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# The First 1000 Days

Conception



Days: 1

Pregnancy



Days: 270

Baby's  
1st year



Days: 635

Baby's  
2nd year



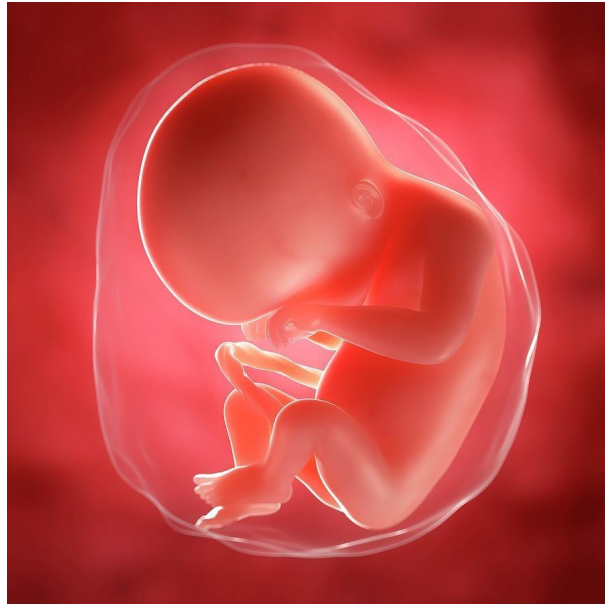
Days: 1000



1 - Timeline of the first 1000 days, from conception through pregnancy, up to a child's second birthday



2 - A foetus at 10 weeks. Sciencephoto.com



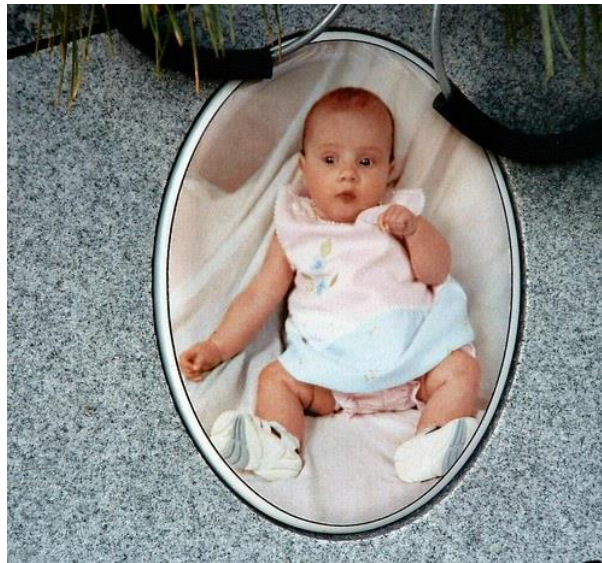
3 - A fetus at 20 weeks [pixels.com](https://www.pixels.com)



4 - A fetus at 30 weeks [sciencephoto.com](https://www.sciencephoto.com)



5 - A foetus at 40 weeks [gymbuddynow.com](http://gymbuddynow.com)



6 - A baby at 6 months



7 - A baby at 1 years old



8 - A 2 year old child

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**What are the first 1,000 days?** The term 'first 1,000 days' is the period from conception through to when a child reaches the age of two. This stage represents a crucial period of development and growth where secure attachments with caregivers are established and they engage with their surroundings. The first 1,000 days of a child's life are a critical period where their bodies grow the fastest and neuroplasticity, where the brain is most adaptable is at the peak. During this time it is crucial that women, infants and young children receive adequate nutrition as this can prevent serious lasting harm, such as lifelong health problems which halt children reaching their full developmental potential. (Karakochuk et al, 2018)

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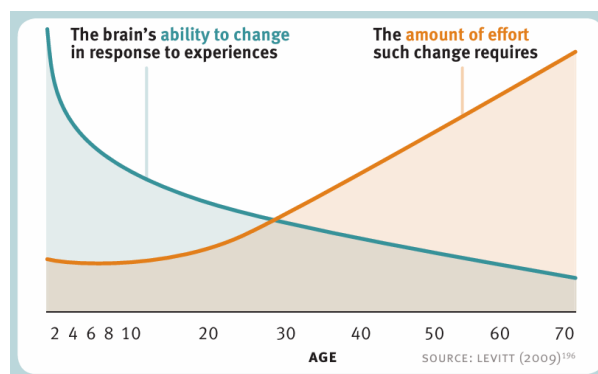
## The First 1000 Days

A Public Health Approach to Supporting Parents

### 9 - A public health approach to supporting parents

**Why is it important?** A baby's brain and body develop rapidly during pregnancy and the early years of life. This period is crucial, as it lays the groundwork for their future. A positive start influences how children view themselves, relate to others, and grow emotionally and socially. It provides a strong base for lifelong development and even shapes how they will care for their own children one day.

