THE FIRST 1000 DAYS

Module number - ECEGY4001

Student number - 1805798

Word count - 2942



(Vivience, No Date)



(Union Project, No Date)



(Breanna, No Date)

WHAT IS THE FIRST 1000 DAYS?

The first 1000 days consist of conception to a child's second birthday and represent the most critical period of brain development in human life (Karakochuk, 2018).
During this time the brain forms neural connections that support the foundation for cognitive, emotional, social and physical development. Therefore, it is crucial for shaping a child's future learning ability, behaviour, and overall health and well-being (Center on the Developing Child Harvard University, 2026).



(FREEPIK, 2024)

Within the first 1000 days, it can be divided into key developmental stages which include:

- Preconception and conceptional
- First trimester of pregnancy
- Second and third trimester of pregnancy
- Labour -delivery-birth
- First month of life
- First year of life
- Second year of life

(Indrio, F., *et al* 2023).

Multiple factors contribute to brain development which include environmental, health and dietary factors. According to Cusick and Georgieff (2017), maximising brain development during this time is vital as insufficient progress can have lasting effects on education, occupation and mental well-being. This article highlights that adequate nutrition, alongside minimised stress, is fundamental for early brain development. Furthermore House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee (2019) highlights that during the first 1000 days, babies and young children are highly vulnerable and sensitive to their environment, and the key foundations of development begin to form; if they fall behind and do not meet expected milestones in their first year, it is more than likely that the babies and young children will remain behind on their milestones.

Brain Development



(ResearchGate, 2021)

To the left is a picture of the brain scan of a three-year-old child who has had a normal upbringing, and then a neglected child's brain scan, and as the picture shows, neglect can significantly affect the brain development.

WHY IS THE FIRST 1000 DAYS IMPORTANT?

Mulcaire-Jones and Scanlon (2022) mention that the first 1000 days of life are important as this period can impact the physical, cognitive and emotional development, as during this period approximately 80% of the brain is formed. Nutrition is therefore a priority during this time frame because proper infant nutrition is vital for optimal brain development, immunity and growth as well as overall health.

The Food and Behaviour Research (2025) indicates that studies over the past years have shown that malnutrition occurring from months before conception up to two to three years of age can play a significant role in negative impacts on physical and mental health. UNICEF, (2021) states that a woman's nutritional status and overall health will directly affect the pregnancy outcome and long-term health of the baby.

Research also demonstrates the impact of dietary patterns, showing that high sugar intake in early on life can affect the health and development (see -High Sugar Diets in early life) for more information. In addition, Zyl and Wyk (2021) found that certain life experiences in the first 1000 days can play a crucial role in the child's school performance; these experiences include prenatal substance exposure, poor nutrition and stress, and iron deficiency.

Why is safety and security important during the first 1000 days?
Safety and security in the first 1000 days of life are vital, due to rapid brain growth during this time period. During early life, learning occurs through relationships with caregivers, and with these interactions it helps influence communication skills, emotions, and understanding (Healthdirect Australia Limited, 2025).

Pikler's theory saw the importance of positive attachments and respectful caregiving in early childhood development. Pikler believed that positive, responsive interactions, such as talking to the infants during feeding and personal care routines supports the development of attachment. These secure attachments support healthy brain development and emotional well-being, underlining the essential role that a nurturing and stable environment plays during the first 1000 days.

WHAT IS EXCEPTIONAL CARE?

As Vardhan (2023) states, exceptional care is delivered when healthcare professionals go above and beyond routine practice, ensuring they focus on patient-centred approaches, demonstrating empathy, respect and effective communication.

This approach ensures that patients feel valued, listened to and actively involved in each decision made about their care. Similarly, Premier Medical Staffing (2016) highlights the importance of understanding the patients' individual needs and respecting their personal preferences in order to be able to provide high-quality care. Understanding that each patient has diverse needs and personal values enables health professionals to provide more personalised and effective care.

