

Cover Sheet

Student number: 2511970
count: 3251

ECEY4005/C

Word

For this assessment I have submitted the following:

Component 1: Sway presentation

I acknowledge the use of Copilot from 8th December to 18th January. I used the prompts:

1. Find me information on caregiving.
2. Help me to find the work of Emi Pikler.
3. Please find me images of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems.
4. Help me find the Froebel Trust's article on treasure baskets.

I can confirm that I have not presented AI work as my own. I have saved the notes and transcripts.

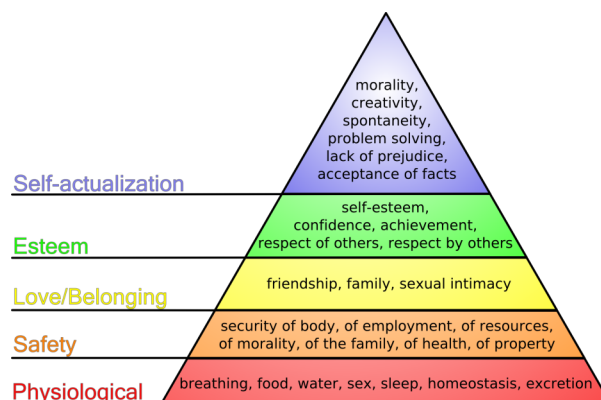
The First 1000 Days



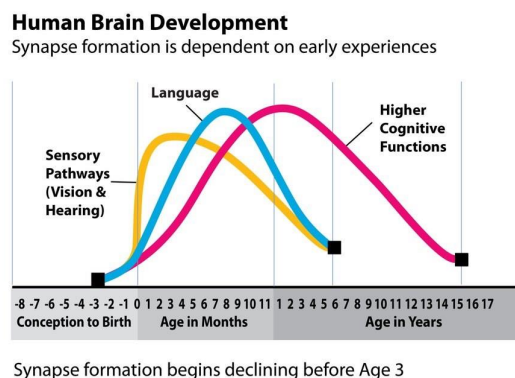
Introduction

Public Health Wales (n.d.) states the period from conception to a child's second birthday is crucial for babies and families, offering a vital opportunity for the best start in life. HM Government (2021, p.7) notes this time lays the building blocks for lifelong emotional and physical health. The early years form the foundation for cognitive, emotional, and physical development and are when babies are especially vulnerable. Children develop diversely during the first 1,000 days; some developmental differences or disabilities are identified early, while others emerge gradually (HM Government, 2021). Recognising and responding to these supports inclusion and wellbeing without defining future potential. Since infants cannot express needs independently, caregivers play a crucial role in support and advocacy, reflected in Ainsworth's Strange Situation, which emphasises the importance of sensitive, responsive caregiving for secure attachment (Davidson, 2005).

The Early Years Coalition (2021) highlights that growth, learning, and development are interconnected from conception through early childhood, with each stage building on the last. Maslow's theory (1943) supports this by stressing infants' dependence on consistently met basic needs such as nutrition, warmth, and comfort before progressing to higher development levels. This vulnerability in the first 1,000 days shows why stable, nurturing environments are essential for protection and healthy development.



According to the NHS (n.d.), 90% of brain growth occurs before age five. While children develop at different rates, developmental milestones guide typical growth patterns.



1 - **Figure 1:** Brain development chart



2 - **Figure 2:** NHS (n.d.) Start for Life Development Guide.

These slides outline expected behaviours between three months and 24 months, as identified in the report.



3 - **Fine Motor**

From 3 months of age, babies typically begin to open and close their hands and bring them to their mouth. By approximately 24 months, toddlers can perform more complex fine motor tasks, such as stacking blocks, using a spoon to feed themselves, turning pages in a book, and holding a crayon to begin making marks



4 - **Speech and Language**

From around 3 months of age, babies typically begin to make sounds such as crying, cooing, gurgling, and babbling. By approximately 24 months, toddlers are usually able to say 50 or more single words and ask simple questions.



5 - Gross motor

At around 3 months of age, babies typically begin to lift their head and chest while lying on their stomach. By approximately 24 months, toddlers are usually able to walk, run, and jump with increasing control and coordination.



