ECEY 4005
2403683
Word count – 2,806

The first 1000 days

(Image: KOKO Plus Foundation 2023)

According to Karakochuk et al (2021) The first 1000 days refers to conception to 2 years of age and is perceived as being a crucial period of a child's growth and development. Karakochuk also suggests that many factors can lead to lasting effects on the child, including their diet, environment, hormonal and any stress that they may experience. Due to its significance, interventions during this period will have the most powerful impact on the child's outcomes.

The early years healthy development report review (2021) states that the First 1000 lay the foundation for children's physical, cognitive and emotional development and their health in general. They also recognise that it is during this time where children are most vulnerable and it may be where additional learning needs and disabilities are recognised or diagnosed, therefore it is the adult's responsibility to advocate for their child or children in their care.

Schwarzenberg and Georgieff (2018) highlight the role of nutrition in the First 1000 days of a child's life and explain how the mother's nutrition during pregnancy and the nutrition that the child receives after birth can significantly affect their brain development, future mental health and future health conditions such as obesity.

According to Capitani et al. (2023) early intervention and sufficient health care and support are of great importance during the First 1000 days and it is also during this period that environmental factors have significant influence.

Capitani highlights the importance of a child being raised in a stimulating and nurturing environment and the importance of the interactions they experience, particularly with their caregivers.

What is the first 1000 days?

Why are the First 1000 days important?

Mercieca highlights the importance of nutrition and movement during the first 1000 days, she believes that it is during this time that foundations for development are set out and it is where the opportunity is provided to build a healthier future. According to Merceica, adequate nutrition is not only essential for a child's basic needs, but it can also influence future eating habits and help them to develop a strong immune system. Merieca also suggests that early influences, when it comes to movement, can determine whether a child has a more active or inactive lifestyle which can impact their health and determine any future health conditions. A childs movements also effects the strength of their bones and muscles.

Finnegan (2016) tells us that the brain grows at a rapid rate during this period, and it can also absorb an astonishing amount of information. Finnegan also highlights how sensitive children's brains are in those early years and that is why it is the crucial time where parents, carers and early years workers have the ability influence the way in which the child learns and develop and by building a strong relationship with the child, they can provide them with the confidence they need to go out into the world.

According to Martin and Padilla (2014) what children experience in those first years affects their brain development, how they react to stress, and it can also determine the quality of the relationships they form. They also claim that those first year's experiences impact the child's emotional and social development throughout their adult life and those early interactions support a child's social and communication skills.

Exceptional caregiving

Good Health

Caregivers need to look after their children's health by responding to their everyday needs, be aware of any changes to their physical and emotional state, protect them from danger, promote good hygiene practices and seek medical care when needed. (World Health Organisation, 2018)

Adequate Nutrition

Nutrition is important both during pregnancy and after the child is born. This can include taking supplements during pregnancy, breastfeeding or making sure that children receive a balanced diet. (WHO, 2018)

Responsive caregiving

Responding to the sounds and gestures a baby makes, engaging in this back-and-forth interaction is known as 'Serve and return' which leads to a caring and attentive relationship between the mother and child (HM Government, 2021)
Responsive feeding is also part of nurturing caregiving and involves interactions being reciprocated between the child and caregiver. (Perez-Escamilia, Jimenez, Dewey 2021)

Learning opportunities
Learning begins long before children begin their school or creche journey, infants begin to learn from birth. Infants learn basic skills from their caregivers, household items and during their everyday care routines (WHO,2018)

Security and Safety

Caregivers must advocate for their young children and to the best of their ability, they must keep them safe from any potential dangers and try to make their environment as safe as possible. This includes making them feel safe and secure. (WHO, 2018)

Ari (2022) highlights how Emmi Pikler (1902-1904) focused on those first few years and her approach to early childhood education suggested that the key aspects of childhood education are loving care, sole attention from the caregiver and freedom to develop in a well- prepared environment. Pikler's approach also highlights the importance of respectful care, including during personal care routines.

Further information via link:
https://youtu.be/0rMp4Rr1NrY?si=e8Pasun1AvwtwdJU

(Images from Microsoft 365 library)

Why is exceptional caregiving so important?

According to the Calderdale annual public health report (2017) children experiencing a loving and secure relationship with their caregiver will see an improvement in their emotional well-being, language skills, ability to learn and will be more likely to form lasting and healthy relationships. The report also states that the caregiver's behaviour and the relationship they have with the child can determine the child's outcomes. Bowlby (2012) also highlighted the importance of children having a secure base and how that secure attachment enables them to have the confidence to explore the world, influence their social skills, strengthen their resilience and reduce the risk of future mental health problems such as depression.