During the first 1000 days of life, pregnant women and their babies receive care and support from several healthcare professionals, including midwives, sonographers, health visitors and general practitioners. Each member contributes to the overall health and well-being and helps the women make choices regarding their care, ensuring the baby has the best start in life (UK Parliament Committees, 2025).



(Welsh Government, 2024)

Vardhan (2023) also believes there are 10 key principles that ensure the practitioner is maintaining a high standard of care. These include active listening, empathy, respect and dignity and clear communication, all of which are essential in building a trusting and therapeutic relationship with each patient. Additionally, educating patients, providing personalised care, responding in a timely manner, team collaboration, continual improvement and maintaining compassionate bedside manner are all key principles for exceptional care. Trust, good teamwork and a safe environment are just as important in maternity care as women are then able to express their concerns and ask questions confidently and to feel safe while doing so (Health and Social Care Services Research, 2023).

WHY IS EXCEPTIONAL CARE IMPORTANT?



UK Parliament (2019) emphasises that exceptional care in the first 1000 days is vital, as it lays the foundation for health, well-being, and later life outcomes. As UK Parliament Committees (2025) mention, exceptional care is essential to ensure that both mother and baby have the best possible start in life. Furthermore, high-quality care has a vital role in reducing antenatal and postnatal mental health conditions, which affect approximately 20% of mothers.

When healthcare professionals provide respect, person-centred care, and empathy, the women are going to feel that they have the correct support in place and that support will reduce the anxiety and stress levels during this important time. With health professionals providing exceptional care, they can help identify any risks early and provide the correct support for the woman and baby. This is important as Bowlby's attachment theory states that exceptional care helps healthcare professionals develop trusting relationships with the mother, which enables her to feel safe and supported in an environment where she can communicate comfortably and openly about any needs or concerns.

According to Bowlby's attachment theory, a caregiver needs to be emotionally responsive and sensitive to establish secure attachment. Bowlby believed that building secure attachments from a young age will help relationships later on in life, as young children who establish attachment early on in life are more than likely going to have stronger self-esteem and better self-reliance as they grow into adulthood (Segal and Jaffe, 2019).

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

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

Practitioners have a role and are committed to helping families give children the best start in life. Ofsted (2025) published ‘Best Start in Life (BSIL) research’, a three-part study that examines the impact on early education and care, as well as curriculum and teaching practices for children under 2 years of age.

Early Years practitioners have a big impact on families and their children by supporting them throughout the first 1000 days of a child’s life, with several responsibilities, some of which are supporting emotional and social needs, providing nurturing care, educating, planning and supervising, communicating effectively with parents and other professionals, and ensuring the environment is safe and secure (Giunashvili, 2025). Practitioners are responsible for ensuring there is a healthy environment in which children can explore and learn.

As Asatiani (2025) mentions, early years practitioners are required to follow the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) Framework, which ensures that the needs of each child are met and their development is supported. The EYFS framework covers seven topics, and these include Personal, Social and Emotional Development, Communication and Language, Physical Development, Literacy, Mathematics, Understanding the World and Expressive Art and Design. These are divided into two different categories: Prime Area, which includes the first three areas, and the Specific Area, which covers the remaining topics.

Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory provides a framework to understand the role of practitioners (Guy-Evans 2025). Within the microsystem, early years practitioners build close relationships with children and their families, which influences emotional security and development (Guy-Evans, 2025). At the mesosystem level, early years practitioners help build interconnections between home and the childcare setting by communicating effectively with parents, If a child's home life is negative and poor, it can affect their behaviour at the childcare setting (Cherry, 2025).

THE IMPORTANCE OF EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP WORKING

An effective partnership in the early years setting is extremely important for many reasons. These include providing high-quality care, building trust with staff, children, and families, maintaining clear and effective communication, engaging in reflective practice, and promoting professional development.