6 - Social and Emotional

From 3 months of age, babies typically respond to familiar adults, show enjoyment in interactions, and use crying to communicate. By approximately 24 months, toddlers can play independently, follow simple instructions and begin to show concern for others.



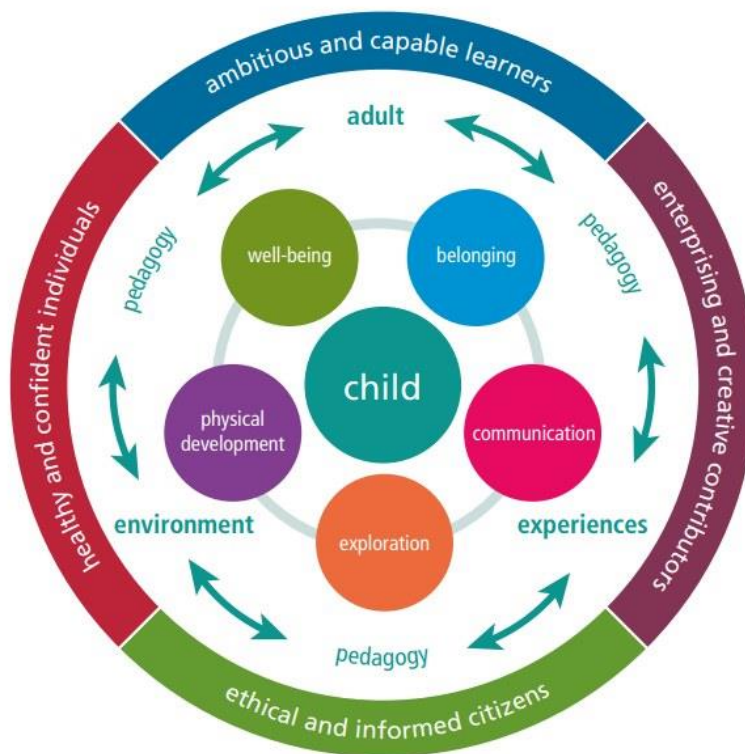
7 - Cognitive

At 3 months of age, babies typically begin to focus on moving objects and the movements of faces. By approximately 24 months, toddlers can complete simple puzzles, name common objects, begin combining words, sort and match colours, and focus on activities for short periods of time.

Exceptional Care



Save the Children (2016) emphasize that childcare, alongside parental care, plays a vital role in children's development. Increasingly, young children spend part of their day in nursery settings where exceptional caregiving and high-quality provision support language development and educational outcomes. Central to this care are the learning environments, experiences, and adult interactions that shape children's opportunities to learn. The Welsh Government (2022) identifies these as three key focus areas: engaging experiences, enabling adults and effective environments.



8 - **Figure 3:** Welsh Government (2022), Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursery Settings. The interconnected roles of engaging experiences, enabling adults, and effective environments in supporting children's development.

Enabling Adults



The Welsh Government (2022) describes enabling adults as those who create emotionally safe, nurturing environments where children feel secure to express themselves, which is especially important during the first 1,000 days of life, a critical period for brain development and attachment. Enabling adults model joy in learning, encourage curiosity, and use play and routines as learning opportunities. By building strong relationships with children, families, and the community, they foster a sense of belonging and support

children's emotional and cognitive development through responsive, well-planned learning experiences.

The Pikler UK Association's pedagogical approach supports these principles by emphasising respectful, responsive caregiving that builds trust through routine interactions (Pikler UK Association, n.d.). This also aligns with Bowlby's attachment theory, which stresses the role of sensitive, consistent care in forming secure attachments (Bowlby, 1982).

Both policy and practice encourage a slower, mindful approach that enables adults to build strong, trusting relationships and positively influence children's well-being during early development.

Effective Environments



Figure 4: Oaten, R (2025) Image of Early Years environment.

