

# The first 1000 days

The first 1000 days refers to the time from conception up to the age of 2. These days set the foundation for the child's development in particular their cognitive, emotional and physical development. It can be said that although this is a crucial time for development it is also a time of vulnerability. During these days of life, it is important that the foundations are set for a babies health, growth and neurodevelopment. Policy makers describe the first 1000 days as 'the golden opportunity' to influence child outcome.

Significant developments happen during the first 1,000 days and the child's brain, body and immune system grow rapidly. Babies will need many things in order to support this but in particular they will need, healthy food, loving and caring relationships, safety and security, play and a healthy environment.

During these first 1000 days the foundations are also set for the child's future success in school and later life, this is because the child's emotional health, physical wellbeing, social skills, and cognitive and linguistic capacities are developed during this time.

Dr Harley Rotbart explains that through many years researching child development 8 essential requirements have been created in order for children to become happy, successful adults. These 8 requirements are the following: Security, Stability, Consistency, Emotional support, Love, Education, Positive role models and Structure. In addition to this, Dr Rotbart argues that one of the best things you can give to your baby/child is your time and describes times as a 'miracle solution'. In her opinion through giving your time you are giving the opportunity to provide all the essential needs and more for you child.



## Needs of the mother/baby during pregnancy.



Research into pregnant mothers has shown that their own health, nutrition and stress levels can have an effect on the baby's future. During pregnancy a healthy and nutritious diet can support the development of the baby's learning, physical skills and emotions.

It is essential that a child receives good nutrition in the womb for its future health. According to research the mother's eating habits, weight and lifestyle can influence the baby's metabolism, immune system and development of organs. If the child receives poor nutrition during pregnancy it can lead to obesity, heart disease or a stroke later on in life.

During pregnancy omega 3 fatty acids seem to have a positive effect and Hennebelle et al 2012 explain that is because it reduces the impact of stress and anxiety on the foetus. During pregnancy it is important that the mother is as healthy as possible, as this will make it easier for their body to handle labour and recovery quicker and more effectively after birth. Pregnant women should avoid smoking, alcohol to ensure the child has the best opportunities and health at the beginning of its life.

The foetus is susceptible to the environment around the mother during pregnancy, meaning that it can hear what the mother hears, consumes what the mother consumes, and when the mother is distressed, the baby may react.



*1 - For the baby to have the best possible start in life, eating a healthy diet whilst pregnant and breastfeeding for at least 6 months if possible is important. Furthermore, once the baby is old enough to move onto solid foods, they should be encouraged to develop healthy eating habits for life. In the first 3 months of pregnancy what a mother eats has the biggest impact on the foetus, in order to develop well a foetus will need various ingredients, vitamins and minerals.*

Additionally, other things such as hunger, increased stress levels of being exposed to abuse can have a lifelong effect on the development of a child. Research has shown that if under a lot of stress while pregnant, the baby's nervous system and growth can be affected and health problems such as heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity or diabetes can develop later in life. Oberlander et al, 2008 explain that at the last stages of pregnancy when a mother is stressed, the baby's own stress response can become more reactive.

A mother or pregnant woman who is experiencing domestic violence may not be able to form a loving attachment with their baby. This is worrying as loving, secure relationships are vital for a child's development. Relationships are so important to a child as it is how they learn to think, understand, communicate, show emotion and behave. A positive or negative relationship will influence how a child sees the world and how they fit into society. Steele et al 1996 say that the results of studies show that the mothers attachment status during pregnancy could predict the attachment style of the baby.

Studies have also shown that a baby of a mother who experienced depression during pregnancy may have future tendencies to depression themselves. Pawlby et al 2009, suggest that once their babies become teenagers the risk of depression is much higher, in fact it can be up to 4x higher of developing depression compared to others. Additionally, a mother's state of mind is likely to get passed on to her baby.

During pregnancy the foetus is susceptible to the environment around the mother, meaning that it can hear what the mother hears, consumes what the mother consumes, and when the mother is distressed, the baby may react. Moreover, when a pregnant mother that is under a lot of stress the foetus can be affected in particular its nutritional systems. High levels of stress in a mother as her serotonin system may be affected the ability to make serotonin available to the foetus through the placenta can also be affected.

Sandman and Davis 2012 suggest that a baby is more likely to find it difficult to deal with stress, changes or take longer to get over the stress when the mother has high levels of anxiety or depression.

