



The provision of exceptional care - emerging from the first 1000 days

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Introduction



The aim of this scrapbook is to demonstrate an understanding of exceptional care when responsible for monitoring the quality of health and well-being of babies and young children commencing from the first one thousand days.

Throughout this scrapbook there will be discussions on how to build positive relationships within settings, challenges practitioners may face and suitable, holistic approaches on how to overcome issues supported by evidence from relevant theorists and research.

What is the first 1000 days?



As Cusick and Georgieff (2013) state the first one thousand days span from conception to the age of two and is a period where the initial establishments and foundations are formed to aid the development of health, growth and neurological pathways.

Another article by Cusick and Georgieff (2016) also states how brain structures form during the early stages of a child's life which contributes to the molding of a child's future due to the rapid growth and plasticity of a baby's brain during the last trimester of pregnancy and the first two years of life. The article also highlights the importance of allowing every child the right to receive optimal opportunities and experiences that will influence and support the growth and development of a young child's brain.

"Every child has the right to life. Governments must do all they can to ensure that children survive and develop to their full potential." (The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2019, Article 6)

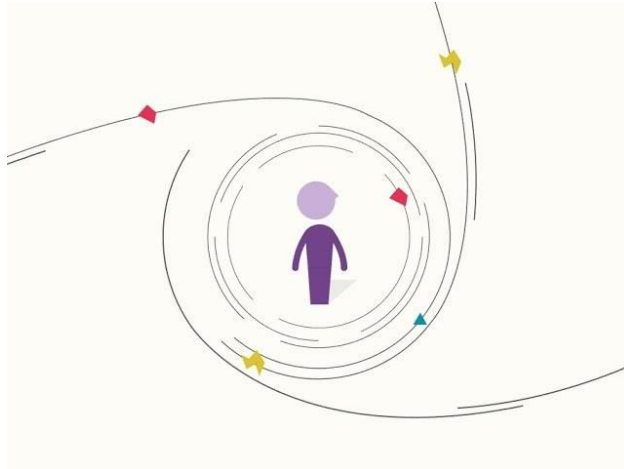
Why are the first one thousand days important?

"A healthy pregnancy sets up the unborn baby for a healthy life. As the baby grows inside the womb, the fetus is susceptible to the environment around the mother; it hears what the mother hears, consumes what the mother consumes and may react when the mother is distressed." (The Department of Health and Social Care 2021, page 14)

The Department of Health and Social Care (2021) document focuses on the basic survival mechanisms that are formed within the womb as well as the importance of parental support that is needed to provide secure attachments and the best quality of life for a baby. It also highlights how potential risk factors such as drug abuse, poor mental health or parental conflict may have damaging effects on a baby's health and development.

"Human babies are born very dependent on their parents. They undergo huge brain development, growth and neuron pruning in the first two years of life. The brain development of infants (as well as their social, emotional and cognitive development) depends on a loving bond or attachment relationship with a primary caregiver, usually a parent." (Winston and Chicot, 2016, pp 12-14)

The 1001 Critical Days (2014) manifesto claims the critical period from conception to age 2 is a window of opportunity for babies to achieve the best start in life. It also highlights the importance of acting early to enhance outcomes for babies and young children during the most vulnerable time of their life. As NSPCC Learning (2021) states early help can be provided at any stage during a child's life and can reduce risk to a child's well-being, along with the need to refer a child-to-child protection service.



1 - (Early Intervention Foundation, 2018)



What is exceptional care?

According to the Statutory Framework for The Early Years Foundation Stage (2021) all early years providers must meet set standards to ensure the correct health and safety of babies and young children is being provided and adhered to. The EYFS (2021) aim is to provide quality and consistency of planning and care to enable practitioners to track children's progress by creating a secure foundation to observe each child's development. The EYFS (2021) also aim to create professional relationships with parents and carers so that children can have the maximum support required to develop and to make every child feel included and valued by their peers and practitioners through the provision of equal opportunities.

