



The First 1000 Days

Why is it important and who is responsible?

According to HM Government (2021) the foundation for a person's overall development is set just before conception until around the child's second birthday, making the first 1000 days of a baby's life critical to ensuring they have the best start. The Department of Education (2021) suggest that a baby's brain grows quickly in the early stages and in agreement with NHS Wales (2011), proposes a baby's early experiences impact their life chances later; it is therefore vital a secure foundation is set where they feel safe and happy throughout childhood with high standards of consistent care.

According to MSP (2021) babies cannot vocalise their needs as they do not have the language, therefore it is the responsibility of the adult to be their advocate, fighting for them during their vulnerable stages of life. Public Health England (2016) suggests professional care during this early stage is crucial to influencing positive health and well-being, increasing outcomes and lessening inequality.

It is the practitioner's duty to influence the development and progression of the baby by shaping a safe, stimulating environment that encourages and supports them as they learn to express themselves in healthy ways. A practitioners role varies but they are positive role models, compassionate and kind prioritising relationships with the baby's immediate and surrounding world for example, their family and the wider community in which they live; considering current challenges for example, poverty, poor mental health, nutrition and the effects of COVID19 on an entire generation of babies. They carry exceptional standards of respect for the holistic baby, placing value on partnerships, collaboration with multi-agencies, safeguarding the baby and inclusivity (Department of Consultations, 2021).

Exploring Exceptional Care...



Conception to Birth

According to Vamos (2019) perinatal/postnatal care can stop future harm and influences positive health and well-being. Enabling environments where parents feel safe and supported throughout pregnancy is crucial to highlighting any problems and ensuring they feel heard and understood while meeting their needs and the needs of the growing baby; therefore, providing parenting classes, midwifery appointments, specialist consultations, and ultrasounds are crucial (NHS, 2020). Best Beginnings (no date) also recommends available charities that support families throughout pregnancy encouraging good mental/physical health during the coronavirus pandemic, including a 'baby buddy' app, which was used more than 2.3 million times during lockdown and 85% of parents used it more than once a day, which influenced positive development for their baby (Best Beginnings, 2020).

Encouraging antenatal attachment is also important, the bonds before birth will affect the relationship once the baby is born (NSPCC, 2020); Dr. Ibrahim Baltagi suggests toward the end of pregnancy babies are familiar with the voice of their mother, their native language, and rhyme. This suggests encouraging families to talk and sing to their baby in the womb will support the baby's development later (Unicef, no date).



1 - (Source: Gloucestershire Maternity Voices, no date)



2 - (Source: NHS Trust, no date)



3 - (Source: Ultrasound Ireland, no date)

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Nutrition and Pregnancy



Maslow (1943) discusses his theory on the 5 basic needs toward reaching self-actualisation. He considers the physiological needs being most fundamental and when achieved leads on to the next stage of the ladder for example, physiological = safety = love and belonging = esteem = self-actualisation. Considering Maslow's physiological needs and according to dietician Bushell (2020), there are major advantages to ensuring nutrition is good throughout pregnancy; a mother's diet influences her baby's development, reducing pregnancy complications, ensuring babies are born with healthy birth weights and reducing the risk of future diseases. According to Unicef (no date), supporting nutrition before pregnancy/during and throughout breastfeeding is vital to increasing the chances for children to achieve their full potential, ensuring accessibility and affordability to everyone so that no one suffers due to deprivation. Research shows that in 2015, 15% of the world's infants were born with low birthweights, already starting their lives at a disadvantage for example, they were more likely to die within the first month; suffer developmental delays and have a lower IQ; the goal being a 30% global reduction in low birthweights by 2025. Most of these statistics were in countries of high levels of deprivation and poverty suggesting the mother's lack of nutrition impacted their developing babies (Unicef-who, 2019).

World Health Organization (2021) suggests regular communication with trained health professionals for example, midwives/dietitians/health visitors during and after pregnancy is fundamental to influencing a positive pregnancy experience/labour/birth, and parenthood. They can offer exceptional care by providing dietary interventions supporting the mother to be healthy during/after pregnancy, shaping a greater future for the baby.



