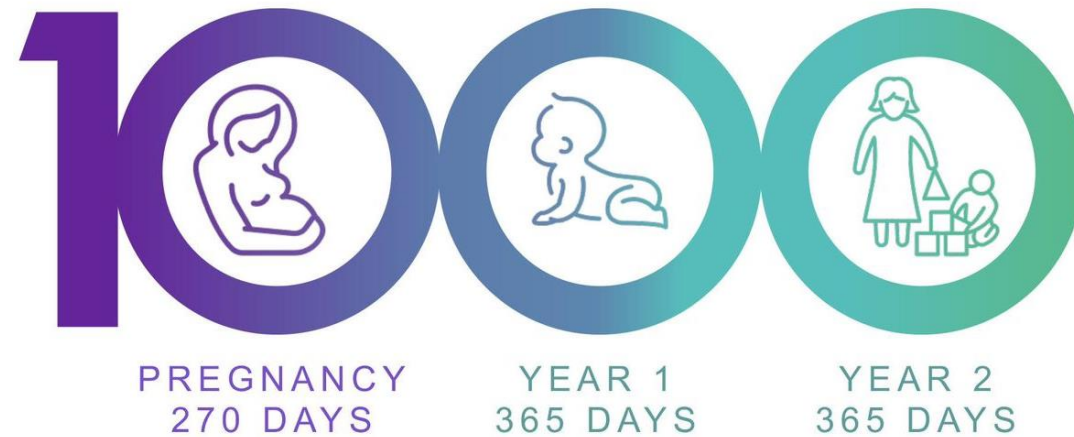


The first 1000 days



(KOKO Plus Foundation, 2024)

FIRST 1000 DAYS:

(OPEN ACCESS
GOVERNMENT, 2017)



The first 1000 days refers to the period between the conception of the child and the second year of his or her life.

The first intervention is to focus on the mother's pre-conception health and the factors that can be placed, in order to reduce the 'risk of certain adverse reproductive outcomes' (Indrio et al, 2023).

A pregnant woman must be provided with the opportunity to have safe access to physical activity, a richly balanced diet and a regular intake of supplementary medicine, such as folic acid, iodised salt or vaccinations, to ensure that the holistic well-being of the mother-to-be and child is accommodated. Attention should also be paid to the woman's immature status prior to conception and her postpartum depression during the pregnancy period (Likhar et al, 2022).

The 'gestational age period from conception to 13 weeks and 6 days' represents a massive change in the growth and development of the future child. The father also plays a crucial role in sharing emotions, doubts and support with the mother-to-be (Indrio et al, 2023).

During the second and third trimester, the development of the fetus is completed and the mother's adherence to the pre-medical examinations and tests is of unparalleled importance. Within the Labour-Partum-Birth, the newborn should be in skin-to-skin contact with the mother right after birth, and "early initiation of breastfeeding should be promoted" (Indrio et al, 2023).

The first 24 months of life represents the period of which the newborn child grows the most. It is at this point where the mother should implement breastfeeding throughout the first six months. This will lay the foundations for the infant's cognitive and development potential, to ensure that they have a prosperous start to their life (Karakochuk et al, 2018). Feeling safe and valued from infancy is key for children to navigate the world independently, and to confidently interact with others in their adolescence (NHS Wales, 2023).

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpyD19Sliaw> (UNICEF Philippines)



The first 1000 days exerts a great influence on a child's future than any part of their lifetime. The period from pregnancy to age two is when children are receptive to environmental, social and cultural changes. It acts as a benchmark for health, well-being, learning attainment and productivity throughout a person's life, whose effects will have a lasting imprint for the future generations (Capitani et al, 2023).

In the first two years of life, the infant child rapidly builds the foundational neural pathways in the brain. For every new social interactions or experiences that the child makes, such as crawling, building blocks, singing, dancing, cuddling and repeating actions, he or she will form new synapses in the brain (NHS, 2023). These electrical impulses give children the opportunity to develop new experiences that are required in their future life. It contributes to the holistic well-being of children's development (Stead, 2024).