Public Health Wales state that caregiving during the First 1000 days is important as during this time the infant will develop at a rapid rate and providing them with a good start can influence how they feel about themselves and how they interact with others. They also highlight that if they do not get a good start and do not have that foundation to build on then it could lead to them struggling to recover from this in later life and it could be more likely that they require additional support.

As highlighted by the House of Commons (2019) if a child's development falls behind in the first 1000 days then it is more likely to have a lasting effect on their future and they are more likely to struggle to catch up in later life. By identifying inequalities and developmental delays and addressing them, it leads to giving the child a better outcome.

Professional partnerships

The role of an early year's practitioner in supporting children and their families

O'Connor (2013) highlights that all early year's professionals work towards providing high quality practice and providing care to both child and their families. O'Connor also notes the important role practitioners play in helping children and their families to deal with transitions and how EYP forming strong attachments with the child and building trust with families can help to assure both the adult and child and improve their well-being.

Public health Wales (2023) state that parents play the most significant role in their child's life and supporting them can break the cycle and have better outcomes for them and for future generations. PHW also mention that being provided with good quality early years education and positive learning opportunities can help families who find interacting difficult.

Birth to 5 Matters framework outlines the important role EYP have in providing children and their families with an inclusive and welcoming environment. The framework also highlights the duties of the EYP which includes; adopting a child centred approach, challenging stereotypes, recognising that every child is unique and are from diverse backgrounds and ensuring that children and their families always feel supported and included.

Cable, C, Goodliff, G, Miller, L (2012) list the various roles and responsibilities that are placed on EYP alongside their everyday practice. They also mention how, like parents, EYP are also responsible for the child's development and well-being and establishing trusting relationships with their families will allow them to have the best opportunity to support the child's development and involve their parents in the process.

The importance of effective partnership working

Birth to 5 Matters also mentions that early year's practitioner and parents and carers working together can make a significant difference to the child's outcomes. Better outcomes are more likely to be achieved when everyone works together with the purpose of developing the best strategies to support the child in the early years setting and at home.

According to Wheeler, H, Connor, J (2009) practitioners who have built trusting relationships with parents are more likely to get them involved in their child's learning and development, by having a greater understanding of their diverse backgrounds and possible challenges they may be facing, allows the practitioner to adapt services to their need and offer other options or support services they may require.

Gasper, M (2010) highlights the various benefits of partnership working, the main benefit being that it can provide more opportunities for their overall needs to be met. Partnership working can allow children, their parents and families to access more support and services that will allow them to assess their needs, access the required services, take control, develop confidence and their skills, become more educated and enable them to feel more fulfilled and make a greater contribution to their community.

Maternal factors that impact development

According to Shanklin and Hodin (1979) the nutrition that a pregnant woman is receiving is the most important factor that impacts the child's development both during the pregnancy and post-natal. A mother being malnourished can lead to many pregnancy complications and it can affect the mother and child's physiological and neurological development and also their behaviour.

Healthy Start Wales is one scheme that aims to help pregnant women and those with children under 4 buy healthy food, milk or vitamins. Further information can be found on : https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/

The Department of Education suggests that practitioners can help parents or carers improve both their childs and their own nutrition by suggesting easy and low-cost recipes or inviting them to the setting to do cooking activities with their children. More information on the importance of good nutrition can be found on: https://help-for-early-years-providers.education.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing/nutrition

Naaz and Muneshwar (2023) state that maternal mental health can have a significant impact on the child's development. Increase cortisol levels which are the result of stress, anxiety and depression, there is a possibility that It could affect the child's brain development and influence how they respond to stress. By supporting maternal mental health and providing children with a nurturing environment, practitioners could make a positive change to the child's development.

Challenges to providing high quality care

Due to the first 1000 days being a significant period of growth and development, early years practitioners play an important role as the quality of their care, the bonds that they create and the learning opportunities they provide can impact a childs future development. (Medicine, I. o. 2012)

According to Owston, Jones and Stanley (2024) there are many challenges to providing high quality care, however the most challenging issue is to do with staffing. As the role of an early year's practitioner can be challenging, it is also a low paid job and does not offer much in terms of professional development, making it more undesirable than other job roles.

Thompsons (2014) research found that recruiting childcare providers has become more difficult, they also mention it being a low paid career that entails a great deal of responsibility and high expectations which causes many job seekers today are more likely to go for jobs in supermarkets as they are more appealing. Thompson also highlights the impact our current economic crisis has also had on the sector and the repercussions of COVID 19 and Brexit have also had a negative impact on the childcare sector.

