

# ECEY 4005

The First 1000 days

I have not used any A.I. in this module.

## **The first 1000 days**

The first 1000 days begins with conception and ends when the child turns two years old. This is an important time for the child's development. This includes the physical growth, brain development and emotional wellbeing (Karakochuk et al, 2018). During this period there are several things that can affect the risk of adverse health issues developing. These include dietary/ nutrition, environmental factors, hormonal and stress changes. By putting interventions in place during this time can have a massive impact on outcomes (Karakochuk et al, 2018).

A child's future can be defined by the first 1000 days as this has a big impact on their development. It is vital that we get it right with this one chance (Unicef, no date). The first 1000 days can have a lasting effect on a child's future. This period can affect the child's brain development, their health, happiness and wellbeing. It can shape their ability to learn and progress in education (Unicef, no date). During this early period a baby's brain can form one million new connections every second. This is the only period that this fast pace happens. Unicef have created a campaign called 'Early moments matter' this helps raise awareness on the importance of food, nutrition, love, care and stimulation has on the brain development.

Nutrition is an important factor during the first 1000 days to help a child's neuro development and lifelong mental health (Georgieff & Schwarzenberg, 2018). Some health risks later in life can be linked to poor nutrition within the first 1000 days of a baby's life. These can include diabetes and obesity. A lack of key nutrients within this time can have an impact on the brain development, it can lead to lifelong deficiency in the brain function (Georgieff & Schwarzenberg, 2018). Pediatricians should refer pregnant and breastfeeding women to the relevant services for nutrition support (Georgieff & Schwarzenberg, 2018).

The first 1000 days programme is a health improvement programme which is lead by public health Wales. This was created to help ensure that the children in Wales have the best possible start in life. It was also written after research showed the evidence to back up the importance the first 1000 days can have on the baby's future health and wellbeing. It has the biggest impact to improve outcomes. It looks at how this period lays down the foundations for happiness and health in later years. This looks at the importance of the brain development and how early experiences can shape the child's development for life (Public Health Wales, no date).

During pregnancy and if breastfeeding the mother's nutrition is important. She needs to be consuming the correct amount of nutrients to be able to provide the nutritional value that the baby needs (Likhar & Patil, 2022). The child's health can be affected if the mother has a poor diet. There is a strong link between nutrition, well-being and learning. The child needs the correct amount of nutrients to ensure healthy development. A child's development and ability to learn and thrive is affected by a mother's diet and how well the child is cared for during the first 1000 days (Likhar & Patil, 2022).



Sources: From Powerpoint stock images.

### Caregiving.

Circumstances that happen from as early as being in the womb can have a lifelong affect on a child's development, well-being and future learning. Once a baby has fallen behind in development it can increase the likelihood of them falling further behind and not able to catch up. With an intervention of specialist support it can be possible to rebuild a child's brain properly and set them back onto the path to a healthy development, this is just a very challenging intense time (House of Commons, 2018). According to the Department of Health and Social care mothers who are healthy at the start of conception seem to have healthier babies. A child's health and development can be influenced by genetics and gender however the child's family, home environment and community all play a part in a child's health, development and future chances (House of Commons, 2018). This publication also looks at the affect the parents have on a child's health and development during these first couple of years. The parent's physical health to include if the parent smokes, drinks alcohol or is a substance misuser, their mental health, their personal relationships and their own childhood experiences can all have a massive impact on the child. If the parent has experienced adverse childhood experiences this can affect how the parent interacts with the child and the relationship they build with them. It is important that a child builds a secure attachment with their parent. Having an insecure attachment is linked to negative outcomes through childhood and into later life (House of Commons, 2018).



Source:Nierenberg (2015)

Exceptional care is to give the best possible care that we can to the babies and children. To give exceptional care, you should have respect for all children including babies (Nurture Babies, 2019). This will help them feel valued, appreciated and that they are important. We can do this during personal care routines, when feeding and changing them give them your full attention, talk them through what you are doing to help them to relax and not worry. Slow things down so that it gives them time to process what you have said and gives them time to respond (Nurture Babies, 2019).