To thrive, all babies need love, care, and consistent attention from the people closest to them. Proper nutrition, play, conversation, and responsive interactions help strengthen their brains and bodies. (PHW, ND) 'Scientists have discovered that the experiences children have early in life and the environments in which they have them, not only shape their developing brain architecture, but also affect how genes are turned on and off and even whether some are expressed at all'. (Harvard University, 2016) These findings highlight just how powerful early childhood experiences are in shaping lifelong development. They show that a child's environment, such as the care they receive and the relationships they form does not only influence learning and behavior, but actually affects how the brain is built at a biological level.



10 - Taken from Harvard University report, *From Best Practices to Breakthrough Impacts*, the graph shows how the brain's plasticity is highest during the early years of a child's life.

## Caregiving



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### ***What is exceptional caregiving?***

*The research by Harvard university (2016), which was highlighted above, emphasises the importance of providing nurturing, stable, and stimulating environments in early life. Positive experiences, such as exceptional caregiving can strengthen brain connections. High quality childcare delivered by staff who are well-trained, secure in their positions and appropriately rewarded, produces better outcomes for our youngest children. A skilled and knowledgeable early years and childcare workforce provides the strong foundation that children need in the first five years to support their development throughout their educational journey. (NDNA 2019)*

*Settings should be organised and accessible to all. It should be inclusive which enables children to build a strong sense of belonging where they feel safe and valued. The Welsh governments curriculum for non maintained nursery settings (2024) identifies that for children to have holistic and meaningful learning, the following key principles are vital.*

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### **Skilful, observant and interested enabling adults**

Enabling adults model enthusiasm for learning and help to nurture children's innate curiosity and take advantage of spontaneous teaching opportunities that arise during play and interaction. Practitioners should be consistent and respect children by encouraging and supporting their decisions and choices they make whilst in their care. We should also help them navigate uncertainty and change with sensitivity, guiding them to handle transitions and adjustments in their daily routines. Sensitivity and arrangements should be made when helping children to manage changes, whether small, such as changes to their daily routine or big which could be moving up to a new room in the setting, a bereavement in the family or leaving the setting completely.



### **Authentic and engaging experiences**

Early learning provision should be practical, purposeful, and grounded in real-world experiences, promoting independence, resilience, and sustained engagement while enabling children to achieve meaningful progress with appropriate risk taking. They should help to promote children's communication skills, physical development, cognitive development and to help them to manage risk and their decision making whilst engaging in rich learning experiences.



### **Exciting, effective environments**

The environment, both inside and outside should be welcoming and offer varied experiences that support all areas of development while enabling children to pursue their interests safely both independently and collaboratively. They should foster a sense of curiosity and wonder and inspire children to explore and problem solve. The environment should be adaptable and diverse, providing appropriate levels of risk and challenge that promote confidence, independence, and resilience. It should be sensitive to the wide range of emotions young children experience, offering sufficient time and designated calm areas for self-regulation, reflection, and emotional well-being.





11 - Linking closely to the key principles are five developmental pathways that are fundamental and support overall progress and development. They have equal value, are dependent on each other and they focus on what the child believes to be important. Following the five developmental pathways will provide support for children to develop at their own pace.

*'Progress across the five developmental pathways is shaped by the quality of our interactions, as well as the learning experiences and environments we provide. A holistic approach to teaching and learning ensures that children are given meaningful opportunities to develop skills both within and across these interconnected areas'. (Gov.Wales, 2022)*

## Professional Partnerships

**What is the role of an early years practitioner in supporting children and families in the first 1000 days?** The role of an early years practitioner in supporting children and families during the first 1,000 days is crucial, as this period lays the foundation for lifelong development. Scientists have discovered that the experiences children have early in life and the environments in which they have them, not only shape their developing brain architecture, but also affect how genes are turned on and off and even whether some are expressed at all. (Harvard University,

