

Promoting exceptional care in the First 1000 Days

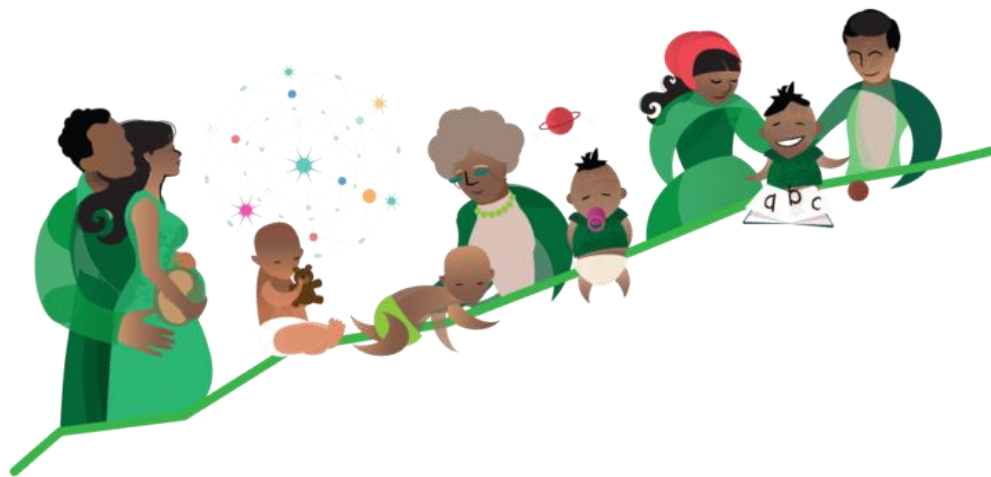
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What is the first 1000days?



The first 1000 days of life is from conception to two years of age and is a critical period for a child's growth and development (Karakochuk, C.D *et al* 2017). It's during these early years of life when the brain is at its most sensitive. This influential time will shape a child's future and how loving nurturing care plays a vital role to giving them the best possible start in life. With adequate health, nutrition, responsive care and opportunities given for learning and protecting them from harm will enable children in reaching their full potential. (Raghavan C and Ruta V, 2022).

A vital role during pregnancy to help build a baby's brain inside the womb, is to provide the nutrients such as folic acid, protein, iodine and iron as this can help fuel the transformation of growth. If any of these nutrients are absent then they can cause a risk of some developmental delay, cognitive deficits or birth defects. (thousanddays.org) During pregnancy as the baby's brain is developing quickly. A mother can help the brain grow by sitting quietly relaxed and talking to her bump and encouraging close family members to do the same. (UNICEF UK, 2021) This forms the start of building an attachment with their baby. Babies at around 18weeks gestation are very susceptible to

any sounds and by 26 weeks will react to those sounds by a startle or cry, the sound of the mother's voice will instantly soothe them. (Pregnancy, birth & baby, 2021)



1 - Relaxing and connecting

Perfect nutrition for brain development is breastmilk containing a variety of nutrients and proteins that are vital for baby brain development. There are numerous studies that show babies that are breastfed perform better as children and teens, because it involves lots of nurturing interaction and mother child touch. (thousanddays.org) Breastfed babies cannot be overfed and breastfeeding can be used to soothe and calm a baby, also allowing that closeness of touch next to mother's skin. Even when a baby is bottle fed a mother can hold their baby skin to skin and look into their eyes to help with the bonding experience. (Unicef, 2021)

“New babies have a strong need to be close to their parents as this helps them to feel secure and loved” (UNICEF UK, 2021)