Clear and Effective communication

High-quality care involves the need for consistent, regular two-way communication between the setting and parents, as this will help create a supportive environment that enables children to develop and grow (Eyworks, 2023). It involves actively listening to show that one is attentive to the other's view and to show empathy by acknowledging their emotions, which helps build trust and understanding between each other (Raising children, 2024).

High-quality care

In the Development Matters (non-statutory curriculum guidance for the Early Years Education Stage), high-quality care is one of seven key features. It focuses on the children's needs, experience and development, and requires a supportive environment that ensures each individual's needs are met (Corampacey, no date). When there is an effective partnership between the professional and parent/carers, it plays a key role in ensuring children succeed. This is because high-quality care enables children to grow, thrive, and develop (Together for Children, 2025).
It is shown that when children have a positive relationship with the early years practitioner, it helps the children to become strong and independent, and when children are provided with an enabling environment that offers support and responds to each individual's needs and interests, it promotes continuous growth with their development (Together for Children, 2025).

PARTNERSHIP

Research by the Department for Education (2014) indicates that when practitioners actively involve parents and carers in the child's education, it supports the child's success. Practitioners and parents/carers need a strong relationship to share relevant information about the child; without this, they cannot share all the required information, and without sharing the required information, it can lead to consequences affecting the child (Department for Education, 2024).

CONSIDER MATERNAL FACTORS THAT COULD IMPACT DEVELOPMENT AND WHAT SUPPORT COULD BE OFFERED

One Factor that can impact development is drinking alcohol throughout pregnancy, as Gerhardt (2014) states that a large amount of alcohol use can cause damage at any time during the pregnancy. Still, during the first couple of weeks, it can have a significant impact on the baby, as this is when the baby's features are developing. It can cause a negative impact on the brain, leading to significant challenges with learning, attention, and communication. Hulmes and Galvani (2019) agrees and mention that the more alcohol the mother consumes during pregnancy the greater the risk to the baby Hulmes and Galvani (2019) also goes on to mention that even drinking alcohol after the baby is born can still have a negative impact on the baby, as the mother would have a lack of appropriate care, safety and supervision.

Another factor that can impact a baby's development is the mother's mental health. This can include anxiety, stress and depression during pregnancy and the postnatal period; mental health difficulties during pregnancy can affect the baby's brain development, while postnatal issues may affect emotional development, as well as attachment and bonding. Several different supports can be offered to the mother and family, including emotional support from friends, midwives, GP and health visitors, as well as access to medication, counselling or psychological therapies.

As Rogers et al (2020) mention, their findings showed that postnatal depression and anxiety have a link with infants having attachment difficulties, and social-emotional, cognitive, language, and adaptive behaviour development.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES IN PROVIDING HIGH-QUALITY CARE?

In an early year setting, there is a lot of pressure in ensuring high-quality care is always provided, but there are also a lot of challenges early years settings face.

Lack of staff

High staff turnover is a common challenge in early years settings. When settings are having difficulties in retaining staff, it often leads to managers depending on agency and, bank staff or means that the managers are having to step out of the office to help manage the workload, which can negatively impact the quality of care the children receive, as it could mean children getting cared for by staff members they are unfamiliar with (Education Committee, 2023). If it is a regular change, it can impact the children's interaction and development (Ofsted, 2024). Regular high staff turnover can eventually impact the children's cognitive development, social-emotional development and their overall well-being due to the constant change in staffing and disturbing children's routines. This could cause the setting to lose out on new families and families leaving (Nursery consultancy, 2026). It is just as important that the practice finds out the reason behind the high staff turnover, which could be low rate of pay, flexibility, poor management with a lack of support or not enough opportunities (Nursery Consultancy, 2026).

