



Exceptional Care in the first 1000 days



1 - Why is the first 1000 days crucial for development?



First 1,000 days (2010) suggests during the first 1,000 days, a child's brain begins developing, growing and building foundations that will remain with them through adolescence. Nutrition, environments and relationships all play a crucial part within the first 1,000 days in shaping a child's future outcomes. Strengthening this further, House of commons (2019) states the window of the first 1,000 days from the time of conception to age 2 of a child's life is a critical period, a period of time with increased vulnerability, where the base of all areas of development and health are laid.

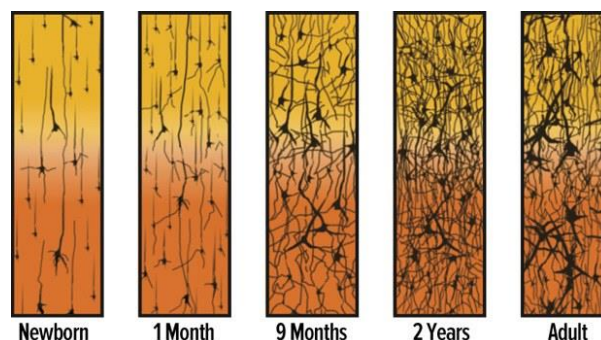


2 - Factors that shape the developing brain

From the time of conception through the age of two years old, is considered as a crucial time where factors can influence a child's outcomes. With three factors specifically thought to have profound effects on the early brain development of a child, these factors are reduction of toxic stress, the formation of a secure attachment, social relationships and ensuring the supply of the correct nutrients (Cusick and Georgieff, 2016). Karakochuk et al (2017) agrees and states the first 1000 days is a critical stage for growth and development, with poor dietary requirements and nutrients having adverse health outcomes, of which can be irreversible. Elaborating further Prado and Dewey (2014) suggest that for adequate brain development, nutrition is extremely important during not just infancy but pregnancy also. With the foundation for the development of several areas such as cognitive, fine and gross motor and social and emotional skills throughout the child's life. Implying further Prado and Dewey (2014) state although nutrition is important throughout life, it is vital within the first 1000 days, both the neural plate and neural tube are affected by nutrients, cell division begins with the neural tube. When the correct nutrients are accessed this supports the creation of neurons, which lead to synapses being formed, these synapses are strengthened by actions such as love and affection.

Lloyd (2019) suggests during many recent studies, scientists have concluded that the nutrients babies receive during breastfeeding offer several significant benefits to their health and brain development. Recent research taken place in the National hospital for children in Washington supports recent studies, providing evidence that through breastfeeding, babies receive a higher level of biochemicals that are vital for brain development and cognitive skills. The recent reform within the Curriculum, fully emphasizes the importance of children being supported to become healthy, confident individuals. This is highlighted amongst the four purposes, ensuring all children take part in physical activity and gain an insight to the importance their diet and exercise has on their mental and physical health throughout their daily lives (Welsh Government, 2022).

<https://hwb.gov.wales/api/storage/b1801d78-38c3-4320-9818-d9996c21aef8/220914-a-curriculum-for-funded-non-maintained-nursery-settings.pdf>



3 - Factors that influence brain development

Gilmore, Knickmeyer and Gao (2018) state that during the period from birth until the age of two years old, the brain develops at a rapid pace and plays a crucial part in several areas of development including cognitive development. Factors such as genetics and environment play vital parts in the development of the brain.

Further influences are also deemed as crucial to the development of the brain. Fox, Levitt and Nelson (2010) suggest that events that take place early on in an individual's life, have a strong influence in not just the brain development but also the behavioural development. Although genetics lay the solid foundations of brain development, it is early experiences and environmental factors that affect and change the structures and operations of the developing brain. Later

experiences also play an important role in maintaining the wiring of the brain from the early stages of life.

The Urban child institute (2006) states as shown in the image above during the time of birth a baby's brain has the amount of neurons it will ever have, further stating at the age of between two and three the brain has double the amount of synapses as an adult brain. Gilmore, Knickmeyer and Gao (2018) state that during the period from birth until the age of two years old, the brain develops at a rapid pace and plays a crucial part in several areas of development including cognitive development. Factors such as genetics and environment play vital parts in the developing brain of a child.

