



Exceptional care in the first 1000 days

What is the first 1000 days?



The first 1000 days is the period from conception of baby until the age of two. This is a time of rapid growth and development. Children's brains develop fastest and are at their most adaptable before birth and during the first two years of life.

During this critical time foundations for lifelong communication, social and physical skills are being laid. By the age of two a child should be able to walk, talk using at least fifty words, climb, kick a ball and scribble with a crayon. (H.M. Government 2021) The first 1000 days also set the foundations for a person's cognitive and emotional development, building lifelong skills of, understanding, reasoning and problem solving. This time is imperative for forging children's emotional well-being, resilience and adaptability (best beginnings, home-start UK and the parent-infant foundation 2020) Supporting families during the first 1000 days will improve future health, well-being and learning potential of children.

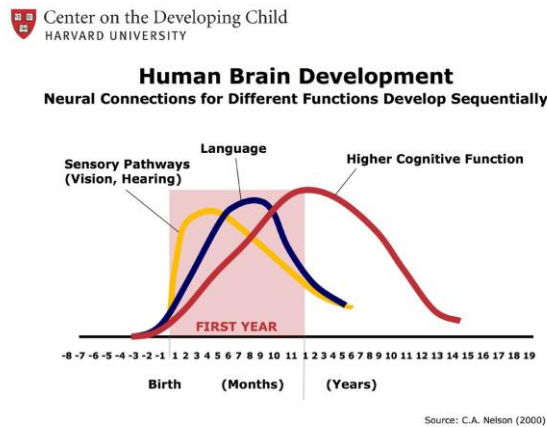
Why are the first 1000 days important?



Even before birth babies rapidly developing brain is influenced by its environment. Nurturing relationships also begin before birth. The responses of those around babies actively promote their brains rapid development. Gerhardt (2014) explains that how the adult responds teaches baby feelings and emotions, what these are and how to manage them. The human brain makes connections from the very earliest of experiences. These experiences have a lifelong impact on their physical and emotional health.

Some of the most important experiences that shape baby's brains come from interactions with significant adults in their lives. Babies can only communicate by babbling and cooing, facial

expressions and movements. It is the response of the adult that can create the 'serve and return' process that helps to develop a baby's brain. (Parent infant foundation). By twelve months babies will be influenced by the actions of an adult when they are introduced to a new experience, they may look to the adult for reassurance. Nutbrown (2005) emphasises the importance of the role of the familiar adult to scaffold the child's learning. Young children and babies have similar basic needs though its of paramount importance that practitioners understand that everyone is unique, it must be understood what is unique about each child enabling their needs to be recognised and met, supporting their development and learning.



what is exceptional care?



Enabling adults are those care givers offering exceptional care. Welsh government (2021) stress the importance of Providing an environment where the child can enjoy, learn and grow to their fullest potential.

Exceptional care is provided in settings that have practitioners who recognise that children are all unique and have different dispositions. Practitioners who Have a genuine curiosity about children and their play. According to Stacey (2009) this time of a child's life is highly significant to their overall development. It is important to value this time and nurture the playfulness and curiosity.

Practitioners offering exceptional care are responsive to the child's needs, wants, likes and dislikes. Recognising that young children can communicate through, actions, words and behaviours. Modelling a joyful approach to learning, sharing in the awe and wonder, taking advantage of the teachable moments. (Welsh government)

The Montessori curriculum allows children to teach themselves through a range of sensory rich materials and hands on activity designed to enhance children's natural learning. Children are free to explore, experience and understand hands on activities that interest and inspire them. The environment is enabling with staff lovingly acting as guides to encourage children's independence. Children teach themselves through engaging in purposeful activities. This meaningful learning builds foundations for learning educational concepts for later in life.

Why is it important to promote exceptional care?