Bonding and attachment are responding to babies needs with love, warmth and care. This repeated human contact will make the Newborn's brain release hormones, helping their brain grow which starts to develop language and memory. By continuing to do this the baby becomes to trust the person in their life and learn the world is a safe place to learn and explore. (Raisingchildren.net, 2020) Babies that feel loved and secure release a hormone called Oxytocin which acts as a fertiliser for the growing brain. Babies are happier and become more confident children and adults. (UNICEF, 2021) As cited in *Why love matters* (Gerthardt, S 2014) explain why loving relationships are essential to brain development in the early years. How these early interactions have lasting consequences on emotional and physical health. Babies need adults help to 'wire up' their brain, as baby's brains are not fully developed at birth. A parent giving cuddles, smiles, warmth and touch will all help them grow healthy brains for their baby. Babies will also understand non-verbal communication such as tone of voice and facial expressions even how they are handled. This will offer the baby comfort and soothing and this will help develop good 'stress wiring'. (Grobrain, 2010) Children's brains are developing so rapidly which means they are more vulnerable to neglect, toxic stress and poor nutrition. This can have a profound effect and possibly be irreversible, which is why it is so important that parents and young children get the support and nutrition for a thriving future during the first 1000 days. Research suggests that children who are subjected to traumatic and stressful events it can have a lifelong detrimental impact on them, resulting in children finding stress levels difficult to manage. These can be referred to as Adverse childhood experiences (ACES) whether it be short term or sustained over a long period of time. Children suffering from exposure to stress and adversity will not have loving nurturing environments and the adults they need during this time to help them cope

with such events that will affect their learning and development as they grow older. (Welsh government 2022)

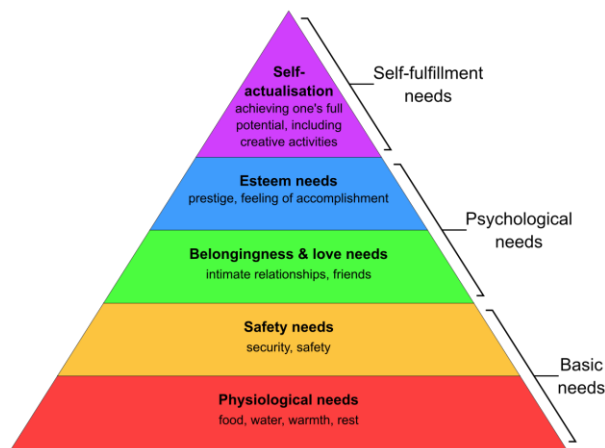


A short trailer on the 2011 documentary film- 'The connected baby' produced by Dr Suzanne Zeedyk demonstrates how babies are born social beings. How babies love taking part in interactions and are confused when someone doesn't want to.

Every single experience a baby has will leave an emotional trace, embedding emotional patterns that are woven into neural pathways of their brain.

It matters a lot how we understand this science as it can help parents make sense of behaviours of their infants and how they can enrich such behaviours with their interactions. (Connectedbaby.net 2011).

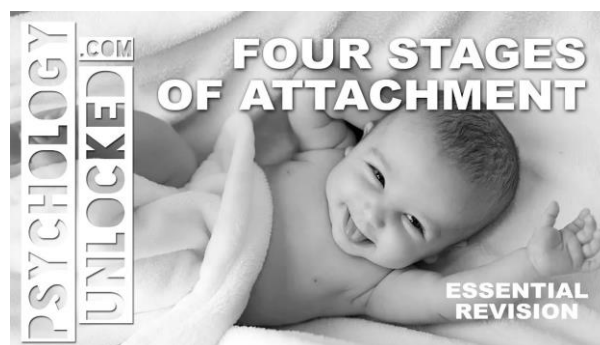
[the connected baby trailer - YouTube](#)



2 - (Source: SimplyPsychology.org, 2022)

Maslows hierarchy of needs pyramid

Notably, Abraham Maslow's (1943) theory has been highly influential over many years and that shows how the five basic physiological needs to an individual are essential to a human's development. When looking at the findings of Maslow's Hierarchy of needs theory and its principles relating to the basic human needs such as love, food, safety and belonging. Maslow suggested that unless those basic needs are met an individual could not move on to the next level to progress. (Noltemeyer, A. et al. 2021) Maslow argued that in raising well-adjusted children safety would be the most essential, and that children require a safe and predictable world, one that unexpected dangerous things did not happen. However, if these things did occur, children would have parents who will protect and shield them from harm. As Maslow points out that love and affection are important needs, and when a person is loved they are better able to fit in to society with feelings of self-worth and self-confidence of feeling useful in the world. (Stoianov, S. 2017)



In the 1940s and 1950s child psychiatrist Dr John Bowlby studied emotional development in babies and how and why babies make attachments. This was one of the first major investigations of attachment and bonding. Although this research was carried out many years ago, the conclusions that were found are just as pertinent today. It looks at the special bond that develops between infant and mother or the main caregiver who look after them.