Ann Clare (2012) explains that historically, early childhood education research has mainly focused on children aged three and over, with little attention given to learning and

development in the first three years of life. This gap has meant that the experiences and needs of babies and toddlers have often been overlooked, especially in educational settings. Drawing on her experience working in early years settings, Clare highlights that the quality of the environment for very young children is vitally important for their learning, development, and well-being. This emphasis on rich, responsive environments is supported by Welsh Government (2024), which identifies effective environments as a key component of its Quality Framework, highlighting the importance of play, exploration, inclusion, and well-being. In line with this guidance, effective learning environments for babies and toddlers should be intentionally designed to support exploration, inclusion, and a sense of belonging. Welsh Government (2024) suggests that providing access to both indoor and outdoor experiences enables children to engage in appropriate levels of risk and challenge while supporting their overall development. Within this context, enabling adults play a key role in observing and responding to children's needs, ensuring the environment actively supports learning and well-being.



9 - **Figure 5:** Welsh Government (2022), *Curriculum for Non-Maintained Nursery Settings Wales*. Illustration of effective environments.

Engaging Experiences



Figure 6: Oaten, R (2025) Image of engaging experience.

The Welsh Government Curriculum (2022) emphasises the importance of engaging experiences that foster a child's natural curiosity, early language, and physical, social, and emotional development. Outdoor, seasonal, and sensory-rich activities, such as exploring natural textures, observing wildlife, or interacting with water, offer real-life experiences that promote creativity, problem-solving, and a sense of belonging. This aligns with Froebelian principles. D'Ascoli and Hunter (2022), on behalf of the Froebel Trust, highlight the value of learning through nature and understanding our place within the natural world. Together, these perspectives demonstrate that even the youngest children benefit from active, hands-on engagement with their environment, laying the foundation for lifelong learning and an early connection to the living world.



10 - **Figure 7:** Froebel Trust short film (2025) *Time for Play, Space to Learn*. Effective environments, engaging experiences, and the role of enabling adults in early years settings.

Professional Partnerships



Effective partnership working underpins early years practice and is essential in supporting families and children's development, particularly during the first 1,000 days of life. HM Government (2021) highlights that collaborative working enables holistic support by ensuring that services are coordinated around the needs of both children and families. Drawing on Gasper (2009), partnership working involves professionals across education, health, and social care working alongside children and families to provide integrated support. This reflects a shift away from traditional top-down models of service delivery

towards a more inclusive, family-centred approach that values parents as active partners and recognises their knowledge of their own children during this critical developmental period.

The importance of adult support within early development is further reinforced through Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. As discussed by Bodrova and Leong (2007), adults play a crucial role in guiding children's learning by providing scaffolding within the zone of proximal development. During the first 1,000 days, when development is particularly rapid, responsive interactions and guidance from caregivers and educators support cognitive, social, and emotional growth. This theory supports the importance of professional partnerships, as coordinated support between home and early years settings helps improve children's learning and development.

Public Health Wales (2011) emphasises the importance of professional partnerships in promoting maternal and child health during the First 1000 Days. Within Cwm Taf, the Healthy Schools Scheme provides a practical example of this approach through close collaboration with School Nurses, the School Counselling Service, and Local Authority services. These partnerships enable consistent, responsive interventions that address individual needs and promote wellbeing across educational and health contexts.

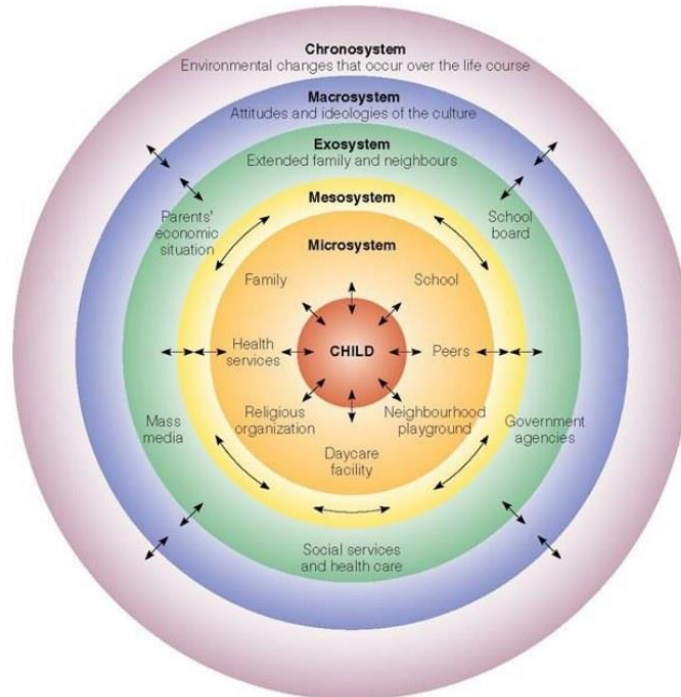
Maternal health is a key focus of partnership working within this period. Public Health Wales (2011) and the Australian Government Department of Health (n.d.) highlight that factors such as maternal mental health, weight management, exercise, and avoidance of alcohol and smoking significantly influence pregnancy outcomes and early child development. Both Health organisations bring to attention that poor maternal mental health can disrupt early bonding, while obesity, alcohol, and smoking increase the risk of pregnancy complications and long-term developmental consequences. These findings reinforce the need for coordinated, multi-agency support to address maternal health as part of early intervention strategies.

