

ECEY 4005: Exceptional Care for The First 1,000 days

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Why are the First 1000 days important?



(Sway, 2024)



1 - (Sway, 2024)



What are the first 1000 days?

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3 - (Sway, 2024)

The initial period spanning from pregnancy to the age of two, known as the first thousand days, presents a critical window of opportunity to shape brighter and healthier futures. This phase represents a time of immense potential but also significant vulnerability. The level of care and support provided to both mothers and children during this period profoundly influences a child's capacity to develop, learn, and flourish. It is during these first thousand days that the foundations of lifelong health are laid, and the brain begins its crucial development. Insights from neuroscience, biology, and early childhood development underscore the pivotal role of nutrients, relationships, and environments in shaping future outcomes during this critical period. Nutrients, in particular, play a vital role in a child's development, as any deficiencies during this time can detrimentally impact the growing brain, hindering academic performance, socioeconomic attainment, and overall well-being. Moreover, inadequate nutrition during this period can increase the risk of obesity, diabetes, and other chronic illnesses, leading to long-term health challenges. (1,000 days, No Date)

Activity Ideas

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4 - Outdoor play

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5 - Water activity

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6 - Sensory Play

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7 - Role Play Activity

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Engaging in these activities offers numerous benefits, including the development of both gross and fine motor skills, as well as familiarizing children with various textures. Role-play activities, on the other hand, aid in understanding and fostering independence in daily life tasks, emphasizing the importance of childcare professionals serving as positive role models. Outdoor environments stimulate imagination, cognitive abilities, social skills, and contribute to holistic child development. Play, a natural skill inherent in every child, serves as a fundamental tool for building fine motor skills, cognitive development, and more (Hooven, 2017).

The advantages of play are vast, as children acquire knowledge, enhance problem-solving skills, strengthen language abilities through observation and imitation, and cultivate creativity and imagination while exploring their surroundings (Anderson-McNamee & Bailey, 2010).

Sensory play holds significant importance in children's learning and growth, as it allows them to utilize their senses to absorb information and experience fun. It contributes to various aspects of development, including understanding cause and effect, brain development, memory enhancement, fine motor skill refinement, language and communication development, observation skills, independent thinking, and emotional regulation by promoting a sense of calmness in children and managing feelings of anxiety or greediness. Each child has unique sensory needs, which may evolve over time (Action for Kids, 2022).

Professional Partnership/ Relationships



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The environment we establish, whether indoors or outdoors, should form the core of children's genuine experiences. It's essential to consistently evaluate and adapt the environment to meet their evolving needs. During early childhood, the exploration of surroundings holds significant importance in children's growth. Through this exploration, they begin to foster a sense of belonging and develop an understanding of the world around them. It's vital to consider not only the physical arrangement but also the overall atmosphere of our environment.

Our environments should offer a rich array of experiences, enabling children to express themselves physically, creatively, and imaginatively, while also encouraging safe exploration of their interests, either individually or collaboratively. We should create opportunities for children to encounter moments of awe and wonder, igniting their curiosity about the world and inspiring them to investigate, solve problems, and cultivate their creativity and critical thinking abilities. Moreover, our settings should be welcoming and reflective of a distinct Welsh identity.

The Welsh Government (WG) should advocate for and embrace diversity, demonstrating inclusivity in their policies and practices. Communication within the setting should be enhanced, with a focus on nurturing and strengthening emerging communication skills. Additionally, the environment should provide children with access to a wide range of authentic resources, facilitating vocabulary expansion and concept development. A well-crafted and organized environment will aid in children's understanding of mathematical concepts, offering tangible and visual opportunities to explore numbers, shapes, and patterns in real-world contexts, both indoors and outdoors. (Welsh Government, 2022)

Environments



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The setting we create, both indoors and outdoors, should be at the heart of children's genuine experiences. It's crucial to continuously assess and adjust the effectiveness of the environment to suit their needs. During the early years, exploring the surroundings plays a pivotal role in children's

development. Through this exploration, they begin to cultivate a sense of belonging and gain an appreciation for the world around them. It's important to consider not just the physical layout but also the overall ambiance of our environment.

Our environments should offer a diverse range of experiences, allowing children to express themselves physically, creatively, and imaginatively, while also fostering safe exploration of their interests, either independently or collaboratively. We ought to provide opportunities for children to experience moments of awe and wonder, sparking curiosity about the world and motivating them to investigate, problem-solve, and nurture their creativity and critical thinking skills. Additionally, our settings should be inviting and reflect a strong Welsh identity.

