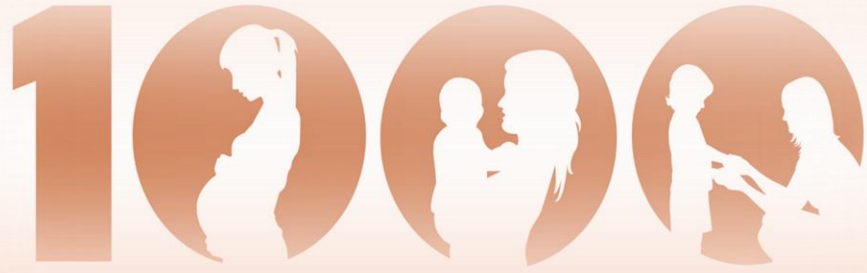
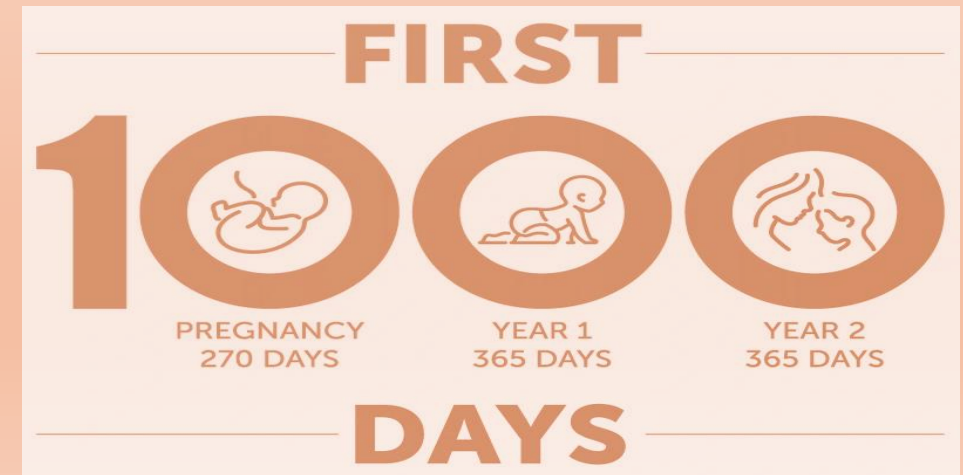


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Source: Danone Research

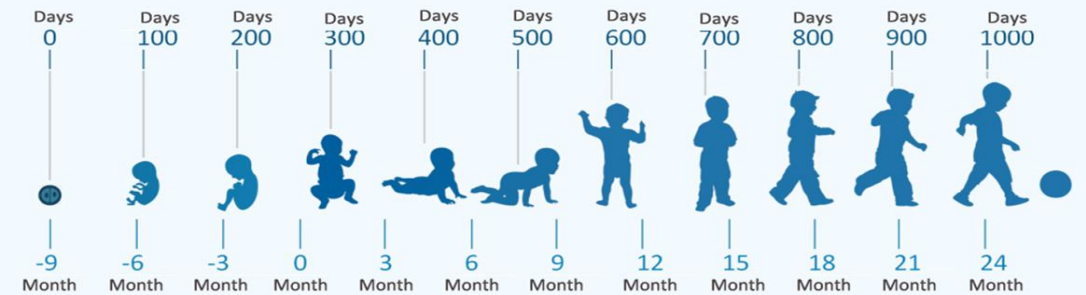
The First 1000 Days



Source: South Dakota Department of Health (no date).

According to Pregnancybirthbaby (no date) the first 1000 days refers to the child's life from conception up to two years of age (24 months). These first 1000 days are the most crucial for the child's brain, body and immune system growth and development. During pregnancy, the mother's health, nutrition and mental health can have all an impact on the child, so it is important the mother cares for her body ensuring good nutrition and safety. Stress levels and trauma in life are unexpected and sometimes cannot be helped so it is important for parents to know help is available and where and how to access it. During the first 1000 days a child needs; healthy adequate foods, loving relationships, safety and security, time to play and explore and a healthy welcoming environment.

What is the first 1000 days?



Bust and Pedro (2020) state your baby's life depends on the first 1000 days. The first 1000 days starts once you conceive throughout your pregnancy and up until the child's 2nd birthday. Leadsom (2021) states two is too late, the first 1001 days is all about prevention. The 1001 days are a crucial time for development but it is also the period of time where babies are most vulnerable. A child's brain is only partially formed at birth and continues to develop through experiences therefore these experiences have a lifelong impact on a child's future. Every family deserves support to ensure their child has the best chance of a positive future, growing up to be physically healthy and emotionally capable individuals.

