



The first 1000 days

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(Myprotein, 2019)

What are the first 1000 days?

The first 1000 days of a child's life, include pregnancy and the first two years after birth. Good nutrition and care during pregnancy help ensure a healthy baby (Karakochuk *et al.* 2018). The first-year infants grow fast, especially their brains. They need healthy food, need love, and safety. They can get sick easily. They also start to understand and use language. Toddlers (1-3 years) learn a lot. They play, make friends, and stay healthy. Good care helps in the future (Pedro *et al.*, 2021)*



(Health Products For You, 2020)

Why are the first 1000 days important?

The first 1000 days of a child's life are super important for their growth and health. Good nutrition for the mom during pregnancy and after the baby is born is key to a healthy start. Nutrition during pregnancy or the first two years of a child's life can lead to irreversible physical and mental development issues. (Likhar and Patil, 2022)• The first 1000 days are important because early experiences shape a child's brain. Monitoring development helps identify delays for early intervention. The first year is a golden age for brain growth. Sensory pathways develop first followed by language and complex thinking (GOV.UK, 2021)•

Exposure to stress and adversity during the first 1000 days can have a significant impact on a child's development. This can include experiences like poverty, violence, and neglect, leading to long-term health and behavioral problems. Secure attachments foster trust, emotions, regulation, and healthy relationships throughout life. Learning: the first 1000 days are a crucial window for learning. Play, exploration, and interaction build foundational skills in language, literacy, and numeracy. Therefore, providing children with a nurturing and supportive environment during their first 1000 days is crucial to their future health and well-being (Likhar and Patil, 2022)•



(Patientser.com, 2024)

Caregiving

What is exceptional caregiving?

Exceptional caregiving means keeping both the mom and the baby healthy, safe, and comfortable. It involves fostering a close and loving relationship with the baby, it supports the baby's development through play and education (World Health Organization 2018).

Enabling environment and Inclusive practices:

By focusing on these considerations, we can create an enabling environment that promotes inclusive practices and supports the development of all individuals.

Individual needs: Recognizing that each person is unique and has diverse needs, preferences, and learning styles.

Accessibility: ensuring physical sensory and cognitive accessibility for all individuals.

Empowerment: providing opportunities for individuals to make choices and develop skills.

Diversity: creating an environment that values differences, fostering a sense of belonging for everyone.

Equity: ensuring that all individuals have equal opportunities to thrive.

Collaboration: working in partnership to create an inclusive and supportive environment.

Respect: treating everyone with respect.

The Welsh government is actively working to reduce child poverty through various strategies, including increasing income support, improving access to quality education and childcare and addressing root causes of poverty, improving child outcomes by focusing on early childhood development, providing access to quality education, and promoting healthy lifestyles. (Welsh government 2024).

Bowlby's attachment theory emphasizes that responsive caregiving fosters secure attachment in infants. Which leads to positive outcomes such as: coping with stress, strong social skills, improved cognitive development, and reduced anxiety/ depression. (read, 2014).

Pikler's approach emphasizes respectful and attentive care, especially during routine tasks, to build trust and foster a secure bond with the child. This fosters a trusting and secure environment, positively impacting the child's development. (Google Book, 2022).

Bronfenbrenner's theory highlights how a child's development is shaped by their interactions with different environments. Exceptional care considers these interconnected systems.

Microsystem: responsive relationships within the immediate environment.

Mesosystem: fostering (parent-teacher communication).

Exosystem: recognizing indirect influencers like community resources.

Macrosystem: promoting cultural values and societal structures that support child well-being.

Chronosystem: adopting care to the child's changing developmental.

(Urie Bronfenbrenner, 1981)*

Exceptional caregiving is important because it provides a strong foundation for a child's development in all area

Brain development: leading to positive outcomes in all areas of life.

Emotional security: fostering healthy emotional growth

Language development: talking, reading, and singing are essential for building a strong foundation for language learning.

Physical growth: healthy physical development relies on good nutrition, quality sleep, and opportunities for physical activity

(NVS Health, n.d.).

Professional partnership



(Animalia-life.club, 2022)

What is the role of an Early Years practitioner in supporting children and their families in the first 1000 days?