Central to effective partnership working is collaboration with parents. The Early Years Coalition (2021) point out that parents are key promoters of their children's learning and development, bringing detailed insight from daily experiences with their children. When practitioners actively engage with parents and build on this knowledge, family expertise can be embedded into everyday practice, supporting a shared understanding of children's needs. Respectful partnerships between families and professionals help ensure consistency of support across home and early years settings, leading to improved developmental outcomes during the first 1,000 days.



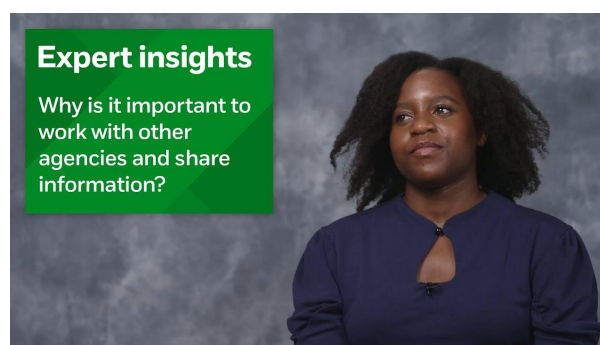
Partnership working also extends to collaboration with specialist external agencies. Drifte (2002) highlights the role of specialist advisers, educational psychology services, social and child protection services, and a wide range of medical professionals, including paediatric, therapeutic, and mental health specialists, in providing targeted interventions. The Early Years Coalition (2021) further notes that collaboration with other professionals, as well as community and support groups, brings together all those involved with the child and family. This coordinated approach supports a clearer understanding of individual needs and ensures consistent, effective intervention.

The importance of collaboration across families, professionals, and services can be understood through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Bronfenbrenner (1979) explains how a child's development is shaped by multiple interconnected systems. Within this framework, the exosystem includes wider social and community influences such as extended family networks, parents' employment, neighbourhoods, media, and access to health, education, and social welfare services, as well as broader policies. Although children may not interact with these systems directly, they influence the adults closest to them, indirectly shaping children's development and wellbeing.



11 - **Figure 8:** *Simply Psychology (2025) Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory.*

Building on the role of partnership working, multi-agency collaboration is also central to safeguarding and child protection. The Childcare Act (2006) highlights that strong multi-agency and multi-disciplinary working is essential in identifying and responding to the needs of children and families. This shared responsibility spans police, local authorities, health services, probation services, education providers, childcare settings, and voluntary organisations. Effective partnership working enables professionals to share information, assess risk, and coordinate timely responses, ensuring children's welfare and safety remain paramount. This safeguarding approach aligns with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), particularly Article 19. This article upholds a child's right to protection from violence, abuse, and neglect. Integrating safeguarding within a family-centred approach demonstrates how professional collaboration during the first 1,000 days supports both developmental and protective outcomes.



12 - **Figure 9:** *NSPCC online video (2025) The importance of sharing information.*