Cost/Funding

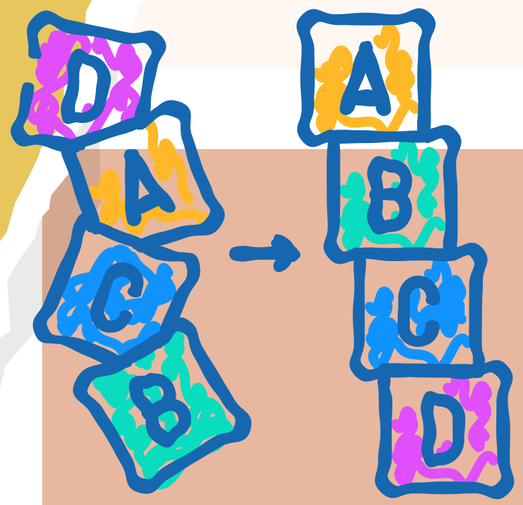
In an early year setting, another main challenge in providing high-quality care is high costs. The Department for Education (2023) states the biggest expense is paying staff which takes up around 74% of the settings

Income, as in an early years setting, for the children to receive appropriate high-quality care a strict adult-to-child ratio is required. This means a lot more staff are needed compared to a school setting, and in addition to this a lot of the staff must be qualified with early years training which means additional costs as qualified staff received a higher wage.

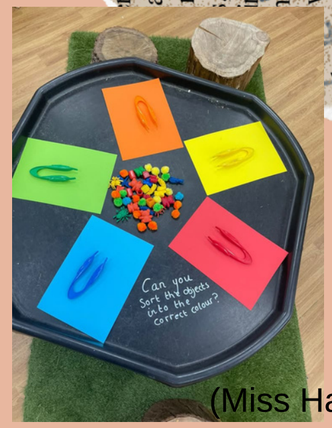
There are mandatory training courses within early years settings, which include safeguarding, food hygiene, and first aid, which cost the setting a big chunk of the money (TheLink, 2024).

Resources and equipment also contribute to the increased cost. Galeon, (2025) mentions that high-quality learning, toys, and outdoor equipment can promote the children's development and create a safe environment. All the resources in the setting must be age-appropriate, and regularly checked to ensure they comply with health and safety standards.

Finally, a lack of funding can make it extremely challenging to meet all the costs required, as the full cost to help provide high-quality care is not always covered by the financial support and Government funding, which, as a result, means the setting may struggle to maintain high standards (Argile, A-M, 2024).



ACTIVITIES



(Miss Hammond, 2024)

Colour sorting activity

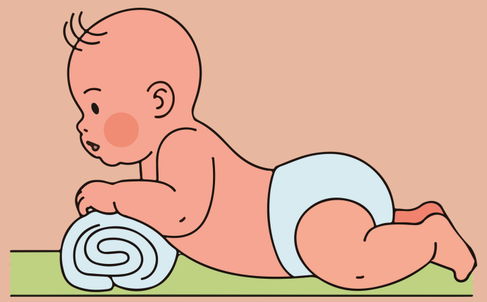
This activity is a colour sorting activity which is suitable for children aged 18 months and over. This was an activity I chose as it is fun, engaging and easy to adapt for different-aged children; to make this activity simpler, the practitioner can place fewer colours and for children at a higher level the practitioner can add shapes and more colours. This activity can be carried out with many other objects around the setting or home, such as colours blocks, coloured bottle lids, pom-poms, or natural materials; this means the activity can stay at a low cost with learning opportunities.

This activity supports the development of mathematical thinking, sorting and categorisation skills, recognising and identifying colours, and fine motor skills. As children learn these skills, it will help them become more confident in the later stages (Twinkl, no date). This activity develops mathematical thinking as it ensures children categorise objects based on colour or shape (Think Academy, 2025).

-Fine motor development – helps the children develop a grip
-Helps improve hand-eye coordination
-Language development – learning colours, shapes (The Global Montessori,2020).

During this activity, there are opportunities to support the children's personal, social and emotional development, as the children can take it in turns and share the equipment while playing and helping one another to build a positive relationship. Furthermore, this can build the child's confidence, self-esteem and independence (Surry County Council ,2025).