5 - (Source: UNICEF Phillipines, 2015)

0-2 Years



Relationship Building:

Connecting with Families

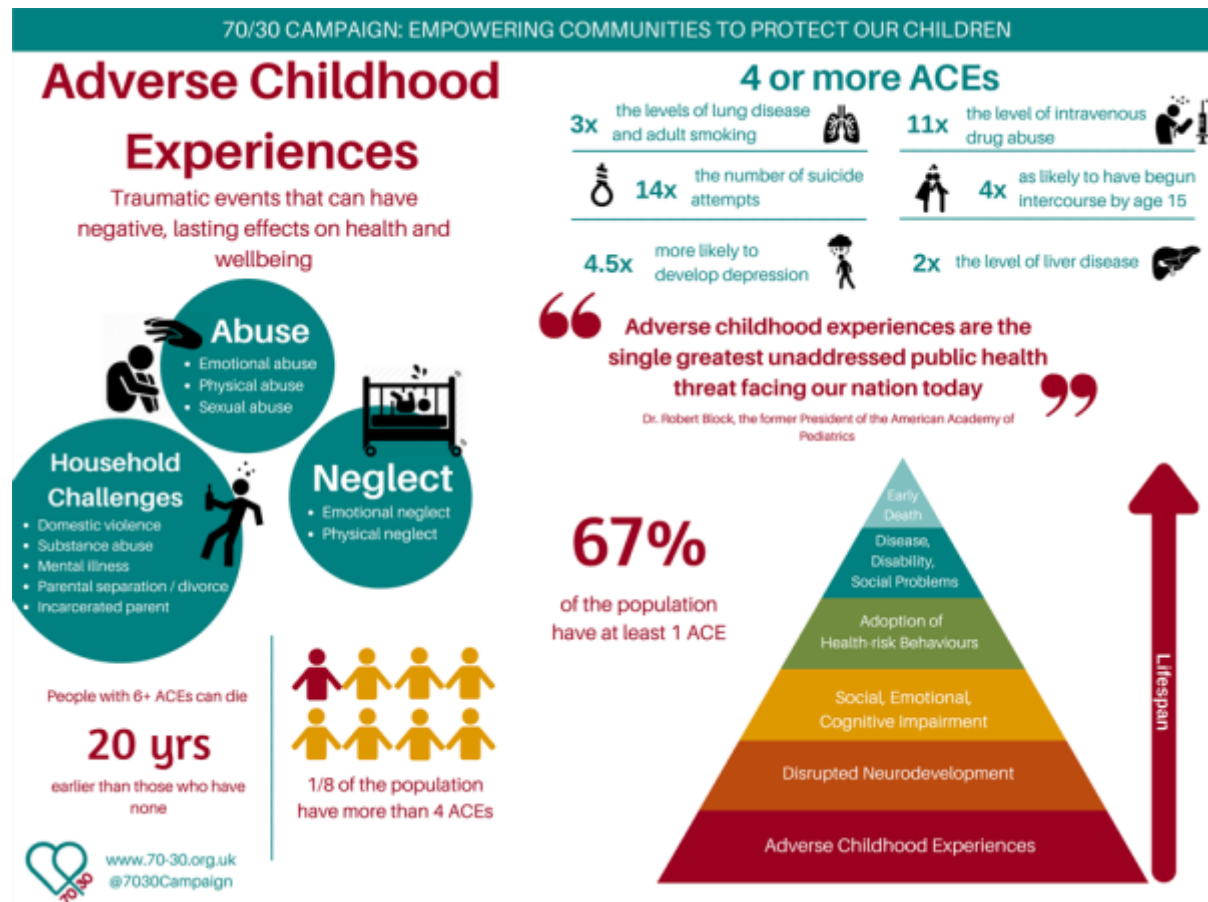


According to the Department of Publications (2021) a child's development and success is hugely influenced by the parents and the surrounding environment in both positive/negative ways; if the baby's mum suffers depression, it could be a risk factor that has a negative impact on the baby's healthy development such as behaviour challenges; equally, if the mother is generally happy and positive, it could influence protection from negative outcomes. NHS Surrey (2020) agrees and argues that within the first 1000 days, the risks to a baby affect their achievements and are associated deeply to social conditions for example, the parents' physical health (smoking, alcohol, substance misuse), mental health (depression and anxiety), relationships (lone parents, divorce, separation, domestic abuse), education, parent/child interactions and if the parents have a sense of love and belonging within their community.

Bronfenbrenner's (1986) research supports this when he discusses a range of studies surrounding the topic of child neglect in low-income families. He suggests the interaction of genetics and environment in family practices impacts the child's development. Vygotsky also believed that family interactions and the social and cultural environment are central to a child's development as the social context is a constant stimulus for learning (Estelle, 2021).