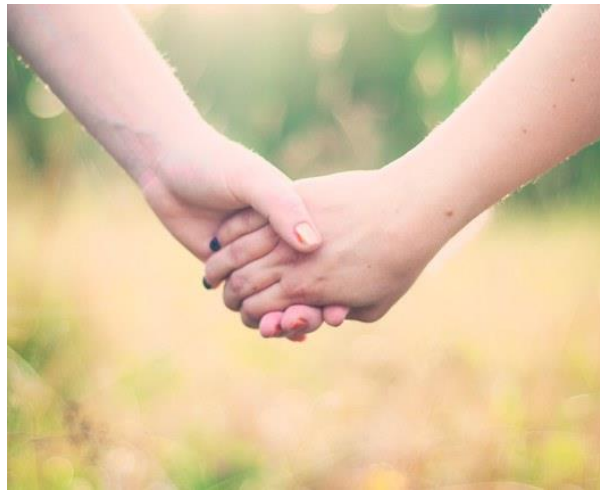
Bronfenbrenner's theory focuses on the significant impact environmental factors have on the early development of the brain. Evans (2020) suggests through Bronfenbrenner's ecological system that all areas are interconnected. The five systems including the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and the chronosystem are all entwined which argues that environmental influences such as personal characteristics, school experiences, family environment, the area in which we live and friends and family all play a key part in the development of the brain. Therefore the influence one system has is highly dependent on its relationship with the others. Further influences are also deemed as crucial to the development of the brain. Fox, Levitt and Nelson (2010) suggest that events that take place early on in an individual's life, have a strong influence in not just the brain development but also the behavioral development. Although genetics lay the solid foundations of brain development, it is early experiences and environmental factors that affect and change the structures and operations of the developing brain. Later experiences also play an important role in maintaining the wiring of the brain from the early stages of life. Concurring with the information presented above Harvard University (2007) believes the experiences in early life play a vital part in the architecture, with the outcomes on the brain being either a sturdy or fragile foundation for all of the learning to take place. More than a million neural connections are formed every second in the first 1000 days of a child's life, when this has happened, the process of pruning begins. During this time the brain eliminates any extra synapses, these being the weaker additions, this depends on how often it is used and is often referred to as the use it or lose it process.



4 - Stimulation and Exploration for babies



At the earliest stages of life play is a crucial part in supporting the development of their social, problem solving, language and intellectual skills. Play and movement is seen as an important part of the early years for babies and is explained as one of the most vital factors that shape the way in which babies view the world around them. Through interactions such as story time, singing, tummy time and spending intimate time with your baby talking to them provides an highly stimulating environment supporting their development of crucial skills. As the baby matures, how we stimulate them changes (NHS, 2016). Serve and return interactions shared between caregiver and baby are vital in the shaping of brain architecture, when adults are responsive to the individual needs of the baby and respond, they are providing an environment that is rich in nurture, love and serve and return. Emmi Pikler founder of the Pikler approach proposed that babies should be respected and deserve the caregivers full attention at all times emphasizing this further during times of intimate care. Further stating baby's should be free to move at a pace that suits them, through exploration of movements with resources such as the Pikler triangle babies develop their gross motor skills with baby's choosing to put their selves in the positions desired (The Education Hub, 2020).



5 - Importance of early experiences



6 - (Source: Freepik, no date)



7 - (Source: parenting desk, 2019)

Freud's theory in a child's development proposed that the developing personality of a child was greatly influenced by five psychosexual stages. During the earliest stages of development Freud stated that the stage of oral exploration takes place with babies taking pleasure from placing many items in their mouths (Mcleod, S 2019). Although some similarities can be seen between Freud's and Erikson's theory on the development of a child, Erikson places emphasis on the importance of the responsive caretaker in a babies early years and argues the early experiences babies encounter both socially and in their environment are highly important to their development (Monroe College, no date). Harvard University (2007) believes the earliest experiences can have lifelong effects on children. Negative experiences may occur in the form of neglect, abuse and many other experiences that are traumatic, having detrimental effects on the child's development. Intervention at the earliest stages can be significantly more effective than intervention taking place later on in childhood. Through the earliest interactions with adults, the environment and other children, babies begin to make an understanding of the world around them. Within the early years of a child's life, promoting exploration is crucial in the development of vital life long skills. As a baby starts maturing through the first crucial 1000 days, exploration is crucial. Gov.uk (2016) suggests responsive adults should support curiosity and exploration through activities such as singing and storytime reflecting their interests whilst offering a communication rich environment where the baby can flourish and reach their full potential. United Nations Children's Fund (1953) shares similar views stating in order for children to flourish, responsive adults, a communication rich environment, a secure attachment, a sense of security and belonging and continuous learning opportunities are vital. As cited by The national society for the prevention of cruelty to children (2021) Bowlby's theory has been one of the most influential theories within the early years. Expressing disagreement with earlier behavioral theorists such as John.B.Watson, Bowlby stated that secure attachments are crucial in the early years, the attachment created between caregivers and babies has a significant impact on their emotional development and their future ability to form secure bonds and trust with others.