Bowlby theorised that if an attachment was disrupted children would not go on to develop a healthy personality and was convinced that early bonds were very important to the baby's future mental health (Davenport, G.C 1991).

Bowlby alongside psychologist Mary Ainsworth (1969) later viewed that an attachment could also be formed with any primary caregiver (such as an early year's practitioner) not only their parents. It showed that if a child is already '**securely attached**' they are more likely to settle sooner with another adult when away from mother or main care person. Ainsworth suggested that to achieve this the early year's practitioner must ensure a '**secure base**' is provided such as giving plenty of attentiveness, care and interactions towards the child that would soon develop into a sense of trust.

As a result, children are more likely to become more independent, self-confident and perform better developmentally. On the other hand, it follows that when a child is '**insecurely attached**' (anxious/avoidant or anxious/resistant) the child will be very unsettled with a new person, they will turn away avoid and dislike any comfort offered. Resulting in behaviour problems and issues developmentally. (MacLeod-Brudenell, I 2004)

Ainsworth (1971) built upon this theory devising a 'Strange situation' test identifying specific attachment behaviours. This short video shows a 'securely attached' child, indicating a positive relationship between mother and baby and how it was observed and measured.

[the strange situation](#)

This is when the role of the caregiver can promote and encourage competence in a child. As early years practitioner's, it is important to have a familiarity with Bowlby's research on children's attachment and how to enhance the quality of care with the importance of their own personal role in facilitating this within early years provision. By building positive relationships with attention, sensitivity and care that will support the child to go on to have healthy relationships with other significant adults. (Conkbayir, M. and Pascal, C. 2014)



Challenges for the Early years Practitioner



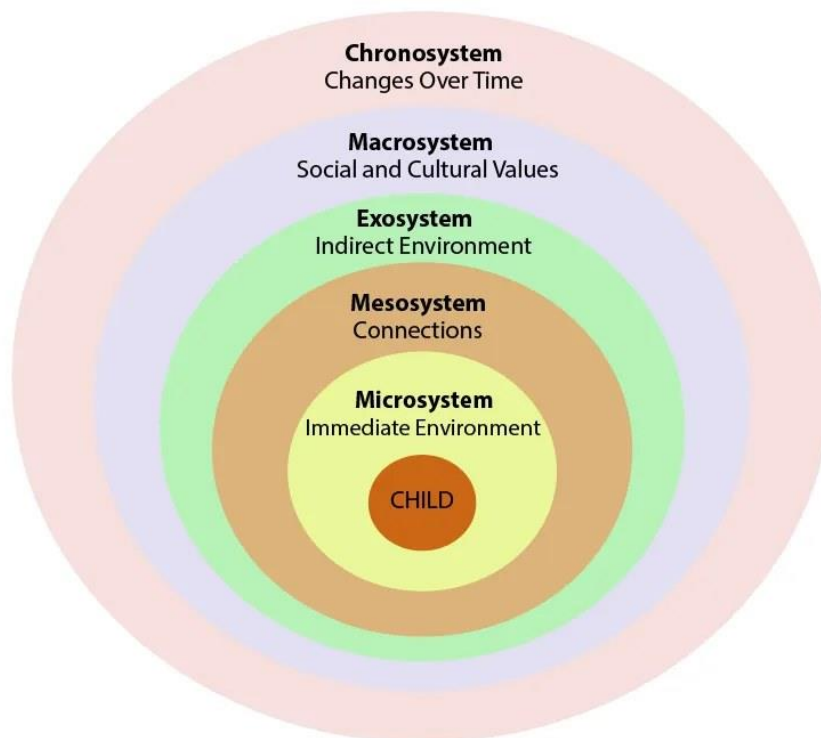
However, Early years practitioners are faced with ongoing challenges of children's differing backgrounds and the demands that it brings, whilst conforming to government requirements, policies and constant evolving curriculums. A high turnover of staff or larger settings can make caring for babies and children more difficult for one-to-one situations and building relationships. (Conkbayir, M. and Pascal, C. 2014) One way of ensuring this can be overcome is with the use of Elinor Goldschmied's (1994) key person approach in settings that ensures babies and children have more consistency from one practitioner, helping the child feel cared about, safe and known. As part of this 'key person approach' it will strengthen and emphasise parental relationships that can be stable and more effective with communication. (Conkbayir, M. and Pascal, C. 2014) Care routines such as nappy changes, dressing and mealtimes can be opportunities to provide those special times where engagement with babies can be used for playful affection that continue to build brain development. This key adult child relationship will grow and become better able for the adult to 'tune in' and provide those nurturing responses that will allow the child to feel safe and secure. This is providing the grounding for a 'secure base' is placed. Once the child has built on this security and trust with their key person they will explore and interact with others around the setting. The child has now formed one of many secondary attachments that they need to be able to thrive when they are away from parent and home environment. (Happykids-childcare) A child's key person can support their holistic development and is an approach set out in the Early year's foundation stage (EYFS, 2021) outlining that it is part of the key person's role to actively engage and support parents with their child's progress and development. This is part of the National minimum standards for registered childcare (NMS) in Wales which states that parents are kept involved with their child's daily activities, progress and achievements and that the registered person ensures good partnership working with parents and carers to meet the individual needs of the child. Goldschmied advises that practitioners should think of the importance of 'the triangle relationship' between child, parent and key person and to implement this daily. The key person's role will include the building of