NHS Surrey (2020) suggest such inequalities must be addressed in the first 1000 days to improve outcomes for the entire family and professional relationships influence this. According to Gerdhardt (2014) tender and affectionate relationships in early years influence positive brain development; early childhood experiences that cause stress to the child for example, parents poor mental health resulting in physical/emotional neglect, can have lasting consequences for their future health. Perry (2002) suggests the detrimental effects on a child's brain growth after the first 3 years experiencing neglect and Gerdhardt suggests that these early stress experiences cause the brain to become less effective influencing problems later for example, depression. According to CDC (2019) these are

known as traumatic adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and result in pain and distress, effecting the child's concentration/behaviour/decision-making/education/emotions, which could also result in violence/crime later in life. However, CDC does suggest that ACEs can be prevented.



6 - (Source: Wave Trust, no date)



7 - (Source: Akua mind and body, 2018)



8 - (Source: Pratt, E. 2020)



9 - (Source: Freya, K. 2017)

NHS Wales (2011) suggests the varied opportunities of support surrounding the most vulnerable in Cwm Taf, for example: Families First/Flying Start/Communities First/Integrated Family Support/Team around the Family; they suggest it is important that public health is incorporated to end the cycle of poverty, lessen inequalities and better health outcomes for babies in the first 1000 days. Practitioners must build trusting professional relationships with parents which could influence a step towards appropriate support networks influencing a healthier future for their baby (NHS, 2021). However, the House of Commons suggest that even though public services are valuable to encouraging parents to love their baby themselves, evidence shows that these inequalities work against parents being able to provide a safe, loving, happy environment, proposing such support only delivers a temporary fix – the underlying issues must be improved for example, low paid unreliable jobs (Department of Publications, 2019).

Nevertheless, considering this research and the UNCRC, articles 2, 3 and 6 outline the importance of being aware of the baby's circumstances and responsive to their needs to influence growth and success (Unicef, no date). Therefore, linking to Bowlby's (1978) theory, practitioners should encourage parents to develop warm, loving, positive relationship attachments, ensuring the baby is safe and developing into determined, skilled learners, adventurous, creative contributors, principled, knowledgeable citizens, and healthy, assured individuals, ready to achieve their full potential in life (Department of Consultations 2021; Early Years Matters, 2021; NSPCC, 2021). Building positive, caring, and empathetic relationships with the baby's family is important and according to the foundation phase framework, connecting with families promoting equality, embracing diversity, and recognising that parents are the child's first teacher is vital (Welsh Gov, 2015).



10 - (Source: Community Fund, no date)

Considering the baby holistically, providing empathy, support, advice, and guidance to parents, while safeguarding the child with early interventions that will bring to light awareness of any risk factors for example, abuse, is vital (HM Government, 2021). The UNCRC emphasises the right of the child to life and survival considering, their best interest and the unique diversity of their life. According to Early Years Matters (2021) practitioners must approach their world respectfully appreciating their uniqueness because the baby's wellbeing is the priority and keeping families together is important.



11 - (Source: Torfaen County Borough Council, 2018)

Care Routines



Tassoni (2018) suggests care such as routines related to eating, sleeping, dressing and nappy changing are fundamental to a baby's development and enhancing activities creatively by interacting during the important tasks are vital for example, talking/listening/singing/tickling/cuddling/soothing/laughing. Care routines support the baby's health and well-being and stimulates self-efficiency, growing their confidence as they begin to take some control for example, holding a spoon or washing their face. These activities support their relationship building with adults by special one to one interaction of gentle touch, tender voice, and eye contact. Bowlby believed developing a loving bond through quality time and attention is vital to positive development and success in adulthood and taking time to learn and understand the baby's cues are crucial and demonstrates respect towards their wants/needs; this influences trust ensuring the baby feels safe in the practitioner's care and promotes the rights of the baby within the setting (Wilson-Ali, Barratt-Pugh and Knaus, 2019; Unicef, no date). Dr Emmi Pikler also saw the importance of relationship building during these important tasks, recognising that kindness and care throughout builds healthy attachments, and positive self-image as they discover their competencies; this is because the practitioner is responding to the babies' gestures/movements by allowing them freedom to be actively involved for example, being mindful of their own actions and allowing the baby to take part (The Pikler Approach, no date).

Below is a video showing the impact of a mother ignoring her baby instead of engaging, this resulted in distress and frustration, confusion and sadness from the baby; Dr Tronick (2009) suggests babies are responsive to emotions and interactions, engaging with their caregivers as young as infants and it is vital practitioners allow this; babies need that love in order for them to learn communication, exploration and belonging. It influences physical development and healthy well-being ready for them to start school later (Curriculum for non-maintained settings, 2021).