- **The role of an Early Years practitioner in supporting children and families within the first 1000 days**

The public health approach supports parents and emphasizes the importance of the first 1000 days, and the role of healthcare professionals, and early years practitioners in supporting children and families.

Supporting children's development

Creating a safe and stimulating environment: Practitioners ensure a safe, nurturing environment rich in sensory experiences and opportunities for exploration. This includes providing age-appropriate toys, activities, and resources.

Supporting language and communication: Using language-rich interactions, creates opportunities for children to communicate their needs and ideas.

Building positive relationships: Practitioners form warm, responsive relationships with children, fostering trust and security. This involves engaging in playful interactions and responding sensitively to children's needs.

Supporting families

Partnership and collaboration: Early years teachers work closely with families to understand their child's unique needs and preferences.

Supporting the family's well-being: Early years professionals offer support to families experiencing stress, poverty, or other challenges.

Promoting healthy parenting practices: Practitioners providing guidance and support to families on various aspects of childrearing (Public Health Wales, 2023)

Why is it important to work in partnership during this period?

What is partnership working?

Partnership working involves effective communication allowing children time to adjust, collaborating with the setting to align home and school activities, maintaining regular phone contact, attending workshops for learning, engaging in community projects, and participating in field trips together (One community A guide to effective partnership working between principal and local councils, n.d.) *

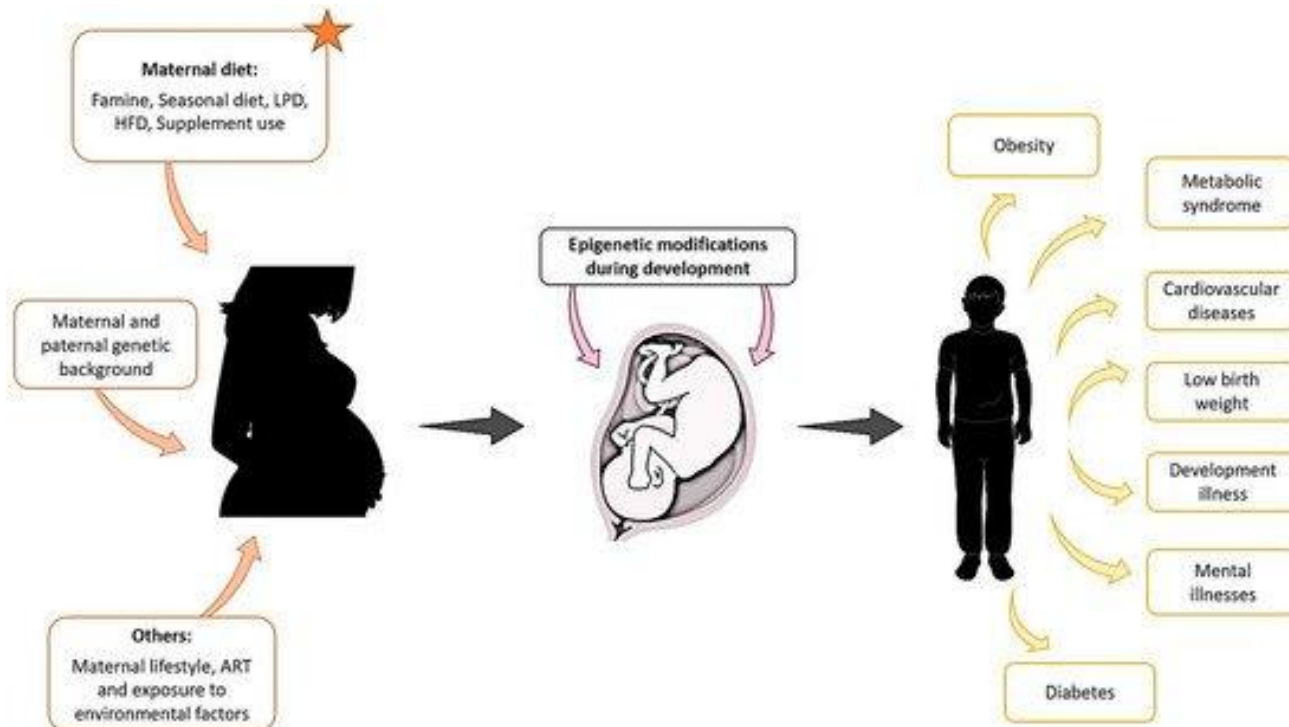
Partnership working is important during the first 1000 days because... **Collaborative efforts enable practitioners to:**