ACTIVITIES

Tummy time

This activity was picked as it is a simple but beneficial activity that the practitioners can do within the baby sections. Tummy time is a vital activity for babies as it supports physical development and to ensure they reach their milestones later in life, like rolling over, crawling and sitting up, as it helps the babies to strengthen their back, arms, shoulders and neck muscles, which are all essential for body control (Mas & Pas, 2026).

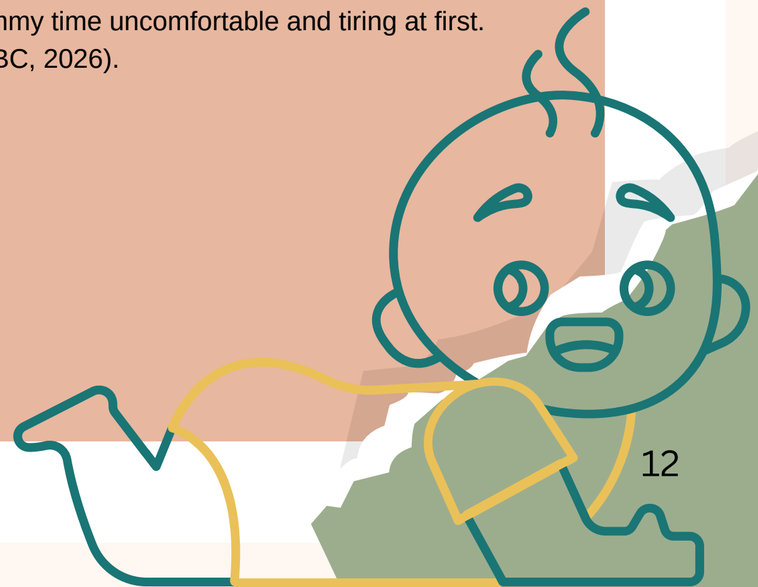
Tummy time can be started when the baby is a few weeks old, but it is generally recommended around 3 months for around 20 – 30 minutes spread throughout the day. Each session can be divided into shorter time periods to suit the baby's level of concentration (NHS, 2025). The baby must always be supervised during tummy time for reassurance and for safety. A range of activities can be placed within the baby's view, these could include sensory toys, balls, blocks, baby-safe mirrors or bright coloured books. These kinds of resources encourage the baby to explore and promote hand-eye coordination while motivating to lift and control head movements. While the baby is on their tummy, an activity could be put out in front of the baby. The activity could include mirrors, sensory toys, balls, or books (Pampers, 2020).

It is important to note that not all babies enjoy tummy time, and that is completely normal. Some babies may find tummy time uncomfortable and tiring at first. Therefore, it is important to keep the baby occupied and engaged during this time (BBC, 2026).



(Blogger, 2023).





REFERENCE

Argyll, A-M. (2024) *DfE research reveals funding to early years providers is insufficient*. Available at: DfE research reveals funding to early years providers is insufficient - NDNA (Accessed 11th January 2026).

BBC. (2026) *What is tummy time and how does it help baby development.* Available at: What is 'Tummy Time' and when should you start it? - BBC Tiny Happy People (Accessed 12th January 2026).

Blogger, A. (2023) *25 Easy Tummy Time ideas for babies.* Available at: 25 Easy Tummy Time Ideas For Babies (Accessed 12th January 2026).

Breanna. (No Date) *Cheerful Little Girl Pointing Upwards, Curious and Playful Child Illustration.* Available at: Cheerful Little Girl Pointing Upwards, Curious and Playful Child Illustration - Graphics by Canva (Accessed 17th December 2025).

Center on the Developing Child Harvard University. (2026). Brain Architecture. Available at: https://developingchild.harvard.edu/key-concept/brain-architecture/?utm (Accessed 14th January 2026).

Cherry, K. (2025) *Ecological Theory: Bronfenbrenner's Five Systems.* Avaiable at: Ecological Theory: Bronfenbrenner's Five Systems (Accessed 06th January 2026).

