



The First 1000 Days

The key themes to the first 1000 days are, development, environment, relationships, stimulation, nutrition and awareness of needs

We will be looking at these key themes in detail and what is meant by "the first 1000 days".



1 - The first 1000 days

What are the first 1000 days?

The first 1000 days of a child's life begin from the moment they are conceived until they are 2 years of age. The experience's in the first 1000 days can have a life long effect on their health and well-being. Providing a baby with their basic needs is important to create a positive first 1000 days. (Pregnancybirth&baby, 2022.)

It is a critical time for babies to develop. During this time, babies are vulnerable as they have not developed communication or physical skills and do not have the understanding to speak for themselves. In the first 1000 days, a baby does not have the ability to speak, or think for themselves. They are heavily reliant on their parents/caregivers. (HM Government, 2021).



The link between the well-being of a child and the well-being of the mother in the first 1000 days is largely significant. This is why women require the optimum care and nutrition in pregnancy as this is the very beginning of a child's first 1000 days and can determine aspects of their future. (Building Health, 2022).



Development in the first 1000 days

Holistic development is so important for children, especially within the first 1000 days. A great way to assist a child's development is letting them engage in play-based activities that are led by the children. This allows the child to lead their own learning. (Brodie, 2018).



2 - Development in pregnancy

The first day of 'the first 1000 days' is the day of conception. From this point until the age of two, there are major developments. During the nine months of pregnancy, more growth and development happens than at any point of an individual's life. The baby is influenced by almost everything the mother does, feels, hears, eats. The mental and physical health of a mother has a great impact on the baby. (Annis, 1982)

To give a baby the best start in life, it is important to give the mother exceptional pre-natal care. Infant development begins at conception. To ensure the mother does not pass on any poor mental health traits such as, stress and trauma, relationship-based mindfulness can be beneficial to the mothers well-being and the baby's growth and development. (Sansone, 2020).

Very early on in the first 1000 days, babies are beginning to move and engage in activities that can be taken as play. Piaget suggests that during this time period, babies begin to develop an understanding of objects, relationships and movement. Contrary to this, Vygotsky expresses the importance of the role of the adult in children's play as he believes that children not lead their own learning but learn from others. (Sagastui, 2021).



One space that aids a baby's development is the outdoors. It is stimulating and full of new smells, sounds and scenery. Outdoor experiences for babies could include:



3 -

- *Tummy time - the baby is able to feel their surroundings by touch and smell what is beneath and around them.*



4 -

- *Crawling on grass*



5 -

- *Watching trees and birds move, observing the new colours they can see and movement of the outdoors.*



6 -

- *Observing lights and cars outside - the colours and flashing of lights will stimulate the baby.*

The outdoors can help the baby gain a better understanding of the world and help them to feel more comfortable. Playing outside gets the baby to know how to respond to different outdoor environments and learning ways to play in different weathers. (Outdoor play, 2022).



7 - Sensory play

"Seeing stars it dreams of eternity. Hearing birds it makes music. Smelling flowers it is enraptured. Touching tools it transforms the earth. But deprived of these sensory experiences, the human brain withers and dies" (Koutlak 1997:3)

Sensory play has been proven to increase positive developments in babies. Piaget (1962) named the 'sensimotor stage' which is a period of time where babies rely fully on their senses to understand the world around them. Rich play experiences are vital for development in the first 1000 days. Sensory play builds memory, awareness, cognitive and physical development and allows children to play without constraints. Sensory experiences are crucial in brain development. Every sensory experience is sent as an electrochemical signal to a babies brain and the information about the new smells, textures, sounds, light and movements are stored to build an understanding of the world around them. Sensory play is significant in the first 1000 days because it enhances cognitive development and teaches babies and toddlers to communicate in many ways, not just verbally. (Forbes, 2018, p.62).

Where can sensory play be applied in the first 1000 days?

A sensory table or creating a sensory bin is a great way to apply sensory play. Fill them with different objects and different materials such as, pom pom's, sand, jelly or even spaghetti. Let the children feel them and be creative with the different textures.

Exploring outdoors is another way to apply sensory play. Allowing babies and toddlers to walk barefoot along the grass or sand or allowing them to feel the bark of a tree are all sensory experiences that will benefit them and can easily be applied every day. (Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Centre, 2022).



Hands on learning



A theorist who has discovered ways to aid development and learning is Montessori. Dr Montessori experimented with materials that would help with children's developmental needs. She observed children's play and how accessible materials were to them. After experiments and study, Montessori saw the importance of hands on learning. Montessori made materials that were child height and the right size for a child to master. (How important are the Montessori materials, no date).

Hands on learning activities for babies and toddlers in the first 1000 days

Activity that can improve development in toddlers is physical activity. Active play is usually child-led and helps to improve their cognitive and physical development. Active play can also refer to hands on learning as it challenges children's creativity. (Pakarinen, 2020, p1-3).