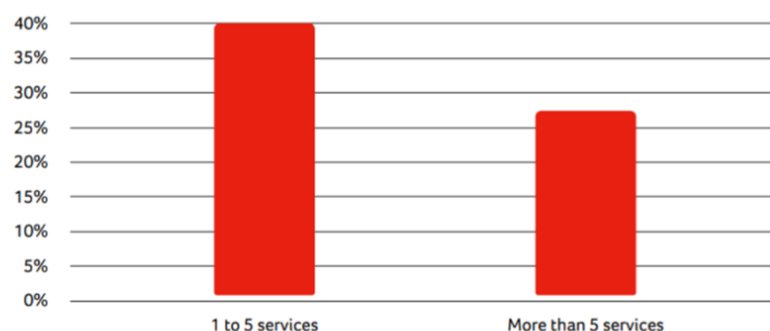
Challenges



Barriers for Parents

A key challenge affecting the first 1,000 days is parents' limited awareness of, and difficulty accessing, early support services. HM Government (2021) identify this issue in *The Best Start for Life*, noting that although services exist, they are often poorly coordinated and hard for parents to navigate. Supporting this, Action for Children (2021) found that two-thirds of parents were unable to access at least one essential early years service, with 82% struggling or failing to access support at all. These findings illustrate how organisational barriers prevent families from receiving timely support during a critical period of child development.

Chart 7 – Proportion of all parents who reported being unable to access early years services



13 - *Figure 10: Action for Children (2021) Proportion of parents who were unable to access services.*

Becoming a parent can be physically and emotionally demanding, and parents are often expected to identify their own needs while caring for a newborn (HM Government, 2021). This lack of clear, accessible information can increase stress, anxiety and feelings of isolation, which may negatively affect parent–infant interactions, attachment and emotional wellbeing. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory highlights how these challenges occur across multiple layers, with the microsystem involving parent–child interactions, the exosystem encompassing local health and community services, and the macrosystem reflecting broader socio-economic conditions and policy decisions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

These barriers are particularly intense for families experiencing disadvantage, such as low income, poor mental health or limited social support. The Best Start for Life presents the issue as shaped by broader social and structural factors rather than individual responsibility, highlighting the importance of coordinated universal services alongside targeted support to reduce inequality and promote the best start during the first 1,000 days (Action for Children, 2021).



Rising Nursery Costs

NDNA (2024) highlight the serious challenges facing childcare providers in Wales, who are under increasing financial pressure due to rising delivery costs and inadequate funding across the early years sector. These pressures have driven a worrying rise in nursery closures, reducing access to essential early years provision. Research by NDNA indicates that the vast majority of nurseries expect to either break even or operate at a loss. Similarly, the petition Save Childcare Provision in Wales emphasises that without urgent action, closures and reduced availability of childcare places may force parents to cut working hours or leave employment, while children miss out on critical early years education (Senedd, 2023). These challenges are particularly concerning during the first 1,000 days, a formative period for cognitive, emotional, and social development, when access to quality early years provision is essential for healthy growth, early learning, and parental engagement. Limited access to childcare also undermines the role of adults as ‘enabling adults,’ a central concept in the Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2024) who support and extend children’s learning and development through guidance, encouragement, and interaction. If these trends continue, there is a real risk of widening inequalities, as children from disadvantaged backgrounds may be disproportionately affected, limiting their opportunities for development and social participation. By calling for more sustainable and affordable childcare provision, both NDNA and the petition underscore the need to safeguard early years services for all children during this critical stage of development, ensuring that every child can reach their full potential from the earliest years.

Activities



Figure 11: Froebel Trust (n.d.) Contents of a treasure basket.

The Welsh Government (2024) describes engaging activities as those that stimulate babies' and young children's curiosity, support early language development, deepen understanding, and encourage creativity, imagination, and problem-solving skills.

Early Years Coalition (2021) emphasises that engaging activities, supported by enabling adults who encourage exploration, independence, and positive risk-taking, are central to children's learning and development. This approach is particularly important during the first 1,000 days, when brain development is most rapid (NHS, n.d.) and highly responsive to experiences and relationships. According to UNICEF (2017), the early years are marked by rapid brain development, with vast numbers of neural connections formed each second, underscoring the importance of early experiences for children's cognitive, social, and emotional development.



14 - **Figure 12:** City of York Council (2021) An example of how Treasure Baskets are presented to infants to encourage sensory exploration.

Treasure Baskets

The Froebel Trust (n.d.) explains that a Treasure Basket consists of a range of natural, household, and recycled objects presented in a sturdy basket for babies aged approximately 5–10 months. It is designed for infants who can sit independently but are not yet mobile, supporting sensory exploration through real-life materials.

