

Exceptional Care in the First 1000 Days

ECEY4005/C Y
1400404
3096 words

What is the First 1000 Days?



The time from conception to age two, or the first 1000 days of a child's life, is crucial for a number of reasons according to Karakochuk (2018). A child experiences fast and fundamental growth in several areas during this crucial developmental window. It is said that a child experiences rapid brain development, growth, physical, emotional, social and cognitive development.

Brain development - This is the time when the brain develops most. The speed at which neural connections grow is astounding, and the architecture of the brain is greatly influenced by early experiences. The best possible brain development is facilitated by a healthy diet, stimulating activities, and supportive relationships.

Physical Growth - The first 1000 days are critical for the development of physical growth. During this period, the growth of organs, bones, and the overall structure of the body depend on adequate nutrition.

Emotional and Social Development - The development of emotions and social skills is greatly influenced by early experiences. A safe attachment, nurturing environments, and positive interactions with carers all contribute to a child's mental health and capacity to build positive relationships in the future.

Cognitive Development - In the early years, cognitive abilities like problem-solving, memory, and attention develop quickly. During this time, stimulating situations and encounters help to build a solid cognitive foundation.

Why is the First 1000 days important?

According to Karakochuk (2018) nutritional deficiencies can have their most severe effects during the first 1,000 days of life, a time when neuroplasticity and development rates are at their highest. Brodie (2018) suggests that “children’s development from birth to three is an explosion of learning, growth and progression in every aspect.” This may suggest that there are key aspects of care that contribute to a baby’s development. These aspects include:

Nutrition – this may be breast milk from birth to provide the baby with key nutrients. Also, introducing a variety of nutrient-rich foods can support overall growth and development.

Stimulation and interaction -Providing engaging and responsive care for the child by playing, singing, and interacting with them .





Exposure to language - Talking, reading, and singing to the child will help them develop their linguistic skills. Communication through gestures, sounds, and eventually words should be encouraged.

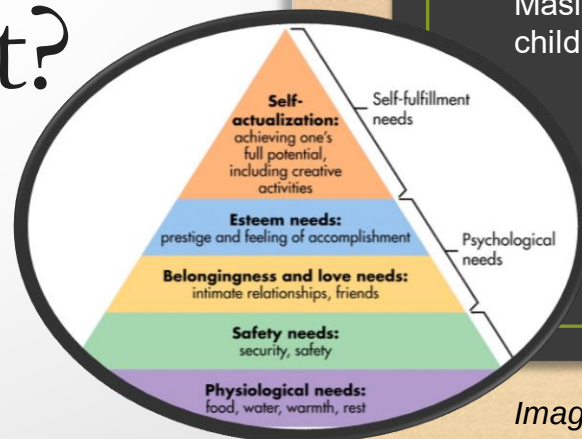
Promoting motor skills – Tummy time and age-appropriate activities supports the development of gross and fine motor skills. It is also important that safe spaces are provided to allow exploration and movement.



Love and affection – love from birth secures attachment between the child and parent/carer. This is important for the child's emotional well-being.

The Early Childhood Curriculum in New Zealand also has the strong belief that “physical, cognitive and socio-emotional growth and development are more rapid during infancy than in any other period of life. Neural pathways formed during this period are the foundations for all future learning.” It also holds the same belief that young children require lots of chances to interact with people, locations, and objects in rich and fulfilling ways.

What is exceptional care and why is it important?



According to the UK Parliament (2019), exceptional care in the first 1000 days requires a holistic and supportive approach to support the development and well-being of the child and it is suggested that when a baby has opportunity to experience different opportunities through exceptional care, it builds stronger connections.

The Marmot Review (2010) suggests that reducing inequality in health throughout the life course requires providing every child with the best start in life. Marmot (2010) claims that early childhood experiences, beginning in the womb, have a lasting impact on multiple aspects of health and wellbeing.

Similarly, Pikler (1940) claims that an infant should be free to move and should not be put into any position until they can get into that position themselves. The significance of responsive caregiving—in which carers are aware of the infant's cues and needs—was emphasised by Pikler's (1940) method. This entails giving the baby physical care, consolation, and emotional support in a considerate manner that pays attention to signs in which they are showing.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943) highlights the importance of meeting the child's needs due to exceptional care from all involved in the child's life.

