

The first 1000 days

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This aim of this scrapbook is to show the importance of the first 1000 days of a child's life and discusses what exceptional care looks like, putting the child's development needs, safeguarding, care, nurture, and family at the centre. The scrapbook will show benefits of good nutrition during the first 1000 days, enabling adults, enabling environments and the benefits of messy and outdoor play.

What is the first 1000 days and why are they so important?

Some of the most important events in the developing child's life happens during what is referred to as the first 1000 days.

(Kraemer, et al. 2017, p. 8) suggests that the first 1000 days is a critical time in terms of endangerment risks and the overall health of children, furthermore, this window in life is when the rate of growth and brain plasticity is at its peak and this is when adverse events and nutritional deficits can have the most detrimental impact on the child's life. Brodie (2018) suggests that although children develop and grow from birth, each child will develop individually to their own needs and quality interactions from birth onwards have the potential to make the most positive impact on a child's holistic development and the rest of their life. Similarly, from the moment of conception as a baby is growing inside the womb, the brain, immune system, and body goes through significant growth. There are many events that can have an impact on the outcomes for a child's life and wellbeing, this includes the health of the mother during pregnancy, nutrition, stress levels, the physical environment and relationships

can all have a lifelong impact in the health and wellbeing of children (Pregnancy, birth, and baby, 2019).

(HM Government, 2021) guidance on the best start to life, states this crucial time from conception, during pregnancy right up until the age of 2 are the most important for Child's physical, emotional cognitive development and has the biggest impact on a child's life. Not only is this time the most significant for development but also a time when children are at their most vulnerable. You can read the document here

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/973112/The_best_start_for_life_a_vision_for_the_1_001_critical_days.pdf

What does exceptional care look like?

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According to the Children's commissioner best beginnings report (2020), in order to provide exceptional care to children and their families it is vital that practitioners form positive attachments enabling children to develop a sense of security and build positive, strong emotional wellbeing. Furthermore, being aware of meeting children's care needs as individual's and maintain and continually develop good communicative relationships with parents and carers. In addition to this the Welsh Government (2016), states that practitioners should be knowledgeable about the rights of the child, become familiar with and adhere to company policies, practitioners provide a warm, safe nurturing and stimulating environment enabling children to feel secure, safe, and comfortable with practitioners and their learning environment. Dryden (2005) points out that practitioners working with children have a duty to develop and maintain a good knowledge and understanding of child development and in addition to this always be willing to learn and adapt and improve one's own skills. Following on from this, Petrie and Petrie (2011) state the importance of being able to communicate appropriately and effectively is vital to building positive relationships, that using senses is something which all humans use instinctively from birth to make sense of the world around us. For example, practitioners using facial expressions, body language and using voice to make sounds and singing.

The following video talks about the importance of communication between practitioners and children in various ways.

(Source: Hounslow council, 2016)

To put it more simply to give exceptional care to babies and young children, practitioners must be loving, accepting, playful and reflective, have good communication skills, have the ability to be inclusive and form positive attachments and show understanding that every child is individual with their own thoughts, wishes and ideas (Burnham L, 2016)

Positive attachment

The theory of attachment was first identified by John Bowlby and the help of his assistant Mary Ainsworth in 1946.

They studied infants who had been hospitalised and did not see their mothers for a period of time. Bowlby determined that even though the infants were cared for they still displayed signs of sadness and restless behaviours. Bowlby's theory of attachment suggests that infants staying close with the mother serves as a survival mechanism due to the bonds formed during the earliest of days and attachment growth through infancy which in turn has the biggest impact throughout a child's life. Furthermore, attachment is forming and maintaining bonds which develops the wellbeing of an individual. Whether or not a child has a positive or negative attachment, each will have a life lasting psychological effect on the life of the child (Watson and Ecken, 2018, p. 1).

When children join a childcare setting, they are leaving the security of their family, which, for some will be the first time and entering this strange new environment with strange faces. One question that needs to be asked is why is it important for practitioners to form attachment? For children to thrive they must feel safe, secure, and loved thus enabling them to self-regulate, communicate, learn, and develop into inquisitive human beings able to build friendships, discover and explore confidently. According to Davies and Troy (2020) It is well known that the mother is the main source of attachment for babies and young children however it is possible for children to form attachments with a multitude of adults for example, grandparents,

fathers, older siblings, and childcare practitioners. Ahnert, Pinquart and Lamb (2006) suggests that relationships with adults other than parents depend on the history of attachment interactions at home and that the more secure an attachment a child has there is more chance of positive attachments being built with other adults, insecurely attached children will find it difficult to trust other adults and show reluctance to explore the world around them. In addition to this, the development of a secure attachment to care givers depends on the practitioner's ability to provide sensitive care towards children and that practitioner that are highly trained have the ability to develop and maintain positive attachments with children.

