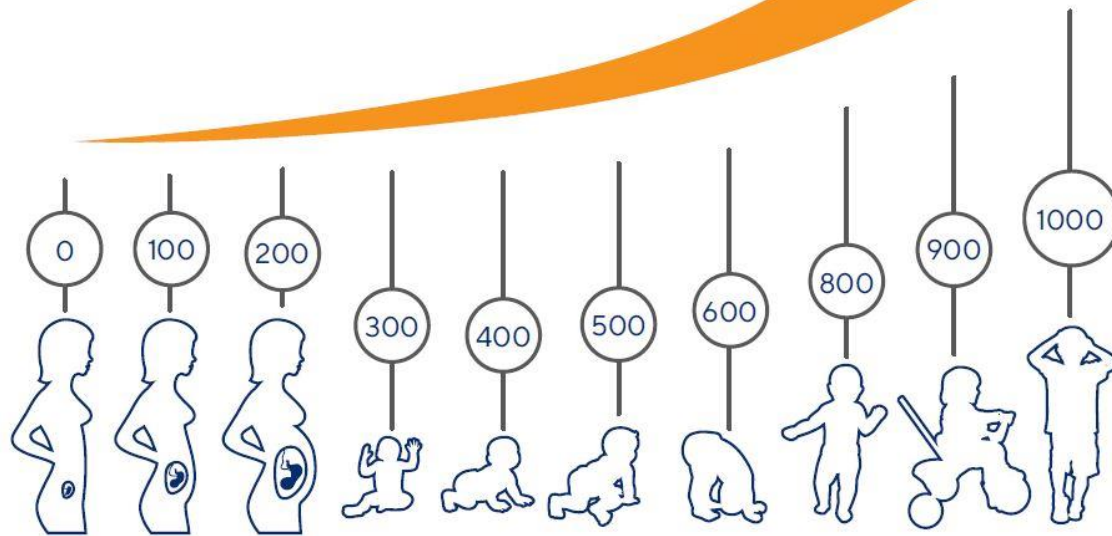


First 1000 Days



(Ausnutria, 2023).

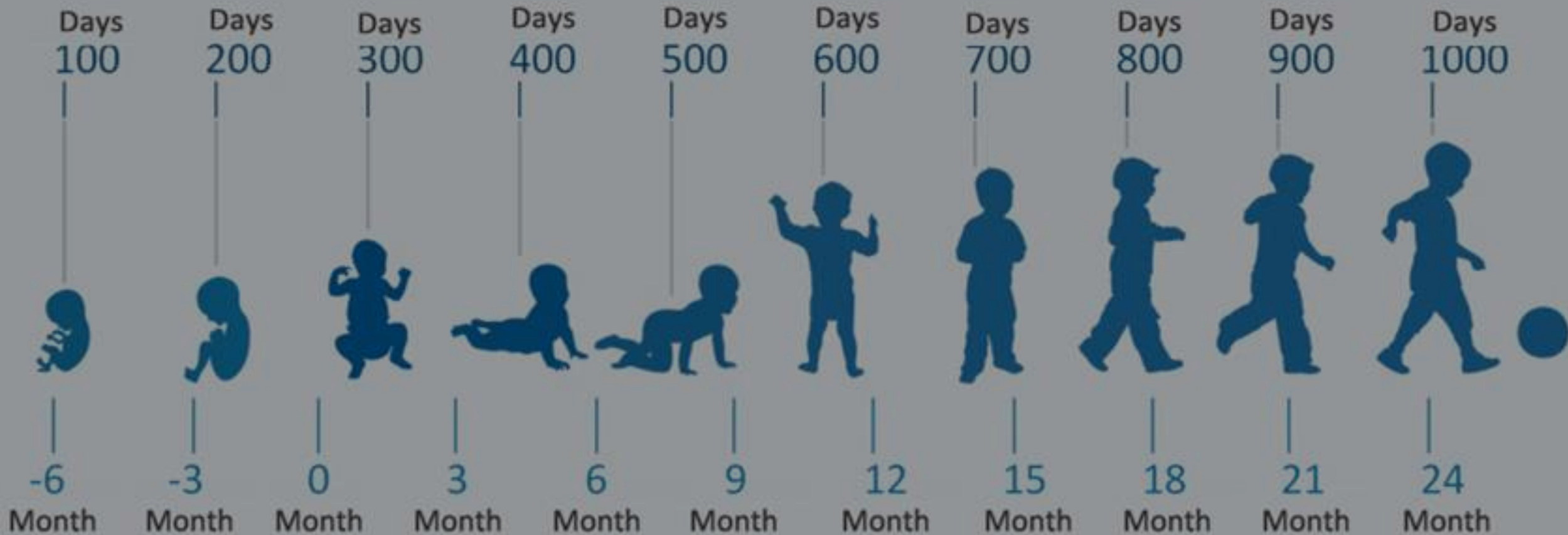
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I confirm I have not used AI during this assignment.