The first and second years of children's life are predominately led by first-time parents. It is the parents that guide the new infant child towards future autonomy, knowing that each of the developmental stage through which the newborn encounters will lead him or her towards success in life (Indrio, 2023). The mother and father are the primary caregivers of the children's early experiences and exposures, "with lifelong benefits for health, productivity and social cohesion" (The Lancet, 2016, cited by NHS Wales, 2023).

EXCEPTIONAL CAREGIVING:

(THOUGHT.CO, 2019)



Exceptional caregiving is the ability for an Early Years Professional to regularly look after the child and family in the first 1000 days.

Exceptional caregiving involves the following aspects: safety and security, being responsive, adequate nutrition, opportunities for learning, and a good mental health and well-being.

The mother-child relationship is complex during the first 1000 days, right from the moment of conception up until the second year of the infant's life. To promote children's growth and development, the World Health Organisation (WHO), and United Nations International Emergency Children's Fund (UNICEF) have established the Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding. The government is steadfast in their commitments to provide children with optimal feeding practices, from the very start of their lives (Likhar, 2024).

From the first and second year of life, the infant child should be exposed to a wide range of stimulating play and activities, that would highly encourage independence, autonomy, and problem-solving skills (Likhar, 2024). It promotes a learning environment that is conducive to success and future productivity.

The newborn child should also start to demonstrate their unwavering love and profound bond between the parents, as they are the foundation stone of the child's physical health, well-being and learning (NHS Wales, 2023).

The emotional environment will also impact the quality of play and play-led activities in which the child is being placed with. For many toddlers and infants who are not yet independent enough to make free choices, and are highly dependent on the adult's use of support to supply toys and playground equipments; the play-opportunity is almost being dominated and controlled by the parents themselves (Brodie, 2018). A responsive and sensitive adult is required to ensure the smooth transition of play activities.

For Pickler (1998, cited by Sagastul et al, 2021), there are four different ways in which adults can display a robust, and playful learning activities for the infant child, by: having to guarantee a safe, and supportive learning environment around other children; to design, prepare, organise and to implement the play area; to provide children with the opportunity to offer a suitable play-time schedule activity; and to display objects (like cups, bowls or cars) and toys in a constructive way during the following sessions. Adults must select and utilise these 'tools' that are bespoke to the infant's developmental milestones.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KR8qjfscA1E> (KINDknow- BARNkunne)

However, in his qualitative analysis, Bowlby (1969, cited by Rose et al, 2016) suggested that the infant child has an innate ability to seek closeness, comfort, solace, sensitivity and protection from a caregiver, both of whom this type of natural instinct is mostly driven by the need to survive and thrive in its environmental stresses. The infant who displays stronger attachments between the parents is more likely to have higher self-esteem and better cognitive competence than those who are insecure with their parents.

Exceptional caregiving has positive implications for the first-time parents and EYEC practitioners. The first two years of a child's life should be unhurried, giving them the necessary 'space, time and freedom' required for the newborn child to build upon the basic foundations of their new emerging skills and knowledge (Welsh Government, 2022). The practitioner must use the language of love, intimacy and attachment; that is deeply rooted in the context of the child's holistic well-being, to promote high-quality of care (PLEYS, 2013).

PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS:

(QUICK CAMPUS, 2024)



The practitioner must work with parents, carers and local communities to ensure that children are thriving well in the first 1000 days of their lives.

The transition to parenthood can cause parents to shift their fundamental responsibilities and roles that they might display at home and in their outdoor environment. A lack of poorly resolved conflicts can harm children, which significantly impacts their well-being and holistic development. Relationships between parents, carers, the wider family and with EY professionals play a crucial role in providing parenting support, emotional advice, physical health, social interactions and practical help (NHS Wales, 2023).