The Local Government Association (LGA) looks at the changes and challenges faced by the childcare sector, one of the major challenges being funding and although some funding is providing from the government by schemes such as flying start, some providers such as private nurseries are reluctant to offer the entitlement as it does not cover their usual nursery fees. The LGA also mention that the suggestion of lowering the ratio could have a detrimental effect on the level of care the children are receiving, particularly children with additional needs who are already at a disadvantage being put in a group of children instead of the 1:1 care they require.

Activity ideas for the first 1000 days

Image A: Community play things (2024)

The Froebel Trust mentions Elinor Goldschmied's work that developed the idea of treasure baskets, they consist of a wicker basket filled with various natural and household items which can be placed infront of children as young as a few months old for them to explore.

According to Hughes and Cousins (2017) Goldschmeid (1910-2009) introduced the world to the importance of treasure baskets and how children can benefit from this activity in the first 1000 days. Treasure baskets can help children in many areas of development such as:

- Develop fine motor skills
- Explore with their senses
- Develop curiosity and cognitive skills

Hellyn and Bennett (2017) co-founded the curiosity approach which is a pedagogy inspired by key theorists such as Montessori, Steiner, Reggio Emilia and Pikler.
The Curiosity Approach also supports the use of treasure baskets and the use of natural and everyday resources.

Further information about the curiosity approach can be found on:
https://www.thecuriosityapproach.com/

Image B: (Being this mama 2019)

Sensory tuff tray

Daly, Beloglovsky (2014) mention 'Loose parts' which are natural, synthetic, bought or recycled materials that children can explore and play with. According to Daly and Beloglovsky, using Loose parts during play engages childrens imaginations and promotes problem solving, curiosity and creativity.

Keyte- Hartland (2022) introduces us to Simon Nicholson who conceived the idea of 'Loose parts' and she compared his way of thinking to that of Loris Malaguzzi (1920-1994) from the school of Reggio Emilia, they believed that all children are creative and curious of the world around them and will enjoy exploring new things.

This type of activity also follows the philosophy of The Curiosity Approach, which has been previously mentioned. As, like the Curiosity Approach, this activity involves natural materials and promotes child-led learning (Hellyn, Bennett, 2017)

Action for Children (2022) look at sensory play and why it is important, sensory play allows children, from a young age, to engage and make sense of the world around them and it also stimulates their five senses. They also state many other developmental benefits such as it suppports brain development, which as previously mentioned we know is crucial in those first 1000 days. Other benefits include:

- Language development
- Improve Fine motor skills
- Enhance cognitive skills
- Encourage creativity
- Help children to regulate their emotions

(Action for Children, 2022)

Image: Muddypuddles.com (2024)

Mud kitchen

The EYFP (2014) promotes learning through multisensory activities that encourage creativity, such as mud play. According to the EYFP mud kitchens promote development of creative, fine motor and social skills and this activity covers the majority of their seven areas of learning:

- Communication and language
- Personal, social and emotional development
- Physical development
- Mathematics
- Understanding of the world
- Expressive arts and design.

The Montessori Academy (2023) also promotes the benefits of mud kitchen play. Although kitchens are not a Montessori toy, they do embody Montessori's philosophy of learning and the importance of outdoor learning resources in a natural setting. TMA hiighlights how the mud kitchens combine cooking, gardening and promote imaginative and interactive play in a natural setting.

Tovey (2014) highlights the work of Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) Froebel's approach promoted holistic development and set out key principles, some of those principles being; outdoor play, creativity, freedom and first-hand experiences. Mud kitchens fit into all of those principles and they also connect the child to nature.

Image: Thames Basin Heath Partnership (2020)

Nature/ bug hunt

Dr S A Munoz (2009) examined the link between outdoor play and childrens health and well-being, her findings showed that outdoor play not only has physical benefits but it can also reduce the risk of social and behavioural problems and have a positive impact on health and well-being.

Knight (2009) mentions nature provision for children under 3 years of age, Knight highlights how Goldschmeid and Montessori promoted the use of natural materials in play but it is Forest schools that has had made a significant impact to setting policies and encouraged and promoted the importance and use of outdoor play.

Worsley (2025) describes Forest schools as an approach that’s main focus is learning in outdoor, natural environment. Worsley also states that this type of activity can have a positive affect on childrens holistic development and can promote key skills such as problem solving, envoke childrens curiosity, develop their understanding of the world and it can also benefit mental health by reducing stress levels.