Corampacey. (no date) *The seven key features of effective practice: high quality care.* Available at: The 7 key features of effective practice: high quality care - The 7 key features of effective practice: high quality care (Accessed 10th January 2026).

Cusick, S. and Georgieff, M. (2016) *The Role of Nutrition in Brain Development*: The Golden Opportunity of the 'First 1000 Days' 175(1), pp. 16-21. Available at: doi:10.1016/j.jpeds.2016.05.013

Department for Education (2024) *Information Sharing 'Advice for Practitioners providing safeguarding services for children, young people, parents and carers'*. Available at: DfE non statutory information sharing advice for practitioners providing safeguarding services for children, young people,parents and carers (Accessed 08th January 2026).

Department for Education. (2024) *Working in partnership with parents and carers*. Available at: Help for early years providers : Working in partnership with parents and carers (Accessed 07th January 2026).

Departnemnt for Education. (2023) *Public Sector Equality Duty*. Available at: Equalities impact assessment - early years foundation stage regulatory changes consultation (Accessed 11th January 2026).

Education Committee. (2023) *Support for childcare and the early years*. Available at: Support for childcare and the early years - Education Committee (Accessed 11th January 2026).

Eyworks. (2023) *Parent Communication in Early Years Settings.* Available at: Parent Communication in Early Years Settings | eyworks (Accessed 10th January 2026).

Freepik. (2024) *Premium Photo, Diverse Group of Babies Sitting Together Wearing White.* Available at: babies - Search (Accessed 17th December 2025).

Galleon, A. (2025) *Managing resources and supplies in early yease and nurseries,* Available at: Managing resources and supplies in early years and nurseries - The Mandatory Training Group (Accessed 11th January 2026).

Gerhart, S. (2014) *Why love matters: how affection shapes a baby's brain.* 2nd Edn. Routledge.

Giunashvili, A. (2025) *The Role of an Early Years Practitioners*. Available at: What Is The Role of an Early Years Practitioner? (Accessed 6th January 2026).

Guy-Evans, O. (2025) *Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.* Available at: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Accessed: 06th January 2026).

Guy-Evans, O. (2025) *Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.* Available at: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Accessed 13th January 2026).

Health and Socal Care Services Research. (2023) *Maternity services: evidence to support improvement*. Available at: doi: 10.3310/nihrevidence_58172.

Healthdirect Australia Limited. (2025) *The first 1000 days.* Available at: The first 1,000 days | Pregnancy Birth and Baby (Accessed 17th December 2026).

REFERENCE

House of Commons. (2019) *First 1000 days of life*. Accessed 10th December 2025, Available at: First 1000 days of life.

Hulmes, A. and Galvani, S. (2019) *A Child's first 1000 days : the impact of alcohol and other drug.* A BASW Pocket Guide for Social Workers. Birmingham: BASW.

Indrio, F., Pietrobelli, A., Dargenio, V., Marchese, F., Grillo, A., Vural, M., Giardino, I., and Pettoello-Mantovani, M. (2023) '*The Key 1000 life-changing days'* Volume 4 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gpeds.2023.100049

Karakochuk, C., Whitfield, K., Green, T. and Kraemer, K. (2018) *The biology of the First 1000 days.* Boca Raton [Florida] CPC Press. Available at: https://research-ebsco-com.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/linkprocessor/plink?id=14382aa2-f596-39c6-95a2-56fcca4220a8.

Miss Hammond. (2024) *Colour sorting.* Available at: Colour Sorting (Accessed 12th January 2026).

Mulcaire-Jones, G. and Scanlon, R. (2022) *The First Thousand Days of Life.* 37(2), pp. 249-256. Available at: PMID: 36629772

NHS. (2025) *Physical activity guidelines for children (under 5 years).* Available at: Physical activity guidelines for children (under 5 years) - NHS (Accessed 14th January 2026).