Physical activity

Physical activity improves muscular development and cognitive development. Children become aware of their environments and how to move and think by developing these skills through physical activity. It is also suggested that physical activity and hands on learning activity can improve motor skills in the first 1000 days. Physical activity can be applied to child-led play, free-flowing play within learning environments, role play and sensory play. (Gao, 2018).



Treasure Baskets

Another hands-on learning activity for babies and toddlers are treasure baskets. Elinor Goldschmied is a theorist who observed babies whilst working in childcare facilities around the UK and Italy. Whilst observing the actions of babies, Goldschmied discovered that when babies and toddlers were offered real objects such as, keys, spoons, pine cones, their senses were stimulated due to the

different smells, textures, taste and sounds that come with these 'real world' objects. When Goldschmied discovered the effects that using these objects had on babies and toddlers she created 'treasure baskets'. Treasure baskets are a basket full of real objects that give the child opportunities to play and explore the world. (Forbes, 2004).



8 - Environments

A baby should be in an environment where they are free to move and reach stages of motor development independently. In the first 1000 days it is important for babies and toddlers to initiate movement themselves. Pikler suggests that when a baby or young child is free to move, they become able to assess their own risks, gain experiential learning from different environments and become attentive to the outcome of their actions. Pikler created nurturing environments for babies and children to grow. (Vamos, 2015)

One of the biggest influences in the first 1000 days of a child's life is their home environment. A great amount of learning takes place throughout these early years so an engaging and nurturing environment is important for health and development. (Health and Social Care Committee, 2019).



During a time period in which a child is in their first 1000 days and the early years, the exploration of environments that they are in is fundamental for development. The environment for such young children should be accessible for them to explore and allow them to begin to appreciate everything around them. Of course, the physical space of environments are beneficial to children, however being able to express themselves emotionally and use their creativity and imaginative skills independently, or as a group is crucial for children to experience curiosity and critical thinking. Every child should feel welcomed into environments they are in. Child centred environments should be an inclusive space where every baby, toddler or child is celebrated. It is also important that children are

around communication in a language rich environment to promote communication skills for development. It helps to build vocabulary and, such skills as these are significant in the first 1000 days for babies and toddlers to understand what is going on around them. (Welsh Government, 2021).



9 - Relationships

The moment babies are conceived they begin to form connections and bonds. Within a matter of weeks of pregnancy, the mother and baby are already working together to create a placenta, an organism vital for both of them during pregnancy and the early years of a baby's life as this is what will provide them nutrition, oxygen and protect them from harmful substances the mother may consume. All of which will evidently contribute to the first 1000 days. The mother must be healthy to provide a healthy placenta. The impact this stage of development in pregnancy has on the relationship between mother and baby is vital. It is one of the first responsibilities a mother has to care for her baby. Throughout pregnancy, a mother must take good care of herself to ensure the baby is healthy and born into a secure attachment. To form a good relationship, a mother needs to be aware of her own needs and feelings to be able to recognise and be aware of her child's needs and feelings. (Gerhardt, 2015).



As a child grows, they begin to develop skills and explore. A parent or caregivers role during this time is to scaffold their children to effectively build on their development to master new skills. Vygotsky believes that the 'zone of proximal development' impacts a child's development and their relationships. Vygotsky suggests that children need adults to be able to learn. Children learn through relationships so when they are supported through their learning such as parents or caregivers taking the scaffolding approach, the child will recognise a positive relationship. (Lewis, 2021).

Bowlby is a theorist who tells us that the relationship between a child and their mother is different to any other relationship a child has. The attachment formed in the first 1000 days between a

mother and their baby is more significant to all other relationships and attachments the child will experience. Bowlby claims that, should this relationship be disrupted, such as the mother leaving the baby to go to work, the young child will be damaged as a result of this separation, especially in the first year of life. However, some argue that if secure attachments are formed in their daycare settings, the baby will not suffer harm from the mother leaving for a period of time because they have a sense of security away from their mother. The role of the adult and practitioners during the first 1000 days is to respond to the child's wants and needs. An example of this could be a child seeking comfort and the adult's response to this desire. A positive response to their needs will create a secure attachment and a healthy relationship. Dismissive behaviour towards the child will cause them to feel a sense of rejection. Therefore, in agreement with Bowlby, attachment is vitally important for all aspects of a child's development especially in the first 1000 days. (Page, 2017).



Current challenges for practitioners when forming relationships in the first 1000 days

Displaying care and affection as a practitioner can be extremely beneficial to children to be able to form other secure attachments during the first 1000 days. It is said that a child will only be ready to learn when they feel a secure attachment. However, being able to do this nowadays can come with challenges. With serious safeguarding policies in place practitioners are left with a fear of being wrongly accused of forms of abuse when displaying affection to children in their care. A project has been created to investigate how early years practitioners can safely show caring and affectionate behaviours in early years settings. It is called 'the professional love in early years settings' and is a research project. Hopefully this initiative will help the confidence of practitioners to overcome this current challenge. (Morgan, 2020).