Image from Simply Psychology

Professional Partnerships

Welsh Government (2022) claims that the enabling adult is a “key principle that is essential for holistic and meaningful learning.” The practitioner’s role is to pay close attention to children in their care through observation, acknowledgement, and react to situations with empathy to support developmental needs of children.

Welsh Government (2022) establishes that by embracing both the past and the present, enabling adults contribute to the child’s sense of belonging by creating solid connections between the learner’s home and the larger community.

Brodie (2018, p.207) makes it clear that since parents are the ones who know their children the best, professionals must possess two complementing skill sets: the ability to care for and educate children as well as the ability to interact with parents in an effective and sensitive manner.

Brodie (2018) also suggests that in order to gather information about parents, their families, and their children as well as to provide guidance from the perspective of a childcare and education professional, parent involvement must be a two-way conversation. This is to ensure that there is clear communication from both the parent and practitioner which creates a stronger relationship and allows the parent to trust in the practitioner.

According to Gasper (2009), by working in partnerships, professional organisations can better organise, plan, carry out, and reflect on their work as members of a team, each having unique perspectives and skill sets that function well together as an integrated whole.

The Early Years Healthy Development Review Report (2021) states that there are many services and partnerships that are offered to families from conception. The first being the NHS which supports a mother and the family through a midwife.

Midwives are registered healthcare professionals who are able to support the mother by personalising a care and support plan throughout pregnancy.

According to Gasper (2009), by working in partnerships, professional organisations can better organise, plan, carry out, and reflect on their work as members of a team, each having unique perspectives and skill sets that function well together as an integrated whole.

The Early Years Healthy Development Review Report (2021) states that there are many services and partnerships that are offered to families from conception. The first being the NHS which supports a mother and the family through a midwife.

Midwives are registered healthcare professionals who are able to support the mother by personalising a care and support plan throughout pregnancy.



Secondly, the health visitor also supports post-pregnancy. The Early Years Healthy Development Review Report (2021) claims that in order to support families until their child starts school, the health visitor is available to offer information, evidence-based interventions, and guidance. After completing a specialised programme in community public health nursing, registered nurses or midwives with the necessary qualifications serve as health visitors. In order to assist parents and maintain the safety and wellbeing of infants, health visitors play a vital role.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory highlights the importance of professional partnerships. Within the microsystem, effective partnership functioning frequently takes place through encouraging cooperation between important figures in a child's life, including parents, teachers, peers, and carers. These partnerships have a direct impact on the quality of experiences and assistance that a child can receive.

Effective partnerships make the mesosystem stronger by promoting interaction and coordination between different organisations, guaranteeing a more unified and well-rounded support system. Collaboration between healthcare professionals and community organisations, for instance, or between nurseries and families, for example, results in a more cohesive and encouraging atmosphere.



Video from Public Health Wales explaining support available from conception

Challenges

There are said to be many challenges during the first 1000 days.

These may include:

Nutrition

Healthcare

Staffing

Difference
of
opinions

Funding

COVID

Area

Social
media

Challenges during the first 1000 days

LoBue (no date) researched the impact of COVID-19 on infants. She claims that the increased anxiety and depression in parents may have had an impact on infants. LoBue also suggests that mask-wearing may have affected infant learning.

It is suggested that poor housing or poverty can affect a child's first 1000 days. Parents may find it tricky to spend money on necessities such as nappies. This could have a negative effect on the child.

When children reach nursery age, another challenge they may face is separation anxiety. When babies are separated from their primary parents or carers, they may get separation anxiety, which can negatively impact their emotional health and ability to acclimatise to the nursery setting. They may also struggle with not having constant one-to-one attention. Giving each child the attention they need can be difficult in nursery settings when there is frequently a practitioner to infant ratio. Insufficient one-on-one time may have an impact on the standard and responsiveness of care. When interacting with other children and practitioners in a nursery, infants must first adjust to the group dynamics of the environment. Sharing resources and attention can be a difficult developmental skill to acquire.

There is also the issue of inconsistency in staff and possible shortage of staff. Caregiving routines may become inconsistent due to high staff turnover or rotation. Having dependable and recognisable adults might help infants feel secure.

It's critical for parents and practitioners to communicate well. If there is a breakdown in communication on the child's everyday experiences, developmental milestones, and any worries, difficulties could occur.

Images from Google

According to Nursery Story (2023), there are many challenges from a practitioner's point of view when babies are in their care. This includes:

Satisfying the growing need for childcare.

