



(Source: First Five Years, 2018)

Exceptional Care in the First 1000 Days

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What are the First 1000 Days and why are they Important?

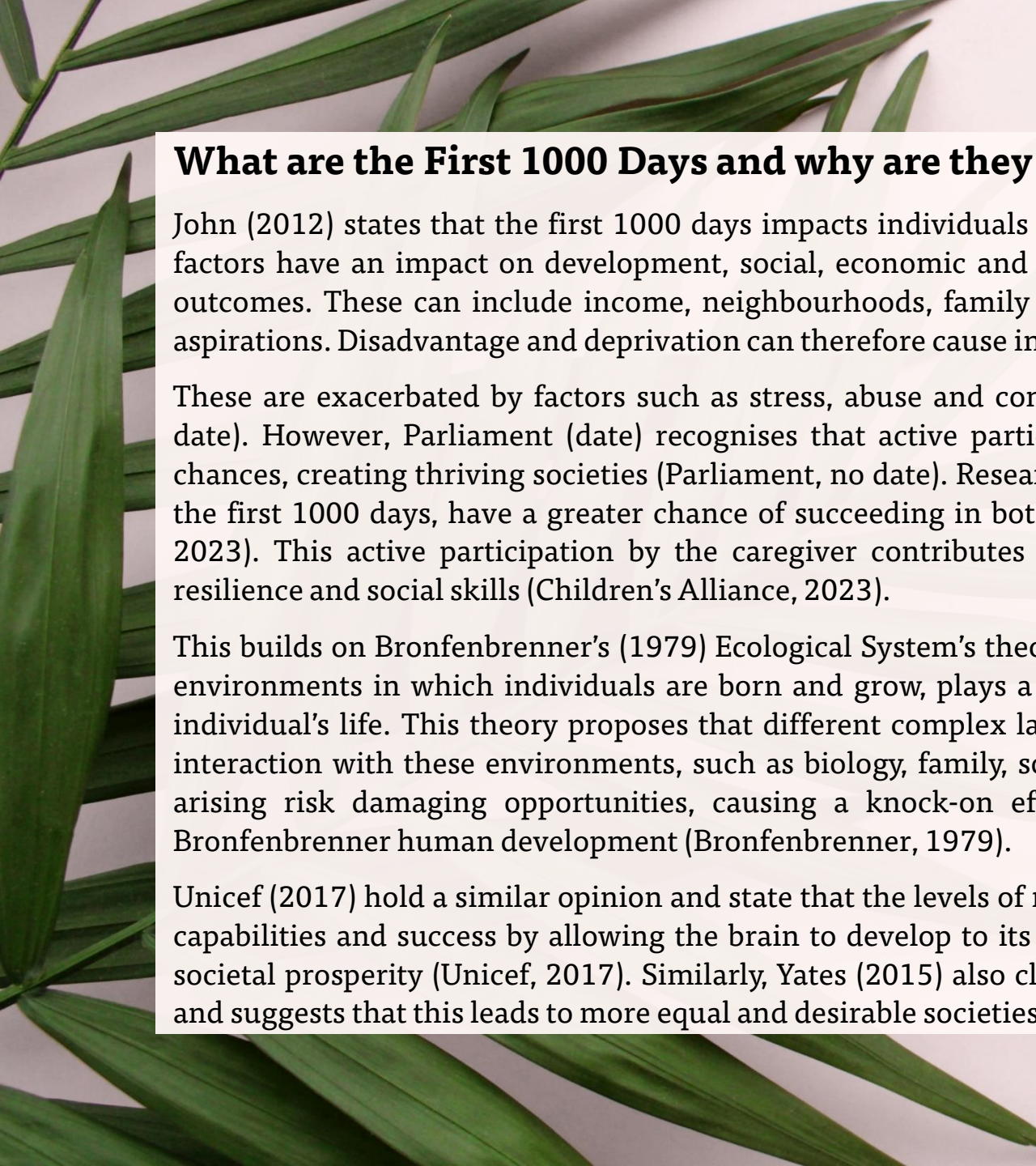
The Health and Social Care Committee (2019) and Cusick and Georgieff (2013) both refer to the first 1000 days as the period from conception to the child's second birthday and highlight its significance on a child's overall development. According to The Health and Social Care Committee (2019) a child's life opportunities are enhanced if both the body and brain can develop healthily during this period.

Similarly, Likhar and Manoj (2022) and EFCNI (2018) highlight its impact on physical and mental health, stating that it is crucial for the body, brain, metabolism and immune system, and to avoid malnutrition and impaired growth.