I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes and other resources I have used which I may be asked to provide as evidence.

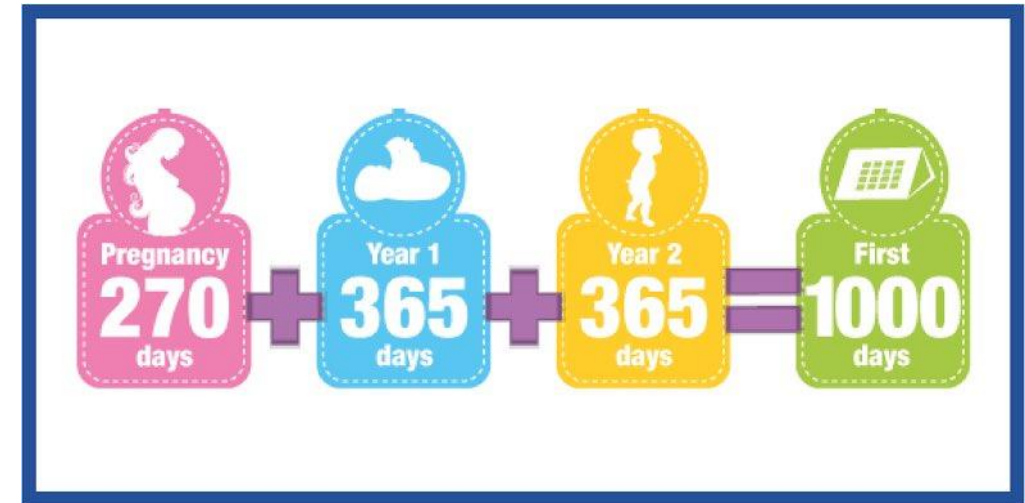
Introduction

(iDSMED, 2019).



What are the first 1000 days?

"The first 1,000 days, from conception to 2 years of age, is a critical window of growth and development" (Karakochuk *et al.*, 2025, p.15). During the first 1,000 days of a child's life, their brain and their body grow at an extremely fast pace which ultimately shapes them into the person they are going to become, by developing their abilities and skills. As their development is happening so quickly during this time, it is very important that child has good nutrition, a safe environment, and positive interactions. This then helps to form their health, behaviour and learning. Some may argue that this time in a child's life is the most important as it plays a strong role in shaping a child's long-term well-being (Maalouf-Manasseh, Oot and Sethuraman, 2016).



(EduNurse, 2022).

Why is it important?

The first 1000 days of a child's life are crucial, as this is when their brain develops the most and they begin forming connections at an extremely fast pace. Experiences like positive care, stimulation and play can impact how the child's brain develops, which helps form their behaviour and learning skills later in life (Cusick and Georgieff, 2016).

The first 1000 days are also crucial for a child's emotional and social development. By having secure attachments and positive interactions with the people around them, it allows the child to regulate their emotions, gain trust and build confidence. This then supports healthy relationships and allows their emotional and social skills to develop (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021).