The practitioner should use their own knowledge, skills, and expertise to give parents the time required to develop a soothing, nurturing child-parent relationships at home, such as: daily activities, family conversations, singing, reading out loud, discovery baskets, and clapping (NHS Wales, 2023). This setting has implications for EY professionals, as it demonstrates their ability to provide meaningful support and strong attachments between the parent and children, who lay the foundations of the family life (Rose et al, 2016).

It is likely though, that the EY professionals will encounter some children from diverse backgrounds who have unmet attachment needs by their parents or carers, which has a subsequent effect on their own learning inputs, holistic well-being and their inner ability to forge positive relationships with others in the future (Rose et al, 2016). Good mental health, and support networks acts as a buffer, thus allowing parents to navigate over through their challenges, and minimise impact of children's safety and learning (NHS Wales, 2023).

According to the Welsh Government (2022), child development is at the heart of the National Curriculum, and the five developmental pathways serves as an indicator of the progress that children are required to do, to ensure that they thrive academically and become independent, autonomous citizens in the everchanging landscapes of our world. Good qualified practitioners will draw upon their past experiences to write a clear rationale that explains what children must do to develop their social intellect at their own pace.

Link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Du3kzULD_3Q

(Simms/Mann Institute, 2017)

The feasible applications of Child Development (the first 1000 days) to Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Theory:

The 'social-ecological model', a theorem that was first proposed by the psychologist, Bronfenbrenner (1974, cited by Grace et al, 2017), aptly states how the developing child is being affected by different social, physical, economic and environmental factors in the ever-changing realms of our world. He argues that child development is a 'natural science of the behaviour of children in strange situations with strange adults' (1974, p.3). It impacts the way in which the child grows and develops from a very young age.

From the first and second year of life, children will be fully exposed to a wide range of face-to-face settings in their microsystems. For example, parents would forge social interactions with the infant child, in his or her immediate surroundings (Grace et al, 2017). They use this opportunity to take part in written or spoken language, which is a key component of the child's development in communication and social skills. This will help support the holistic wellbeing of future generations (NHS Wales, 2023).

The macrosystem can also significantly affect the child's social-emotional development, such as the cultural belief systems for which he or she was being brought up with. These values can be imposed by religious institutions, governments, society and schools (Grace et al, 2017). The EYEC practitioner has a responsibility to ensure that the parents are well-invested and avid in the child's early learning from the first 1000 days. It acts as a shared blueprint for future health, productivity and social cohesion (NHS Wales, 2023).

Lastly, the chronosystem refers to the patterns of environmental events that might impact the child's developments, throughout its life course, and transitions (Grace et al, 2017). During the first 1000 days, a child's first inner experiences are predominately placed by the parents themselves. They help us shape the way in which we perceive and understand our world, that is constantly evolving. It is the parents that are the primary caregivers of their child's early exposures and learning development (NHS Wales, 2023).

Maternal Factors:	Support Strategies Available:
Exposure to domestic violence can result in the new mother-to-be experiencing depression, anxiety, poor self-esteem and feeling emotionally drained. A recent study proposed by the Children's Commissioner for England, has suggested that over one million children aged 0-5, who live with an adult have witnessed endemic abuse at home (Department of Health, 2019).	The EY professional can also implement intervention strategies, such as services and counselling psychology for families and new-parent to be, who are perpetrators of domestic violence (Frank Field PIP UK, cited by Department of Health, 2019).
Parental alcohol abuse significantly effects the baby's ability to think rationally and cognitively. Deprived families display greater levels of social fragmentation, an ongoing violence, lower levels of family cohesion, and a substantial use of illegal drugs. The family's ability to survive during adversity is eroded. It can cause many unprecedented challenges to the family unit (Rose et al, 2016).	Research shown by the Early Learning Goals (ELG) has strongly suggested that EY practitioners should fully provide support to family members who are struggling with the overuse of alcohol consumption, by making secure attachments amongst community-based organisations (Forrester et al, 2021).