12 - (Source: UMass Boston, 2009)



13 - (Source: BabyCentre, 2022)



14 - (Source: MonkeyPuzzle, no date)



15 - (Source: NurseryWorld, 2014)



16 - (Source: LoveEvery, 2022)

The Environment and Experiences



When considering the first 1000 days, the foundation phase profile suggests the varied developmental outcomes expected for a baby aged 6 – 24 months, generating questions about what the outcomes should be from birth to 6 months and why they have been ignored (Department of Education, 2021). When providing exceptional care, creating an environment for all areas of the baby's developmental stage must be considered including additional learning needs (My Space, no date). Consider birth-6 months 'language development' which is absent from the foundation phase framework; babies are developing an understanding of speech even before they speak by responding to varied tones for example, gurgling excitedly if something is funny; talking is also being influenced by their cues for example, crying, cooing, sucking, and burping; and there is vocal play as they start to explore repetition of sounds, imitating and eventually recognising their name. This stage is fundamental to their development because it lays the foundation for talking as they begin to take control over the muscles required for speaking (NHS Foundation Trust, 2016). Nevertheless,

the foundation phase framework does suggest babies are constantly growing new skills and must be supported as they progress at their own stage allowing them to work through the process. It is the practitioner's responsibility to create an environment with a range of positive experiences to support this (Department of Education, 2021; Curriculum for non-maintained settings, 2021).

Encouraging progression is vital, by observing, assessing, and responding sensitively to their unique wants/needs including culture diversity (Department of Publications, 2018). In the Te-Whariki approach, New Zealand Government (2016) believe the involvement of family and community is crucial to successful development as children learn best when their culture is supported, developing existing knowledge and experiences that they bring to the setting. Bruner also believed progression happens through constructing new ideas and concepts based on current/past experiences; it is an active, constructive process that is influenced through problem solving activities leading to the discovery of facts, relationships and new truths and delivered in sequence from enactive, iconic to symbolic learning (Walshy, 2019). Te-Whariki encourages a stimulating setting full of varied opportunities for interaction and exploration, facilitating variety of choice and ensuring diverse experiences for them to engage in curiosity and grow. The Reggio Emilia approach encourages this by seeing the child's potential ready to contribute in the world (Learning, Teaching Scotland, 2006).

According to the Department of Publications (2021), the use of outdoors and indoors is key to true learning experiences, encouraging inquisitiveness of the environment and influencing a sense of belonging and gratitude toward the world in which they live through varied problem-solving situations and challenges to enable them to progress to the next stage. Practitioners must be aware of the physical and emotional atmosphere to ensure the baby reaches their full potential. It must be considered when creating such a space that rich, stimulating engagements must allow the baby to express themselves physically, creatively, and imaginatively, discovering their own likes and dislikes all the while progressing (My Space, no date; New Zealand Government, 2016).

Practitioners must observe and assess the baby's holistic needs by providing child-led opportunities for learning about the world around them. Like Bruner, Piaget had a constructivist approach suggesting that a child's cognitive development begins from infancy and that all experiences they are exposed to within their environments support the process of growth. Piaget believed that there are stages children must pass through before developing to the next level; each stage progressing from an earlier understanding for example, Piaget believed birth – 2 years old is a sensorimotor stage, before reaching the pre-operational stage of 2 – 7 years, babies must reach the sensorimotor stage first (Early Years Educator, 2021). This suggests that within the first 1000 days, practitioners must create an environment for babies to explore through their senses influenced by their:

1. reflexes (new-born) - sucking, grasping, and orienting
2. primary circular reactions (1-4 months) - sucking thumb, habitual utterances, flexing legs allowing them to become more exploratory
3. secondary circular reactions (4-8 months) - repetition, developing dropping/throwing schemes, cause, and effect, responding to actions for example, smiles
4. coordinating secondary circular reactions (8-12 months) - intentional behaviour, goal-oriented behaviour and coordinating schemes
5. tertiary circular reactions (12-18 months) - experimenting, searching and imitation
6. symbolic/representational thought (18-24 months) - keeping things in their mind, solving advanced problems, invisible displacement, and role play (Perron, 2015).



17 - (Source: Reggio Emilia, 2018)

Music and Song



Tassoni (2021) suggests that the positive effect of music on a baby's personal, social, and emotional development should make music an essential consistent experience. She believes it influences a sense of security by promoting attachment and according to Bowlby, attachment is fundamental to a baby's future relationships (Wilson-Ali, Barratt-Pugh and Knaus, 2019); This attachment bond can be encouraged by promoting the family's musical culture by playing or singing what they are familiar with at home, influencing a sense of safety. Lerner and Parlakian (2016) suggest sharing music with babies promote love, agreeing that attachment bonds are created. Dr. Ibrahim Baltagi (no date) suggests this is because music has impacted brain circuits involved in trust, cooperation and empathy influencing how the baby and practitioner connects with one another.