Partners must have a clear understanding of the common goals they are trying to achieve. Sharing their skills and ideas leads to more creative solutions and better outcomes. sharing resources and workload, practitioners can work more effectively. Teamwork fosters better communication and coordination among professionals. Working collaboratively can increase job satisfaction, motivation, sense of accomplishment, and shared success (www5.open.ac.uk, n.d.) *

The Childcare Act 2006 emphasizes collaboration between agencies. It encourages local authorities to work with organizations like health and social services. This involves sharing information. This allows professionals to get a complete picture of the child's needs and provide coordinated support.

Early identification and intervention are key in the Childcare Act 2006. This requires collaboration between professionals to support children's needs.

Inspirational – Team Building – Work Related uplifting



Mothers strongly influence how their children develop. This includes genetics, diet, habits, and environment. A mother's health is key to her child's growth. Her mental well-being, financial situation, and equality care all affect the child's outcomes

(Fitzgerald, Hor and Dark 2020) .

Maternal factors and support strategies available

Maternal factors

Nutrition: A mother's diet plays a crucial role in the development of her child. Nurturing pregnancy and breastfeeding is essential for proper brain development, growth, and overall health. However, maternal obesity increases risks for both mother and baby, including gestational diabetes, high blood pressure, and cesarean section, which increases the risk of premature birth, a serious problem that affects many babies.

Environmental factors: exposure to toxins and pollutants during pregnancy can have detrimental effects on a child's development. Furthermore, maternal viral infections can significantly increase the risk of both mental health issues.

Genetic factors: Genes not only determine physical traits like height and eye color, but they also shape a child's temperament, affecting their social and emotional development, and impacting a child's academic performance. Genes inherited from the mother play a vital role in this complex interplay, contributing to a child's physical characteristics, temperament, and susceptibility to various diseases.

Lifestyle choices: a mother's lifestyle habits such as smoking, alcohol consumption, and drug use, can have detrimental effects on the developing fetus and increase the risk of birth defects and developmental delays. In low-income families, these risks can be exacerbated due to limited access to quality health care, nutrition, and support services. This can lead to a cycle of poverty and poor health outcomes for both mother and child

(Fitzgerald, Hor and Dark 2020).

Support strategies available

- Educate on the benefits of a balanced diet for pregnancy and breastfeeding.
- Provide access to healthy affordable food, especially for low-income families.
- Provide weight management programs for mothers and counseling.
- Promote healthy food policies.
- Prioritize funding for maternal nutrition programs.
- Create support networks for pregnant and breastfeeding mothers.

- Conduct community outreach to raise awareness about pregnancy risks among local families.
- Promote vaccination, hygiene, and early infection treatment during pregnancy.
- Offer comprehensive postnatal with a focus on mental health and development screening.
- Invest in research to investigate the long-term consequences of environmental and maternal influences on children.

- Preconception counseling assists couples in understanding their genetic risk, exploring options like carrier screening, and making informed decisions before pregnancy.
- Early intervention for children with developmental delays.
- Support groups provide emotional support and a sense of community for families facing these challenges, while continued research.