Keeping staff and preserving their well-being.

Resolving skill gaps or shortages in staff.

Overseeing administrative duties.

Keeping up with Ofsted/Estyn inspections and regulatory compliance.

Managing financial strains and budget restrictions.

Supplying a child-safe and secure environment.

Keeping updated of developments and trends in technology.

Delivering inclusive care to children with a range of requirements, including special needs and disabilities.

Managing the effects of outside variables, including unstable economies or public health emergencies.





Image from Google

Environment

According to the Welsh Government (2022), “the environment we create in our setting, indoors and outdoors, should be central to children’s authentic experiences.”

In terms of the Reggio Emilia approach, the environment acts as the third teacher after parents and the practitioner.

The classroom environment is designed to support and enhance all aspects of a child's development.

The setting is designed to promote interactive, experiential learning. The purpose of utilising diverse learning zones, play areas, and interactive materials is to spark children's interest and include them in interesting activities.



Images from Google

A child-centered approach is encouraged by the Welsh Foundation Phase, where the curriculum is tailored to each student's needs and interests. The classroom is designed to encourage inquiry, discovery, and self-directed learning so that children can actively participate in their education. All children's needs are taken into consideration and the setting is made to be inclusive. Diverse learning styles, abilities, and interests are accommodated via differentiated learning environments and resources.

According to Hodgman (2011), an enabling environment will:

- Give a child challenges and activities to complete that's stimulating.
- Recognise a child's interests and give them the freedom to experiment and explore.
- Be adaptable to allow for both more loud and active play as well as quiet, introspective, and concentrated learning—perhaps in a cosy book corner.
- Encourage children to learn in all six areas of learning so they can hone their existing abilities and pick up new ones.
- Help children in learning social skills and the norms of the world.
- Children should be allowed to take chances and make errors, and their imaginations and creativity should be encouraged.
- Provide safety and emotional support.
- Encourage independence and assist children in learning about the needs, cultures, faiths, and backgrounds of others.



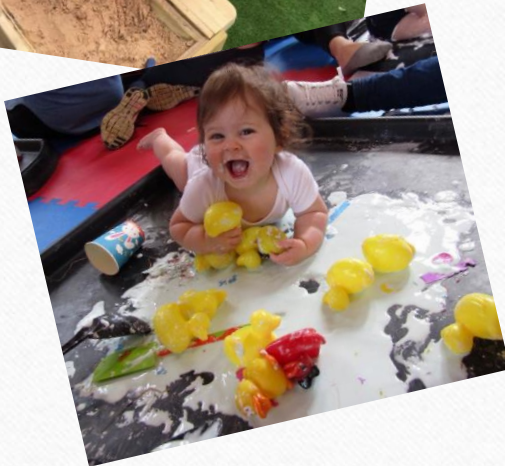
Images from Google

Activities

Welsh Government (2022) states that engaging experiences should be embedded within the curriculum. Welsh Government (2022) quotes that “the experiences we offer in the early years should be hands on, purposeful and meaningful to the child.” As children investigate amount, number, shape, and pattern, they require hands-on activities that inspire them to apply basic mathematical vocabulary. It’s important to provide children with activities and experiences that are going to enhance their learning and allow children to explore in a contained setting. Children should be given opportunity to explore indoors and outdoors.

Piaget's Theory of Play (1967) suggested that during the sensorimotor stage (0-2 years), infants and young children explore their surroundings with all five senses by living in the moment.

Gascoyne (2019) believes that children learn best when they are allowed to freely engage in a wide range of sensory experiences using all of their senses. She suggests that a child can only do this when they feel comfortable and secure enough to explore their surroundings with curiosity.





Images from Google



Treasure Baskets

Goldschmeid (2004) introduced the treasure basket. A seated newborn, around 5 to 10 months old, can access the Treasure Basket, which is a collection of 80–100 natural, home, and recycled items stored in a strong round wicker basket.

Brodie (2018, p.113), points out that “the items in a treasure basket need to give baby a full sensory experience – touch, smell, colour, sound (and safe to taste!).”

Infants' senses are stimulated by the range of textures, shapes, and objects found in treasure baskets. They promote tactile exploration and aid in the development of infants' sense of touch. Treasure baskets foster independent exploration and stimulate an infant's natural interest. As they choose things from the basket, toddlers develop decision-making skills that foster a sense of independence.