Why are the first 1000 days important?



Stead (2024) states it is important to remember that while early experiences are crucial the brain's capacity for changes decreases the older a child gets. Therefore the environments we create for young children set the foundation for lifelong learning and development. In the first few years of a child's life more than one million new neural connections are formed every second (Centre on the Developing Child, 2016).

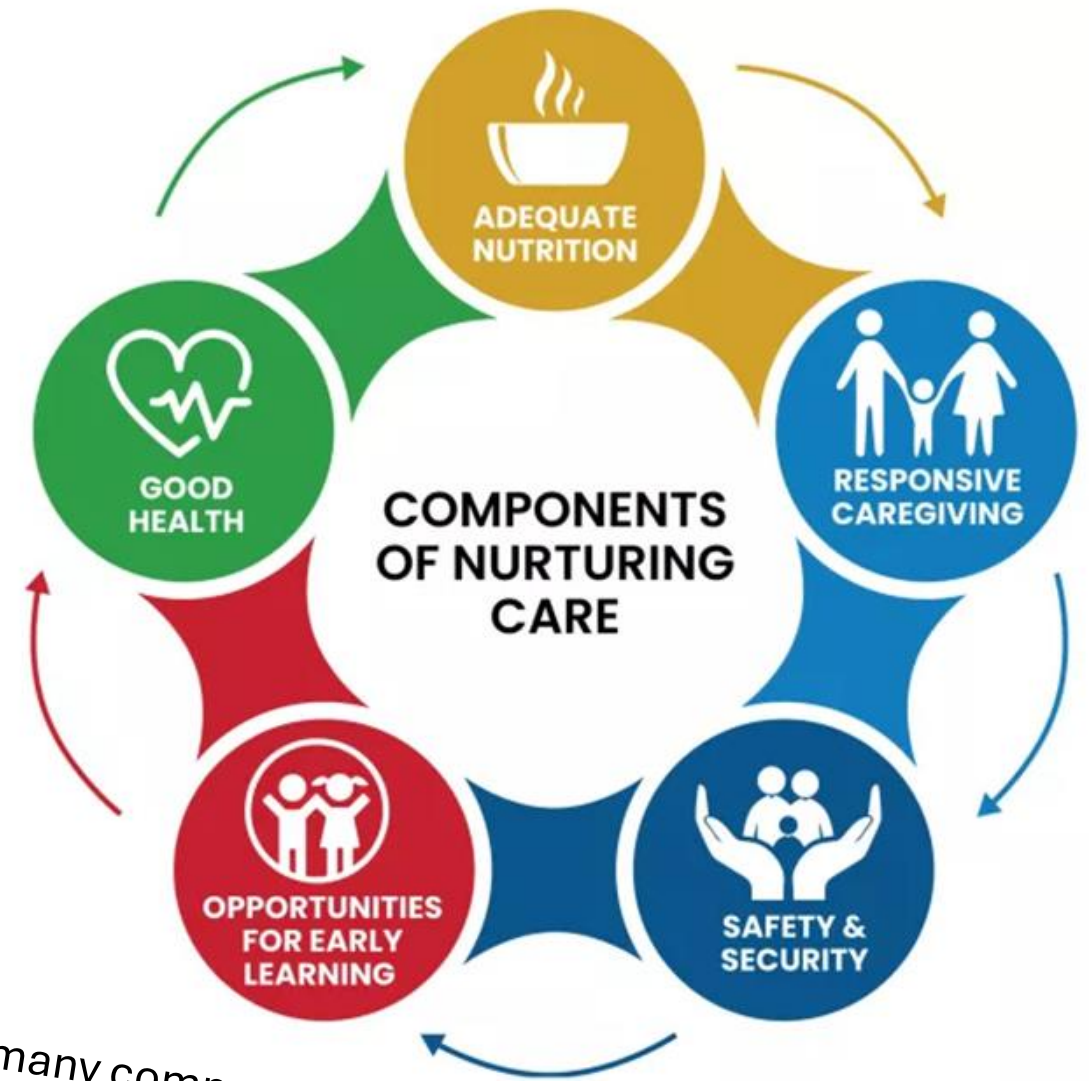


According to pregnancybirthbaby (no date) a child's brain develops more quickly during the first 1000 days than any other time in their life. The way the brain adapts to the environment will contribute to the type of person they will grow up to become. Loving, safe, secure relationships and environments are vital in a child's holistic development, feeling safe and loved will allow a child to flourish and become confident.