During the first 1000 days it is a critical time for the child to develop their physical and communication skills. To enable the child to develop they need the encouragement and support from their caregiver. If there are any concerns with development, then the caregiver needs to seek advice from a professional as early as possible. By recognising any development signs and getting support as early as possible is what a supportive caregiver will do (H M Government, 2021).

To help support healthy brain development the baby needs a secure environment and a nurturing relationship with their caregiver. The relationship that they have with their caregiver affects these areas of development, Emotional wellbeing and mental health, speech, language, concentration and attention (NSPCC, 2021).



Source: First things first (2018)

Caregivers must provide a safe, secure and loving environment to help support healthy brain development. They need to have the correct nutrition and quality interactions from parents or caregivers. Those children who do not receive this exceptional care are likely to have issues with well being and mental health as they grow older (nurturing-care, 2018). The early years in a child's life are the ones where the environment around them can have the biggest impact. This time lays down the foundations for learning, development, health and wellbeing so any environmental factors can have a lasting affect on the child's overall development. Children who have been raised in a negative environment are more likely to end up with a lower paid job than those who receive exceptional care from a parent or caregiver (Nurturing-care, 2018).

## Caregiving

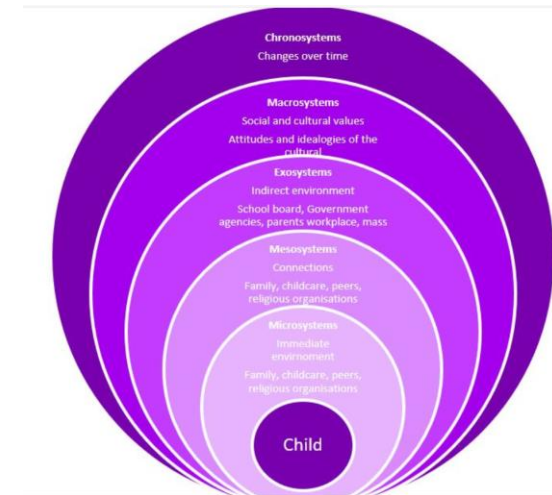
Birth to five matters talks about the importance of the practitioner's role to children's development and wellbeing. This states that they should be caring individuals who feel love, concern and responsibility for the children in their care (Birth to 5 matters, no date). They should be nurturing and engaging. Should show the children respect and work in their best interests. Practitioners should realise that giving good quality care is just as important as providing play and learning opportunities. Physical care routines are a perfect time to help build secure, trusting relationships which help the baby/ child feel safe to explore and play. These times are also perfect learning opportunities for one-to-one interactions (Birth to five matters, no date).

A child needs an enabling, safe, secure environment that provides rich and meaningful interactions. The children need to be spoken to and communicated with. Reading them stories, singing nursery rhymes and engaging with them help with their language, communication and social development (Public health Wales, 2023).

Bronfenbrenner was a theorist who recognised that everything in a child's environment has an impact on their development. He created the Ecological system theory. He labelled five different levels of the surrounding environment that affects development (The Education People, 2021). Bronfenbrenner's theory has influenced the EYFS to recognise and value the importance of relationships and the environment. They concentrate on positive relationships and enabling environments. The development matters (2020) document lists enabling environments as a one of the key features.



Source: Raising children.net



Source: The education people, (2021)

## Caregiving

Please click on this link to watch a short you tube video on Bowlby's attachment theory <https://youtu.be/5EeA8Jm9f6c> . Bowlby looks at the importance of having a secure attachment with your caregiver and the lasting impact it can have on your development if this does not occur. He states that with a secure attachment a child will develop and grow into a confident and resilient adult. Having a secure attachment with your caregiver helps with social and emotional development enabling the child to build meaningful relationships in the future. The secure attachment helps the child feel safe, secure and builds trust. It gives the child the confidence to explore new things (MR. Brain,2023).