"We must try and get inside the child's thinking, so we are able to identify and support the child's motives. This means working out what it is the very young child is paying attention to, asking questions about, trying to express." (Smidt, 2015, page 59)

Smidt (2015) demonstrates the use of holistic approaches to understand and support a child's development by seeing babies and young children as a person and making them feel seen, heard, understood and respected by listening and recognising signals that express how a baby or young child feels in order to accommodate their needs and validate their feelings and emotions.

Healthy Children.org (2021) explain how babies and young children cannot communicate how they feel and so the responsibility lies with the practitioner to recognize the signals through verbal cues and body language. The website states babies will scream, whimper and use desperate body language and agitated movements to express the need for factors such as food, comfort or changing.

An example of exceptional care is highlighted in an article by Ephgrave (2015). The article focuses on the importance of creating a stimulating environment that is equipped to acquire each child's needs to support their level of development. The article also explains how careful and thorough observation of each child is required to acknowledge and understand their interests as it will inevitably support their progression and will allow them the opportunity to create healthy relationships between the child and the practitioner.

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) as summarized by Pichère, and Cadiat (2015) is a pyramid to categorize and identify a human being's needs ranging from the most basic needs such as breathing, eating and sleeping to more fulfilling needs that influence self-improvement. The excerpt explains that for a human being to reach their full potential, the most basic of needs of food, water and shelter must be accommodated to in order to survive and develop. Hopper (2020) explains that Maslow's five categories of needs are: Physiological, love, safety, self – actualization and esteem. Hopper (2020) also states that once basic needs are fulfilled, higher needs in the hierarchy emerge for a person to fulfill.

Why is it important to promote exceptional care?

The Welsh Government (2020) promote a duty of exceptional care through the design of their curriculum with their four purposes to support learners to develop their sense of identity as well as their focus to create:

- “Ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives.
- enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work.
- ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society.” (Welsh Government, 2020, [no pagination])

The Welsh Government (2016) states all practitioners caring for babies and young children have a role to fulfil by ensuring children's rights are being implemented daily to protect children from violence, abuse and neglect.

“Governments must do all they can to ensure that children are protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and bad treatment by their parents or anyone else who looks after them.” (The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2019, Article 19)

Current challenges

Covid-19

Hobbs and Bernard (2021) explain the damaging affects the Covid-19 pandemic has had on Early Childhood Education and Care due to the temporary and permanent closures of nurseries and settings back in 2020. Hobbs and Bernard (2021) Highlight the uncertainty of financial stability the sector now faces due to the reduced demand for Early Childhood Education and Care settings and the rise of inadequate funding provided - as it was already threatened prior to the pandemic. Family and Childcare Trust (2022) state during the pandemic babies and young children missed out on vital cognitive and social opportunities of development such as engaging in the outdoor environment and utilizing motor skills as well as the ability to interact with other children due to the restrictions set in place and the closures of settings. As Mink (2021) states many families lost support systems such as friends, family and health care professionals during the pandemic resulting in added pressure on struggling parents and carers to provide full time care and schooling to babies and young children who required their full engagement. Family and Childcare Trust (2022) show concerns on a widespread delay in children's development due to the lack of education and support provided during the pandemic. An article by Caron et al (2020) claims domestic violence is more frequent when social isolation occurs such as school holidays and natural disasters which in this instance, the Covid-19 pandemic.

Mental Health

"Mental health problems in children under 5 are often under-recognized, under identified, under researched and their parents and carers are, as a result, often under supported." (Nelinger et al. 2021, [no pagination])

According to Nelinger et al (2021) The report also states 1 in 20 per-school-aged children in England displayed signs and symptoms of mental health issues and raised the importance of practitioners recognizing the signs to provide further support. NSPCC Learning (2022) informs of numerous examples on what signs to recognize in young children such as: Self-harm, sleeping problems or sudden mood and behavior changes. The Anna Freud National Center for Children and Families (No date) explain how children are susceptible to absorbing the feelings and emotions of those around them and highlight how important it is to observe and reassure young children in order to promote and influence healthy behaviors.