10 - Nutrition

Pregnancy

Nutrition during the first 1000 days plays a fundamental part in the development of a child. It is the fuel a child requires to learn and grow. Consuming the right nutrients at the right time is vital for brain development during this period because the brain is growing at such a fast rate. A baby growing during pregnancy is relying on what the mother eats. A mother with a poor diet may result in a baby with slower brain development. The only source of nutrients for a baby is what the mother consumes.

Infancy

When a baby is born and they begin to grow the brain is still developing. Nutrition is imperative as an infant. Some mothers may decide to breastfeed. Breastmilk contains many nutrients that are beneficial to not only brain development but to an infants body too. Not only is breastmilk used to provide the right nutrition to a baby but it is also a great way for a mother and their baby to bond.

Toddler

At this stage of the first 1000 days a child is eating solid foods. The main nutrients that should be consumed to promote development are protein, iron, zinc and iodine. If there has been an iron deficiency during pregnancy, the iron intake must be monitored now as the damage may become irreversible.

Why is nutrition significant in the first 1000 days?

Without the correct nutrients during the first 1000 days it can have serious negative impacts on development, behaviour and cause a child to be less interest in play which is a major input in a child's learning. (1000 days, no date).



11 - Awareness of needs

Maslow

When talking about the needs of a child during the first 1000 days we can look at Maslow's hierarchy of needs to be aware of what a baby or young child may require.

Displayed as a pyramid, the hierarchy of needs shows us the physiological needs at the bottom. This is the basic needs to survive. Food, water, shelter and basic health. This is important in the first 1000 days because all children should have their basic needs met and unless this first part of the hierarchy is satisfied, as Maslow expresses, you cannot move on to the next section. Next is security. A need of being safe, secure and protected. In the first 1000 days this can be having secure attachments and babies and young children being in safe environments where they are protected. Once those needs are met, the third section is one that takes into account the social nature of this person. The need to belong. A baby should feel loved and have a social element to their lives. This creates a chance to develop and be around language rich environments. At the fourth level there is the self esteem section to the pyramid. This is how a person feels about themselves. If a baby or young child has their needs responded to positively, they are more likely to have higher self-esteem. If a child is dismissed they may feel rejected. Finally at the top of the hierarchy is self-actualisation. This relates to development which is vital in the first 1000 days. (Pichere, 2015).

Why are the first 1000 days significant?

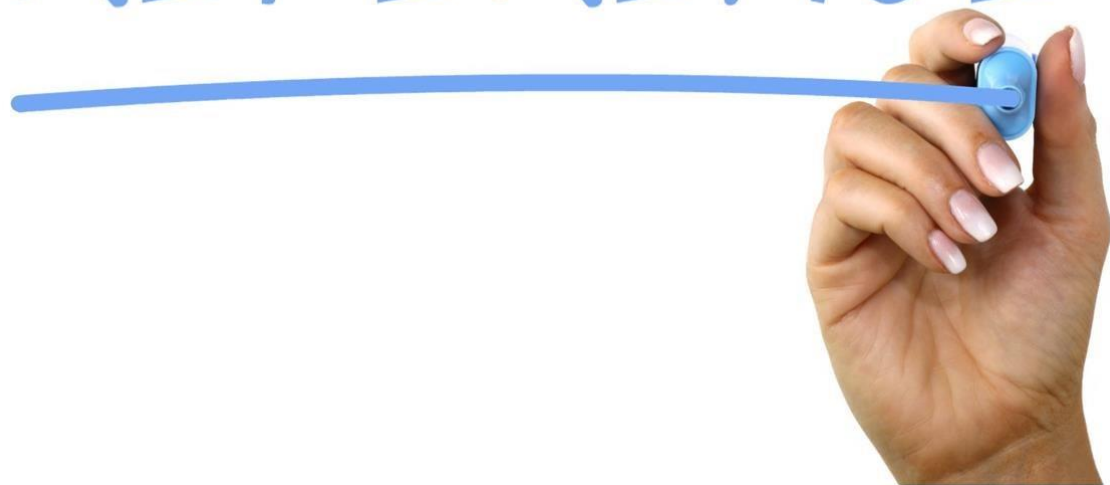


The first 1000 days are significant because it is a time where attachments are formed, their brains are developing and the child begins to learn even before they are born. When a baby is conceived, the first 1000 days begins. A healthy mother during pregnancy creates a stable start to life for their unborn baby. A baby feels everything in the womb, therefore a pregnant mother with poor mental or physical health can sometimes be passed on to the baby. This can result in the baby suffering with academic, social and emotional difficulties later on in life. (HM Government, 2021).

This period of time is where a baby is born, learns to eat, move, think, use their voice, play, love and so much more that allows them to become healthy, well developed people. It is one of the most important times in a new life. (Gradovski, Mikhail, et al, 2020).

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