Nursery Consultancy. (2026) *Addressing Staff Turnover in Early Years Settings: Strategies and Solutions*. Available at: Addressing Staff Turnover in Early Years Settings: Strategies and Solutions - Early Years Consultant London (Accessed 11th January 2026).

Ofsted. (2024) *Maintaining quality early years provision in the face of workforce challenges.* Available at: Maintaining quality early years provision in the face of workforce challenges – Ofsted: early years (Accessed 11th January 2026).

Pampers. (2020) *Tummy Time: The Ultimate Guide.* Available at: When to Start Tummy Time for Newborns? | Pampers UK (Accessed 14th January 2026).

Premier Medical Staffing Services. (2016) *5 Tips for Exceptional Patient Care.* Available at: 5 Tips for Exceptional Patient Care - Premier Medical Staffing (Accessed 18th December 2025).

Raising Children. (2024) *Effective communication with parents and carers for professionals.* Available at: Communication with parents: professionals | Raising Children Network (Accessed 09th January 2026).

Rogers, A., Obst, S., Teague, S, et al (2020) *Association Between Maternal Perinatal Depression and Anxiety and Child and Adolescent Development.* 174(11). Available at: doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.2910

Segal, j. and Jaffe, J. (2019) *How the Attachment Theory Developed.* Available at: Attachment-Bowlby.pdf (Accessed 06 January 2026).

Surry County Council. (2025) *Personal Social and emotional development in the EYFS.* Available at: Personal social and emotional development in the EYFS - Surrey County Council (Accessed 12th January 2026).

The Global Montessori. (2020) *Sorting Colors*. Available at: Color Sorting For Toddlers | Practical Life Lesson | GMN (Accessed 112th January 2026).

TheLink. (2024) *Early Years Continuous Professional Development.* Available at: Early Years | Continuous Professional Development | The Link (Accessed 11th January 2026).

Think Academy. (2025) *All-in-One Guide to Sorting Skills in Early Math Learning*. Available at: All-in-One Guide to Sorting Skills in Early Math Learning - Math Learning | Think Academy US (Accessed 13th January

REFERENCE

Together for children. (2025) *Early Years Quality Framework*. Available at: Early Years Quality Framework - Together for Children (Accessed 08th January 2026).

Twinkl. (2020) *Colour Sorting Activites – Cut out and Stick.* Available at: Colour Sorting Activities - Cut out and stick (Accessed 12th January 2026).

UK Parliament Committees. (2025) *Written evidence from National Childbirth Trust (NCT).* Available at: FDL0052 - Evidence on First 1000 days of life (Accessed 18th December 2025).

UK Parliament. (2019) *The first 1000 days from conception to age 2.* Available at: First 1000 days of life - Health and Social Care Committee - House of Commons (Accessed 19th December 2025).

UNICEF. (2021) *Ensuring a Healthy Start: The First 1,000 Days*. Available at: Ensuring a Healthy Start: The First 1,000 Days | UNICEF Lao People's Democratic Republic (Accessed 13th December 2025).

Union Project. (no date) *Illustration of Sleeping Baby.* Available at: Illustration of Sleeping Baby - Graphics by Canva (Accessed 17th December 2025).

Vardhan, R. (2023) *10 Essential Tips for Providing Exceptional Patient Care.* Available at: 10 Essential Tips for Providing Exceptional Patient Care — Medgate Today (Accessed 18th December 2025).

Vivience. (No Date) *Ultrasound image of a Developing Baby Illustration.* Available at: Ultrasound Image of a Developing Baby Illustration - Graphics by Canva (Accessed 17th December 2025).

Welsh Government. (2024) *A Healthier Wales – Health and Social Services News*. Available at: A Healthier Wales - Health and Social Services News 28/02/2024 (Accessed 18th December 2025).

Zyl, C. and Wyk, C. (2021) *Exploring Factors That Could Potentially Have Affected the First 1000 Days of Absent Learner in South Africa: A Qualitative Study.* 18(5). Available at: https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18052768