CHALLENGES IN PROVIDING HIGH-QUALITY CARE:

(HEADTEACHER UPDATE, 2021)

The Disabled Living Foundation (DLS) states that there are '770,000 disabled children under the age of 16 in the UK' (Knowles, 2016).

Disability is a challenge when providing high quality care for the following reasons: social stigma and marginalisation of disabled people, a remote and inaccessible facilities, a lack of highly qualified trained staff who are partially responsible for looking after children with disabilities and other learning impairments, and a lack of availability of space in the classroom environment or any other settings in which the person is being placed in (Knowles, 2016).

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4zldt1GXl0> (BBC Wales, 2023)

Children and young people with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) have difficulties in forging social interactions with other people in their environments. They often struggle with key fundamental concepts such as reading, writing or mathematics; and unlike the child of their age, they will grasp over the key ideas and knowledge for a sustained periods of time (English Government, 2016b, cited by Knowles, 2016). This has a huge knock-on effect on their vision, mobility, dexterity, hearing aids and stamina.

The EY professional must display effective partnership working with the parents and carers of the disabled child for at least three times a year. They are envisaged to take the opportunity to review the progress of their child, and to explore what measures can be implemented to ensure that the child thrives competently and socially in their own learning spheres. The practitioner should show genuine care and emotional support to SEN children to build a sense of belonging and pride in the school community (Welsh Government, 2022).

The EY professional and the parent or carers of the disabled child have a responsibility to listen to his or her needs and opinions first, at the forefront of decision-making. It is a fundamental human right for all, and this is highly applicable to every child, irrespective of their social status and backgrounds (Welsh Government, 2022).

According to the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), more than '3.9 million children across the UK are living below poverty' (Knowles, 2016).

Poverty is a challenge when providing high-quality care because it is a multi-dimensional issue that affects families, friends, local communities and individuals across the country. When people are living in absolute or relative poverty, they will have a less thriving opportunity to life. Children will be exposed to a limiting access in healthcare, high-quality of education, and to the most basic, fundamental human resources. It perpetuates a cycle of vicious poverty and inequality (Knowles, 2016).

There is a clear evidence to suggest that children who are living in poverty are suffering from major physiological and social problems. The national campaign, 'Psychologists Against Austerity' (PAA) has explained how austerity policies can negatively impact the person's mental health and holistic wellbeing. There is a fear of instability and insecurity, and feelings of great loneliness and powerlessness amongst parents and children. They are unable to cope financially and economically in this situation (Knowles, 2016).

In Wilkinson and Pickett's report, 'The Spirit Level' (2010, cited by Knowles et al, 2017), the authors argue that it is the unequal distribution of resources which impacts the way a person achieves its outcomes in education, physical health, life expectancy and obesity in a meritocratic society. Countries such as the UK, USA and Portugal have the highest gaps in income across all parts of the world. They believed that in a more egalitarian society, there is a greater desire for social cohesion, trust, and lower levels of violence.

Over the past few years, the Welsh Government has proposed the 'Free School Meals' scheme, whereby all children from non-maintained primary schools were eligible for free school meals. This scheme was in response to the cost-of-living crisis during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Welsh Government's ambition to tackle child poverty across Wales. They want to ensure that each child does not go hungry during the school premises, and to promote this idea of sustainable eating (Welsh Government, 2022).

PLAY ACTIVITIES:

(HOW WE MONTESSORI, 2018)



Loose parts are tangible objects through which children can 'move, manipulate, control and change' whilst they play in their own environments.



(Orlando Science Centre, 2020)

Loose parts is a fundamental part of the children's active learning. In Piaget's development theory, she suggested that children should actively engage in their own learning environments and take any calculated risks. They should be exposed to a wide range of stimulating objects in their playground areas and indoor classroom settings (Piaget, 1952, cited by Daly and Beloglovsky, 2014).