## Importance of mental wellbeing for a child.



A woman who are under stress may unintentionally pass their stress on to their child. Babies are more likely to be irritable and crying regularly if they exposed to their mother's stress hormone. Parental stress can also affect the brain through reducing the volume of the hippocampus.

Not only is the mother's physical wellbeing of importance but also their mental wellbeing. Mental health can impact how a parent bonds with their baby which is why not only is it important for the baby's needs to be met but the parents too in order for them to meets the child's needs.

**Gerhardt, 2014 says that 'the mother's quality of life is shared by her foetus, but this is not just her physical state. The foetus also shares in her state of mind'.**

## Enabling adults



An enabling adult is a person who ensures that a baby reaching their full potential through ensuring they grow into a health, well-developed child and adult. After a baby is born, their physical environment, nutrition and relationships can have a lifelong impact on their health and wellbeing. Emde, 1988 says that one of the most crucial things for a baby is how emotionally available and present the parents/caregiver is to them.

During the first 1,000 days a child's communication and physical skills will be continually developing and it is seen as a critical period for these skills. Parents should be encouraging and support the child to learn these skills and monitor their progress/development over this period.



*2 - After a baby is born parents can help a baby feel secure through giving them lots of love and attention. This can be done through playing, singing, reading and communicating/talking to them*

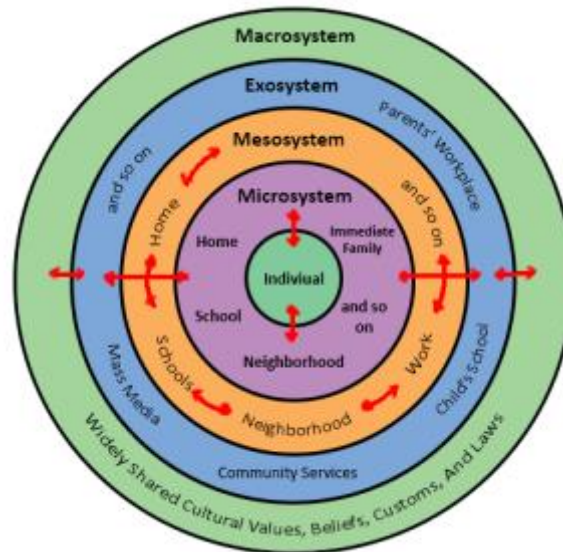
Research has shown that babies need parents who are responsive and adapt to their needs. It is important that parents take note of a baby's constantly changing states and tune into them. Emotional security can be developed in a baby when parents provide enough attention and sensitivity to their babies. When a child is upset early regulation is critical and involves responding to the baby's feelings in a non-verbal way. This is usually done through someone's face, tone of voice or touch. As a baby has the capability to feel many emotions, they will rely on an adult to help manage states of discomfort and distress, through showing comfort and contentment, and although they rely on others gradually, they are making sense of the world around them by themselves.