Brodie (2018) believes that the treasure basket supports cognitive developments in infants. Babies pick up knowledge through object manipulation and exploration. As babies grasp, shake, and investigate the objects in their treasure baskets, they develop their problem-solving abilities, hand-eye coordination, and ability to remain focused on objects. Also, treasure baskets can enhance fine motor skills. Young children's fine motor skills are developed through handling the small objects in the treasure basket. Hand-eye coordination and muscular control are developed through grasping, reaching, and handling objects. Carers are able to talk with infants as they explore the treasure basket, discussing the objects and their qualities and promoting language development. This exchange promotes vocabulary growth and communication abilities.

Loose Parts

Daly and Beloglovsky (2015) explores the reasons why loose parts can be so beneficial to infants and toddlers. They believe that playing with loose components exposes children to a "what if" universe that fosters the kind of thinking that results in theoretical reasoning and problem solving. Infants' play is made more exciting and adventurous by loose parts, which also help children think creatively and solve problems.

Daly and Beloglovsky (2015) explain loose parts as alluring, beautiful found objects and materials that children can move, manipulate, control, and change while they play. Loose parts are said to offer a range of developmental benefits.

For infants, loose parts offer diverse sensory experiences since they come in a variety of textures, shapes, and sizes. In order for infants to develop cognitively and make sense of their surroundings, sensory exploration is essential. Fine motor skill development is aided by handling and manipulating loose parts, such as by gripping, stacking, and moving things. These exercises enhance coordination and build hand muscles.

Because of their adaptability, loose components can be made to suit a baby's wide range of demands and interests. They encourage inclusive play, enabling children to play together regardless of their skill levels or developmental stages.

The importance of social interactions and cultural background in cognitive development is emphasised by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory. Playing loose pieces can foster social relationships and teamwork among peers. Furthermore, in line with Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development, carers can assist young children in learning through loose parts play.



Images from Google



References

Brodie, Kathy. *The Holistic Care and Development of Children from Birth to Three : An Essential Guide for Students and Practitioners*, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018.

COPE. (no date). *Adjusting to early parenthood*. [online] Available at: <https://www.cope.org.au/new-parents/first-weeks/>. (Accessed: 16.01.2024)

Department of Health and Social Care (2021). *The Best Start for Life A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days The Early Years Healthy Development Review Report*. [online] Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/973112/The_best_start_for_life_a_vision_for_the_1_001_critical_days.pdf. (Accessed 16.01.2024)

Green, T.J., Karakochuk, C.D., Kraemer, K. and Whitfield, K.C. (2018). *The Biology of the First 1,000 days*. Boca Raton: Taylor & Francis.

Hodgman, L. *Enabling Environments in the Early Years: Making Provision for High Quality and Challenging Learning Experiences in the Early Years Setting*. Andrews UK; 2011.

hwb.gov.wales. (no date). *Enabling learning - Hwb*. [online] Available at: <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/designing-your-curriculum/enabling-learning>. (Accessed: 02.01.2024)

Marmot, M. (2010). *Fair Society, Healthy Lives: The Marmot Review*. [online] *institute of health equity*. The Marmot Review. Available at: <https://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/resources-reports/fair-society-healthy-lives-the-marmot-review/fair-society-healthy-lives-full-report-pdf.pdf>. (Accessed: 14.01.2024)

Media, M (2000). *Nurturing Babies' Physical Development With the Pikler Approach | Under 2's*. [online] Teach Early Years. Available at: <https://www.teachearlyyears.com/under-2s/view/the-pikler-approach-part-2>. (Accessed 17.01.2024)

Pikler UK Association. (no date). [online] Available at: <https://pikler.co.uk/about>. (Accessed 17.01.2024)

References

Public Health Wales. (no date.). *The First 1000 Days programme*. [online] Available at: <https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/the-first-1000-days-programme/>. (Accessed 19.01.2024)

publications.parliament.uk. (no date). *First 1000 days of life - Health and Social Care Committee - House of Commons*. [online] Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmhealth/1496/149605.htm>. (Accessed: 14.01.2024)

www.psychologytoday.com. (no date). *The Impact of COVID-19 on Babies | Psychology Today United Kingdom*. [online] Available at: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/the-baby-scientist/202302/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-babies> (Accessed 16.01.2024).