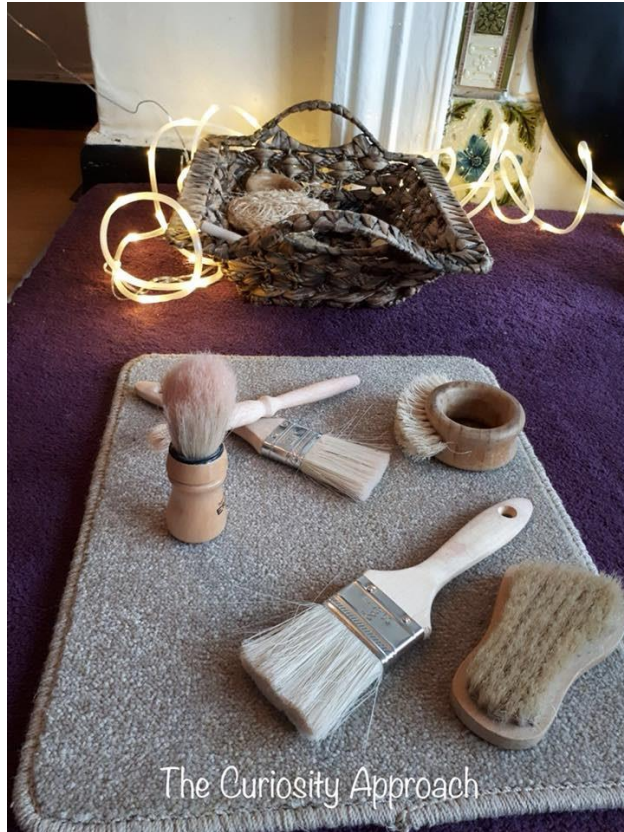
The enabling adults need to provide an environment which has broad and varied experiences, which allow the children to express themselves in a physical, creative, and emotional way. This will lead to the child being able to follow their own interests individually or with others if they choose to.

The document says that the enabling environment should value diversity and show inclusivity in the experiences. They should be communication rich and promote emerging communication skills and have access to mathematical concepts within the environments so that they can learn about number, shape, and patterns holistically.

An enabling environment should inspire children's natural curiosity about living and non-living things, they should be able to explore, problem-solve, be creative and develop critical thinking skills as they play. The environment should also allow for children to master the skills that they are learning by being able to revisit, practice and develop.

This is closely linked to the Curiosity approach to learning as they believe like Piaget and Montessori that for babies to learn about the world around them, they use their senses. So, if a baby is handling different objects and having the freedom to move around, they are learning. This approach believes that if you follow the babies' natural interests and curiosity then they will learn to connect with the environment, build relationships and it allows them to learn in a holistic way (Curiosity approach 2019 and Pound 2006).

[Enabling Pathways](#)





When the Welsh Government's new curriculum guidance (2022) came out in 2022 the section on enabling environments recognised the importance of the environment in a child's learning. The curriculum's vision is that the environment will allow for the voice of the child to be heard and listened too, which links to the UNCRC.

The document focused on the key to allowing the children learn in a holistic and meaningful way are adults who are knowledgeable, observant, and interested in the children they care for. The adults will need to provide engaging and exciting experiences for the children that will encourage them to develop independence, allow them to take risks, give them challenges and opportunities to experience success along their lifelong learning path.

[New Welsh Government Curriculum Guidance](#)



Early Years Matters (2022) also agrees that the environment plays an important role in extending children's learning and development. Babies and young children need to feel relaxed and comfortable in their environment before they can explore, so building close relationships is crucial for the child's learning. Once the baby or young child is settled, they will be able to access the activities and opportunities you provide. They will be able to observe, touch, manipulate and manoeuvre around the areas that they wish in the confidence that you will support them if needed.

Brodie (2018) says that babies should have as much space as possible to allow for them to move and explore their environment. Young babies need to be given opportunities for stretching and rolling for toys, whereas older babies need to space to bum shuffle or crawl around to access their environment. The adult will need to observe the children in their environment to see what activities they access, and they will be able to observe any play patterns such as schematic play (see video).



3 - Schemas

Activities



Treasure Basket Play



4 - Treasure Basket Play Video



Forbes (2004) says that Elinor Goldschmeid founded the idea of treasure baskets after working in Italy and the UK. During her time with the children, she observed them playing with real life objects rather than more traditional baby toys.

Goldschmeid noted that the objects were real life or natural and were items with a range of textures which stimulates smell, hearing, and taste.

Forbes (2004) and Goldschmeid both agreed that the baby's concentration whilst carrying out the treasure basket activity was astonishing but recognized that most practitioners would not see this as something to acknowledge.

Forbes (2004) says that babies from 6-9 months can be introduced to a treasure basket as it is when they are able to be propped up to access the basket and is when their eye-hand-mouth co-ordination is in its developing stages, which allows them to develop and practice this skill. The objects in the basket should encourage the use of all the senses, babies can select and explore each object at their leisure by mouthing, smelling, touching, and staring.

Treasure baskets also allow children to develop their communication and creativity skills, serve and return skills can be developed as the practitioner plays along side the baby and the activity is inclusive to all children.

Goldschmeid also values the importance of a key person supporting the child as they first start to play, as for a child to feel comfortable and secure in the environment to access the treasure basket, they need to have a close bond with the care giver, which links to Bowlby's attachment theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs. A child needs to feel safe, secure, and loved to access the environment they are in which then builds up their self esteem and lets them learn about who they are.