Nutrition is also another key reason that the first 1000 days are important. This is because the nutrients in a child's body can support their physical growth and help their organs develop properly. It is important that the right amount of protein, iron and essential fats are being consumed by the child to ensure healthy development. Ultimately, poor nutrition during the first 1000 days can lead to a weakened immune system and long-term health problems, which can be difficult to reverse later in life (Martorell, 2017).

As well as nutrition, the first 1000 days are also crucial for building a strong immune system. During this time, it is important that the child has access to good healthcare, vaccinations and a clean environment. This then helps protect the child from any illnesses (Martorell, 2017).



Caregiving

(DanversYMCA, 2025).

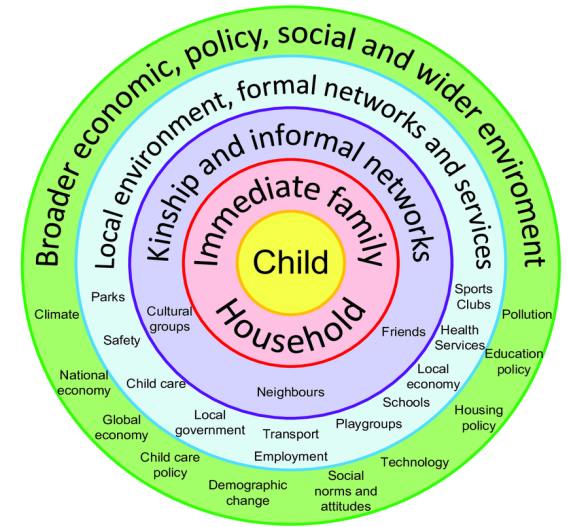
What is exceptional care?



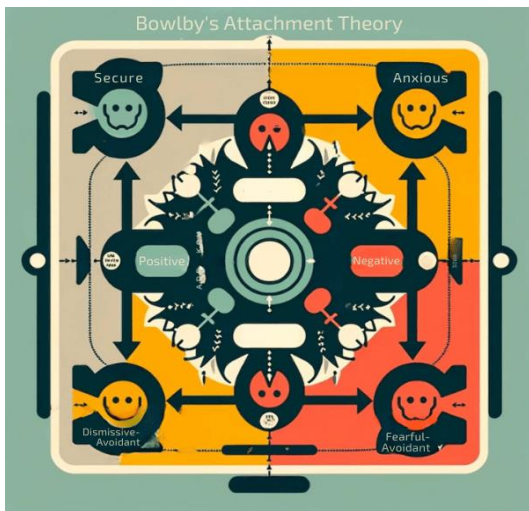
(ExceptionalCare, 2025).

'Exceptional care' refers to a standard of healthcare that goes further than meeting a person's basic needs and goes above and beyond what is normally expected, which always reflects on high-quality practice. Regarding general practice, it can involve ensuring the needs of the children are centred and the care is safe and efficient. In this study, it explains that "'exceptional care' is framed and explicated as the delivery of an outstandingly high quality of care that is perceived as effective, safe, efficient, patient-centered, timely, and equitable to an exceedingly high standard" (O'Malley *et al.*, 2023, p. 1235). This quotation highlights that it is about how the care is delivered to the children and how they experience it. This ensures that all aspects of care are at their highest standard, with the children's needs at the centre of the care provided, which emphasises inclusive practice and enabling environments which ensures the children feel valued and supported (AdminJEC, 2024). To give exceptional care, practitioners must have key characteristics such as reliability and empathy to gain a trusting relationship with the child and to understand their feelings. Patience, to ensure a calming environment and communication and problem-solving, to ensure the needs of the children are prioritised and a high-quality care experience (AdminJEC, 2024).

Bronfenbrenner- "Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory explains that an individual's development is shaped by interconnected environmental systems, from immediate surroundings like family to broader societal structures like culture" (Guy-Evans, 2025, p.1). This can be linked closely with exceptional caregiving as it involves the support a child receives from their parent, carer or any other immediate relationships, which ultimately will shape their overall growth and development. Bronfenbrenner's theory then explains that these early interactions will determine how the child responds, creating either a positive or negative environment, which is vital for the child's early development (Guy-Evans, 2025).