Pecorelli (2019) suggests that even during pregnancy, behaviours and lifestyles are transmitted to the unborn baby, and suggests that air quality, food and drink and exercise impact the development of a child.



(Source: LinkedIn, 2023)



What are the First 1000 Days and why are they Important?

John (2012) states that the first 1000 days impacts individuals throughout their lives, and that although personal and genetic factors have an impact on development, social, economic and environmental factors can also determine levels of health and outcomes. These can include income, neighbourhoods, family structures and relationships, diets, and capabilities, skills, and aspirations. Disadvantage and deprivation can therefore cause inequalities that inevitably impact on a child's development.

These are exacerbated by factors such as stress, abuse and conflict which lead to adverse childhood experiences (Parliament date). However, Parliament (date) recognises that active participation during this period, can have positive impacts on life chances, creating thriving societies (Parliament, no date). Research also shows that children who receive greater support during the first 1000 days, have a greater chance of succeeding in both academic and social settings later in life (Children's Alliance, 2023). This active participation by the caregiver contributes to physical and emotional development, whilst also building resilience and social skills (Children's Alliance, 2023).

This builds on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological System's theory which suggests that social determinants; the conditions and environments in which individuals are born and grow, plays a critical role during this period and shapes the outcomes of an individual's life. This theory proposes that different complex layers impact on development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). A child's interaction with these environments, such as biology, family, social landscape' shapes a child's development and any conflicts arising risk damaging opportunities, causing a knock-on effect for all other layers, ultimately impacting development. Bronfenbrenner human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Unicef (2017) hold a similar opinion and state that the levels of nutrition provided during this stage influences a child's learning capabilities and success by allowing the brain to develop to its full ability, positively contributing to personal life chances and societal prosperity (Unicef, 2017). Similarly, Yates (2015) also claims that food and stimulation is the key to child development and suggests that this leads to more equal and desirable societies.

Caregiving – What is Expectational Care and Why is it Important?



(Source: What to Expect, 2022)

The Cambridge dictionary (no date) defines caregiving as looking after and providing support to an individual, regardless of their characteristics. This can include parents, teachers and mentors (Cambridge Dictionary, no date).



(Source: UK Open College, no date)

However, O'Malley et al.(2023) define exceptional caregiving as the provision of efficient, secure and high-quality care.



(Source: Unison, no date)

Caregiving affects the quality of life for individuals, helping those who have social, cognitive, physical or health related needs (CDC, date). Caregivers can assist with bathing, eating, dressing, and changing. However, they can also provide emotional support (CDC, date).

Caregiving – What is Expectational Care and Why is it Important?

Gerber (no date) states that respectful caregiving should be demonstrated through interaction with children, and that all children should be treated with dignity, regardless of their age.

Caregivers should therefore consider the individual's dignity and human rights, acting in accordance with the Human Rights Act (1998) and the Equality Act (2010). This ensures that children are treated with respect and have their rights and freedoms fulfilled (Human Rights Act, 1998).

Heale (no date) highlights the importance of exceptional caregiving during the early years, expressing its impact on the child's relationships and attachments. Building on Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory, Heale (no date) stresses that the levels of attachment developed by children during the early years are a key predictor of future development, and this is largely influenced by the level and quality of support provided by the caregiver.

Similarly, Davidson (2018) research shows that exceptional caregiving leads to trusting environments that lead to improved relationships and strengthened attachments.



(Source: HFL Education, no date)



(Source: Barnfield College, 2024)



(Source: LLC., no date)

Caregiving – What is Expectational Care and Why is it Important?

Era (2023) argues that exceptional care leads to increased feelings of security, happiness and confidence. Children also develop social skills and friendships, allowing them to learn how to share, how to build essential social skills and learn about equality and diversity (Era, 2023).

According to Government (no date b) exceptional care involves caregivers spending time with children to get to know them and find out what they enjoy, how they learn and where greater support may be required. When caregivers can do so effectively, it helps build strong foundations for future development (no date b).

A study undertaken by Welsh Government (2014) highlights that children should be provided with happy and secure environments, outside of the home to develop through learning, social skills, challenge, relationships and experiences. Exceptional care, provided across the board and to the same standard therefore builds the foundations for the child's lifelong success (Welsh Government, 2014).