Routines

Children and Young People's Health Service (No date) explain how babies and young children need routines to feel safe and secure, especially when settling into a new environment. An article by [Imran, Zeshan,](#) and [Pervaiz](#) (2020) state how some children may not be able to stick to set routines and so may require more quality time spent with them through elements such as hugs and cuddling. [Imran, Zeshan,](#) and [Pervaiz](#) (2020) suggest activities such as blowing bubbles, listening to music and singing allow children to receive your full attention and enable them to settle.

Professional partnerships and relationships

“Nurturing emotional relationships are the most primary function needed for both intellectual and social growth.” (Bradbury, 2022, page 5)

Enabling Adults

Kent and Moran (2019) emphasize the importance a practitioner has in managing the communication between a child's system to support their well-being through social pedagogues that implement holistic views of the whole child. GOV.UK (No date) claims creating effective relationships between parents and carers begins with families visiting settings prior to a child starting as it benefits young babies and children by allowing them to settle into a familiar environment. GOV.UK (No date) suggests multiple ways practitioners can communicate with parents and carers such as: Home visits, daily interactions with key persons and providing documentation of a child's progress.

Activity ideas



The Early Knowledge and Childhood Center (2022) suggest when infants and toddlers are part of familiar activities and routines, they develop relationships with the people they interact with and gain a sense of belonging and self-confidence.

North Yorkshire County Council (2017) Suggests incorporating elements of heuristic play with everyday household objects to stimulate the five senses (touch, taste, sound, smell and sight) of a baby or young child through activities such as treasure baskets. North Yorkshire County Council (2017) explain how using a basket with lowered sides allows easy access for a young, seated child. The treasure basket as North Yorkshire County council (2017) explain is then filled with natural elements such as wooden spoons, pine cones, pegs, mirrors and ribbons to allow babies and young children to safely explore their curiosity independently through a variety of objects that range in size, texture and weight to encourage the use of their fine and gross motor skills.

Conkbayir and Pascal (2014) reflect on Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762) beliefs of encouraging children to be leaders of their own learning, enabling them to become critical thinkers and solve problems independently. Conkbayir and Pascal (2014) explain how practitioners can enable opportunities of exploration by allowing babies to crawl, investigate objects, textures and play resources.

According to Public Health England (2016) Another activity that engages babies and young children's attention is reading story books aloud. Public Health England (2016) claim regular talking and reading from birth stimulate speech and language skills and encourage reactions and responses from babies and young children. Conkbayir and Pascal (2014) state how Lev Vygotsky's (1978) book entitled 'Thought and Language' highlights the independence of both functions. However, Vygotsky believed both functions inevitably work together to support a young child's cognitive development through the absorption of the culture they are immersed in. For example, Conkbayir and Pascal (2014) claim nursery settings encourage children's development of language through regular social interactions with practitioners and other children. Repetition of expressive words and sounds spoken with a variety of pitch as Lewis (2019) explains enables babies and young children to accumulate and develop social and emotional skills, build a strong vocabulary through mirroring along with the ability to link words to pictures and objects.



Environments



Early Years Matters (2016) claims enabling environments encourage babies and young children to feel relaxed and confident to explore their surroundings when they feel emotionally safe to do so. As Ouvry and Furtado (2019) claim young children learn about themselves and their environment through movement as it becomes their first language to express and explore their senses.

An example of providing exceptional care in a baby or young child's environment by Early Years Alliance (2021) focuses on a child's needs by highlighting the significance of creating a warm, welcoming environment. The website claims the importance of providing both familiar and unfamiliar age-appropriate resources such as books and toys as it enables babies and young children the independence and ability to access the resources easily, with the guidance and encouragement from practitioners to explore their curiosity. As Nursery Resources (2018) states a practitioner's priority is to create a safe, explorative environment for babies and young children to develop and learn through self-led activities. An example of how to create a safe enabling environment by Childcare (2019) is to keep an organized, clutter free setting with low shelves to encourage safe exploration. The website also suggests how dividing the room into separate learning areas will also help children find activities easily.