(Scott, 2016).



(Main, 2023).

Bowlby- "John Bowlby's Attachment Theory emphasizes the importance of early emotional bonds between a child and their caregiver" (McLeod, 2025, p.1). This is explaining that the early relationships between a child and their caregiver are vital for the child's emotional development and future relationships. This links with exceptional caregiving, as the close relationships are forming a secure base for the child, which allows them to feel safe and secure. This type of caregiving supports their social and emotional development, which is essential for forming healthy relationships later in life (McLeod, 2025).

The importance of exceptional care.

Exceptional care is very important, as it plays a crucial role in ensuring that children have improved outcomes and experiences and overall, an improved well-being in the setting. By delivering exceptional care children, it allows them to feel valued and supported, which can be extremely important in some cases, as they might feel vulnerable or anxious (O'Malley *et al.*, 2023). This can be especially important regarding children's care, as providing compassionate and inclusive care can have a positive effect on their emotional and physical well-being. It can also promote equality as it allows practitioners to recognise each individual needs, including understanding their developmental stage, abilities, background and circumstances, which is ultimately high-quality care. By focusing on their needs, it can also encourage a strong relationship with families, which promotes trust and always allows for a clear understanding (O'Malley *et al.*, 2023). When building these trusted relationships with families, it is important to have strong communication, empathy and patience, as it allows practitioners to understand any concerns and create a calming environment that supports a positive care experience. Overall, exceptional care encourages reflective practice, which improves the experience for children and their families (O'Malley *et al.*, 2023).

Professional Partnership

(Calix, 2025)



What is the role of a practitioner in the first 1000 days?



(LMPGroup, 2025).

During the first 1000 days of a child's life, an early year's practitioner plays a crucial role in ensuring their growth and development are on the right track, all whilst supporting their well-being (Tumaini Rucker Coker *et al.*, 2024). To support the children in the best way possible, it is important that practitioners work alongside any relevant healthcare workers to provide appropriate care and appropriate resources. This will have a positive impact on the child's nutrition, sleep schedule and developmental milestones. Ultimately the practitioner's role is to build a trusting relationship with both the child and families to ensure the child's physical and emotional development are strong in the first 1000 days (Tumaini Rucker Coker *et al.*, 2024).

Early years practitioners play a key role in supporting the family during the first 1000 days of a child's life. They do this by ensuring the parents have the correct conditions to thrive in their role (Public Health Wales, 2023). The practitioners not only give advice when needed but also ensure that the environments where the families live, work and socialise are secure and safe. Practitioners play a vital role in assessing each individual family's needs and ensuring there is easy access to support, which will help ease the parent's stress levels, support relationships and mental well-being. Early years practitioners' main goal is to strengthen family's confidence and resilience to overall help give the child the best outcomes whilst addressing any needs or concerns that the parents have (Public Health Wales, 2023).

Effective partnership working.

What is effective partnership working?- Effective partnership working refers to building a professional relationship with any relevant healthcare professionals and organisations. During this relationship, both sides must have clear communication and have respect and trust for one another to ensure the best outcome for the child (Baars and Menzies, 2015). In early years, effective partnership also refers to working alongside families, this means practitioners must have clear communication with the parents and listen actively to any concerns or worries they might have. This also means involving them in any information given by the healthcare professionals and in any decision-making about the child's growth and development (Evans, 2004).

Why is it important?- Effective partnership working is essential in early years as children's learning and development are influenced by the relationships and the environment around them (Kambouri *et al.*, 2022). In this article, it is emphasised that a positive partnership between the child's parents and the practitioners means there can be open communication and both sides can trust one another. This then supports consistency with the child's learning, behaviour and well-being (Kambouri *et al.*, 2022). This can also be linked to Bronfenbrenner's theory, which highlights that children develop within interconnected systems. When effective partnership is happening, this strengthens the systems by ensuring there is consistency at home and in the nursery setting. Which helps children feel secure, supports their emotional development and enhances their learning outcomes (Guy-Evans, 2025).

Maternal factors and support strategies.



(Douglas, 2022).