(Source: Government, 2022)



(Source: GHQ Training, no date)



(Source: Gaunt, 2022)

Professional Partnerships – The Role of the Practitioner in Supporting Families and Children in the First 1000 Days



(Source: WJEC, no date)

As part of the first 1000 days, practitioners have the role of supporting children and families, to provide respectful caregiving and learning opportunities for development. Gerber (no date a) states that respectful caregiving should be demonstrated through interaction with children, and that all children should be treated with dignity, regardless of their age or background, in line with the Equality Act (2010). According to Gerber (no date a), children should be seen and treated as capable individuals, encouraging and leading to active play and interaction, as well as intimacy and happiness. Additionally, providing children with full attention allows the child to feel emotionally stable which encourages exploration and play, whilst feeling secure (Gerber, no date).

This is based on Bowlby's (1969) attachment theory. According to this theory, attachment provides individuals with the security to learn and experience, leading to growth and development (Rees, 2007).

Lack of, or a loss of this attachment can have negative impacts on the remainder of the child's life, both emotionally and psychologically, negatively impacting their future development and relationships (NSPCC, 2021).

Similarly, Pikler (1994) highlights the importance of health in the first 1000 days. Pikler's (1994) theory argued that secure attachments lead to healthy individuals, and that this is achieved by providing respectful care. Pikler (1994) reinforces the importance of self-initiated activity, including movement and play, suggesting that it influences confidence, control and self-image. Pikler (1994) sees respectful care as a trust, enjoyment and co-operation between caregiver and child, and can only be achieved through observation, reflection and partnership working. The repetitive tasks undertaken as routine, such as feeding and changing often involve touch in intimate areas, when children are at their most vulnerable (Pikler, 1994). Pikler (1994) therefore proposes that these should be undertaken with respect whilst engaging with the child, providing full attention to build trust. Pikler (1994) also proposes that the carer should actively participate in the child's interests, encourage conversation, and adapt to the child's movements. By doing this, the child beongs to build an attachment with the caregiver, leading to exploration and development (Pikler, 1944).



(Source: Corneri, no date)



(Source: Cambo, no date)

Professional Partnerships – The Importance of Effective Partnership Working



(Source: Havering, no date)



(Source: Online Learning College, no date)

Kambouri et al. (2022) highlight the importance of the role of parents in early years education, and its impact on their development.

According to Government (no date a), parent involvement in their children's development is one of the main factors that influence success regardless of background.

However, partnership working also involves liaison between teams, including health and social care teams, to ensure the child's needs are met (Early Years Matters, no date). Partnership working allows all involved individuals to share information about the child's development and provide assistance to those who require greater co-ordinated support (Early Years Matters, no date).

According to Dixon et al. (2022) partnership working is the foundation of safeguarding as it combines and brings together different opinions, expertise and approaches to provide clear understanding of the child, their needs and circumstances, ensuring support can be personally tailored.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model shows the interactions between children and their environments, with the child at the centre of the model with multiple microsystems present. These microsystems represent the connections between environments like school and home. This theory proposed that strong connections between the individuals and environments involved, leads to harmony and has a positive impact on child development.

Current Challenges

Many of the current challenges facing caregivers is the result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the changes this has brought to everyday life, impacting the demand for caregivers and their expertise (Hobbs and Bernard, 2021). Many of the issues are based on low funding, increased staffing costs, and recruiting difficulties (Verrill, no date).

One of the most significant challenges relate to the difficulty of employing and retaining highly qualified members of staff due to changes in working patterns and therefore childcare requirements, the cost-of-living crisis, as well as changes in parental preference. This is exacerbated by fewer individuals completing early years-based qualifications or beginning careers in such settings (Goddard, 2023).

Research shows that higher qualified staff members, having graduated in early years courses, leads to significantly improved service provision for young children. Thus, providing opportunity for greater communication, literacy and mathematical development, through improved quality of interactions (Welsh Government, 2014).

Research also shows that due to the absence of children from social, educational and health settings during the pandemic, development issues in children's speech and language have been identified, leading to an increase in specialist referrals (Goddard, 2023).

Social and emotional development has also been negatively impacted, with caregiver's identifying less advanced social skills, including the ability to make friends, grow confidence and communicate effectively with others (Goddard, 2023).

Lack of independent self-care such as toileting and dressing has also become apparent, to a higher degree than would usually be expected for the age or stage of development (Government, 2022b).

These developmental issues have therefore caused unprecedented challenges for caregivers, causing increased workload and stress in trying to help young individuals catch up and develop the skills that the pandemic halted (Goddard, 2023).

Strategies have therefore been implemented by caregivers in early years setting to address these gaps, prioritising communication and language, social and emotional development and physical development by providing greater opportunities for children to catch up (Government, 2022b). For example, some caregivers have developed social networks with similar settings so that children can meet others their own age, mix and develop relationships (Government, 2022b). Others have opted to send books home so that parents can read to their children, developing their language skills (Government, 2022b).