- Lifestyle ensures access to affordable treatment for pregnant women
- Provides access to food assistance programs like food banks.
- Implement home visiting programs for support and early intervention.
- Provide high-quality early childhood education.
- Incorporate information on contraception, pregnancy prevention, and substance use risks into sex education

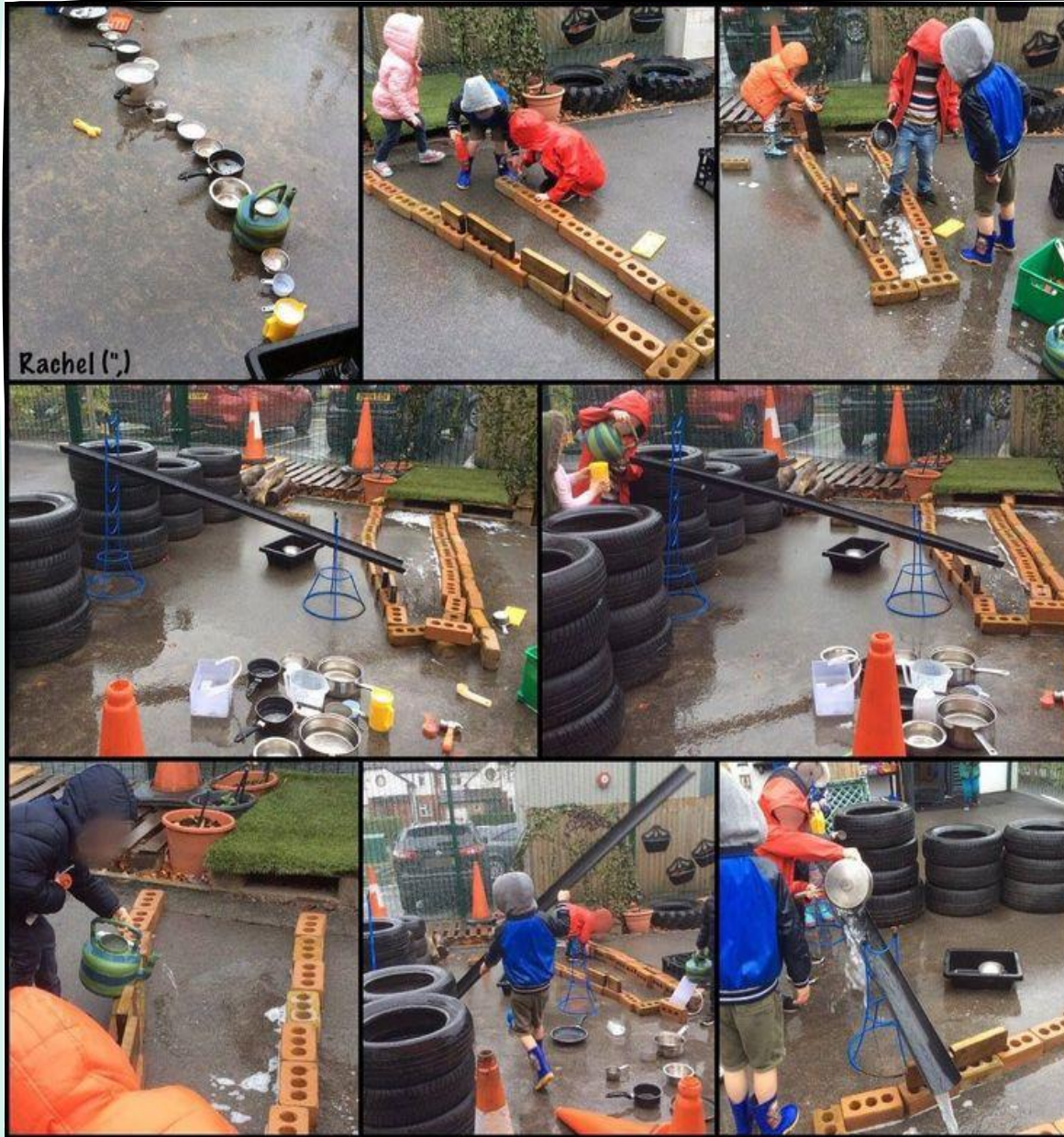
(Muglia et al., 2022, Negussie, Geller and DeVoe, 2019).

What are the challenges in providing high-quality care?