'Professional love' (which describes a close loving bond with young children cared for by professionals) however this can sometimes come with potentially heavy demands in the role. It is important to have a supportive work environment to share any challenges of the role but also the celebrations. There is a vital role needed from managers to ensure a supportive network is in place for the key person as there will come difficult challenges and struggles. But also, for managers to be responsible for creating time for practitioners to talk about their worries regarding this approach so it translates into practice well. Some early years practitioners may have different feelings, expressing that it could mean lack of fairness in ways children are treated or limitations due to 1 : 3 ratio that the National minimum standards (NMC) require for babies up to 2 years. (Elfer, P, Goldschmied, E. and Selleck, D. 2003) The Key person will also communicate with wide range of outside professionals that may be involved with the child such as Health visitors, social workers, speech and language therapists etc (Birth to 5 matters, 2022)

With this in mind according to psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (1979) it recognised the multifaceted nature of children and their development and how there are many factors that will affect them. Bronfenbrenner's theory is of the belief that the environment will impact on a child's development and that the child will impact on their environment. It shows that development is not affected by one single factor but a system of relationships over some time, consisting of different individuals, services and organisations. (Conkbayir, M. and Pascal, C. 2014)

There are five systems that make up the ecological system theory as seen in the diagram how the child is always central.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



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Bronfenbrenner argued that human development particularly in the early years will take place through reciprocal interactions between an adult and child including the environment. Bronfenbrenner's note how important the power of interactions and the role of the adult, and to be effective it must be of high quality and occur regularly over extended periods of time. An example can be seen in early years settings that includes feeding and changing times and play activities. Bronfenbrenner referred to these as 'proximal processes' and this was part of the revised model called the 'bioecological system' and located within the microsystem. (Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1994) Proximal processes are seen as key to development and how the concept has important implications. Through reflections of a child from the early year's practitioner, they can facilitate a positive learning environment and restructure creating new features that reflect the child's interests and extend learning. In relation to the model, it actively stresses the importance of relationships with parents and children in early years education. (Hayes, N., O'Toole, L. and Halpenny, A.M. 2017)