These issues, alongside low funding and staffing issues have caused increased pressures on early years settings.

Activities

There are many activities that promote development in the first 1000 days, including Nicholson's (1972), Montessori's (1915) and Froebel's play theories (Provenzo, 2009). These theorists reinforced the importance of self-activity during the early years, particularly focusing on loose parts.

Loose parts activity involves providing children with materials that can be moved or re-assembled to enable self-directed learning. During this process, children are left to play with no specific end goals, improving creativity and widening imagination (Aşkar and Durmuşoğlu, 2023).

According to Nicholson (1972), allowing children to manipulate the environment creates opportunity for critical thinking and that hands-on learning opportunities heighten children's flexibility and curiosity, leading to development.

Montessori (1915) states that this type of approach allows children to explore in a secure environment, whilst Malaguzzi states that it allows children to form identities based on experiences (Hewitt, 2001).



(Source: Rawstrone, 2020)

Storytelling

The process of storytelling involves using words and actions to reflect a story whilst encouraging creativity and imagination (National Storytelling Network, no date).

According to Raising Children (2023), storytelling in the early years encourages development through imagination and language, whilst also strengthening relationships and attachments.

Medlicott (2019) also highlights its positive impact on social awareness, and its ability to encourage behaviour and the way in which individuals deal with different situations.

Storytelling develops listening, communication and concentration skills whilst also providing information, and providing links between books and reality (Bowkett, no date).

Dickinson and Morse (2019) also argue that storytelling has positive impacts on cognitive development and therefore lays the foundations for development.

Medlicott (2019) suggests that storytellers should choose well-liked stories and should think about the activity before reading to the child, thinking about how to approach the story and make it effective for the child. Medlicott (2019) proposes the use of props to make the story more engaging, as well as using sounds.

Raising children (no date) also highlight the importance of the child being able to see the reader's face and the book. The reader should make facial expressions to make the child more interested and encourage the child to learn the meaning of words through talking about pictures and repeating words. Making connections between the book and reality can also assist with their development (Raising Children, no date).



(Source: Medlicott, 2019)



(Source: Martin, 2020)



(Source: Graal, no date)

International Approaches

Globally, early years education and development focuses on language and social skills, as well as emotional and physical development (Government, 2023).

The Reggio Emilia and Forest school approaches are just two international examples of early years approaches to encourage development and learning (White Lodge, 2022).

Developed by Malaguzzi in Italy the 1960s, the Reggio Emilia approach focuses on children's curiosity to explore and learn. Its aim is to provide curriculum based on hands-on opportunities that encourage self-learning (White Lodge, 2022). This approach emphasises the fact that children develop at a greater rate when opportunities are provided to be active and experimental and allow children to communicate their thoughts and ideas (White Lodge, 2022).

According to this approach, children can build their own understanding and possess one hundred languages in which their express their thoughts (Dias, 2023). Care providers should listen and observe children during this process to understand their interests and base a curriculum on these findings (Dias, 2023).

However, this approach has been criticised for its inability to monitor results of learning (Kinnu, no date). Caregivers must be highly observant, and learning can be interpreted differently (Kinnu, no date). The quality-of-service provision can therefore be inconsistent and causes difficulty in recognising the efficiency of the care giver (Kinnu, no date).



(Source: Pinterest, no date)



(Source: Ozuna, 2022)



(Source: Hampton International School, no date)

International Approaches

Much like the Reggio Emilia approach, the Scandinavian Forest School approach is another method which focuses on child-centred and self-directed learning through nature. Both value hands-on opportunities and respect independence (Dias, 2023).

This approach was introduced to provide children with opportunities and experiences to learn within nature and the environment. It focuses on distinguishing a link between children and nature and highlights the importance of the outdoors for holistic and inclusive development (Dias, 2023). Not only does this approach encourage exploration by the child, but also risk taking and learning from nature (Dias, 2023). It has been proven to develop skills for resilience, problem-solving, communication and teamwork (Dias, 2023). However, it does not suit or meet the needs of every child and makes adapting to mainstream school difficult when the child reaches school age (Dias, 2023).

Both the Reggio Emilia and the Forest School approaches share common ground in their commitment to child-centred learning (Dias, 2023). However, while the Reggio Emilia approach highlights creativity in the community, the Forest School highlights a link with nature (Dias, 2023). Both offer important learning opportunities for children and cater to their differing needs, although both have been criticised for their unique approaches (Dias, 2023).



(Source: Weinstein, 2023)



(Source: Early Learning HQ, no date)



(Source: How We Montessori, no date)

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