



The First 1000 Days

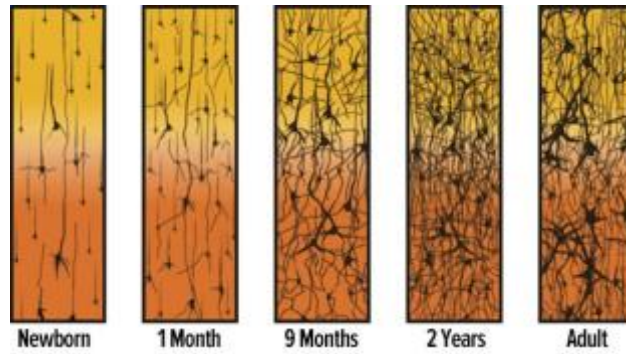
Student Name: Claire Bolch Student Number: (2104728) Word Count:2740



1 - Why are the First 1000 days of life so important?

It is thought that from conception to the age of 2 years the experiences babies have in the first 1000 days of their life have a detrimental effect on their well-being and health throughout their life. By ensuring a child has everything they need during these first 1000 days will help them live a healthy life in the future (Pregnancy Birth and Baby, 2019).

Maden, (2021) explains John Locke's theory of knowledge. John Locke was a 17th century English philosopher who believed that at birth a baby's mind is a blank slate "Tabula Rasa" that we adequately fill with 'ideas' which are experienced throughout life by using the human senses. By 'ideas' Locke means anything that we experience through our senses therefore a baby cannot create 'ideas' but will learn these through sensory experiences.



2 - Brain Development

It is believed that the first 1000 days of a child's life are fundamental to their development, health and well-being. It forms the foundations of the architecture of the brain for growth and development expanding the window of opportunity for the child. By stimulating a child's brain from the first day of its life, in a loving and caring environment, it contributes enormously to the child's hearing, vision, language, social and emotional development (Yates, 2015).

In addition to Yates' view (Karakochuk et al. 2018, p.11) supports the positive impact on the importance of the first 1000 days claiming that it illustrates a window of opportunity of growth rates, when the brain is forming new neural connections a process called neuroplasticity.



3 - Yates 2015 [Video]



4 - Nutrition

An assortment of nutrients play a part in the proper development of the brain. Iron plays a specific role in the first 1000 days throughout pregnancy into toddler-hood. With lack of iron in these important days affect infants and toddlers learning together with their social and emotional behavior (Stirling-Reed, 2022).

<https://x4d6i4m8.stackpathcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Picture1.png>

According to SMA Nutrition (2022), breast feeding helps provide the baby with the nutrients it needs for a great start. The protein content in a mother's breast milk helps the baby grow steadily. During the process of breast feeding the levels of protein alter over time, during the early weeks the baby requires a high level of protein to grow faster but can only tolerate little amounts of milk in their small stomachs. As the baby grows and gets older the protein in the milk decreased allowing a steadier growth. Ultimately breastfed babies will get exactly the milk and nutrients they need when they need to get it. This supports stable weight gain and there is a reduced risk of obesity in later life. As well as providing nutrients breast milk reduces the risk of allergies.

Whilst McCarthy (2020) supports the encouragement of breast feeding argues the also point of the barriers some mothers will face with breastfeeding and that it may not be as easy or possible for that individual. McCarthy explains that one should bare in mind that formula milk can also be used as a tool to support breastfeeding. It maybe that the mother cannot supply enough breast milk or purely chooses not to breastfeed for personal reasons. There are many other ways to help babies grow and flourish and its important to keep a real perspective.

As a practitioner it is important to support a mother's decisions when choosing their way to nurture their baby, all we can do is provide information and support.



5 - Nurturing

An equally important aspect to note is that without nurturing, caring and providing stimulating environments in the first 1000 days, can leave children falling behind peers at school. Additionally, being exposed to stresses or adversity during this crucial time can cause adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in the future, furthermore, exposing children to higher risks of poor health, compared to children that have no ACEs at all (House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee, 2018). From these points one could conclude that the role of an early years practitioner is paramount in assisting parents and carers to nurture and care for children helping them reach their full potential in the first 1000 days of their life and enhancing their future development as a whole.



6 - Barriers affecting parents and carers

Some barriers may occur for parents and carers during the first 1000 days of their babies life. Being judged as a parent especially after giving birth to a first child can cause poor mental health and well-being of a parent which may influence the way a parent brings up a child. These parents will doubt their capabilities. Adding to this pressure is a parent who may have finance worries without their abilities to work and provide (CymruWellWales, 2017). An example of these worrying times could be during the COVID 19 Global Pandemic this made parents feel isolated and worried about their families getting ill and being able to provide financially. Parents who are experiencing the first 1000 days of a child's life during the pandemic have reported to experience high levels of stress. Restrictions on people socialising during this time left parents and carers worried about the effects this could have on their child's social skills causing depression and other mental health issues this increased as the pandemic progressed ultimately influencing the parent child relationship and bond also impacting on the child's health and development. Before the pandemic, a parent would be able to seek support from other agencies during this crucial time face to face, unfortunately they couldn't leaving them feeling alone (Morris, 2021).