Factor	Solution
Financial struggles: limit access to essential medical services including preventive care, and specialist consultation. This can lead to delayed or avoided treatment, potentially worsening health outcomes. The financial stress associated with healthcare costs can significantly impact mental health, exacerbating conditions like anxiety and depression. Also, financial barriers limit access to quality education. High tuition costs exclude many from higher education, hurting future careers. Underfunded schools lack resources, impacting learning (Fowler, 1995, World, 2020)·	Quality healthcare should be effective, safe. Quality healthcare also should be timely, equitable, integrated, and efficient. This means short wait times, equal care for all, a full range of services through life, and making the most of resources. To improve high-quality education, we need a multi-pronged approach. This includes financial aid like government programs and scholarships, expanding access to an affordable healthcare, increasing funding for education, and tackling the root causes of poverty (Smith, 2018)·
The lack of staffing and support: It is a major challenge facing many practitioners and caregivers. Staffing shortages lead to increased workloads for existing employees, which can result in burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and reduced quality of care. This can lead to difficulty meeting demands, resulting in frustration and a sense of failure (Shemtob et al., 2023)·	Increasing wages and benefits, utilizing technology, and expanding healthcare infrastructure. Creating a positive work environment. (Waitzman, 2022, Anon, 2023)· Hire more staff and provide adequate training, and supervision to ensure adequate coverage and reduce the workload on existing employees. Promote work-life balance with policies like flexible schedules and generous leave. Improving working conditions to retain qualified professionals and alleviate staffing shortages (CareQualityCommission, 2022, Shemtob et al 2023)·
Stress and burnout: These are prevalent among healthcare professionals, negatively impacting both patient care and their well-being. Stress and fatigue can increase the risk of medical errors and mistakes putting patient safety at risk. Stress can contribute to various health problems including anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, and even physical ailments. Also, the emotional and physical demands of caregiving can lead to burnout if self-care is neglected (Smith, 2018)·	□ Effective healthcare teams, positive patient relationships, and proactive coping mechanisms are crucial for preventing burnout. □ Early recognition of stress is vital to ensure quality patient care. □ Regular team meetings improve communication and help address concerns. □ Maintaining a healthy work-life balance. □ Regular self-care including exercise and relaxation, meditation can help individuals become more aware of their thoughts and emotions. □ Talking to friends, family, or mental health professionals can provide valuable support and cope. □ Training in stress management equips practitioners and caregivers with the tools to cope effectively (Smith, 2018)·

Activities that provide meaningful learning





Loose parts play

The theory of loose parts play was developed by architect Siman Nicholson . It emphasizes the importance of providing children with open-ended materials and environment. Loose parts are materials that children can use freely to create, explore, and imagine. These could include things like

Natural materials: sticks, leaves, rocks, and water.

Recycled materials: cardboard boxes, bottles, caps, fabric scraps.

Household items: buttons, spoons, pots, and pans (Haughey,2023).

Loose parts play helps children develop creativity, problem-solving skills, and fine motor skills. Loose parts play are everyday objects like boxes, leaves, sticks, and pebbles that children can use to play creativity. Loose-part play is a powerful tool for developing a child's imagination. Imagination, as Einstein pointed out, is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is restricted to our current understanding, while imagination encompasses to entire universe and all that is yet to be discovered. Loose-parts play can be even more fun outdoors, where children can use larger items like planks, and tire crates. It can be done anywhere, at home, in school, playground, or even outdoors. (Louv,n.d.).

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms play as a fundamental right. This underscores its crucial role in a child's holistic development, income passing physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and intellectual growth. Play facilitates interaction, emotional regulation, creativity, and crucial thinking.

(Casey and Robertson,2019).

Storytelling

Storytelling is the art of sharing narratives, whether through spoken words, written texts, or visual means. It is a fundamental human activity that has been passed down through generations. It can take many forms, from bedtime stories and picture books to folktales, myths, and even interactive storytelling apps.

Storytelling pots a child's brain power.

By listening, they learn to focus, remember and predict.

Sharing stories strengthens the bond between children and their loved ones.

It creates warm and happy memories together.

Storytelling could be done in different ways like paper puppets, story stones, story cubes, picture storyboarding, a story with props, digital storytelling, and role-playing.

Paper finger puppets: Kids can pretend to be different characters.

Story stones: kids can find smooth rocks and decorate them with pictures they can use paint, stickers, or pictures from magazines. Then, they can use the rock to make up stories.

Using puppets: children can use store-bought or homemade puppets to act out a story.

