



The First 1000 Days

The first one thousand days of a child's life starts roughly at the time of conception and ends at their second birthday. These first 1,000 days are vitally important to every individual, as this is where the growth and development of the brain happens which is crucial for their long life health (Thousand Days, 2021). A Child's health and development in these two years are influenced by their parent's physical health, mental health, relationships, education and their style of parenting.



Nathan Wallis, a Neuroscience Educator, explains how a baby's genes respond to the environment in the first 1000 days to decide what kind of brain is required for the rest of their lives. Wallis discusses some parenting ideas for making the most of the child's first 1000 days and laying the greatest foundations for their future.

Relationships are one parenting focus that Wallis discusses. He says that children have better outcomes in the early childhood development stages depending on their intimate relationships. He is implying that focusing on one relationship in particular but not at the expense of the importance of all secondary relationships, such as those with grandparents. He says that research shows that parents staying at home for the first year of their child's life is the most important thing that they can do.



Wallis believes that being present and engage in as much face to face interaction as possible is vital. Making time for interaction is crucial during the early stages of a child's development. It is important for a parent to prioritise connecting with their during during the formative years of their life.

For the first 18 months, Wallis believes that it is best to not force learning or strive to meet development milestones with the child. Instead, pay attention to the child. Children observe and learn from watching an adult. A child's language development can be significantly accelerated by the adult copying them rather than giving them directions or instructions.

Stimulating Environments



Children who have had well stimulated environments in their first 1000 days will also have a better cognitive capacity with a higher chance to live an advantageous and fuller life. A stimulated environment can be a room in a setting or even in the child's home. It is where a room is filled with exploration objects that are safe that gives the child an opportunity to have a freedom of movement. The room can include sensory play activities which will provide the children with a fascinating adventure in the environment that they are in. Any activity that engages any of the babies five senses(touch, smell, taste, sight and hearing) including movement and balance, is considered sensory play.



When the stimulating environment includes sensory-rich play the children become concentrated, focused and determined within their problem solving. This type of play is greatly enjoyable for children and also very beneficial for their development as each sensory experience will help to create and re-establish important brain connections.

Recent researching of the brain has been developed and demonstrated that a child's surroundings have a significant impact on brain development and growth.

There are numerous parents that still believe that development should be at the pace of the baby and that they are not forced to do things that they are unable to do.

Science Daily (2017) discusses how Audrey van der Meer, a neuroscientist believes that this idea can be backtracked to the early 1900s. Back then, professionals believed that our genes define who we are and that development of a child occurs irrespective of the stimulation to which a baby is exposed. They believed that hastening growth was detrimental because it would and should occur spontaneously.

Piaget 1936 stated that children are actively accomplishing their knowledge of the world as they grow. He believed from his findings that the first stage of his approach is the cognitive development stage. He called this first stage the sensorimotor stage, where children from birth to the age of two experience the environment through their senses and movement. At eight months old, Piaget discovered a vital component is object permanence and this is where they the babies discover that objects remain existing even when they are out of sight.

From the age of two, the child then enters the operational stage. This is when they start to use their imagination which will then gradually get them involved in taking part in pretend play. At this stage, they are starting to learn to talk and also learn that words symbolise objects. This will then allow them to ease in to the pre-operational stage. After this stage they then enter the concrete operational stage where they learn the idea of conservation. Piaget called the next stage, which happens after 12 years, the formal operational stage. This is when they become aware of consequences of potential actions.



Respectful Care



Respectful care is the practitioner ensuring that the child is at the center of everything that they do. It is focusing on support, dignity, and agency in the delivery of care.



Young children learn about their surroundings and how to engage with the world by having relationships with adults. The social and emotional development of newborns is shaped by their connections with their families. When children are interacting with their families, they will begin to develop the abilities that they will need throughout their lives.

Respect for the child's confidence and competence, the freedom of movement and primary caregiving are three key principles to respectful care.

Primary Care

The Key Person method to primary caregiving focuses on the specific bond between a small group of children and a named member of staff. To ensure a happy settling in time and ongoing relationship at the nursery, it is best for the adult and the child to bond with the key person to begin with as this will help the practitioner to get to know both adult and child and them to know the key person so that they children can grow in the greatest way possible.

It is beneficial for the practitioner to be aware of the way that they react during routines such as changing their nappy, food time, cleaning their face, getting the child dressed. For example, if the child needs their hands wiped but refuses to allow the practitioner to help, it is more respectful for that member of staff to talk to them through what they will do to help whilst demonstrating on themselves. A child will respect the practitioner this way in comparison to if they sneaked up to them without being made aware.