Treasure basket play also links to Bruner's Spiral curriculum as it is an activity that the baby can re-visit at any time, which will deepen their understanding of the items. This type of play allows babies to develop curiosity of the world around them and gives them new and exciting objects to choose to play with in their own way (Gascoyne 2012).



Sensory/Messy Play



Brodie (2018) describes play as usually having lots of movement which is full-bodied. Play develops as the child grows so to begin with a baby will start with adult play and interactions, then develops into own agenda play and onto social play with their peers. Play allows for all areas of development to be explored, experimented, and improved over repeated practice, which is why providing babies with opportunities for different types of play like sensory play cannot be overstated.

Piaget believed that children learn through a natural sequence of development and described children up to the age of two in the sensorimotor stage. This means that they learn predominantly from physical actions such as their senses and providing them with sensory activities will allow them to develop a sense of the world around them (Pound 2006).

Children who are provided with sensory play activities are inspired by others as they play, and they respond to this in their own individual way. Sensory play allows them to communicate and express themselves creatively and encourage critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Welsh Government Curriculum for non-maintained settings 2021).



Being Inclusive



Wilkins (2020) says that it is important to celebrate the uniqueness at an early age so that it develops the children's self-worth and tolerance before children start in school. She says that this can be carried out holistically by foods provided, music played and characters and images within the setting.

Brodie (2008) points out that a challenge for a setting could be having children who are undiagnosed with an additional need, which could lead to the child and parents feeling frustrated as their needs are not being met. It is important that staff feel supported in their role, so that they are confident and competent in dealing with each child's individual needs. Staff training is crucial for inclusivity.



Professional Partnerships



An Early Years setting will need to provide new parents and baby with a key working person who can build a relationship with the parents and child. The key worker will need to be an effective communicator as this could be the first time that the baby has been left with anybody, so it is crucial that the parents feel listened to, supported, and respected (Brodie 2008).

The key worker will need to collate information from the parents about their child as they know the child best. The practitioner will need to ask questions about caring routines, cultural requirements, and family life, which may seem intrusive, but you need to know about the child to be able to care for them effectively (Brodie 2018).

The parent/key worker relationship will hopefully continue to develop as the baby attends the setting with information being passed back and forth between home and setting. The key worker and parents should both feel comfortable to discuss things that may be hard, such as an issue with development, but as you have built up the professional relationship with the parent, they should realise that you want what is best for the child like them and are trying to find the best ways to provide this.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory says that the child at the centre's development will all depend on the relationships built in each of the five systems and states that a parent's good relationship with their child's keyworker could affect the way in which the key worker builds their relationship with the child (Guy -Evans 2020), so it is important to get the relationship right at the start.

The relationship that is built with a key child will also develop as they attend setting, it is likely that you will form a close bond with them, which makes them feel safe and secure in their environment and enables them to go off and explore opportunities given to them, safe in the knowledge you are there to support them.

A survey was carried out by Sheffield University (2016) into the closeness of key workers and children in their care which is described as "Professional Love". The results showed that many practitioners believe that showing affection to children is important, but some did have concerns as to how this could be seen.



Respectful Care



Pikler's (no date) approach links to Maslow's hierarchy of needs as they believe that primary caregivers need to develop secure and trusting relationships with babies in their care, especially during times such as nappy and feeding, as the babies will begin to feel more recognised for who they are and valued within the relationship. Giving babies respectful care can build secure attachments, develop a self-image, and lets them understand their own capabilities. This approach they believe will influence the babies physical and emotional well-being throughout their early development.

The Pikler approach is to be carried out 'with' the baby not 'to' the baby. All aspects of the care routines are to be carried out slowly, calmly, and respectfully allowing time for the baby to process what is needing to happen next. The care giver should wait for the baby to give them a sign before they continue with the process, this level of knowledge of the babies allows the baby to feel that their physical and emotional needs are being met and they feel accepted and recognised as an individual.

Pikler (no date) also says that babies need space, freedom, and time to explore their environment independently which allows physical development to develop naturally rather than being forced upon them when they are not ready.

This approach is respectful of the baby's needs, but is always not achievable, especially if the baby attends a childcare setting. As previously discussed, national minimum standards do not allow for 1:1 care for babies, so this is not entirely feasible in setting. However, the new curriculum focuses on practitioners observing children and providing hands-on experiences for individual children in their care, so this could develop over time.



International Approach



Forest School

Forest School was developed in Scandinavia but has been introduced in the UK since 1993. Forest School is an opportunity for children to learn holistically in the outdoors. It encourages and develops children's confidence, self-esteem, exploration, and supports risk taking, which enables children to become healthy, resilient, creative, and independent in their learning (Forest School no date).

Te-Whariki

Educa (no date) says that Te-Whariki is the early education curriculum for New Zealand which was introduced in 1996 and updated in 2017. Te-Whariki places the child at the centre of the curriculum and focuses on them gaining knowledge, skills, and attitudes. It develops learning dispositions and allows children to be robust and resilient learners when they enter the school system.

The Welsh Government has recently introduced a new curriculum framework for schools and non-maintained settings, and they have taken ideas from places like New Zealand and incorporated it into the curriculum. This means that the focus is now on each individual child and their learning experience, they like Te-Whariki want the children to have experiences, gain knowledge and skills. There is also a focus on the outdoors and how to holistically allow children to learn about the world around them.



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