8 - The role of the adult



9 - (Source: Thomas, 2022)

Rose, J (2012) views the practitioner as a rainbow. not a scenic view made up of seven intertwining colours but an individual with seven crucial roles that are interconnecting all with the child at the center. These roles are the facilitator, the observer, the assessor, the creator, the critical reflector, the carer and the communicator. Professional Association for Children and Early Years, (2019) believe that practitioners should provide learning opportunities that promote curiosity, awe and wonder through environments that promote play and exploration with responsive adults scaffolding

each child's learning based on their individual needs and stage of development with all children's holistic development being supported. Adults should provide meaningful opportunities for both child led and adult led play. The Welsh Government, (2022) defines the role of the adult in the early years as integral to a child's development. Enabling adults have a duty to provide an inclusive, joyful, safe, nurturing and communication rich environment where the children in their care feel a strong sense of belonging, and are fully supported to become independent and confident individuals. As cited by Ali, Pugh and Knaus, (2019). Bowlby (1969) developed a theory that has been highly influential worldwide within the early years. Proposing babies are born with the desire to form secure attachments with primary caregivers around them, the attachments formed plays a significant factor in the development of the child and also the brain development. Bowlby emphasized the importance of adults providing a safe, secure and nurturing environment where babies form a sense of security and belonging. Sharing similar Erik Erikson's theory states the first stage of his psychosocial development is trust vs mistrust. As babies are dependent upon their caregivers, the way in which they choose to respond to the baby has a significant impact on their health. Through responsive adults who are in tune with the baby's individual needs, trust is formed not just in the caregiver but in the world around them. Equally if the needs of the baby are not met or met inadequately this forms a fear of the world around them and a distrust towards their caregiver (Scheck, S 2014). In agreement Mary Ainsworth's theory of attachment shares very similar thoughts to both Bowlby's and Erikson's theories. Ainsworth claimed that the attachment formed is highly dependent on the mother or caregiver's behavior and how their needs are met focusing on how responsive the adult is, further stating children need to form an attachment and dependence with their primary caregivers before trusting others, if this attachment is not formed affects to a child's emotional and social well being can be detrimental (Mcleod, S, 2018). Contending this Harris suggests that nurture within the early years is not a crucial factor in the developing child and further states that children's peers around them play more of a vital factor in the shaping of the child rather than the responsive adults. Elaborating further Harris believes children are socialized by their peers and that parents and caregivers have very little input to a child's evolving character or personality (Harris, J. 1998). Recent findings by Page, J (2017) states that within the early years sector the term professional love is widely disputed. Whilst it is evident professional love between practitioners and children has several positive benefits for long term emotional well-being of the children. Professional love plays a large factor in the secure bond and attachment formed between practitioner and child, offering them a sense of security, love and belonging, whilst supporting their emotional needs. Although for many practitioners they deem this as a barrier to the care provided, with studies showing practitioners shared their views on recent child abuse cases within settings, prompting them to not display a level of professional love to children. The studies findings were clear and yet we are still left to question, if children within settings are not being shown professional love, are the emotional needs of the child being neglected?



10 - (Source: Thomas, 2022)