From the first 1000 days, the baby should be provided with the opportunity to use their physical movement skills to build upon the foundations of their childhood experiences. It is the responsibility of the parents to ensure that the infant child has a freely-move and routine-based settings, so that they can practice their first wobbly steps, sitting, standing and 'cruise' around furniture (Stead, 2024). They should simultaneously develop their controls of legs, co-ordination exercises and gross motor skills (Brodie, 2018).

From ten weeks old up until seven months, the infant child should be on their tummy time. This is an excellent opportunity for babies to use their arms to push up from the floor, giving them the necessary strength that is required to develop their upright posture in the spine (Archer and Siraj, 2015, cited by Brodie, 2018). For non-mobile babies, it is highly recommended that the parents play and roll over their child freely and independently on the floor, so they can effectively improve their muscle coordination.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BJ1xJglvba0> (Kids in the House, 2017)

Young children learn their own understanding of the natural world through their sensory exploration. The infant child utilises their sight, sound, touch, smell and taste to nurture and stimulate their sensory play. The children's ability to touch objects is deepened when they first experience tactile resources that are: soft, rough, spongy, furry, bumpy, slick, abrasive, slimy, and hard (Daly and Beloglovsky, 2014). These human commodities are fundamental to the child's holistic development (Stead, 2024).

The Treasure Basket is a collection of "80-100 natural resources... placed in a sturdy round wicker basket that is made available to a seated infant from about 5-10 months old" (Froebel Trust, 2017).

From the first 1000 days of lives, the infant child will be exposed to a wide range of sensory exploration through their use of hands, fingers, and the mouth. The child will have the opportunity to play with a variety of non man-made materials that will encourage his or her stimulation in the outdoor environment and brain development. This type of activity is non-social and so this type of exploration must be done independently by children in a safe, nurturing and secure play-based area (Hughes, 2017).

From an early age, children are fascinated and captivated by the notion of animals, and the types of animals that are displayed in the books, TV programmes and stories. Children will be presented with the opportunity to explore a wide range of insects that are in their garden or outdoor environments, such as spiders, snails or butterflies. They might undertake visits to see larger animals in the zoo. All of these shared experiences "allow us to invite children to move like animals" (Goodger, 2023).

International Approaches:

Te Whāriki was first published by the Ministry of Education in New Zealand in 1996. This documents sought to bring children together from all facets of society, with a strong sense of identity and belonging. It serves as a shared blueprint for teachers, professionals, kaiako, children and families to interweave their own unique goals, aspirations and strands in the Te Whāriki curriculum. It was one of the first national curriculum documents that was implemented in the EY Education sector (Ministry of Education, 2017).

However, the history of the Reggio Emilia approach was first founded and pioneered by the Italian teacher and psychologist, Loris Malaguzzi. It was his firm belief that children are born with unlimited capabilities and a sense of wonder. They have an innate ability to connect with the natural world that is around them, through meaningful play and sensory exploration (Malaguzzi, 1998, cited by Chicken and Whitehouse, 2022). He wanted children to become active citizens in the ever-changing world.

In Te Whāriki, children right from the birth are placed at the heart of the national curriculum. They start to engage in meaningful social interactions with people, families and other surroundings - a process that happens

throughout their lives. Children experience an environment where they learn and are equipped with strategies required for active thinking, social explorations (mana aotūroa) and reasoning. Over time, children become increasingly capable of using problem solving skills whilst challenging themselves in their physical outdoor space (Ministry of Education, 2017).

However, according to Reggio Emilia, children from a young age start to develop critical thinking skills, and demonstrate the inner ability to convey their own understanding of the world through 'drawing, painting, shadow work, and photography' (Vecchi and Gandini, 2011, cited by Chicken and Whitehouse, 2022). Malaguzzi (1998, cited by Chicken and Whitehouse, 2022) upholds this perception that children are 'creative meaning-makers', who depict their own natural worlds that is not always verbal.

Overall, both Te Whāriki and Reggio Emilia played an instrumental role in providing an inclusive and equitable education for children. Their objective was to ensure that each child from the youngest age receives a thriving opportunity to learning in life, with a clear focus on the holistic well-being and development.

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