The Welsh Government (WG) should champion and embrace diversity, demonstrating inclusivity in their approach. Communication within the setting should be enriched, focusing on nurturing and enhancing emerging communication skills. Moreover, the environment should ensure that children have access to a wide array of authentic resources, aiding in vocabulary building and concept development. A well-designed and structured environment will support children's comprehension of mathematical concepts, offering visual and hands-on opportunities to explore numbers, shapes, and patterns in real-world contexts, both indoors and outdoors. (Welsh Government, 2022)

Current Challenges



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It falls within the practitioner's responsibility to ensure a high-quality environment, often likened to that of a caring parent, though practitioners are cautious to emphasize it is not identical to parental care (E. Peter, G. Elinor, S. Dorothy, 2011). Some practitioners express the sentiment that their role resembles that of a second mother, as they fulfill tasks and responsibilities akin to what a parent would typically do with their child on weekends or other days outside of the setting. This perspective highlights the deep involvement and nurturing role practitioners undertake, often feeling akin to a behind-the-scenes caregiver, though they acknowledge the distinction from actual parental roles. As one toddler room leader, Carol, reflects, they witness and engage with children as much as parents do throughout the week.

The impact of adverse childhood experiences can be profound and enduring, affecting various aspects of a child's life. Events such as domestic violence, parental separation, mental illness, or incarceration can result in long-term health issues, socioeconomic disadvantages, and even premature mortality. These challenges are not limited to older children but begin from conception, with the first thousand days of life being particularly critical for the establishment of foundational physical and cognitive development. Success during this period significantly influences future life prospects, while failures can severely hinder a child's potential. For instance, the detrimental effects of maternal smoking on fetal development are widely understood, but it's important to recognize that prolonged exposure to stress hormones, like cortisol, due to chronic maternal stress, can also impede fetal development, leading to complications such as miscarriage, developmental delays, and premature birth (Poggi–Davies and Sandman, 2006).

Being Inclusive

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The initial 1,000 days of a child's life are widely recognized as crucial for establishing a strong foundation that influences their growth and development throughout their lifetime. This aligns with findings from neuroscience, which underscores the significance of the period from birth to seven years as a critical stage for extensive physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and moral development in children. During these formative years, children acquire fundamental concepts, skills, and attitudes that shape their overall development. It is essential for parents and caregivers to provide attentive care and support during this period to ensure that children achieve their developmental milestones, especially those with special needs.

However, not all parents of children with special needs are aware of their child's challenges during the early years, leading to delays in identifying, intervening, and providing necessary support to help them reach their developmental milestones. This lack of early identification may pose challenges for Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) practitioners when these children enroll in their centers, as they often lack sufficient information about the child's background from home and may struggle to recognize the child's specific challenges. Consequently, children with special needs may be overlooked or neglected in ECCE learning programs.

Furthermore, this oversight can contribute to the perpetuation of illiteracy among children with special needs, as they may be denied access to ECCE services that could benefit them. The inability of ECCE practitioners to effectively accommodate and integrate these children into mainstream programs may hinder their development. Additionally, parental denial of their child's condition and subsequent withdrawal from ECCE services further exacerbate the situation, despite efforts by the South African government to implement policies like the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy in 2015, aimed at providing equal opportunities for all children regardless of their differences.

Literature suggests that timely identification of children with special needs enables their inclusion in ECCE programs, provided they receive additional and specialized support tailored to their specific challenges. Depending on the nature of the identified challenges, these children may require short- or long-term interventions and support from both home and the ECCE center. However, achieving effective in-class accommodations requires the cooperation of parents or caregivers, who may not always support the efforts of ECCE practitioners in facilitating their children's development alongside their peers. Various factors contributing to these challenges will be further explored in the proposed chapter. (N. Tyilo, 2021)