Maternal Factors	Support strategies
Maternal Health- Pan <i>et al.</i> (2025) discovered that maternal health can affect a child's social, emotional and cognitive development. This maternal factor means that interactions with the child become less, leading to attachment and emotional issues for the child. This study highlights the importance of family connections, meaning that early support is crucial for healthy development (Pan <i>et al.</i>, 2025).	This article talks about the support strategies which can reduce the impact of maternal stress. These include identification of maternal stress, followed by access to mental health support like counselling. This study highlights the importance of family during this hard time. This can mean having support systems around which can reduce maternal stress, meaning positive interactions with the child leading to healthy development (Pan <i>et al.</i>, 2025).
Maternal Nutrition- Likhar and Patir (2022) explain that poor maternal nutrition can affect a child's brain development and growth, especially during the first 1,000 days. Poor maternal nutrition associated with iodine, iron and fatty acids can affect a child's motor and cognitive skills and weight. This study discovered that healthy maternal nutrition could lead to an overall healthy development for the child (Likhar and Patir, 2022).	This study also emphasised the support strategies available, which should start before pregnancy and continue throughout. Some strategies include a balanced and appropriate diet to ensure mothers get all the correct nutrients. Likhar and Patir (2022) highlight the importance of antenatal care, which allows for advice and referrals if necessary. There is also access to health programmes which can help support maternal nutrition, reducing the risk for a negative development for the child (Likhar and Patir, 2022).

A child wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and red overalls is crawling on a light-colored floor, surrounded by numerous colorful plastic blocks in red, blue, yellow, green, and black. The child's hands are visible, reaching towards the blocks. The word "Challenges" is overlaid in large white text with a horizontal line underneath it.

Challenges

(Kelly, 2016).

What are the challenges in providing high quality care?



(Tran, 2019).

Funding- Funding plays a crucial role in early years regarding the quality of care. Huston (2015) highlights that appropriate funding can have a huge impact on multiple different factors, such as employing well-qualified staff, providing professional development and maintaining ratios. This article explains that the main cost in early years is the staffing wages, and when there is not enough funding being brought in, it results in nurseries paying staff low wages, high staff turnover and no stability for the children. This then influences the quality of care, which results in poor interactions between practitioners and children. Therefore, efficient funding will support well skilled staff and supportive learning environments, which are linked with positive outcomes for the children (Huston, 2015).

Staff burnout- Burnout and a high demanding workplace can have a significant impact on practitioners delivering high quality care in early years. Stein *et al.* (2022) highlights that practitioners deal with high stress levels and exhaustion due to a demanding workplace, which leads to practitioners not engaging with the children and not being emotionally available for them when needed. It could also mean that practitioners behave negatively around the children, which could lead to them copying that behaviour. Mondri *et al.* (2023) also explains that burnout in the workplace is linked with pressures and management demands, which makes it difficult for practitioners to provide high quality care.

What are the challenges in providing high quality care?



(ChildCareAware, 2026).

Ratios- Child to adult ratios can have a significant impact on how effectively practitioners deliver high quality care, as it can limit their attention with individual children. When ratios are high in early years settings, the practitioner's 1-1 attention and interaction with the children is reduced, which means they cannot support their developmental needs as much as the child might need (Perlam *et al.*, 2017). High ratios also increase safety risks, as practitioners could struggle to supervise the children all at once. Overall, it can reduce the emotional support and learning experiences, making it difficult for practitioners to deliver high quality care in early years settings (Perlam *et al.*, 2017).

Training levels- Training and skills level play a key role in ensuring practitioners can provide high quality care, especially when caring for children with ALN. Siller *et al.* (2021) emphasises that when early years settings have limited access to ongoing professional development, it can be difficult for practitioners to adapt to certain environments and strategies or know how to respond effectively to the behaviour of ALN children. This can also mean that practitioners confidence levels can be reduced from this which doesn't allow them to provide the highest quality care. Therefore, poor training can have an effect on inclusive practice, meaning that the children are not getting the care they deserve (Siller *et al.*, 2016).