Providing a rich environment



The environment plays a central role in supporting children's development and learning. As highlighted by the influential Reggio Emilia as the 'third educator' and states how the early years practitioner can be creative with careful environmental planning by creating lots of pleasant points of interest. (Hayes, N., O'Toole, L. and Halpenny, A.M. 2017) The curriculum of Te Whariki has notably been influenced by Bronfenbrenner bioecological system in the development and implementation of their early years curriculum. It consists of four principles of Empowerment, Holistic development, Relationships and Family and community which underpins evidence informed theories from both Bronfenbrenner and Bowlby believing that curriculum should speak from past, present and future. (Te Whariki online, 2017) Te Whariki is an inclusive curriculum that involves adapting environments working together with families particularly for infants with building of trust with a familiar adult during their first experience at an early year's setting. (Te Whariki Early childhood curriculum, 2017)

The current curriculum for Wales set out in the curriculum for non-maintained settings shares similar principles that highlight how it is essential for engaging exciting environments. That provide meaningful learning that focuses on the needs of the child through the five developmental pathways that are - belonging, communication, exploration, physical development and well-being. (Welsh government, 2020)

It is paramount in recognising one's role to create safe learning environments by encouraging and supporting children's natural curiosity. Modelling compassion and kindness will have a positive impact on children and their well-being. These are fundamental for all young children in their development and learning. These attributes ensure all children can make progress at their own pace and in their **preferred learning environment**. The quality of the holistic approach given will ensure that opportunities for children to develop across these pathways are provided. All are fundamental

to key principles to the learning and development of all young children and the six areas of learning during the first 1000 days. (Welsh government, 2020)



3 - Sensory experience

Babies and children should have plenty of opportunities to the outdoors. Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) encouraged children to explore both indoors and outdoor environments. The role of the early years practitioner according to Froebel in the planning of both environments was critical and should support and promote feelings of wonder and purposeful for children. Much like Piaget, Froebel believed that children learn about the world from within, and by following their interests with a good educational environment. (Conkbayir, M. and Pascal, C. 2014)

The advantages for outdoor learning for babies and children can enrich senses that they can engage and connect with the natural world. The outdoor environment children's imagination, creativity and encourage investigation and exploration to understand the world around them. (Welsh government, 2020)



4 - Outdoor area

Own image



5 - Outdoor area

Own image

Activities



According to Piaget (1976) keeping children curious and make them wonder will offer them a chance for problem-solving. Piaget believed that children's intellectual growth is affected by the environment. In the beginning a baby's reactions are purely reflexive and that reactions will soon become purposeful, being the first stage of cognitive development, which Piaget named the Sensorimotor stage. (Mooney, C.G. 2013) Take for example The Curiosity approach (2017) who promote that babies will learn through handling objects and exploring their surroundings. All they need to learn is the space and time to be able to explore the environment, and as the adult to be close by offering security, presence and love. Offer the baby loose parts such as wooden rings, brushes, natural materials and introduce treasure baskets. It was the idea from Elinor Goldschmied that treasure baskets filled with natural everyday objects that can be interesting for babies. They can choose what they want to play with using their eyes, mouth, feet and hands. The adult can offer support and encouragement where needed by sitting and just observing. (Forbes, R. 2004)

Pikler's approach allowed doing less for the child involving the freedom but on the same hand building on the importance of adult child relationship. The adult is allowing the child to be a free person and equal in the relationship, creating a safe place, respectful care, move and learn at own pace with no rush from the adult. As previously discussed, – babies are born social beings and wanting parents undivided attention and causes confusion when attention is not returned. Babies from 4-5weeks will naturally lift a leg to enable changing or a lift an arm for a sleeve. It is how adults notice and give patience for an active collaboration.

This short video of a 5week old baby shows how this everyday occurrence such as nappy changes can be a perfect opportunity for interacting and engaging.

["dance of the nappy" from "the connected baby" documentary - YouTube](#)



8 - Heuristic play

The curiosity approach, 2019

To conclude



The importance of a responsive nurturing adult during the first 1000 days cannot be underestimated. Close loving relationships are essential to brain development. For a baby to thrive away from home environment they need security and comfort. As stated in the EPPE project (2004) parents and early years practitioners make a real difference to young children and their

development, offering a wide range of activities such as reading, singing, painting etc. Children need mindful educators who know why they do these activities and what the benefits are for. Loved and secure children will ultimately blossom and develop.

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