## Pregnancy and Labour: Day 1- 270



*12 - Early years practitioners can offer a range of support during pregnancy. Antenatal care will begin and specialist services such as midwives, can provide guidance on healthy eating, exercise and health tests such as blood and urine tests and screening for disorders that your child may be at risk of developing. You will also be given ultrasound scans which will monitor your babies growth. Practitioners can signpost you to antenatal classes, parenting workshops and help to support any mental health challenges you may be experiencing through the community mental health or perinatal mental health teams. During labour your midwife will monitor and support you throughout the whole experience to ensure your baby arrives safely. (NHS Wales, ND)*

## Baby's First Year: Day 271- 635



The aim of the health visiting teams are for children and their families to lead healthy lives, both physically and emotionally and promote the health of the whole community. (Aneurin Bevan university Health Board, ND) Early years practitioners such as Health Visitors will help and support you at this next stage by guiding you to how to look after your baby through bonding and feeding and helping you understand your babies behaviour, resulting in parents becoming confident and capable thus providing babies with a strong foundation to develop. The Health Visitor will support and advise parents/carers about key public health messages which improve family well being and also support parents/carers to become resilient to the challenges of parenting. (Gov.wales, 2024)

## Baby's Second Year: Day 637- 1000



The role of the professional practitioner during this time period is to support you and your child as their physical development moves to crawling and walking and their speech develops. They will steer you to services that will help support your child's development if they are not hitting their developmental milestones and provide you with information how to help your child. Soon your child will be reaching their second birthday, so your professional practitioner will provide you with information regarding childcare such as Flying Start, where you will be able to access funded high quality childcare.

### Partnership working

"Partnership working provides opportunities for needs to be met collectively as well as individually so that the needs of whole families can be addressed in a unified way.

Partnership working is embodied in the notion of children, parents, families and communities having access to a wide range of support and developmental services". (Gasper, M. 2010) Partnership working is extremely important and Birth to five matters (ND) states 'partnerships with parents can be truly effective only when parents and practitioners work together to enable children to create meaningful connections to their wider world and to foster a love of learning.' Partnerships with parents are particularly important, as they ensure that interventions are appropriate, and sustainable. The Victoria Climbié enquiry identified many failings within the system of partnership working. Specific concerns of Lord Laming were referral and communication between different agencies. (HMICFRS, 2003) The most important result from the findings are that practitioners should collaborate with families, healthcare professionals, social services, and other intervention services to ensure a consistent and coordinated approach. Sharing information, resources, and expertise allows practitioners to safeguard children and address developmental and health concerns promptly and effectively.

What are the challenges in providing high quality care?

| Factor             | Impact                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Staff retention    | Staff retention is poor, and staff are leaving the sector to get better paid employment elsewhere with less responsibility and less demanding working conditions. (Early years Wales, 2025). The issue of a high staff turnover results in the reduction of skilled and experienced professionals providing high quality care. It limits the opportunity for practitioners to develop key relationships with the children in their care and without the continuity of care with a key worker, children's needs will not be met, and developmental issues may be missed. As a result, staff may find it more difficult to accurately assess what children already know and can do, as well as identifying their next steps in learning. A lack of familiarity with the children can also negatively impact the quality of practitioner and child interactions, which are essential for effective learning and development (Gov.uk, 2024)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Parents            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 'Childhood trauma is linked with how comfortable people feel in hospitals and clinics. (Theconversation.com, 2024). Some parents may find the task of accessing help from professionals quite daunting due to previous negative experiences and interactions, such as ACEs. 'Childhood trauma is linked with how comfortable people feel in hospitals and clinics. (Theconversation.com, 2024). Public Health Wales states child mistreatment is linked to increased distrust, and evidence suggests that those exposed to multiple ACEs are more likely to view public services as unsupportive and to distrust medical professionals.</li><li>• Financial struggles may prevent parents accessing appointments due to transport costs and a lack of money may inhibit parents providing their children with healthy nutritional meals. Parents living in cities with no outdoor provisions are unable to take their children to play in healthy outdoor environments if they have little money.</li><li>• Fear of judgement when asking for help. Parents may feel that if they ask for help, it is a sign of weakness, and they are unable to take care of and provide for their children and family and thinking that they will put themselves on the radar of social services (Lauren Elizabeth Lines et al, 2025).</li></ul> |
| Funding            | According to a petition submitted to the Senedd ( Senedd Cymru, 2025) funding rates for flying start providers do not cover the true cost of providing quality childcare and childcare providers cannot charge parents the actual cost of childcare when the scheme funding falls short of the actual cost. This is resulting in many providers running at a loss which in time will force them to close, which will ultimately lead to scarcer childcare places and longer waiting lists as there will be less flying start places for the children.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Access to services | Flying start is a geographical targeted programme, which is only accessible to children that have been identified as living in areas of poverty, leaving the service only available to children living in identified post codes. Many children who are also living in poverty cannot access the service, simply because they do not live in certain post codes, leading to the scheme being labelled a postcode lottery. A report by the Welsh government published in 2025 stated that only 58% of eligible children accessed the childcare offer in 2023 – 2024. Many of the parents noted that reason why they did not take up the offer was that the application process was lengthy and time consuming. Some parents reported that the documentation required to access the funded places was difficult for them to provide. With the majority finding the process intrusive to their finances, especially concerning self employed parents. (Gov.Wales, 2025)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