Storytelling with drops: children can use everyday objects as drops in their stories (Ampbell,2023).

The value of storytelling

Storytelling is a bridge between generations, connecting children to their heritage and traditions. It also enhances their communication skills and encourages them (Childs Play International,2024).

- Storytelling ignites a child's imagination, and this inspires them to invent their fantastical tales.
- Stories help children to learn about the world, and concepts and provide a model of behavior.
- Stories help children relax and understand their feelings.
- Stories help to develop focus and concentration.
- Reading stories can be a source of fun. (Anka zapart, 2021).



(Readingeggs.co.uk, 2025)

Activities to support a child in the first 1000 days



(Kerr, 2021)

•Sensory Play

Sensory play is any activity that stimulates our senses touch, sight, hearing, smell, and taste. Messy sensory play is great fun for kids. They can use all their senses to explore and have fun. Toddlers love to play with things that feel and look interesting.

Sensory play may include:

bubble-blowing mix part dish soap with 6 parts water, and get ready for a bubbly explosion of fun.

Play with slime

The slime is great for toddlers, they can touch and even taste it. It can be made from safety materials

Make a mud kitchen

It is a good idea to explore some messy creative play. They can make their mud kitchen. They can use some old pots, spoons, and bowls .

Fake snow

Snow fun any time. They can make fluffy fake snow. They will enjoy shaping into snowballs and snowmen. There are a lot of activities like sand and water, painting, and sensory bottles, (Action

of Children, 2022)*

•How does this support a child's development within the first 1000 days?

Sensory play is important for kids in the first 1000 days because it helps them to learn, solve problems, and feel good about themselves. It helps kids learn to take, make friends, and understand how things work. Sensory play also is important for young children they learn best when they can use all their senses and do things that interest them. Play helps them get ready to learn more complex things later on, like math and science (Early,2022)*

Even though sensor play is a lot of fun, it supports brain development, enhancing memory, developing fine motor skills, and supporting language development. Helping children understand what is around them. (Action for children,n.d.)*

International approaches

• Reggio Emilia

The Reggio Emilia Approach is an Italian education style. It is a way of teaching young children. It focuses on how kids learn best when they are with others. It believes that through playing and talking with friends and teachers, kids discover and grow. It emphasizes teamwork, with multiple teachers collaborating in the classroom. Children have access to a special space called the Atelier for creative exploration. Teachers document children's learning, and everyone- teachers, parents, and the wider community plays a role in supporting each child's growth. Natural light is maximized in Reggio Emilia schools, improving children's well-being and cognitive function.

• Montessori

The Montessori approach focuses on dependent learning through hands-on- activities and play, developed by Dr. Maria Montessori in the early 1900s. It is effective for children of all ages and abilities. It is a valuable approach for parents and educators who want to create a nurturing and stimulating learning environment for children (Montessori Education- Montessori Northwest, 2024).

Compare and contrast.

The national approaches of Reggio Emilia and Montessori share a focus on child-centred learning yet diverge in their emphasis and methods. They are both approaches to early childhood education. Reggio Emilia emphasizes the importance of the environment- and the child's relationship with it but Montessori focuses through structured activates and prepared environments.

In Reggio Emilia, learning follows the children's interests. Their project guides what they learn. The teacher works alongside the children, learning with them. In Montessori; there is a set plan for what kids will learn. The teacher helps them learn by guiding and observing

(Reggio Emilia Approach, 2019, Biermeier, 2015, Montessori Academy, 2023).

• How can this theory be used to support child development within the first 1000 days?

- Strong relationships in Reggio Emilia benefit children's early brain development.
- Engaging environments support all areas of child development.
- Children explore their interests by fostering learning and curiosity.

Independence builds competence and self-esteem in the Montessori approach which supports children's development in the first 1000 days. Montessori activities build practical life skills like self-care and coordination which help children to learn and grow.

By integrating aspects of both Reggio Emilia and Montessori, educators, and parents can cultivate supportive environments that foster the holistic development of young children during this critical period

(My Teaching Cupboard, 2023, Excellence in Childcare and Preschool at Maria Montessori International Academy, 2017)•

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