Every year according to HM Government (2021) research learns more regarding 'adverse childhood effects' also known as ACEs. These are traumatic events children endure, these could be a result from many factors such as exposure to poor parental mental health, abuse, neglect, parental drug misuse along with other risk factors. This research shows the importance of parents and carers having access to the best support suited for them enabling them to give their children the best start in life. Furthermore Stead (2024) also states each positive interaction and caring experience a child encounters reinforces the brain's development, the more secure these pathways become in the early years the better equipped the child is to effectively process information, skills and experiences throughout their life.

What is exceptional care?

According to World Health Organisation (2018) nurturing care refers to conditions created by public policies, programmes and services. These help ensure children good health and nutrition while also protecting them from any danger or threat. Nurturing care is also ensuring young children have the opportunities for early learning to further their development through positive interactions that are emotionally supportive and responsive. Gerhardt (2015) states loving relationships are essential for a child's brain development in the early years especially. Gerhardt (2015) states loving relationships are essential for a child's brain development in the early years especially.

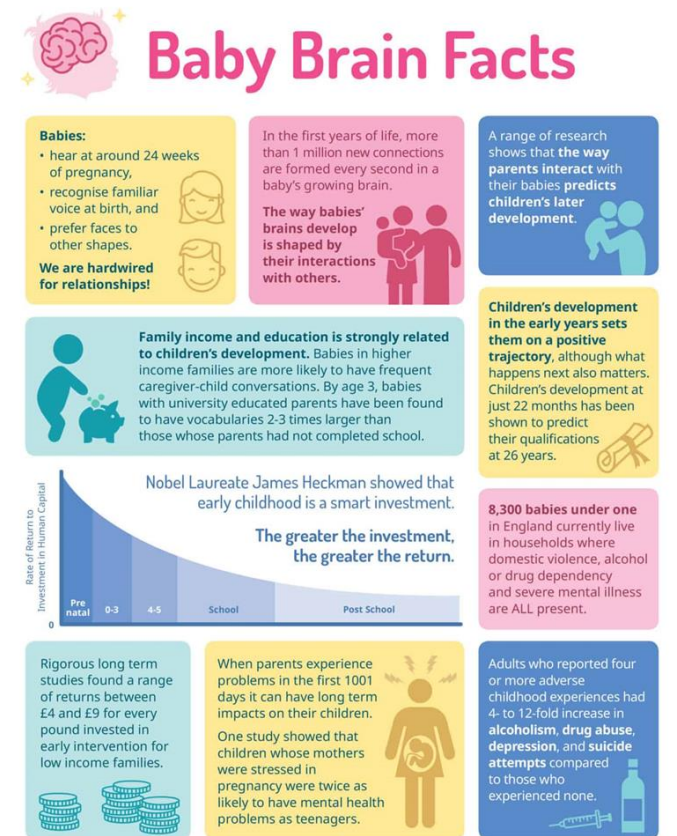


This graph shows the many components to exceptional care including adequate nutrition, responsive caregiving, good health, safety and security and opportunities for early learning. Parents, families and other primary caregivers are the main providers of nurturing care. (nurturing-care, 2018)

Why is exceptional care important?

Bust and Pedro (2022) state growth and development occur at a faster pace during gestation and infancy than any other period in life, making the first 1000 days vulnerable for malnutrition. Nutrition during the first 1000 days has been linked with children's later physical growth and muscle mass development along with brain development, cognitive function, and multiple health related risks and concerns.

World Health Organization (2018) states nurturing care is necessary for all babies, especially premature and low-birth weight babies as their responses are less predictable caregivers can struggle leading to them giving the child less attention putting them at greater risk for malnutrition and poor development. Without nurturing care the children are at risk for difficulties in their development and growth. Early experiences for children have positive impacts later in life, positively effecting learning, health, behaviours and adult social relationships and well-being. A child is able to develop holistically if they receive exceptional care especially in those crucial 1000 days.



Tackling adversity + supporting early relationships
→ healthier brains + better futures

References and further information can be found on <https://parentinfantfoundation.org.uk/1001-days/campaigning-resources/>



What is the role of an early year's practitioner in supporting children and families in the first 1000 days?

According to Public Health Wales (no date) parents want to do all they can to support their child/children with all their needs, however most parents will at some point in the early years of their child's life find it difficult. Parenting requires many aspects, along with knowledge and skills it needs emotional, social, material and financial resources to ensure the best future. The role of an early year's practitioner includes having the skills to support each family and knowing when they need that support, and educating parents and carers on what nurturing care is and how it is provided can be important, some parents may not have support around them from family members and may lack the information on how to give their child the best care so ensuring they have that key information can make all the difference to their lives and the child's.