I confirm that I have not used any AI tools in the research and creation of this assignment. I can confirm that I have not presented any AI generated materials as my own work. I can confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used, which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

Reference list 1

!,000 days (2010) Available at https://thousanddays.org/why-1000-days/ (Accessed on: 4 January 2025)

Asim, A (2022) *Student-Friendly Teaching Approaches.* United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Action for Children (2022) *What is Sensory Play and Why is it important? Available at:* https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/blog/what-is-sensory-play-and-why-is-it-important/ (Accessed on: 19 January 2025)

(Image B) Being this mama (2019) Fall Loose Parts Play ideas. Available at: https://www.beingthismama.com/kids-activities/fall-themed-loose-parts-play/ (Accessed on: 18 January 2025)

Birth to 5 Matters. Inclusive Practice and Equalities . Available at: https://birthto5matters.org.uk/inclusive-practice-and-equalities/ (Accessed on: 15 January 2025)

Bowlby, J. (2012). A Secure Base. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis.

Cable, C, Goodliff, G, Miller, L (2012) *Working with Children in the Early Years.* United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis.

Calderdale Public Health Annual Report (2017) Foundations of Life – First 1000 Days. Available at: https://calderdale.moderngov.co.uk/Data/Health%20and%20Wellbeing%20Board/201703161000/Agenda/Agenda_Item_07_02_50004_Item%207%20Director%20of%20Public%20Health%20Report%202017.pdf (Accessed on: 14 January 2015)

Capitani E, Lorenzini C, Biuzzi A, Alaimo L, Nante N. Factors influencing the first thousand days of life. The importance of Nurturing Care. J Prev Med Hyg 2023;64:E172-E177. https://doi.org/10.15167/2421-4248/jpmh2023.64.2.2850

Daly, L., Beloglovsky, M. (2014). Loose Parts: Inspiring Play in Young Children. United States: Redleaf Press.

Department of Education – Help for Early Years Providers. Available at: https://help-for-early-years-providers.education.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing/nutrition

Dr S, A Munoz (2009) *Children in the Outdoors, A Literature Review. Available at:* https://ltl.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/children-in-the-outdoors.pdf (Accessed on: 19 January 2025)

Finnegan, J (2016) Lighting up young brains – How parents, carers and nurseries support children's brain development in the first five years. Save The Children. Available at: https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/keywords/emergent-literacy-and-math-skills/ (Accessed on: 11 January 2025)

Gasper, M. (2010). *Multi-agency Working in the Early Years: Challenges and Opportunities.* United Kingdom: SAGE Publications.

Hellyn, L, Bennett, S (2024) The Curiosity Approach ltd (2024) Available at: https://www.thecuriosityapproach.com/ (Accessed on: 18 January 2025)

House of Commons, Health and Social Care Committee (2019) *First 1000 days of life. Thirteenth Report of Session 2017-19. Available on* https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmhealth/1496/1496.pdf (Accessed on: !8 January 2025)

Hughes, A M, Cousins, J (2017) *The Routledge International Handbook of Early Childhood Play. Play Birth to Three.* United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis.

Karakochuk, C D, Whitefield, K C, Green, T J, Kraemer, K (2021) *The Biology of the First 1,000 days.* CRC Press.

Keyte- Hartland (2022) Early Education, The British Association for Early Childhood Education. *What is Loose parts play in the EYFS?* Available at: https://early-education.org.uk/what-are-loose-parts-play-in-the-eyfs/ (Accessed on: 19 January 2025)

KOKO Plus foundation (2024) Good Nutrition in The First 1000 Days https://kokoplusfoundation.org/2023/09/27/good-nutrition-in-the-first-1000-days-of-life/

Knight, S. (2016). Forest School in Practice: For All Ages. United Kingdom: SAGE Publications.

Lee Owston, National Director Education, Alex Jones, Director, Insights and Research and Yvette Stanley, National Director Regulation and Social Care, Posted on: 13 May 2024 - Categories: Early years available : https://earlyyears.blog.gov.uk/2024/05/13/maintaining-quality-early-years-provision-in-the-

Local Government Association (2023) Early Education and Childcare: Changes and Challenges for the future. Available on: https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/early-education-and-childcare-changes-and-challenges-future#conclusion Accessed at: 18 January 2025.

Martin, L. T., Sontag-Padilla, L. (2014). Off to a Good Start: Social and Emotional Development of Memphis' Children. United States: RAND Corporation.