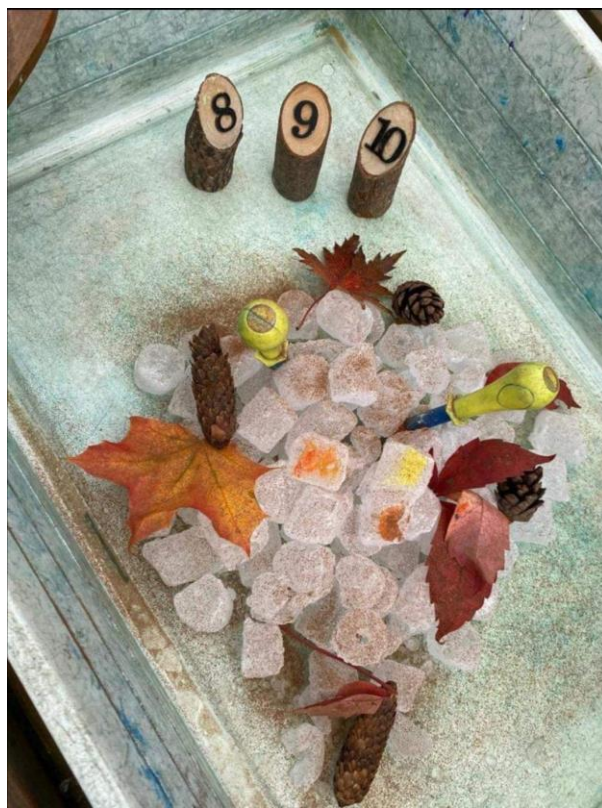
11 - (Source: Thomas, 2022)



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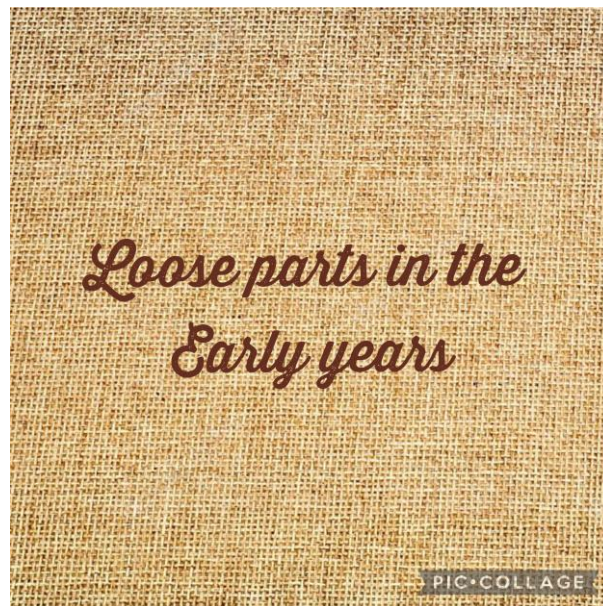
Welsh Government (2022) highlights the importance in the environment enabling adults provide for the children in their care, stating the experiences offered for exploration both indoors and outdoors play a fundamental part in the child's development. Environments should be communication rich, supporting not only a child's physical needs but also their emotional needs, as well as being fully inclusive. Opportunities allowing curiosity, awe, and wonder should be provided that are accessible daily. An environment that supports all areas of development of a child that intertwines together. It is essential that children have frequent access to opportunities to critically think, problem solve, and use their physical and creative skills. In addition to this Pound (2006) states influential theorist Malaguzzi viewed all children as independent and powerful learners and believed the environment

acts as a third teacher, playing a crucial role in ensuring learning opportunities are meaningful. Following Malaguzzi's approach to education, the Reggio Emilia approach was founded, an approach that is now recognized widely for offering children enabling environments, where they lead their own learning and are viewed as collaborators who learn about the world around them through interactions with others. Birth to 5 matters (2021) emphasize that each day, every opportunity provided for children should be an occasion for development and holistic learning to take place. Enabling adults should not focus on individual areas of development of the child, but recognize through encounters of environments that are stimulating and adults who are responsive we keep the whole child in mind meeting their individual needs holistically. Te Whariki is the early years curriculum in New Zealand built on a foundation that empowers each child to learn and grow through delivery of a holistic approach to each individual. In comparison to several other curriculum's Te Whariki recognizes the importance of the child as a whole and the importance of the environments to enable holistic opportunities of learning to take place as well as placing strong values on the importance of relationships within the family and community. Through the deliverance of Te Whariki children are not assessed against expected milestones and states adults should be in tune with what the child is trying to achieve and its possibilities with the child at the heart of the process. Te Whariki further affirm both learning and development are woven together, and display their four principles being woven with exploration, belonging, communication, well being and contribution throughout the curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996).