The change in EYFS statutory framework that each child must be assigned a keyworker. Show the government realised what an important impact building a good strong secure relationship can have on a child's development. This also allows the parents/ carers to build a trusting relationship with this keyworker. They know who to approach if they have any concerns or need any extra support with their child (Department of Education, 2024).



Source: Parekh (2022)



Source: Olive & Pip (2025)



Source: Hopscotch nursery

### **Professional partnership.**

The role of the practitioner and setting is to encourage healthy eating (Brodie,2018). This can be achieved by ensuring that practitioners have the knowledge and understanding of how nutrition affects development and what nutrition is age appropriate. Settings need to provide a range of healthy snacks and meals. These foods and drinks need to meet the national food and drink guidelines. They should share this knowledge with parents to try and educate them on the importance of good nutrition (Brodie, 2018).



Source: Reed 2025

The role of an early year's practitioner is to help support the child within their setting. This is done by becoming an enabling adult. Children learn through play and when this is supported by an adult it can make the experience more intense (Whalley, 2021). Professionals must provide engaging environments for the children to learn within and this must be adapted to cater for all the children's needs. The practitioner should provide high quality interactions with the children by praising the child, commenting on what the child is doing and giving the child their full attention. They should make observations on the children and if necessary, make any referrals to other relevant health care professionals (Whalley,2021). The role of the practitioner is to model, prompt and help the child during play activities. Help encourage the child's language skills by communicating with them and modelling language. Encourage and support the child to explore to enhance learning (Whalley,2021).



Source: Community playthings (2011)

Professional partnerships.

Early years practitioners need to build meaningful relationships with not only the children but also their families. They need to be able to respect the families and any cultural differences that they may have. They need to ensure that they respect and value all parents (Education Scotland, 2020). They should be good positive role models for children and families, non-judgemental to the families. This will encourage the parents to ask for any help or support that they may require during these important times in the child's development. Early years practitioners should listen to the parents this shows them that they are respected and important (Education Scotland, 2020). This can be achieved by providing a warm and welcoming environment. Provide parenting classes and stay and play sessions. Create good home to setting links from the beginning. Provide settling in sessions from the start with the parents present at first and then with the child on their own. This is to reassure not only the child but also the parent so they can see that the setting is a good secure and safe place to leave their child (Education Scotland, 2020).

Effective partnership working is when other professionals come together to share information and knowledge to work out the best way to support the individual children (Open University. 2024). This could be other practitioners working together from the same setting or it may include exterior agencies like speech and language or health visitor. This is important because it will ensure that the support the families are given is individualized for each child, which is found in the children's Act 2006 (Crown database, 2011).



Source: Gov.uk (2014)



Source: I Stock (2025)

### Maternal Factors.

Maternal factors that can impact development can include the parent's health before and during conception (Parliament Uk, 2019). Parents who are healthy before and during conception are more likely to conceive healthy babies. To give babies the best start in life early interventions should be put in place. These can include getting health advice and support from a nurse, doctor or midwife.

If a parent witnessed or experienced any childhood adverse experiences to include abuse and trauma then the child is more likely to be subjected to the same (Parliament UK, 2019). By ensuring that the parent has specialist interventions from professionals qualified in this field can help reduce this cycle from continuing.

If a parent is living in poverty unable to consume the correct nutritional foods, then this can affect a baby's development (Parliament Uk, 2019). By accessing services like the food banks and getting the healthy eat vouchers from the midwife can help the mother to be to get the right nutrition and eliminate the effects on the child.

If a mother has a history of alcohol, substance misuse or mental health then this can cause problems with the child's health and development. For example, if a women drinks alcohol whilst pregnant the child can develop a lifelong condition called fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, this can cause physical and cognitive problems for the baby (NHS,2023).