Freedom of Movement

The ability to move freely is critical for a child's mental and emotional development, as well as their physical development. Practitioners can encourage physical development in their earliest stage by placing objects out of reach of children during tummy time. This will encourage the child to use their stomach muscles to stretch and move to try and grab the object. During this activity the child is using their hand to look up and around at what is around them, this will help with the development of their skull and will also strengthen their neck and shoulders. Eventually, these muscles will become stronger resulting in the child being able to sit up, encouraging move looking around helping the eye muscles to become stronger.

Some babies do not get enough time to play on their stomachs, which may affect their development and take their muscles longer than those babies who engage in tummy time often. This implies that crucial milestones such as rolling, sitting up and crawling could be delayed with that child.

Toni Christie, an early childhood expert based in New Zealand, focused on respectful people and stated that one of the first things that is noticed about a respectful person is that they take their time. Especially with children who benefit from the adult taking things slow for example, when they talk and walk, and make a conscious effort to do so.

Respect for Confidence and Competence

Respect for confidence and competence is the third pillar of respected care. Involving children in the process and planning of activities is one of the most beneficial things a practitioner can do within the setting.

Children benefit from being involved in activities even in simple tasks as nappy changing. By the practitioner asking the child can they change their nappy that child will then feel involved and participating in what is going on. When young children are given the option to do something diverting during tantrum, it helps with their behaviour. When the adult asks a child a participating question and also waits for the response it boosts the child's confidence and lets them recognise their own worth and competence. It is also very beneficial for practitioners to be trained in interpreting children's body language and gestures and responding appropriately to them



The Pikler Approach

The Pikler UK Association explains that according to Emmi Pikler healthy attachments are critical for a child's general well-being and physical, emotional development. She discovered that crucial opportunities for the infant and parent to form a stable and trusting bond are provided in the moments of feeding, changing and bathing. A considerable portion of daily routines are made up of these caregiving moments, where the child learns about themselves and relationships with their carer. As a result, it is critical that the newborn feels safe, recognised and loved. Throughout their early development, the baby's physical and mental well-being will be influenced by how they experience these times of care.

She concluded that babies form safe bonds as a result of respectful and deeply sympathetic care routines, as well as a healthy self-perception and comprehension of their abilities. Pikler discovered that this allowed the baby's and young children to openly explore themselves and the environment that they are in without being interrupted by the caregiver.

An important key feature of this model is that the young child can be involved and contribute to the event and have an affect on the relationship. In other words, all parts of the baby's care are done 'with' rather than 'to' them. The parent is aware of their motions and makes gentle and slow hand movements allowing the newborn to follow and eventually join in and copy.

Pikler believes that it is never a good idea to compel a young child to do something that they are not ready for. Instead, the adult will solve how they are able to get the child to do what they wish by allowing the child to feel at ease.

Brain Development



Providing for your child's needs in the first 1000 days of their life will help them live a healthy life as this is the time where their brain and body considerably expands and develops. The brain starts to develop after 16 days from conception and then continue to grow throughout the pregnancy.

The University of Edinburgh states how it is recognised that maternal stress has an impact on the child's behaviour and ability to manage emotions as they grow. However, they do highlight the fact that this research is concluded through questionnaires so it may not be accurate. Cortisol levels are connected to the development of the baby's amygdala, a brain area that is crucial in emotional and social development in childhood, according to a study led by University of Edinburgh.

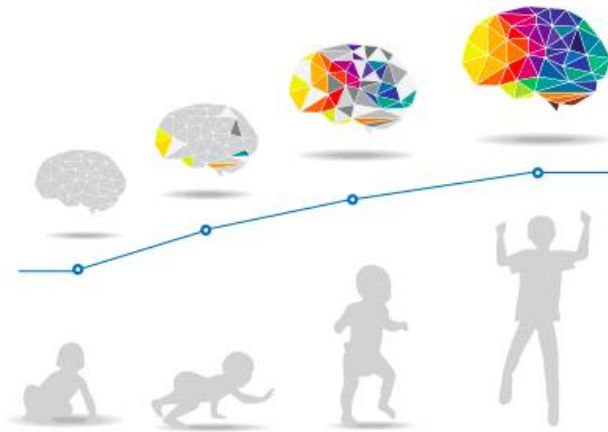
Early in pregnancy, a child's brain will begin to expand and develop at a rapid rate. The brain would have had ten thousand cells in the fourth week of pregnancy, and by the twenty-fourth week, it would have had ten billion cells. This extraordinary change is the result of the nutrition that the baby gets from the mother. There are nutrients that a baby will receive from their mother that will have an important part in forming the baby's brain during pregnancy, such as iron, zinc, iodine and folic acid. A risk of delays in development, cognitive deficits and birth defects may occur with the child if one or more of these nutrients are not present during the pregnancy.