Respectful Care and Meaningful Learning



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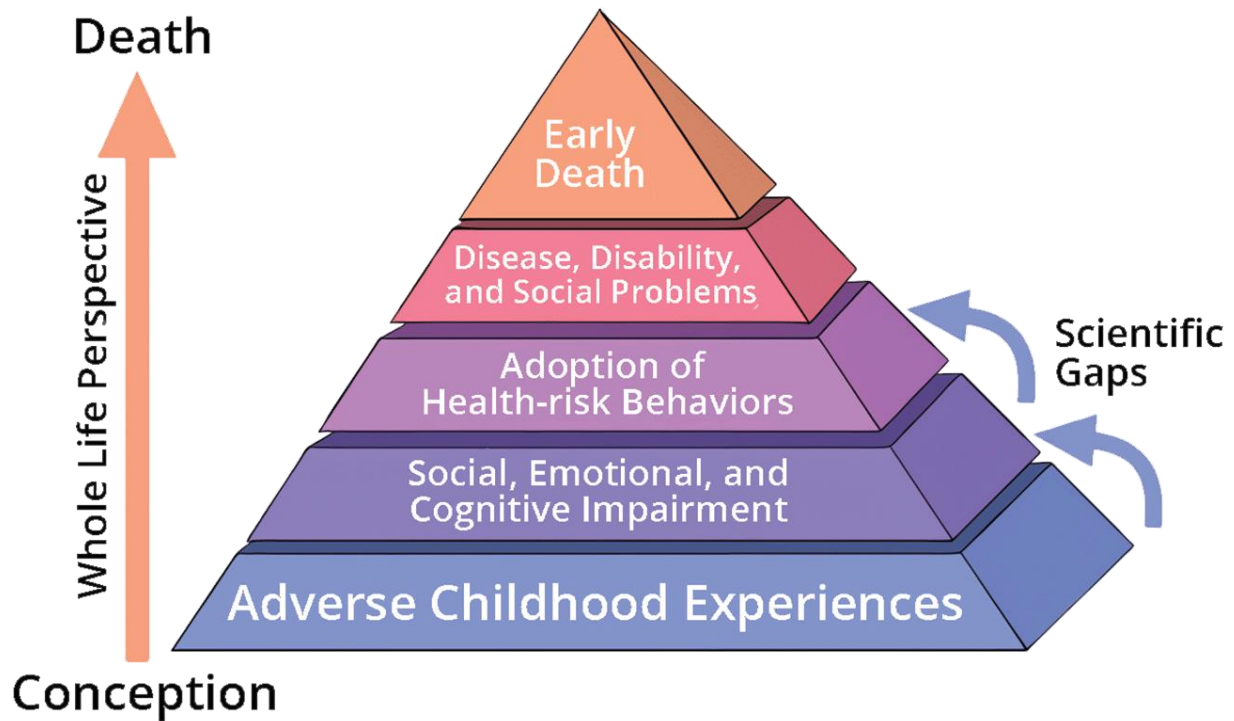
Respect manifests in various forms and can be expressed through diverse means. It encompasses reverence for individuals, materials, concepts, principles, and cultural customs. This respect can be silently held, actively displayed, or deeply felt. When a sense of respect is present, corresponding behaviors reflecting that respect naturally emerge. A respectful classroom hinges upon the foundation of a respectful school environment.

According to Wessler (2003), the definition of a respectful classroom varies among individuals. Fostering a culture of respect within the classroom fosters a broader understanding and appreciation of the diverse demographics present within the school community. Diversity extends beyond visible differences and must be comprehended to effectively support both children and their families. A respectful classroom atmosphere diminishes apprehension toward the unfamiliar and unexplored.

In such classrooms, children are encouraged to familiarize themselves with one another, learn about diverse perspectives, engage in intellectual exploration, and do so within an atmosphere of safety and esteem. Such an environment fosters a willingness to share one's thoughts and feelings, as respect pervades the classroom culture. An open-minded approach characterizes a respectful classroom, where

students feel secure in expressing their ideas, even in the face of disagreement. Embracing this ethos fosters a sense of connection among all individuals involved. (M. Regina, P. Joan, 2006)

International Approaches



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In Italy, the city of Reggio Emilia has become a celebrated model for early childhood education, stemming from grassroots efforts by parents dissatisfied with traditional schooling. This movement birthed a system of preschools and early elementary classes emphasizing artistic expression, long-term projects, and immersive environments to cultivate democratic and free-learning communities. Guided by foundational principles deeply intertwined with the city's history, the Reggio Emilia approach has inspired educators globally, not just for its aesthetically pleasing schools, but for its passionate advocacy and imaginative solutions.

In New Zealand, early childhood education (ECE) has become nearly ubiquitous, with diverse services reflecting various philosophies and structures. These services, including kindergartens, play centers, and center-based care, have evolved over time to adapt to changing social needs, parental values, and employment patterns. They often collaborate with local schools and community organizations, each incorporating the national curriculum Te Whāriki alongside unique local curricula tailored to the values and cultures of their communities.

Forest School Swansea Neath Port Talbot (FSSNPT), established in 2001, offers forest school experiences to children and young people, aiming to foster self-esteem, environmental awareness, and confidence. Evolving into a charitable organization in 2018, FSSNPT provides sessions across various outdoor settings, funded either through specific projects or participant fees. They also offer training programs for aspiring forest school leaders, prioritizing individuals committed to fostering connections with nature and community, with an emphasis on lived experiences and expertise in safeguarding and finance.

Forest School, originating from Scandinavia and rooted in the philosophy of *friluftsliv* (open air living), offers child-centered learning experiences in natural environments, enhancing confidence and problem-solving skills. While it complements formal education and can align with curricular goals, there's a caution against overstating its benefits without sufficient evidence, according to Dr. Mark Leather, an expert in outdoor education.

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