All children need a stable and secure relationship with at least one caregiver for healthy development to occur (Bowlby 1997) Bowlby's Attachment theory proposes that babies need to form trusting relationships at a young age, forming the feeling of security leading to a natural desire to learn and develop. Quality care provided to children at early years settings, lead to secure attachment. This bond is determined by the ability of the practitioner to sensitively and appropriately respond to the child's wants and needs. The building of relationship plays an important role in supporting children to their full potential and influencing their future wellbeing.

Respectful care



The relationship is a key principle in the Piklar approach. Piklar recognised that with respectful care, secure attachments are made, and partnerships are built between the child and practitioner. The greatest attention each child receives is during times when their nappies or clothes are being changed, or when they are being fed or cleaned. In a relaxed, unrushed manner the softly spoken practitioner meets the child's needs verbalising the events. With care and respect, it is ensured that the child has an influence on what is happening, building the trusting secure relationship (The Piklar collection). furthermore, Vygotsky emphasise the importance of language. Talking about familiar, routine experiences is crucial for building knowledge and understanding as well as building relationships. Words, facial expression and body language are forms of communication that help children to understand.

Babies communicate from birth by means of looks, coos, and cues. Brodie (2018) points out that until their vocabulary and language develops, babies cannot articulate their feelings and emotions. The enabling adult must support baby to enjoy the positive learning experiences with the world around them. Babies can enjoy 'tummy time' from the age of 10 weeks. when babies are put on their tummies, they view their world from a different perspective. They strengthen their core and neck, impacting on their posture, spine alignment, core stability and other areas of physical development. This activity can be enhanced by adding items of interest to babies play area. Baby might reach, happily for a toy, displaying joy once the grasp has been obtained. A joyful encouraging response by means of verbal praise, a smile or an excited hand gesture from the practitioner

rewards baby in this essential experience for baby's development. This is an example as a quality interaction. From this simple physical activity baby has problem solved, communicated and gained pride, built confidence, with a positive effect on emotional well-being.



1 - Tummy time

Current challenges



One of the current challenges facing the early years sector is the coronavirus pandemic. The coronavirus impacted physical and mental health. The impact of reduced social contact and the lack of support from extended family and professionals has significantly affected babies (HM Gov). It is too early to gauge the long-term effect, though the repercussions of the pandemic are worrying in regard to children's development and well-being. The Delphi Study to Understand Options Available that will help to Identify, Address, or Mitigate the Impact of COVID-19 on Children Under Age 5 (2021) confirms that Covid-19 has had a negative impact on Children and their families. Early years practitioners should be aware that children may have been affected by emotional upset and stress caused by bereavements due to COVID-19 or their families struggling with a low income or poverty. It is important that Early years settings take time to understand, give back the feeling of belonging that may have been missed, support children and their families without adding pressure to 'catch up' on missed education, instead offering time and opportunity for children to enjoy a range of experiences. To be social, to play, explore, learn and grow with enabling adults and peers, especially

encouraging the outdoor environment with the aim to fulfil the children's needs, promoting holistic well-being.

Caring for children is both intellectual and emotional, caring, loving relationships are naturally formed. Professional love has strong links to Bowlby's attachment theory. It is widely recognised that secure, strong relationships have positive outcomes in all areas of children's development and learning. Page (2018 p. 125-141) explains the positive complimentary notion of professional love as enhancing the relationship between child, parent and practitioner. The child who is used to love and attention at home would be comforted and content in the care of the practitioner where the bond or relationship has been formed. The challenge to early years settings may be the view of the appropriateness of the 'love' and how this may be deemed appropriate. There is also the view that the practitioners 'love' may risk or threaten the parents' relationship with their children.

Environments



The United Nations convention on the rights of the child is an international human rights treaty for children. It lists the rights that children have and the obligation all adults must promote these rights. Article 13 states that play is a fundamental right for all children. Children must be given the opportunity to play indoors and outdoors and have time to relax. (UNICEF)

Babies and young children have a natural curiosity about the world around them. When enabled and with some encouragement and support they can focus their attention on things that interest them for extended periods of time. Froebel stated that play is a child's work. Pound (2005) explains Froebel's belief in the child centred approach with the emphasis being on play, arguing that the garden was the best environment for young children to learn and develop. Each child should explore in their own way, achieving their own goals and coming to their own conclusions. Play and play resources should be open-ended to facilitate this.