<https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Early-Childhood/ELS-Te-Whariki-Early-Childhood-Curriculum-ENG-Web.pdf>



<https://sway.office.com/PZ2BjLvlygdQNhn8#content=yM8iBl2X8z8Nhl>



The concept of loose parts originated from the theory of architect Simon Nicholson in the 1970's. Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (2013) highlights the importance and benefits of loose parts play within the early years and the development of the child. Loose parts are items and resources that promote curiosity, discovery and invention, enabling young children to independently experiment, problem solve and discover. Throughout the process of exploration of loose parts Simon Nicholson's theory stated that they were able to meet the needs of all children regardless of age and development and further supports the holistic development of each individual. With no specific way of playing with such items children are able to lead their own play following their imagination. In agreement Play Wales (2017) states loose parts play supports every child's holistic development, with natural environments specifically offering higher opportunities of endless possibilities for play, creativity and imagination. Several benefits of offering loose parts in the daily environment include increased levels of imagination and creativity, both fine and gross motor development, the development of mathematical concepts as well as personal, social and emotional development.



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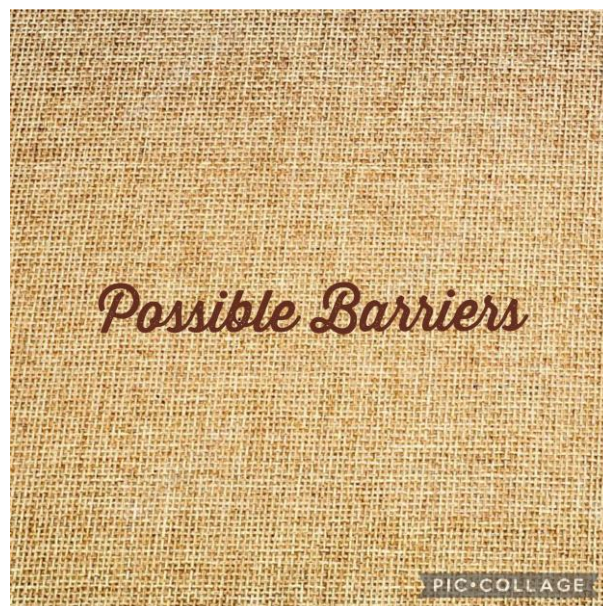
23 - (Source: Thomas, 2022)



24 - Effective parent partnership working

In order for young children to have the best possible start to life, involvement of parents and carers in their child's learning has been identified as crucial. GOV.UK (2011) state practitioners working in

the early years must make every effort to overcome any potential barriers that may be faced in order to create an effective partnership with parents and carers. Such barriers may include one's own experiences, language, different cultures or possible learning difficulties. By creating a positive bond with the parents and carers at the setting this supports the building of trust in the practitioner to meet the individual needs and wants of their child. Sharing similar views Birth to 5 matters (2021) suggests effective partnership working with parents and carers make a crucial difference in the outcomes of the children. Being the children's first educators, parents and carers are by far the most important people in a child's life, by creating a respectful, trusting relationship ensures that the holistic development of the child is fully supported. Murphy et al (2021) believes practitioners are seen as individuals who hold trusted information regarding children's development, therefore it is crucial this is shared between effective communication. Fitzgerald (2004) agrees that through positive partnership between parents and practitioners an holistic view is seen by all benefiting the development children, with unique knowledge being shared and implemented between those most important to the child, leading to smoother transitions and also creating a shared understanding that both home and setting positively contribute towards the child's development. Providing feedback to parents and carers about their child's day whilst away from them is highly important and times such as handovers support the involvement of parents by sharing information about the child's likes, dislikes, feeding and important moments from the day are communicated to the parent or carer, allowing parents to feel involved. Through recent studies by Researching effective pedagogy in the early years Blatchford et al, (2002) states the findings suggested that learning and teaching were deemed as most effective with positive partnership working with parents and carers where home learning took place.



Gov.uk (2022) states that during the COVID-19 pandemic, many settings and education placements faced several barriers preventing them from offering the usual level of opportunities for children within their care. Routine inspections that have taken place have highlighted many negative impacts the pandemic has had on the children. Among early years settings, practitioners are seeing a large increase in the delay of speech and language skills, with practitioners being urged to access continuous professional development in order to meet the needs of each child, supporting them in any areas that are displaying delays. United Kingdom Parliament (2021) suggests that staffing has been a barrier faced by many settings, current concerns have been expressed by Parliament whether this could affect the quality of care some children could receive. Another barrier seen by many

settings during the pandemic is the breakdown of strong partnerships with parents, carers and the local community, with a high percentage of staff within the early years stating they feel pressure and stress within their role during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is evident both children's and staff's emotional well-being and mental health have been affected.



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