Reference list 2

Medicine, I. o. (2012). The Early Childhood Care and Education Workforce: Challenges and Opportunities: A Workshop Report. United States: National Academies Press.

Mercieca,L (2019) The Healthy Kick. Available at https://www.thehealthkick.co.uk/ (Accessed on: 04 January 2025)

Montessori Academy (2023) Available at: https://montessori-academy.com/blog/mud-kitchen-for-kids/#:~:text=The%20Montessori%20Perspective,approach%20to%20educating%20young%20minds. (Accessed on: 19 January 2025)

Muddy puddles (2024) Available at: https://muddypuddles.com/blogs/blog/benefits-mud-kitchens (Accessed on: 19 January)

Naaz A, Muneshwar KN. (2023) How Maternal Nutritional and Mental Health Affects Child Health During Pregnancy: A Narrative Review. Cureus. 2023 Nov 13;15(11):e48763. doi: 10.7759/cureus.48763. PMID: 38098932; PMCID: PMC10719542.

O'Connor, A. (2013). Understanding Transitions in the Early Years: Supporting Change Through Attachment and Resilience. United Kingdom: Routledge.

Ofsted (2022/2024) Best Start in Life: a research review for early years. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/best-start-in-life-a-research-review-for-early-years (Accessed on: 11 January 2025)

Pérez-Escamilla R, Jimenez EY, Dewey KG. (2021) Responsive Feeding Recommendations: Harmonizing Integration into Dietary Guidelines for Infants and Young Children. Curr Dev Nutr. Apr 30;5(6):nzab076. doi: 10.1093/cdn/nzab076. PMID: 34104850; PMCID: PMC8178105.

Public Health Wales – The First 1000 Days – A golden opportunity to build a fairer future https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/the-first-1000-days-programme/resources/the-first-1000-days-a-golden-opportunity-to-build-a-fairer-future-infographic/ (Accessed on: 4 January 2025)

Public Health Wales (2023) The first 1000 days – A Public Health Approach to supporting parents. Available at: https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/the-first-1000-days-programme/resources/a-public-health-approach-to-supporting-parents-summary-report/ (Accessed on : 4 January 2025)

Schwarzenberg SJ, Georgieff MK, AAP COMMITTEE ON NUTRITION. Advocacy for Improving Nutrition in the First 1000 Days To Support Childhood Development and Adult Health. Pediatrics. 2018;141(2):e20173716

Shanklin, D. R., Hodin, J. (1979). Maternal Nutrition and Child Health. United States: C. C. Thomas.

(Image A) Stead, C (2024) Community Play Things. The First 1000 days, designing your nursery with the baby's development in mind. Available at: https://www.communityplaythings.co.uk/learning-library/articles/the-first-1000-days Accessed on: 18 January 2025

The Healthy Start Scheme (2025) Available at: https://www.healthystart.nhs.uk/ (Accessed on: 13 January 2025)

The Froebel Trust (2024) Available at: https://www.froebel.org.uk/training-and-resources/elinor-goldschmied-treasure-baskets (Accessed: 18 January 2025)

Thames Basin Heath Partnership (2020) School and Heath: Making Connections with Nature. Available at: https://www.tbhpartnership.org.uk/news/schools-and-the-heath-making-connections/ (Accessed on: 19 January 2025)

Thompson, M (2014) Social Care Wales. Understanding Workforce shortages in the Welsh Social Care and Childcare Sector. Available at: https://insightcollective.socialcare.wales/whats-on/news-and-blogs/understanding-workforce-shortages-in-the-welsh-social-care-and-child-care-sector Accessed on: !8 January 2025.

Tovey, H. (2013). Bringing the Froebel Approach to Your Early Years Practice. United Kingdom: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

Welsh Government (2014) Foundation Phase Nursery: A Guide for Parents and Carers. Available at: https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/foundation-phase-nursery-guide-for-parents-and-carers.pdf (accessed on: 19 January 2025)

Wheeler, H., Connor, J. (2009). Parents, Early Years and Learning: Parents As Partners in the Early Years Foundation Stage - Principles Into Practice. United Kingdom: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

World Health Organisation, United Nations Children's Fund, World Bank Group. Nurturing care for early childhood development: a framework for helping children survive and thrive to transform health and human potential. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018. License: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO

Worsley, K (2025) Pentagon for learning and play. Forest Schools – What are they and what are their benefits? Available at: https://www.pentagonplay.co.uk/news-and-info/forest-school-benefits#:~:text=Many%20studies%20prove%20that%20outdoor,encourage%20environmental%20sustainability%20and%20conservation. (Accessed on: 19 January 2025)