Welsh government (2021) insist that the outdoors provides the perfect environment to promote children's wellbeing. Allowing space, freedom and time to play, explore, investigate and discover.

Making available opportunities to experience the element of risk and challenge, promoting their natural problem solving, enabling children to experience success promotes independence, giving the child a sense of reward, pride and self-worth.

Ephgrave (2020) maintains that children should have access to different environments stating that the outdoor environment is as important as indoor, if not more so. Ephgrave believes that children should have access to the garden all day, that the advantages of the outdoors should be exploited. It is recognised that children talk more outside and there may be more chance for them to be independent and take risks and in doing this they are learning to problem solve, negotiate, cooperate, assess possibilities and dangers thus taking control of their own learning.

The importance of child led play is noted by Piaget maintaining that learning and development takes place in stages. The sensorimotor stage is the first 1000 days. This is when most of the child's understanding, and knowledge is drawn from action and their senses. Children learn through doing things more than through listening. Children have their own way of learning, a natural schema. A child adapts to the environment by modifying their schema. Children who are actively involved in the environment develop through play and exploration, using action and their senses to learn. Discovering through sight, sound, touch, taste and smell (Linden 2012) Piaget emphasised that development was a result of the interaction between the child and the environment, proving that nature and nurture are of equal importance. Similarly, Vygotsky Agrees that every child needs to make sense of the world around them however, insists that there is always a social moment in development. A child develops when other people respond to their words or actions. (Packer 2017) Vygotsky maintains that language is a primary tool, central to cognitive development, children will benefit through adults Scaffolding them through their learning. Practitioners should support children in a task that they can't quite do on their own, changing the level of support to meet the need.

It cannot be denied that the outdoors has a multiple of benefits to the children's holistic development. Forest school is the ultimate example of sensory play, offering children the freedom of discovery in a natural, rich environment. Knight (2016) points out that Forest schools offer the benefits of increased physical awareness and development, risk taking and risk management. Improved resilience, knowledge, imagination and creativity within the woodland environment. Early years settings can adopt the forest school ethos that can suit almost any early years setting.

Loose parts



Loose parts are materials that can be moved carried, designed and redesigned in many ways. It is widely regarded that playing with loose parts increases creativity and imaginative play also promoting social skills and communication. Johnson and Watts (2019) claim the open-ended nature of loose parts makes for diverse, inclusive variable play. Natural sensory rich parts encourage exploration, enabling children to use their senses. Feeling tactile objects, The sound of clicking stones together, Making potions with flowers or making kites with leaves. Transporting heavy or awkward logs may call for teamwork, problem solving and deeper critical thinking skills. The children are playing, having fun and learning.

Curiosity



Babies have a natural curiosity, exploring with their hands, feet and mouths. Treasure baskets are a collection of sensory-rich natural or household items put together to offer limitless open-ended learning and play opportunities, allowing baby to play with no adult involvement. (Gascoyne 2017) As children grow older this idea could be extended into a 'curiosity corner'. The child would have a whole area filled with items to spark curiosity, awe and wonder extending their knowledge and interests through fascinations.

Sensory



A new-borns primary source of information is their sight and hearing, babies purposely seek out faces and sounds of human voices. Pound (2005) confirms that talking and singing to baby helps create connections in their brain. Children's brain development benefits from rich, stimulating experiences. Young babies require regular opportunity for sensory and physical exploration. It is a widely accepted fact that during the first 1000 days children learn most effectively from their senses. Sensory play involves a range of materials providing scope to explore colours, shapes, sounds, textures and so much more.