Allingham (2022) interpretation of the work of Maria Montessori's (1912) key contributions notes the importance of the physical and emotional environment, both inside and out as it enables children the independence to explore without restrictions. Similarly, Grimmer (2022) highlights how Urie Bronfenbrenner's influence on understanding how children develop and learn is still relevant today as Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) places the child at the center of focus, enabling the

observation of contributing factors from the environment in which a child is influenced by. For example, Grimmer (2022) notes that influential factors such as a child's family, home environment or nursery setting can all have an impact on how a child learns, behaves and develops through life.

"There should be flexibility and variety within the environment, offering risk and challenge, and supporting children to develop confidence, independence and resilience. The environment should be responsive to the range of emotions a young child can experience and should offer time and protected quieter spaces for self-regulation, contemplation and reflection to nurture a child's well-being."
(Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings, 2022, page 14)

Similarly, Nursery Resources (2018) also highlight's the importance of accommodating each child's individual needs and emotions by having elements such as quieter areas in settings for babies or young children with special educational needs to utilize and relax, in case they ever feel too overwhelmed.



Being Inclusive



Nutbrown, Clough and Atherton (2013) describe the importance of having effective pedagogues and curriculum for settings to utilize with an understanding that every child is unique and require different needs that deserve to be heard.

“Babies deserve to be given the opportunity to grow and develop in the security of a community that affords them respect, with practitioners who sees the world through the child’s eyes.” (Nutbrown, Clough and Atherton, 2013, page 99)

Nursery Resources (2019) state it is a practitioner’s responsibility to create an environment that promotes equality and values diversity by having respect for religious differences, ethnicity and beliefs and abilities within the community. An example of exceptional care through an inclusive approach as Nursery Resources (2019) suggests the importance of providing diverse books and entertainment for children in settings to broaden their knowledge of those around them and to prevent any bullying in settings.

Early Years Alliance (No date) state when young children are faced with inequality from an early age, it can have detrimental affects on their confidence, self-esteem and trust with others in the long-term.

In order to create an inclusive environment as stated by Sensory Trust (No date) having elements such as an open space allows children of all abilities to utilize and feel included.

“Inclusion is ultimately about how people treat each other.” (Nutbrown, Clough and Atherton, 2013)



2 - EYFS (2022)

Respectful care and meaningful learning

The Welsh Government Curriculum for Funded Non-Maintained Nursery Settings (2022) suggests how children are more inclined to question and take risks through meaningful, real-life experiences as it enables them to acknowledge the purpose of their learning and how it can support them later on in life to identify problems and to form an understanding of the world around them.

Resources for Early Learning (No date) explain how everyday activities such as story time, feeding and outdoor play allow opportunities for rich, conversational talk and engagement to understand how a baby or young child is feeling which provides security to young children and creates bonds between the practitioner and the child.

Ari (2022) Highlights Emmi Pickler's (1968) approach to early childhood education and the development of a child through important factors such as consistency. Ari (2022) states consistency allows routines to form in reflection of home life which encourages children to take initiative and follow their own capabilities once they feel comfortable to do so.

International Approaches



As the Ministry of Education (No date) Early Childhood Curriculum claim the Te Whariki approach is a bi-cultural curriculum developed for the use of New Zealand's Early Years services. The document also states the curriculum value children as capable learners from birth and learn from engaging in meaningful interactions with people, places and things throughout life.

"Children's capabilities often fluctuate from day to day. Within minutes they can be both dependent and independent, influenced by temperament, health, the environment or people's expectations. A curriculum for the early years must be flexible enough to accommodate these fluctuations, providing familiar experiences alongside new opportunities for exploration and challenge." (Ministry of Education, No date, page 13)

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