13 - There are many challenges in providing high quality care to children and their families. Factors and influences such as staff retention, parents feelings and experiences, funding and accessibility all have a major impact on the services that are available to young children and their families.

Activities

Theorist Friedrich Froebel believed that a child’s early years are crucial for education, forming the basis for future learning. He emphasised that young children learn most effectively through active engagement, conversation, and play. When providing activities for children, practitioners should consider the impact that they will have on their learning and development. (Tovey,H. 2012) Through play, your child learns about their surroundings, practices new abilities, and connects with you. As they grow, their playtime will adapt to their ever evolving developmental needs. 'When outside, all of a child’s senses are stimulated and there is direct contact with the weather, seasons and natural world. This

enables them to learn about risk in a managed environment and how to cope with these risks' (Coram Pacey,



**14 - Talking** Talking to your baby is their first experience with language. Start talking to your baby at every opportunity. Look directly at your baby, making eye contact and talk to them. You can talk to them about anything, tell them what you are doing or where you are going, even naming things in the vicinity. Your baby will start to reach out to you by cooing or babbling, this is referred to as 'serve and return'. Positive experiences of this will help babies brains develop communication skills. Without this your baby's brain development may be disrupted and this could lead to delayed development. 'This back and forth helps your child to learn language and conversation skills, and they'll love the attention they get from you! Making eye contact shows your baby that you want to communicate with them and helps support learning' (Unicef, ND) Harvard university (ND) states this serve and return approach supports language development and social skills which provide a foundation for cognitive abilities that will form as the child grows.



**15 -** The video shows examples of serve and return between a child and other adults. It demonstrates



16 - **Clay/Play dough** Clay easily responds to little hands. It can be moulded, squeezed, flattened, or rolled, while retaining its shape. It provides limitless opportunities for shaping, creating patterns, and bringing a child's imagination to life (Tovey,H. 2012) Using clay or playdough helps support many areas of children's development: **Physical** - When children use different tools and manipulate the play dough by pulling, rolling and moulding they are developing their fine and gross motor skills and developing their hand-eye coordination. **Social and emotional** - Children are developing their social and emotional skills during play by talking and interacting with peers about their creations and the different tools that they are using. It builds confidence and feelings of achievement when they are proud of the creations they make. **Creativity and imagination** - When children use the clay or playdough to design and make items, they are expressing their ideas and learning how to problem solve. (NAEYC,ND)



17 - The video shows a child developing their fine and gross motor skills whilst manipulating the play dough.



18 - The video demonstrates children using their imagination and creativity with loose parts.

## International approaches

The international approaches of Reggio Emilia and Montessori approaches are two well known models of early childhood education. Both focus on child-centered learning, but they differ in how children learn, the role of the teacher, and the structure of the environment. The Reggio Emilia approach, which was developed in Italy, views children as strong, competent and full of potential (Bruton.P, 2007) . Learning is driven by children's interests and ideas. Creativity and collaboration with other children is encouraged and enabled. Teachers learn together with the children and they guide children's learning through observation. Practitioners, parents and children work together in partnership and their views are respected, which builds strong relationships. In contrast, the Montessori approach, developed by Maria Montessori, places the child at the centre of their learning and emphasises independence and active learning. Practitioners prepare the environment with purposeful activities that are used to encourage the development of the child's cognitive and motor skills. The practitioner stands back and observes the child without much interference. (Isaacs. B, 2018) Both approaches are similar where they focus on child development through learning experiences, however Montessori has a more structured approach to the child's learning and focuses more on individual learning, Reggio Emilia children make independent choices when learning and they are encouraged to learn from each other.

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