Stead (2024) states the environment we set play a crucial part in a child's learning opportunities, these activities are shaped by interaction with adults the activity itself and the environment they are in. An early year's practitioner's role is to ensure that every aspect of the child's environment is carefully thought out to provide all elements for the children's holistic development. These include; sensory rich environments to enhance cognitive development, opportunities for safe movement to further develop physical skills, language rich environment to provide them the skills to thrive linguistically. Risk taking opportunities to develop their confidence and risk-taking abilities (Sandseter & Kennair, 2011), outdoor play and access to enhance their mental wellbeing.

SERVE AND RETURN

The serve and return relationship between a child and caregiver is extremely important ~~for brain development, it can be done through~~ response to our voices and closeness, eye contact, touch, music and facial expressions.



(Harvard University, 2024)



The importance of effective partnership working

Partnership working refers to many different scenarios however, can be simply described as a group of people/organizations coming together to achieve a common goal (Community Change, 2010). Crown Database (2011) states professionals working in an effective partnership ensures families/carers receive holistic support that suits their needs best. According to NHS (no date) the places in which parents live, work and socialise impact and influence how they parent, how they think and feel and what they family's do. Therefore, effectively working in partnership especially in the first 1000 days creates a strong foundation for the future. Mahmood (2022) supports this by saying working collaboratively with other sources such as specialists, families, workers, anyone that interacts with the children and their families helps build a range of targeted support to improve family wellbeing meeting each family's specific needs. Mahmood (2022) continues to state that as stipulated in the 2019 Health and Social Care Committee report on the first 1000 days of life high quality local services for children and their families/carers need to be grounded by the following seven principles;

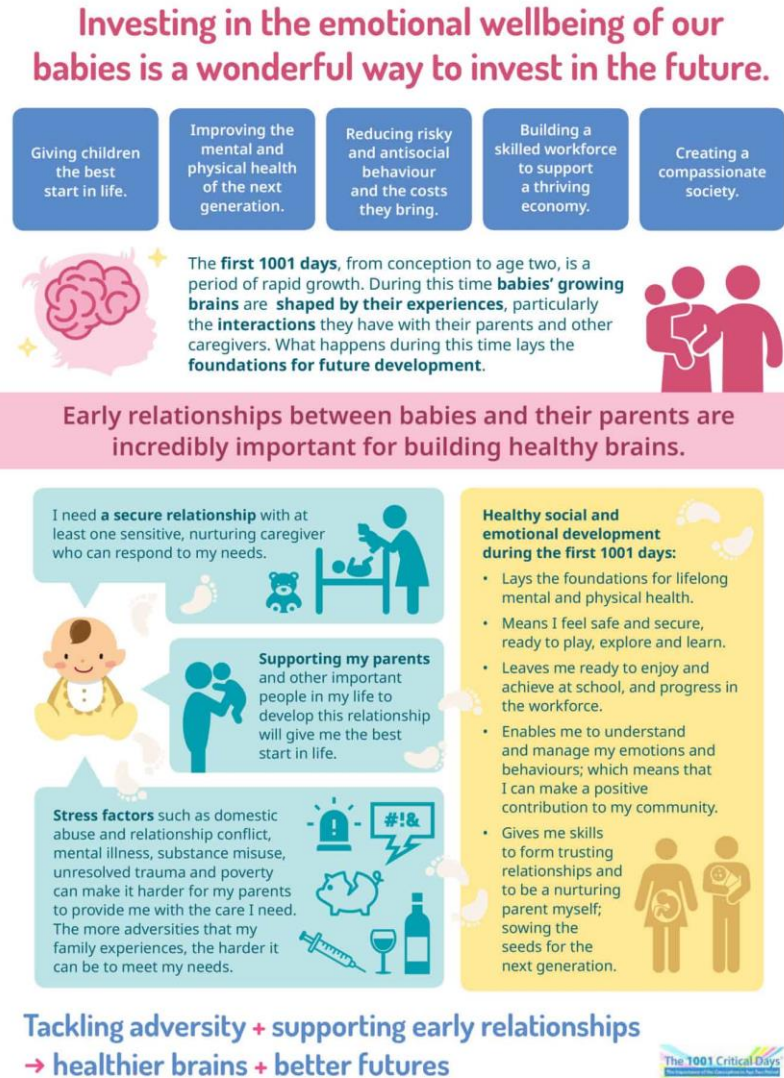
- Prevention and early intervention
- Enhance capability and capacity of workforce
- Community partnerships
- Evidence based provision
- Meeting the needs of marginalised groups
- Multi agency working at system and
- Proportionate diversity



Source: www.cdhn.org

What maternal factors have an impact on development and what support should be offered?