7 - Supporting Parents Through Hardships

Working during the Pandemic as a practitioner it is important to listen and support parents and children during times of hardship, reassuring parents that their children are safely cared for in a loving environment. National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA), (2020), evidence this by giving examples of ways in which early years providers supported children and their families during the pandemic. Some had 'Keep In Touch' sessions where practitioners would contact via video link or social media sharing stories, singing songs, yoga sessions and encourage families to get outside when possible for walks in the park.



8 - Enabling Adults

During the first 1000 days the role of the adult is vital in the learning progress of the child especially in this period of their life. The enabling adult must create environments that support learning which is emotionally safe and allow babies and young children to manage and convey how they feel and behave in a positive manner. The adult should remember when caring for the individual to be consistent, modelling kindness and compassion (Welsh Government, 2021). (Learner 2022) supports The Welsh Government in modelling nurturing behaviour, stating that a child will learn from adults who promote strong and respectful relationships with others around them.

To illustrate this point, one might say that the role of an early year's practitioner caring for the infant in the absence of their parent or carer, especially in first 1000 days is a paramount model of behaviour.

In addition to modelling nurturing behaviour the enabling adult should give respectful care to the babies and infants.



9 - Inclusivity

Enabling adults must respect inclusivity within their environment, with the knowledge that children from all different backgrounds and Wales has become a multi-cultural place to live. Whilst it is important to value and respect inclusivity among children, adults must also make a connection between languages both English and Welsh not only communicating verbally but taking time practice the use of alternative methods of communication doing so through observing and connecting with behaviours of a child. Exploring different language and culture should be offered by the enabling adult to promote knowledge and understanding of the world around them. Being sensitive to children's thoughts and feelings, promoting a happy fun approach to learning whilst encouraging independence and building resilience (Welsh Government, 2021c) Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY) 2022) supports inclusivity in early years, stating that every child is unique in and will have a developmental pace of their own. Practitioners should treat children fairly, not necessarily the treat them exactly

the same way, considering their individual needs and interests. Secondly supporting that adults should support and include children regardless of ethnicity, culture, their gender ,what language they speak or if they have a disability.



10 - "Rhyme Bags"

Claire Bennett, (2019) supports the use of Rhyme bags which are a fun way of introducing song to a setting, by filling the bag with rhyme relatable objects will help the infant to recognise and link the object with a song.

Supporting the use of rhyme bags (James, 2009) indicates that not only does this help language and communication development but helps exercise a child's memory by remembering lyrics.

Song time in a setting, at any learnable opportunity is important to practice as an early year's practitioner to support and connect with the babies and infants and support their developmental goals whilst creating a soothing and calming environment.



11 - Holistic and Enabling Environments

The environment a baby and young child is brought up in is considered important to its learning and development, some theorists have influenced the early years frameworks in the UK over the years (Hodgeman, 2012).

The Welsh Government (2021b) describe an enabling environment as a mixture of indoor and outdoor play and experiences allowing the children exploration to be the key element in their development growth. By allowing children to explore the world around them gives them a sense of belonging. Welsh Government further explains that not only providing physical spaces but a practitioner or enabling adult should consider the emotional aspect of the environment allowing the children to express themselves fully following their interests either independently or with others around them. To create this holistic and enabling environment one should consider providing a range of resources to help build a child understanding by offering visual and practical opportunities of learning. By providing a flexible and nourishing environment for children explore and problem solve from a young age develops a child's resilience, independence and building confidence. Supporting the theory of play through exploration.

'Te Whariki' is New Zealand's Early Years Curriculum, who also supports many aspects of the Welsh Governments view of an enabling rich environment. Te Whariki promotes exploration of the environment from an early age. Messy play being amongst those encouraged in the first 1000 days this provides sensory experiences to stimulate the children's well-being and growth. When children actively explore they use all their senses and a range of materials and equipment. The Te Whariki approach offers hands on experiences using natural materials offering children an insight of the natural environment teaching how to take care of the environment and natural materials including exploring and learning in the outdoors (Veazey, 2021)



12 - Who inspired enriched enabling environments in early years?

There are many pedagogues from around the world that has helped us gain a enrich environment for children in early years.

Friedrich Froebel a German educator invented the concept of kindergarten. This in time was called the Froebelian approach promoting the importance of play in early years allowing children to understand their world first-hand. As a practitioner when introducing Froebel's early years pedagogy it is important to offer play that is relevant for that child's stage of development

keeping them content in their play whilst offering opportunities to make choices whether these be wrong or right this will help them learn what is right as an individual (Arnerich, 2021)



13 - Maria Montessori originally had her first involvement with young children as a medical practitioner. Montessori promoted a stimulating environment for children offering a child led approach to play (McLeod-Brudenell 2014c). According to Isaacs, (2015) the Montessori approach has been noticed for its contribution in showing practitioners the importance of children learning through their senses and natural materials and resources. The Montessori approach offers children learning opportunities in their environment independently but being supported by practitioners. The Early Years Foundation Stage incorporates Montessori by supporting the child as a unique individual providing and enabling environment to play and learn in.

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