## Attachments/Relationships



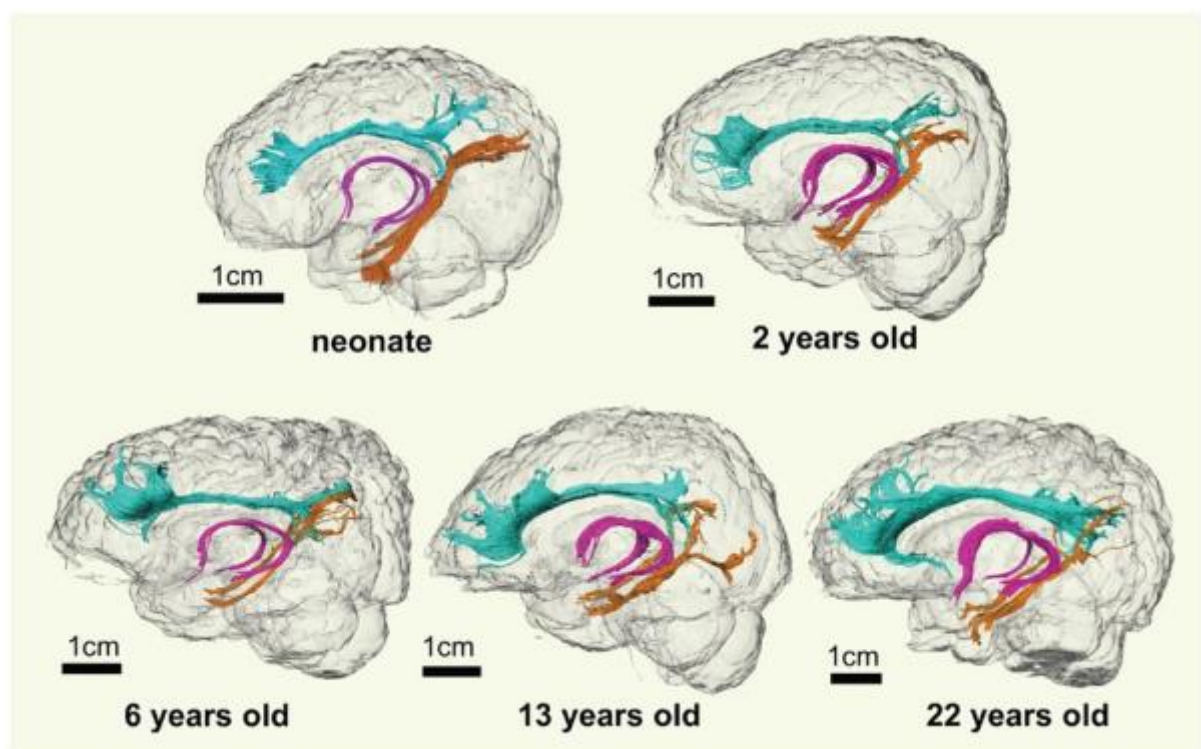
Researchers aim to understand how babies and toddlers look at the world and their relationships. Babies are extremely susceptible to their environment from conception to 2 years old, they are completely reliant on their caregivers, and the attachment they have to them can influence later development. Buss et al, 2012 explains that positive bonding and secure attachment during a baby's first year is so important that it can even cause a small hippocampus that has been affected by stress to restore back to normal volume.

In order for a child to feel safe and secure they need a stable and committed relationship with an adult, therefore forming a secure attachment with their primary caregiver. Forming these relationships supports early development through building emotional scaffolding. Changes in relationships can happen because of a changing environment and a baby's development. This can be seen when new relationships are formed between the baby and people in its close circle or microsystem when a mother goes back to work after maternity leave.



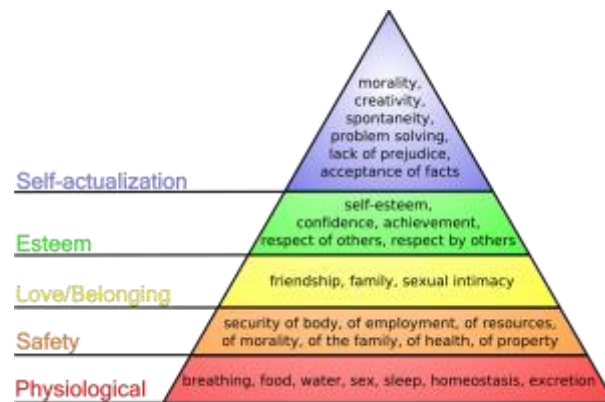
3 - Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory helps us to understand attachments and relationship. Within this theory the child's environment is split into 5 systems: the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem. According to Bronfenbrenner the people in the child's microsystem will have the most influence over them and their development, this will include family members and teachers or friends. This theory leads out into the chronosystem that is involved with environmental changes that occur over the life course.

## Neurological development



During the first 1000 days a baby's brain will develop more rapidly than at any other time of life. This development will contribute to the sort of individual the baby will grow into, and the brain will mould and adapt to its environment. Physical health can be affected by brain development, as the brain is linked to the rest of the body, and therefore an unsafe or unhealthy environment during this

time of life will have a knock-on effect later in life. The last few weeks of pregnancy have a particularly strong effect on the baby's rapidly growing brain, as neurons connect and start to establish pathways. One could say that the 3 main factors that influence early brain development are, reduction of stress, strong social support, secure attachment and nutrition.



4 - The importance of neurological development is emphasised through Maslow's hierarchy of needs that was published in 1943. The hierarchy consists of 5 needs, that include, self-actualisation, esteem, love/belonging, safety and psychological. Maslow placed these in a specific order with psychological needs being at the bottom and self-actualisation being at the top, explaining that one to be realised for the next to happen. According to this theory, after the child has reached each stage, they will reach their fullest potential as a human being.

## Physical development



The Physical Literacy Association, 2017 describes physical literacy as when an individual has the “motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life”. Additionally, Raley and Hagerman, 2008 state that exercise is “the single most powerful tool to optimise brain function” and that “for the brain to function at peak performance, our bodies need to work hard”.