A maternal factor that can impact development is financial state, a parent would be unable to provide nutritional meals for themselves during pregnancy and the child when they enter the world if they don't have sufficient income. Mercieca (no date) states there is more to food than just filling the stomach, when we feed a child, we are also building the child's relationship with food. It is important to include healthy fats in a child's diet from early on to support their brain development. These foods include; avocado, fish, eggs, berries, cheeses and milks. Lack of these foods can negatively impact a child's early development. Healthy infant development is supported by healthy nutrition, alongside this according to Bust and Pedro (2022) it is important for mothers to avoid harmful substances during pregnancy such as alcohol, drugs, and cigarettes. Maternity and early years (no date) states that every family should be offered support early in pregnancy, the services should be joined up and easy to access. To help the children often the adults who care for them need supporting too, especially during pregnancy. The Healthy start Scheme provides food welfare to pregnant women and children under 4 years old in the UK. These are vouchers that the government provide low-income families that can be used for formula milk, plain cows milk, fresh and frozen fruit and vegetables. (Cambridge University Press, 2015)



What are the challenges in providing high quality care? And how can we overcome these challenges?

There are many challenges in providing high quality care, these include lack of support/staffing, lack of understanding/training, stress and burnout. National Academies Press (2012) states the available data shows that childcare workforce is majority women and poorly compensated (chapter 2: Kagan et al., 2008). Working conditions professional opportunities, incentives, administrative support and policies all have play a role in how the setting and workforce run.

To overcome these challenges strategies need to be in place, Maternity and Early years (no date) state to achieve high quality care we need better communication between services, we need to gather feedback and use that feedback to improve, we need to attract and train new and returning recruits to the workforce, develop clear progression plans including personal development and training.

A priority is understanding how educators can respond to the adverse impact of the challenging times of mental health, good mental health for staff, children and young people starts at everyone feeling comfortable in talking about their well-being for everyone to feel supported and have someone to talk to. (Dobemindful 2025).

Activities

Play in early years is how children learn and develop, according to TTS (2020) each activity is meant to be cross-curricular. In early years it is important to take an integrated approach to support the children's holistic development. Each childhood should be a magical time, allowing them to explore the world and make sense of everything around them while also ensuring they have appropriate materials to help enhance each area of their development. Science activities allow children to experiment with cause and effect while identifying and comparing and learning simple science concepts.



PowerPoint images

Smalltalk (no date) states sharing a story book with children is a great opportunity to build a secure positive relationship between practitioner and child. Reading books before rest or nap time is helpful in relaxing the children and helping them get ready to fall asleep, a child's imagination can go beyond with their curiosity stimulated. Storytelling has many benefits, it helps develop children's language skills, cognitive skills, while also exploring emotions.

Activities

Mystery/Treasure Box

A mystery box is a good way to enhance children's senses and imagination, Thomas (no date) supports this by saying mystery boxes stimulate children's intellectual curiosity while exploring and learning about different objects and expanding their vocabulary. The opportunities while using a mystery box are endless, changing the objects daily and even the opportunity to incorporate different objects related to certain themes the children may be interested in that week or objects that relate back to home bringing in further discussion about home life, family and bonding with one another. Hughes (no date) states treasure baskets offer young children a variety of materials and objects within their reach allowing them independence and choices to choose what they explore in their own way at their pace. The greater the variety of objects that are available to the children the greater the stimulation for the child's interest and brain development. It is important to note that the adult's role is to be responsive and not directive, allowing the children to take lead in their own play.



Source: Pinterest (2015)

Activities

Loose Parts

Loose parts have endless learning opportunities, they are materials that children can manipulate, transform, transfer, combine and explore. Casey and Robertson (2016) supports this by stating the list of possible loose parts are endless some could include natural resources, building materials and tools, scrap materials and random found objects. Loose parts support communication by enhancing socialisation and cooperation allowing the children to learn from one another and extends their vocabulary by hearing others around them using more complex words.

St. Kliment Ohridski University Press (2017) states materials all have different uses, designs, forms. People think about the different materials and what uses they can be while producing stories about them and interacting with them. Children need loose parts to observe the world and learn about cause and effect. Loose parts also play a big role in enhancing children's imagination and creativity. Loose parts act as a magnet for children, drawing them in making them curious about the world around them and the materials allowing their curiosity and imagination to go wild. Loose parts are open ended and allow for endless play, offering unlimited thoughts and possibilities for child led play. Another benefit of loose parts is fine and gross motor skills development by encouraging them to manipulate objects, carrying loose parts from one area to another.

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