The video below talks about the impact of attachment on a child's development.

(Source: The global teacher, 2021)

How the brain develops

Image

Garvey (2018) states that it is widely considered that the brain is one of the most complicated mysteries which is constantly being studied and analysed with more and more research taking place daily. One finding is how important the five senses are to the brain. Moreover, according to Victoria Government (no date), the five senses enable the brain to receive information through sight, sound, smell, taste.

The video below shows that the brain begins to develop early during pregnancy and talks about ways to support healthy brain development.

(Source: Early years count, 2019)

Importance of communicating with babies and children

Clare A (2015) states from the time babies are born they have the ability to communicate their needs immediately. This initially is done through crying when they are hungry, in pain or need

changing. In addition to this, Mums can even understand different cries from their infant and can tell what it is they need. Therefore, it is important for practitioners to understand their role in providing effective communication to children

Watch the video below from the Welsh Government which looks at the importance of communicating with babies before they are even born.

(Source: Welsh Government, 2021).

Talk with me Wales website offers ideas on how to support children's development with videos, activities, and advice to help children to grow. You can access the website here <https://gov.wales/talk-with-me>

How children learn

Image

All children are individual and learn in a variety of ways. For example, sounds, watching and copying, reading and by watching others. Piaget's theory of cognitive development talks about the human intelligence and how humans acquire knowledge, build upon and use it through life. Eagan (2012) suggests that Piaget believed knowledge and intelligence is something that grows from birth through a range of stages and that humans develop their own perception of the world around them encouraged by their environment.

Image

As the image above shows, the sensorimotor stage from birth to age two is where children learn about the world through motion and using senses. During this time children are learning how to manipulate and gain control over their own bodies. An example of this would be through practice play. This would look include making patterns of sound and movements, shaking, or banging, making babbling noises even games such as peek a boo. The more children play with different objects the more they learn how to use and manipulate them, they begin to observe how their play effects the environment. Similarly,

Vygotsky believed children's learning takes place gradually over time and development increases in stages as they grow but that children socially interacting with the adults around them is what forms the basis to grow and develop. An example of this would be pretend play, role playing what they may have seen for example home corner or looking after a doll that is unwell. The main difference between the theories is where Piaget believed learning is self-directed discovery, Vygotsky believed children learned from the adults around them and that pretend play allows children to develop to their individual needs and grow (Javed, 2021).

Image stack

It is important for practitioners to understand how to ensure support is in place to provide for the basic needs of the children. The Early Years Childcare service (2021) discusses the theory of Abraham Maslow and the hierarchy of need. The article states that Maslow focused on how humans reach their full potential in life and that people require motivation to reach certain goals. Furthermore, not everyone requires the same needs at the same time as some are more important than others.

Look at the image below. You can see how Maslow divided human needs into 5 areas the first 2 being the most basic.

Image

According to Pacey (2021) Practitioners must be aware of how to provide for basic needs of all children. Moreover, children's willingness to learn is guided by their feelings and emotions, that happy children who are cared for and looked after will enjoy and desire learning experiences but for those who are not having their basic needs met, they will find these experiences somewhat challenging, and it is the role of the early years practitioner that can help support the basic needs for the child. An example of this would be practitioners observing children during activities and taking notice of how the children are developing their skills and what they can do or find difficult to do. This is also an effective way of monitoring the level of the children's understanding and their likes and dislikes.

Enabling pathways

Image

Enabling environment

The Welsh Government framework for Enabling pathways (2021) has been produced to support practitioners to implement a curriculum for early years. It is designed to be inclusive for all and sets out as a learning journey allowing children to develop at their own individual pace. The guidance focuses on essential key principles

- Play and playful learning
- Being outdoors
- Observation
- Authentic and purposeful learning

You can read the document here https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/consultations/2021-05/enabling-pathways-consultation-document_0.pdf

The video below looks at how children learn through play and shows the importance of playful learning and allowing children to be independent through the early years. Learning through play helps children make sense of the world enabling them to discover, develop cognitive skills build upon social skills and develop emotionally and physically.

