

The first 1000 days

The first 1000 days is the most important part of development an individual can experience. Within this period the fundamental foundation of a person is developed, this alongside the varying experiences they will experience will then shape and determine how a person develops and who that person becomes. The first 1000 days begins at conception from 3 weeks up until the child is 24 months. According to First Things First* (*FTF) (2024), within the first 1000 days the child's brain will begin developing and during this time a baby will develop all the cells that they will require for their entire lives. These Brain cells help a person develop all the skills that will be needed within life.

During this developmental period, all the sections of child's brain is developed. Some of the areas developed are responsible for; speech and language, emotions and regulating them, fine and gross motor skills, and a variety of other areas. This is why it is essential that all the basic needs of both the child and their primary care giver are met. In order for primary caregivers to be able to fulfil the needs of the child holistically. Modern Minds (2021) reiterates this idea by using the analogy of pouring from an empty cup. The example explains that when a person has a cup of water that is full, a person can pour it out wherever is needed, in order to complete a task, such as watering a plant. It continues to explain that once that cup is empty a person is no longer able to pour it out which could damage the plants health and lead it to wilt. Similarly, if a primary caregiver or even an Early Years Practitioner neglects the care and needs of themselves it could have an effect on a child under their care. This is why it is vital that the needs of the caregivers and the children under the care of them are all met.

By meeting the needs of a child holistically within this developmental is could have a positive effect on the child/children. Positive effects which could result from this are; forming secure attachment styles, good emotional regulation, gaining positive experiences, confidence, independence, positive risk taking, good nutritional habits and many other positive effects. Additionally, failure to meet basic needs of these participants could result in long term affects such as; difficulties forming bonds/ secure attachments, behavioural issues, speech, and language delays/difficulties, experiencing negative experiences, forming insecure attachments styles and many

more. By giving children a positive start to their development, it could also be easier to identify any developmental problems/ delays, which could develop which as a result may give primary caregivers and Early years practitioners a chance to intercept them.

Caregiving

It is important for Primary caregivers and Early Years Practitioners to ensure that the quality of care being provided is up to an exceptional standard. What is exceptional care some might ask themselves? A good definition of exceptional care is ensuring the holistic needs of a child are met within a safe, nurturing environment, allowing the children to grow and develop to their full potential. PACEY (No date) suggests effective ways to identify if an environment is meeting standards to provide high quality care. One effective way to identify if a setting is providing high quality care could be to carry out research on the childcare provider and reading CIW and ESTYN reports carried out there. This is a good indicator if the setting is keeping to the high standards provided to them by their local authorities, CIW, and ESTYN. Another effective way of identifying high quality care in settings could be, observing the environment and atmosphere that the care is being provided in.

Birth to 5 matters explains that environments should meet the needs of the children attending the setting. By providing an enabling environment of which meets the needs of the children in the setting it will also allow Early Years practitioners to ensure that they are carrying out inclusive practice within their setting. An effective way of providing an enabling environment would be to make sure all equipment provided to the children is in good working order and of an age-appropriate level while still allowing room to take appropriate risks in their development. Having equipment on a child accessible level is a key step in allowing the children to make decisions for themselves when it comes to their play and learning. Adjusting the room when necessary for the abilities of the children can also contribute to an enabling environment. An example of this may be ensuring all equipment is accessible and that the room is appropriate for those who may need to use a wheelchair to manoeuvre around. Another way of ensuring a setting is providing high quality care would be if a setting provides appropriate training to educate their staff. If staff fully understand the holistic needs of a child within their care then they may be more likely to ensure all developmental, educational and care needs are

meet and maintained while constantly reviewing their own practice regularly to review on how to improve and adjust the setting and their practice to continue doing this. A positive atmosphere and a clean, safe, sensory fulfilling environment can also be good indicators of if a setting is delivering high quality care. Each setting must be adhering to Policies and Procedures of the setting and standards given to them by CIW and ESTYN.

Challenges

When Early Years Practitioners are providing high quality care, they may face some challenges. According to the Local Government Association* (*LGA), a challenge that may be faced could be due to funding. If there is a lack of funding for a setting it may be hard for the setting to maintain setting buildings and equipment or to be able to employ staff. This could result in strain on the current resources and staff which could have a detrimental impact on the setting delivering the high-quality care. The LGA also suggests that another challenge that could be faced by Early Years Practitioners providing high quality care could be due to lack of funding to settings it could have the permanent result of closure. If a setting is unable to keep up to the standards provided to them by local authorities, employ a suitable amount of staff in order to be able to accept the children on to the site keeping within ratios of the setting then a setting may not be able to profit and may eventually have to close as a result of this. Another challenge faced by Early Years Practitioners may be a language barrier within the work place.

Within a childcare setting, there will be a variety of children, all with individual backgrounds and potentially ethnic backgrounds, which may mean that children entering the setting may not use the language of the registered setting as their first language. This could prove problematic to Early Years Practitioners when communicating with that child and their families. Another possible challenge that may be faced in the Early Years settings could be lack of support from other agencies and/or a child's family when providing care for a child with Additional Learning Needs. Due to the strain on other agencies it could take time for settings to be provided with appropriate Individual Learning Plans which could mean that staff of the setting may not be able to fully meet the needs of the child in an effective manner until this is done. This of which could result in an ALN child feeling misunderstood which can show itself through a negative emotional outburst. An additional challenge

in which may not be obvious challenge to others could very well be staff wellbeing. Early Years Practitioners provide high quality care for those within in their settings but problems with their mental health, physical health or problems within their personal lives could affect their ability to do this to a high standard. A referenced earlier when discussing the importance of the first 1000 days, it is important for Early Years Practitioners make sure they are also cared for themselves in order to pour from their cup as failure to do this could have effect on the environment and children within their setting.