Source: Prevent child abuse (2024)



Source: The digital college (2025)

## Challenges

Some challenges that are faced as childcare practitioners to provide high quality care include low wages, this industry is known to be low paid this can cause a lack of staff as some move out of this industry to higher paid jobs (Gov.Uk, 2024). With less staff you can feel under more pressure and stress. A lack of professional development can affect the care as if workers are not kept up to date with the latest training, then may not be able to provide the correct help and support (Gov.Uk, 2024). Safeguarding issues can cause workforce challenges which can affect the quality of care given, for example if your place of work does not complete the induction period for new employees then important pieces of information could be missed. This could include allergens and any additional needs a child may have (Gov.uk, 2024). Poor management that does not support their staff can cause challenges as it can mean that the setting has a high turnover of new employees, this can affect relationship building with the children and parents (Gov.uk 2024). Staff burnout is a challenge that can affect the quality of care given, burnout is when you are physically, emotionally and mentally exhausted (Aspire training, 2024). This can be due to the stress faced in day-to-day work, the high demand for emotional support with the children and the amount of challenging behaviour that we now see in settings (Aspire training, 2024). Trying to balance all of this and live their own lives can have a massive impact on staff and their mental wellbeing.



Source: Pease (2025)



Source: Hill (2023)

## Activities

According to the Welsh government (2024) it is not just important that children have enabling adults they also need effective environments and engaging experiences. These experiences will help with the child's holistic development.

There are many different activities that practitioners can set up to help support a child in their development within the first 1000 days. For example, a sensory activity could be messy play. Some benefits of this type of play include helping develop cognitive skills, uses their five senses and encourages exploring (NHS, 2024). An example of messy play could be a tuff tray filled with dried rice and scoops for the children to explore and play with as this would support their fine motor skills and hand eye co-ordination. Children learn through using their senses, by touching, smelling and looking helps them to explore different materials and products (Stead, 2024). Different sensory activities would give the children the chance to use all of their senses therefore supporting them in these areas.

Another example of an activity that can support children's development in the first 1000 days includes reading books and singing nursery rhymes or songs with young children individually or within a group. This type of activity will help with their language development and communication skills and will help to build an attachment with the adult (NHS, 2023). This is also good for the child's emotional wellbeing as they will have a strong trusting relationship with the adult and make them more comfortable within the setting (NHS, 2023). Children learn from adults and spending good quality time with the child helps most areas of development.



Source: Stead (2024)



## Loose parts

Another way to support children's development within the first 1000 days could include providing them with loose parts. Loose parts are different materials and objects that children can explore and play with. These objects and materials can include log slices, pinecones, lids, wooden rings and pegs (Play Scotland, 2019). children can play with and explore the different loose parts, and they can use their imagination and creativity by saying an object is something its not usually. For example, a child could have a log slice and be pretending that it is a burger. Play Wales (2023) claim that allowing children the opportunity to construct their own play is essential in their development. Benefits of children playing with loose parts include promoting children's creativity and giving them the opportunity to explore (Play Wales, 2023). They also claim that loose parts provide an always changing play space for children which is something they need in order to stay engaged and develop further (Play Wales, 2023).



Source: Amazon

## Montessori approach

The Montessori approach is a teaching approach that is very child centred. This approach involves child led activities which allows the children to choose what they want to play with and gives them opportunities to explore and make their own decisions on their play (Meinke, 2019). This would allow the children to build their confidence and independence as they are in charge of their own play. Also, it encourages and normalises children developing at their own speed as it understands not all children are at the same level (Meinke, 2019).

## Welsh curriculum

Similarly to the Montessori approach, the Welsh curriculum also focuses on the importance of a child centred approach (Welsh Government, 2022). This approach also focuses on child led activities being essential to everyday practice. This is done through observations that practitioners carry out on the children to assess their interests and dislikes (Welsh Government, 2022). They use the information they gathered through the observations to prepare personalised activities and experiences based on their interests (Welsh Government, 2022). A benefit of this approach is that it provides engaging and meaningful activities for the child.

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