Pediatricians believe music has a positive effect on mood suggesting it can be used to influence varied emotions for example, calmness, courage, confidence, enthusiasm, and happiness. Sleep routines could benefit from its calm soothing atmosphere as soft, repetitive music slows down the

heartbeat influencing calm, deep breathing influencing relaxation (Unicef, no date; Healthy Children, 2021).

Pacey (2017) suggests nursery rhymes/songs, instruments and opportunities to explore sound patterns/rhythms influence the development of early language/literacy skills. Providing song and music supports phonological awareness which supports reading/spelling later on; babies who engage in music and sound are setting the foundation for speech/language and communication development.

Divya Singh is a counsellor and supports this sharing why music is important for early childhood development:



18 - (Source: Singh, 2019)

Story-time



According to Victoria State Government (2019) if children are provided with purposeful language interactions, exposed to much vocabulary in their early years and engaging in opportunities for

learning different concepts through language, it delivers better academic success for them later. They suggest exploring language in all interactions is crucial, creating opportunity for description and conversation constantly by repetition. Engaging in consistent affirmation when they attempt to join in is vital too because it encourages them to continue which links to Bruner's theory - praise/rewards influencing the child's decision to repeat their achievements for example, babbling their version of a story (Walshy, 2019).

MP Nick Gibb suggests in his speech that reading stories to babies enhances their vocabulary expanding their capacity to learn, and by the important activity of reading to a baby, it is the first step to them becoming confident readers. An American study from 2003 found that children from a professional family origin would be exposed to 2,153 words every hour by 3 years old; however, a child from a deprived background living in poverty would be exposed to 616 words every hour by 3. He proposes similar findings in the UK suggesting a disadvantage to the development of a baby's future language and literacy skills due to poverty (Department of Education, 2016). As practitioners, exposing babies to story time is vital, it supports their social, cognitive, well-being and mental health encouraging them to explore the world surrounding them (High Speed Training, 2022).



19 - (Source: A Mummy Adventure, 2017)



20 - (Source: Midwest Montessori, 2022)



21 - (Source: Community Playthings,2018)

Treasure Basket



According to BBC (2022), Speech and Language therapist, Alys Mathers explains how babies naturally use touch, smell, sight, sound, and taste to explore their surroundings while making sense of the world around them. They learn cause and effect and develop an emotional awareness; sensory experiences support the baby making links between what they see, hear, and feel and by linking these experiences into their senses they will build more brain connections, developing their language skills too. According to Kiddi Caru Day Nursery, treasure baskets can be made up of simple natural materials and such activities can be reciprocated at home without the need to spend money on new items. It encourages babies to explore and investigate making new discoveries in a stimulating and interesting way.



22 - (Source: Kiddi Caru Day Nursery, 2015)

Current Challenge: COVID19



According to *Babies in Lockdown* (2020), surveys suggest COVID-19 could have detrimental effects on the futures of the estimated 200,000 babies that began their lives during lockdown, with families already at risk of poorer outcomes suffering the most for example, low-income families; Hobs and Bernard (2021) speak on behalf of the UK Parliament and suggest evidence of preschool age being impacted in varied negative ways, including physical, social, and emotional development, behavior and mental health, affecting school readiness. This research suggests practitioners need strategies in place to support babies/families in the first 1000 days particularly those living in poverty to provide for the needs of the youngest in society and investing in the development of a COVID generation of babies. However, there is a problem, as discussed throughout this assignment, support is available but, NSPCC's Chief Executive, Wanless shares his letter to the Secretary of State, with the concerns highlighted by Best Beginnings, Home Start UK and Parent-Infant Foundation suggesting the government could be failing these families during this time as services struggled to provide support even before the pandemic and cuts in funding creates more challenge. A baby's development is not solely influenced by education and a single practitioner's input in one setting; it is intertwined with care from the wider community and the country for example health visitors. Wanless, urges the government to face this challenge widely so that all practitioners involved in supporting the babies first 1000 days gives them a better start in life.

Conclusion

Providing exceptional care to a baby and their family throughout the first 1000 days includes varied settings and professional input ranging from conception, throughout pregnancy, labour, birth and up to the baby's second birthday. Rich, stimulating environments with learning opportunities through hands on sensory experiences encourages their future development and partnerships with parents, families and other professional relationships supports the babies' holistic needs identifying current challenges for example poverty, mental health, and the effects of COVID19 on individual families; this care influences the baby's success beyond 1000 days.

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