2 - More about sensory play

Waterplay



According to Gascoyne (2017) All children enjoy playing in water. Water has proven therapeutic benefits, promoting wellbeing. Water play can take place indoors or outdoors. Children can develop their transferring and pouring skills, hand eye coordination and build mathematical understanding whilst exploring water movement. Water play enjoyment can be extended by changing the temperature or colour or by add different resources. Bubbles is an exciting addition to water play, adding to the sensory element of the activity.

The Piklar triangle



[What is a Piklar Triangle?](#) Piklar Triangle is a simple wooden frame designed to encourage gross motor development. Young babies can reach to grip onto the bars, as baby grows the equipment can be used for different activities, promoting a range of developmental benefits. The child may learn to pull on the bars to help them manoeuvre or stand. Children have a natural want to climb and explore, in doing so they will learn about balance and their body's limits. The ramp or slide offers a whole other range of learning opportunities from physically sliding alone or using materials to change friction to sliding or rolling other toys or loose parts up or down. The Children are in control of their own play and learning. The Piklar triangle has a strong link to Montessori, the children teach themselves, at their own pace, depending on their interest and motivation. They are managing and teaching themselves risk levels, making decisions and growing in confidence as their ability, strength and independence improves.

Being inclusive/ Belonging



The sense of belonging promotes happiness and well-being. Nutbrown (1996) states that a respectful practitioner includes all children, valuing and respecting the child's individuality, their language, culture, background, ability and needs.

Additionally Welsh government (2021) maintain that it is the responsibility of the early years practitioners to show genuine care and support to all children. This builds strong, secure relationships, vital in providing the sense of belonging. Consistent, respectful care should be of paramount importance with children's interests, likes and dislikes being responded to appropriately. familiar resources that reflect the culture and community of individuals should be provided, building strong connections with the children's home and community. (Welsh gov 2021)

Zavershneva and Van de Veer explains that (2018) Vygotsky believes that development is a social process. That children learn through relationships and social interaction with family and members of the community, and what is relevant to their own society. Understanding a child's homelife and culture enables caregivers to promote the child's development in a more meaningful, holistic way. Hedegard (2012) confirms this theory explaining further that learning environments should be

changeable and dynamic. As a child changes, grows and develops, the relationship between the child and the environment also changes thus influencing the learning opportunity. For example, when a baby is laid on their back, the view of the world is different to how it would be when laid on their tummy. their view of the world changed therefore the relationship has changed. These experiences should be seen as a relationship between the child and the world.

Notably Bronfenbrenner believed that child development needs to be thought of within the context of the family, in the community, in society in a series of ever widening circles. (Roberts 2010) suggesting that children are influenced by their social circles. Similarly, Bronfenbrenner identifies the extent of the influence. For example, at child care settings children and babies have regular contact with people outside of their immediate family, meaning their social influences expand wider than their immediate family.

New Zealand's early childhood curriculum, Te Whariki uses the analogy of a woven mat, a complete thing of beauty different made from threads of learning and development being entwined together. The focus of the curriculum is on the children as they are now, not preparing them for the next stage. Learning is based on the children's interests, with responsive staff being involved in play asking open ended questions to encourage a deeper learning experience. The children engage with the learning environment, home, family and the nation's beliefs and values. The concept of belonging promotes emotional and social wellbeing. Children learn from engaging in meaningful interactions, recognising and valuing diversity. The outcome is envisioned that children grow healthy in mind, body and spirit, secure in their sense of belonging and in knowledge, making valued contributions to society. Hall et al (2014) explains the emphasis that similarly Reggio Emilia's approach to learning is focused on parental and community involvement which builds a sense of social responsibility towards all children and their families. The approach recognises the importance of working with the whole family as well as the environment, educating the children with rich stimulating physical environments enhancing children's creativity. Reggio Emilia's ethos is about recognising what is meaningful to each child, understanding their natural curiosities and responding to their interests and needs. The emergent curriculum promotes inclusivity with the tailored learning suitable to any culture.

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