When the child is born, their brain is still growing and developing just as rapidly as it was in the womb. Now the baby will be learning about the environment around them and how to communicate with the world. Babies require healthy nourishment to power their expanding brains, in addition to responsive connections with their parents and safe, supportive surroundings to explore.



The best food that a child could receive is breast milk as this has a positive impact on their brain development as it contains a variety of minerals and proteins that are essential for a baby's brain development. Breast milk does not only deliver the best nutrients for the brain development, but it also influences the quality of their experiences and interactions with adults. It also impacts growth factors and hormones that cannot be duplicated in infant formula. Breastfed babies perform better on intelligence tests and have higher scores as teenagers according to numerous studies. Breastfeeding helps to enhance a baby's sensory and emotional skills, which is necessary for both cognitive and socio-emotional development, because it involves a lot of mother and baby touch and caring connection.

The brain continues to develop at a high rate speed as they grow into a toddler. A newborn baby's brain is roughly the size of one quarter of an adult's, however by the age of three, it will grow to roughly 80% of the adult brain size. By the age of five, it will grow to 90% of the adult brain size. The brain is focusing on building connections in early life that allow brain cells to communicate with one another, including connections in the language centers of the brain.



Nutrition



Future Learn (2022) highlight how it is believed that the health, nutrition and stress levels of a pregnant woman can affect the unborn child's future. Their health and wellbeing is impacted by their own physical surroundings, relationships and nutrition once they have been born. It is critical, for the future health of a child, to have adequate nourishment while still in the pregnancy and throughout childhood.

Research has proven that the development of a baby's metabolism, immune system and their organs are impacted by what the mother consumes, her weight and lifestyles choices. Health problems for the child such as obesity, heart disease and diabetes can all be caused by poor nutrition throughout the pregnancy and early life.

It is vitally important for a woman to consume a healthy balanced diet while they are pregnant so their baby gets the most effective start in life and for the child's brain, physical skills and emotions to properly develop.

Ensuring that babies have the correct variety of nutrients in their first 1000 days will enable them to have a greater chance of fighting infections as their immune systems will be a lot stronger. In poorer countries with developing economies, getting the correct nutrition in the early years of life would have a huge positive effect on infections and malnutrition in children. In richer countries, it is also crucial to ensure that nutrition is correctly given, as it will reduce the risk of diseases.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IsklUFIK3mk>

Professional Relationships



To have a professional relationship the practitioner firstly needs to understand their responsibilities and requirements and what is expected of them. When the child's context of family is known it provides valuable insight into how they interact within the environment and who they are. Research in America found that when child care practitioners are professional they use less negative guidance. Also, when practitioners have a stronger bond with the children's caregivers, they provide more of a positive guidance to the young children. The study underlines the importance of offering focused interventions to assist the professional development and psychological well-being of practitioners.

Attachment



Strong Foundations: Getting it Right in the First 1000 days collected evidence that suggests that action must be centered on education, empowerment and a public health strategy to assisting the public in comprehending the importance of the first 1000 days. This research was review by experts at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute.

Bupa Australia supported the research, which found that a family under stressful situations in the first year of the child's life resulted in leading in the child to feel symptoms of anxiety and depressive in their infant age.

Attachment types are also a focus in the first 1000 days, according to the report, with two main styles that are secure attachment and insecure attachment.

A sense of attachment stability, comfort with proximity, confidence in requesting support, interdependence and other constructive ways of handling stress are all characteristics of secure attachment.

Typically, insecure attachments are linked with an increase in chance of developing social and emotion difficulties in the future. When caregivers are inaccessible, insensitive or unpredictable in responding to the child's demands then insecure attachment develops. According to the findings of this research, fathers have a significant role in their children's socialisation. The improvement of psychosocial adjustment, social competence, maturity and the bond between the baby and father are all impacted on the positive behaviour that the father as shown, such as accessibility, engagement and responsibility. On

the other hand, poor behaviour from fathers can have a long term impact on the child, socially and with relationships, a higher risk of having avoidant attachments conversely a lower likelihood of secure attachment styles.

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