Recently, there has been a concern of lack of physical activity in children and adults and how this has negative effects on physical and mental health, therefore leading to having a lower quality of life. Hoeger and Hoeger, 1993 say that “movement and physical activity are basic functions for which the human organism was created’. From conception to 2 years old physical competence develops at an extremely quick rate, during this time a baby will go from barely moving to becoming independent and exploring physically in a space of a few months.

It can be said that an ‘enabling environment’ consists of physical development being nurtured. A child’s development should also be supported as they explore and investigate the world physically and affectively. According to Goddard-Blythe, 2005, movement will play a part in shaping a child’s personality, feelings and achievements. They believe that learning can be built on the integrity of the relationship between our brain and body. Furthermore, it is known that very young children learn through their sensory and physical experiences.

## Enabling environment / experiences



Gopnik, Meltzoff and Kuhl, 1997 and Brierley, 1994, argue that babies need novelty and stimulation in their environments, also Bruner, 1960 and his theory of cognitive growth agree by saying that a child’s development is influenced by environmental and experiential factors.

Research into joint play in Dutch childcare centres, has shown that for a toddler to achieve emotional security the educator’s skills to manage the group in play is of major importance. In addition to this toddler’s need time and space to be actively involved in their play. Under United Nations regulations play is recognised as a right that every child has according to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 1989. There are many potential benefits of play for young children according to Baines and Blatchford 2011, Fromberg and Bergan 2006 and Moyles 2015 and as a result it is included in early years frameworks across many countries.

According to the National Playing Fields Association play should be ‘freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child.

## Crawling and walking



5 - In today's society there is a higher importance and value put on sensory-rich play for young people of all ages. One form of this is treasure baskets. Treasure baskets can be a way to develop and encourage literacy, numeracy and sorting skills whilst also learning about the properties of different materials. It is a form of sensory experience that can help children understand the world and how it works. A treasure basket is made from ordinary objects and encourages children to explore, problem solve, create and discover.



6 - Frequent and regular opportunities to explore and learn in an outdoor environment can be seen as essential. The Early Years Foundation Stage Curriculum also puts emphasis on outdoor experiences for the benefit of a child's learning and development. The benefits of this are endless, but one benefit is that it offers opportunities for physical activity, freedom, movement and a sense of wellbeing, furthermore it gives children contact with the natural world. Secondly the outdoors can help children to develop the skills needed to assess risk and manage new situations through allowing them to experiment, discover and develop physical capabilities. A third benefit is that it supports and promotes problem-solving skills, creativity, imagination and resourcefulness. Outdoors learning allows children to learn and understand about nature and how humans, animals, plants and lifecycles depend on one another.

Dr Emmi Pikler is a theorist that was concerned with young children's physical and psychic health. She stressed the importance of giving respectful care and allowing the child's self-initiated activity. One of the first things the Pikler approach is concerned with is doing things with the child and not to the child, meaning that the child's cooperation is crucial during care activities. Additionally, the child is invited to take part in things and are encouraged to give consent. Secondly Pikler suggests that activities should be conducted in a calm, gentle way without any distractions. Practitioners should be fully engaged with the child and give full attention. This is concerned with creating trust, and is done through one to one times spent with a child during feeding, bathing, dressing etc.

Lastly, Vygotsky, 1987, put forward that the development of a child is more of a social process, rather than an individual one. It can be said that the social situation in early years settings help to promote learning and development. In addition to this, research has found that children feel a sense of importance when they are included in collective activities.

## Barriers to a young child receiving exceptional care



Over 200 million children in developing countries do need meet their developmental potential factors such as poverty, disease, violence and malnutrition can lead to poor health and a loss of neurodevelopment potential. Moreover, research has shown a link between poverty in infancy and bad health and wellbeing outcomes later in life. The reason for this can be as a result of parents experiencing financial hardship not being able to provide the level of care their baby needs.

Secondly, the coronavirus pandemic has caused increase stress on caregiver relationships and there has been impacts on parents and babies, themselves. Research has found that the ones that have been most affected by this are Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, alongside those already at risk of poorer outcomes.

COVID- 19 has affected the services provided to parents and babies, especially during times of lockdown there was an effect on the care and support received and accessing information. Surveys also found that there was a huge difference in parents' opinion, some described feeling abandoned and let down, whereby others thrived and felt that services stepped up and offered more than before.

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