The concept of the Treasure Basket was developed by Elinor Goldschmied, a pioneering Early Years educator and researcher, who proposed that this form of play enables babies to engage in rich, multi-sensory exploration. Through independent investigation, infants are able to explore objects using their senses at a pace that suits their individual development. Julia Manning-Morton emphasises the importance of focusing on babies' experiences within early years settings, highlighting the value of allowing infants time and space to explore freely (Froebel Trust, 2024).

Treasure Baskets also reflect Friedrich Froebel's principles (Froebel Trust, n.d.) of hands-on learning, freedom with guidance, and meeting the child at their current stage of development. By allowing infants to choose how they interact with objects, the activity supports autonomous learning and early decision-making. Hughes (n.d.), writing for the Froebel Trust, emphasises the significance of Treasure Baskets in supporting early learning, noting that curiosity and sustained concentration underpin children's learning and creativity and that these experiences play a vital role in development.



15 - **Figure 13:** Froebel Trust (n.d.) A child engaging in Heuristic play.

Heuristic Play

Another key contribution of Elinor Goldschmied was the concept of heuristic play, designed to support children's exploration of cause and effect and their understanding of how they can impact objects. Julia Manning-Morton identifies examples of suitable materials, such as conkers, pinecones, and pom-poms, which are typically presented to children in a cloth bag. A variety of objects provides a range of sensory properties, enabling children to investigate freely within a safe and supportive environment. The role of the adult in this context is described in Froebelian terms as "internally active, externally passive" (Froebel Trust, 2024), allowing for careful observation and the planning of meaningful, bespoke learning experiences. This approach aligns closely with the Welsh Government's Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care developmental pathways, which emphasise that responsive adults play a critical role in fostering positive dispositions to learning. From birth, children benefit from high-quality interactions with adults who provide time and space for curiosity, exploration, and safe experimentation (Welsh Government, 2023).

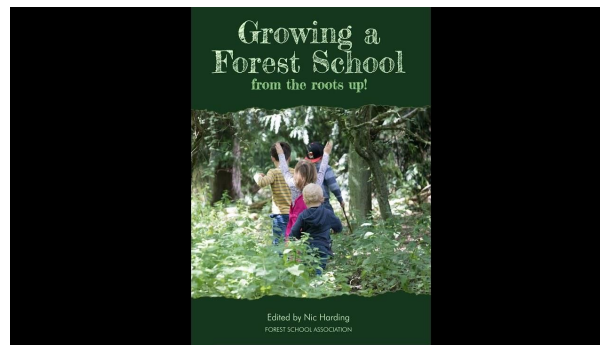


16 - *Figure 14: R, Oaten (2026) Forest School.*

Forest Schools and Outdoor Experiences

Outdoor learning provides a flexible, sensory-rich environment that supports holistic child development, offering opportunities for movement, exploration, and play. Experiences in natural settings often engage children for longer periods and in more complex ways than indoor activities, helping them develop physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively, while fostering creativity, problem-solving, and resilience (Rose, Gilbert & Richards, 2016).

According to the Forest School Association (n.d.), Forest School takes a holistic, child-centred approach, encouraging curiosity, exploration, and managed risk-taking in natural environments while nurturing resilience, independence, and a range of skills, including emotional, social, physical, and spiritual development. These principles align closely with Montessori theory, which emphasises learning through direct engagement with nature to stimulate curiosity, sensory exploration, and independent problem-solving (Montessori Partnership, n.d.).



17 - **Figure 15:**Forest Schools Association (2022) *An introduction to Forest School.*

The Montessori Partnership (n.d.) presents a range of Montessori-inspired outdoor activities that can be adapted for babies and young children to support early developmental goals. Activities such as simple gardening, balancing exercises, collecting natural objects for counting or sorting, observing clouds and insects, treasure hunts, and outdoor art provide sensory-rich experiences that encourage curiosity, creativity, and physical coordination.

These activities support key developmental pathways (Welsh Government, 2023), including physical skills like spatial awareness and negotiating obstacles, as well as exploration skills such as using the senses to investigate the world, all contributing to healthy development during the critical first 1,000 days. Together, this evidence demonstrates the importance of outdoor, play-based learning in fostering early childhood growth, wellbeing, and lifelong connections with nature. Forest School and Montessori approaches promote child-led exploration, sensory engagement, and holistic development, helping children build confidence and resilience.



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