(Source: EDx education 2020)

Outdoor learning

What is the importance of outdoor learning? Pentagon play (no date) states that studies show too much indoor play can be at a detriment to the development of children's learning. In addition to this, studies by Bernadette and Whittaker (2005) (cited in pentagon play, no date) children engaging in outdoor play, enables the brain to mature quicker than those spending more time indoors thus allowing the development of language and social skills resulting in happier healthier children who are ready to learn. Bilton (2010) suggests that whilst there are concerns from adults about children becoming ill from being outdoors too long it is good for

building the immune system. Adults also tend to worry about children playing in wet and damp weather conditions however children seem to want and enjoy outdoor play whatever the weather.

Practitioners must be aware of the benefits of outdoor play and incorporate this into the learning environment. To create exciting outdoor play would be creating areas of learning. Taking health and safety into account practitioners can create areas for planting or digging, construction area with blocks and tools, role play such as farm shop or car mechanics. Providing this type of provision allows the children to explore their learning environment freely and puts the practitioner in a unique position to observe and make changes as necessary thus enabling practitioners to get to know the children's abilities and learning needs (Outdoor learning handbook, no date).

Image stack

Messy play

Amelia (2018) suggests messy play is important for child development and provides babies and young children with interesting and sensory experiences which opens up the world around them enhancing creativity and learning through multiple sensory experiences. Gascoyne (2018) explores and dispels the myths about messy play believing that messy play no matter how messy gives children a worthwhile experience. Messy play involves children using their senses during exploration using touch, smell and not using focus to produce an object at the end. Furthermore, messy play does not have to be meticulously planned, children will make the best of outdoor learning using their hands, feet, and imagination.

The images and video below show some examples of messy play.

Image stack/video

Practitioners incorporating messy play into the learning environment provides opportunities to aid children in developing their motor skills, muscle strength, finger strength, and gaining control in the hands and arms by moving in a variety of ways.

Enabling adults

Image

Early years practitioners are the enabling adults supporting children through this vital time of learning. According to the Welsh Government (2021) enabling pathways document, practitioners creating safe learning environments is essential for the progression and development of all learners enabling children to express emotions and behaviours positively. In addition to this, practitioners should be consistent in their approach, show compassion and kindness to all and support children in their learning through uncertainty, change and new routines.

Urie Bronfenbrenner believed that human development is affected by the immediate environment, this includes relationships with family, extended family and carers and the outside world. Furthermore, children learn and develop through interactions with adults and how they conduct themselves. This theory suggests that positive relationships with practitioners and creating rich environments for children to enjoy is pivotal for child development.

Image

The image above shows how Bronfenbrenner's theory has been separated into 5 parts with the child at the centre. The Child's immediate surroundings are in the microsystem this would be parents, carers. Next the mesosystem, this is where practitioners come in. Practitioners are in a unique position to build positive relationships with children and families to create positive learning experiences for children. For practitioners to fully understand how a child has developed over time, the immediate environment should be looked at and taken into consideration under observation (Aubrey and Riley, 2019).

Respectful care - The Pickler approach

Image

The importance of healthy attachments for children is well recognised amongst care givers. But when are these moments in particular opportunities for building secure attachments? Emmi Pikler believes primary caregiving moments such as changing, feeding, and bathing give practitioners the opportunity to build relationships based on trust and security. Practitioner's using this approach will make the most of these opportunities by maintaining positive communication, giving undivided attention using facial expressions and soft tones, engaging the infant throughout the process. Pikler believes the process shows that trust and co-operation come from the infant as an active partner due to the experience being positive and respectful (The Pikler approach, no date). Access the Pickler website here <https://www.pikler.co.uk/about>

Watch the following video on the rewards of the Pikler experience

(Source: Pikler USA, 2016)

Nutrition

Image

There is much research into the nutritional benefits during the first 1000 days. 1000 days (no date) claims that alongside positive relationships with caregivers' nutrition is one of the first foundations for a child's healthy development and growth. In addition to this, Cwm Taf Health Board Wales (2011) believes good nutrition whilst mum is pregnant is pivotal to the baby's development inside the womb improving the infant's chances of being born healthy and reduces risk of health problems in the future (Source: Nestle nutrition institute, 2018)

Video

This scrap book has given a short insight into the development of children through the first 1000 days of their life. The learning environment is key in supporting the development of children through play. Children learn when they are feeling happy, safe, and relaxed in environments that make them feel comfortable enough to explore independently (Early years matters, 2022). Effective communication is vital to children's development and positive

relationships with practitioners help children to grow into happy, healthy, ambitious global citizens ready to learn and achieve. The first 1000 days of a child's sets children on the road to the rest of their lives and early years practitioners are in a unique position to aid children through their journey to life.

Dear Baby, life advice for your first 1000 days

Video

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