Professional partnerships

When working within the Early Years in most cases Early Years Practitioners may need to engage in a variety of situations which will need to result in Multiagency working. Multiagency working is where a variety of professionals work together to gain the best outcome for a child and their development. An example of this could be if a child is experiencing speech delays/difficulties. In this situation, the child's family, nursery setting, health visitor, paediatrician and a Speech and Language specialist would all need to work together to gain the best outcome for the child. Multiagency working is an effective way to work together.

Some of the professionals that may be apart of a multiagency team are; Social Services, Dieticians, Pedeatricians, Speech and Language Therapists, Physiotherapists, Pyscologists, Police, Childcare and educational Settings such as Nursery or School, Health Visitors and many more. The NSPCC (2023) states that a major benefit from doing this is each professional being able to share and contribute opinions, ideas, and approaches. This is an effective way to make sure everyone is heard, and everyone gets a chance to ask/discuss any topics that might relate to the child. By having effective communication, it ensures that all professionals are working from the same viewpoint with the same strategies and outcomes in mind for the child. Another positive outcome from doing this could be, being able to provide consistency for the child/ children involved. If this was not discussed thoroughly by the professionals involved, then this could potentially cause confusion and conflict. Another benefit of working together with multiagency professors is this is meeting the needs of the child to be able to develop to their full potential. This is supported by Articles 3 and 6 of the UNCRC.

Despite this range of benefits previously discussed there may also be challenges when carrying out the practice of multiagency working. Some challenges that may be faced could be poor communication amongst the agencies. Although professionals strive to achieve effective communication with one another sometimes this can become a challenge for a variety of reasons. One reason could be, due to the amount of people involved and the professionals having different work schedules it may not be an easy task to find a time that all the professionals are available to attend meetings to discuss the children's cases under the care. This could have an effect of being unaware of any changes or developments amongst certain children and their families. Another challenge that could be faced in multiagency working could be funding. In many areas funding could be an issue as if there is a shortage of funding the agencies may not be able to employ more staff to lighten the workload of others within their agency. As a result of this, this may put a strain on staff within the agencies which could present another challenge of being able to observe and keep in close contact with the other professionals and families of certain children. This as a result could put a stress on the staff which may affect the manner in how they interact with other professionals and families.

This may then lead to families feeling forgotten or unheard in matters to do with their child. An additional challenge when working with other multiagency workers could be a misunderstanding of other professionals and their roles. If there is not a clear understanding of the professionals involved and their roles within the team then this could potentially lead to jobs not being completed due to the impression that another member of the team was responsible for this. This could as a result delay the process of giving children and their families the support that is needed for them to advance which could delay any progression being made in a child's developmental journey.

Activities

During the first 1000 days it is particularly important that children are challenged appropriately to advance their development. An effective way to do this is by providing the children with stimulating and engaging activities. Nubabi (2017) suggests that a benefitting activity for children within the first 1000 days could be

sensory play activities. It is discussed within the article that there are many positive outcomes that can be gained from engaging in sensory play. These include:

- Developing both fine and gross motor skills
- Developing the senses of the child
- The child is allowed to experience a variety of different textures, smells, sounds, sights and tastes.
- It gives the child the opportunity to explore different objects/ foods in a safe environment.
- It will allow the child to develop their knowledge and understanding of the world.
- It encourages appropriate risk taking within the child's decisions.

By providing a child with a sensory stimulating activity, not only are Early Years Practitioners providing the children with the opportunity to develop and grow the above-mentioned developmental areas, but Early Years Practitioners are encouraging the children to become fully engaged and immersed in the activity which again would encourage curiosity, risk taking and development. This is helping keep practice in line with the Child's Right to play in Article 31 of the UNCRC but also keeping to the standards of the local government curriculum of Learning through Play.

International Approaches

There are many approaches to childrens learning and development which are practised in many different parts of the world. One of these approaches is the Reggio Emilia Approach. This approach was founded in Italy. Nido (No date) states that the "Educators using the Reggio Emilia Approach believe that children should have some control over their learning. Children have many languages in art, music, and drama, and they should be encouraged to learn through experiences like listening, moving, touching, and observing". This approach is similar to the national curriculum of Wales and their approach in learning through play. The Reggio Emilia Approach has been seen to be effective and successful in among the children who have participated in it.

Another international approach that can be considered is the approach taken in New Zealand, Te Whariki. The Ministry of Education (2017) describes Te Whariki as “an inclusive curriculum - a curriculum for all children. Inclusion encompasses gender, ethnicity, diversity of ability and learning needs, family structure and values, socio-economic status, and religion”. Within this approach it places emphasis on the importance of play. This approach also believes that learning through play can help children develop important life skills such as problem solving and appropriate risk taking.

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