Activities

(MyKidReports, 2024).



Activities to support a child during the first 1000 days.



(Clipart, 2016).

Activity	How does it support the child?
Reading- This activity can include a child reading out loud to a practitioner or it could mean them reading quietly to themselves or in their head. It could also mean a child listening to a story whilst a practitioner reads it to them.	A reading activity during the first 1000 days plays a key role in supporting meaningful learning as it can help children develop their language, cognitive and social and emotional skills. Milani <i>et al.</i> (2025) highlighted that when children read at such a young age, it can improve their interactions with others and their language skills which are key to early development. This allows them to make meaning from different sounds, words and emotions (Milani <i>et al.</i>, 2025). Similarly, Klass <i>et al.</i> (2024) emphasised that different reading activities can promote brain development, strengthen relationships and support a child's communication skills (Klass <i>et al.</i>, 2024). Both articles highlight that a reading activity can provide meaningful learning in the first 1000 days.
Loose parts- This activity can include a child using open ended materials to explore in their own way. These materials can be everyday items or recyclables and there is no right way for a child to play with them.	Loose parts play can provide meaningful learning during the first 1000 days, as it supports a child's exploration and problem-solving skills through open ended materials. By using these materials, it allows children to experiment with them, developing their curiosity and learning skills. Loose parts play can also relate to a child's cognitive, social and emotional development, as it encourages creativity (Gibson, Cornell, Gill, 2017). During the first 1000 days when a child's brain is developing, these experiences can help them build strong connections. This shows that loose play becomes a valuable approach when supporting meaningful learning (Cankaya, Martin and Haugen, 2025).

Activities to support a child during the first 1000 days.



(MontessoriParenting, 2018).

Activity	How does it support the child?
Sensory play- This activity can include a tuff tray that explores any of the five senses (touch, smell, sound, sight and taste). It can be any type of activity which lets the children explore these senses.	Sensory play can provide meaningful learning during the first 1000 days, as it supports a child's brain development through experiences. During the first 1000 days, children will begin exploring the world using their senses and by creating sensory activities for them, it can help them make the connections needed for their brain development, which allows them to make sense of the environment in a meaningful way (Arjulayana, 2025). These activities will also stimulate multiple areas in the brain, which develops a child's cognitive, creativity, curiosity, problem-solving and motor skills. Sensory play therefore promotes holistic development (Arjulayana, 2025).
Role play- This activity can include children imitating real life experiences using resources such as dress up, prams, phones or home utensils. Role play can be played independently, with adult support or as part of a group.	Role play can support meaningful learning during the first 1000 days, as it allows children to engage in imaginary situations, which helps develop their curiosity and creativity skills. Fleeer (2024) highlights that any type of imaginary play can help children understand early concepts, which allows them to make sense of their daily routine, which can also support their communication and social development. During a child's role play activity, they can imitate familiar behaviour, such as in their home, which helps them develop their social and cognitive skills. The first 1000 days are key to a child's learning, which is based around social interaction. Role play then supports emotional engagement and encourages joint attention (Fleeer, 2024).

International approaches

Forest school- Forest school is a way of learning through a natural outdoor environment where children can take part in different activities. It focuses on hands on learning through play and exploration and supports children's development by building their confidence and social skills (Sella *et al.*, 2023). Forest school has been known to support a child's early development during the first 1000 days, because learning in an outdoor environment can support children's cognitive, social and emotional development. Different interactions with nature encourages children to explore, developing confidence skills which can promote healthy development (Johnstone *et al.*, 2022).

Reggio Emilia- The Reggio Emilia approach originally came from Italy, which emphasises learning through exploration and views children as strong, capable and curious. This approach allows children to explore their environment, developing their social skills, interaction and developing their relationships and includes, teachers observing the children in these environments and informing their planning based on how the children engaged (Manera, 2022). The Reggio Emilia approach supports children's development during the first 1000 days, as it encourages them to explore, play and develop their relationships, which supports their development. During this time, it can provide children with learning experiences that promote early learning opportunities (Liu and Geist, 2019).

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