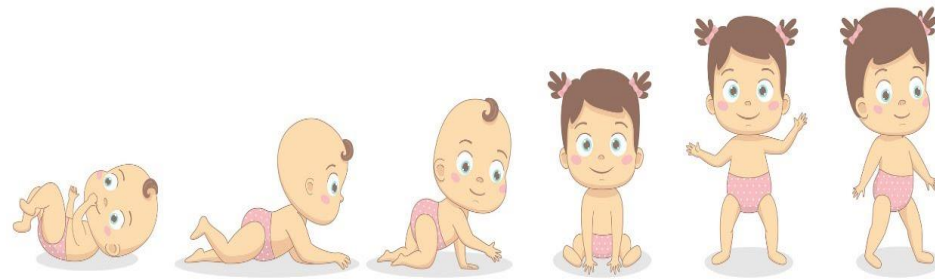


The First 1000 Days



Why First 1000 Days are Important ?

(Source: Google search, 2023)

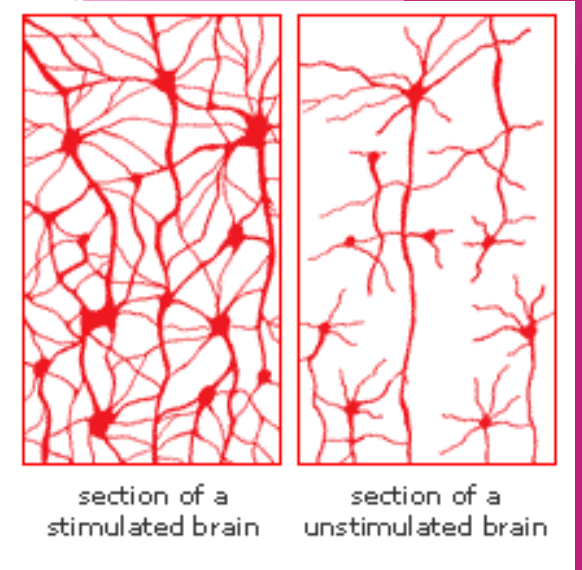
Introduction

The First 1000 days.

According to HM Government, (2021) the first 1000 days of an individual's life consists of the time from conception to the age of two. They believe that these 1000 days lay the foundations for a child's development, agreeing that the experiences that a child has during these first days can shape their lifelong cognitive, emotional and physical health.

Brain Development.

The first 1000 days are important to the holistic development of a child as it is in these first years of life that the architecture of the child's brain will be formed (Yates, 2016). Yates (2016) states that babies are born with billions of neurons, but the connections will only form if stimulating and caring environments are provided and love, care and support are received by the child. She believes that if this is not the case then the child is being deprived from a healthy development that is crucial in those important first years of life. Yates (2016) says that the first 1000 days are a period of growth and opportunity that can and will make a difference to the child's development.



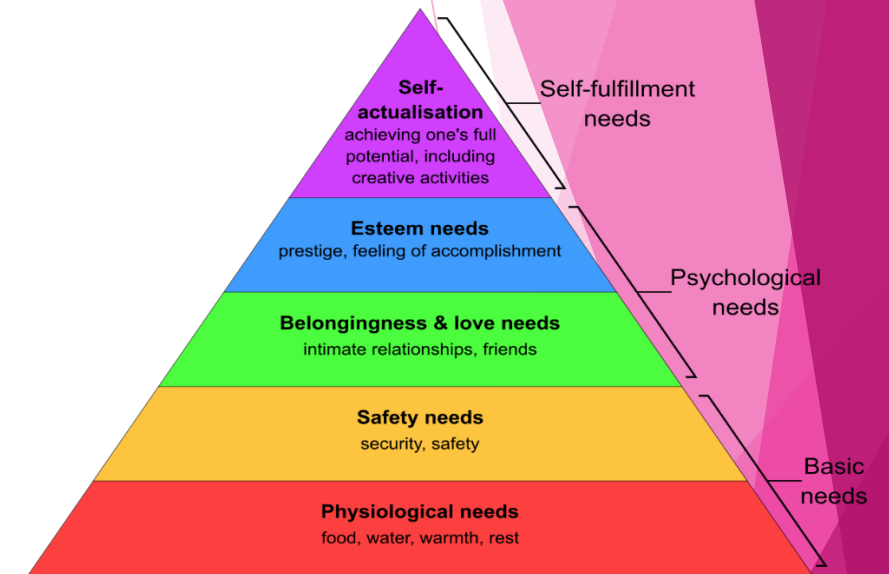
(Source: earlychamps.com, no date)

Basic Needs.

It is important that during the first 1000 days the child's basic needs are met. This is encouraged by Maslow's hierarchy of needs, (cited Mathes, 2023) where he describes a child needs to have their physiological and safety needs met primarily, known as basic needs. Basic needs include things such as food, water, warmth, rest and safety. Maslow suggested that these needs must be satisfied before progressing up the hierarchy and developing the next level. To meet these basic needs a child must feel loved, cared for, happy and healthy.

Nutrition.

According to Schwarzenburg and Georgieff (2018) in the first 1000 days nutrition is also an important factor to the child's neurodevelopment and mental health. They believe that the nutrition of the foetus is equally as important as it is for the individual as a child. They state there are key nutrients that are important to support neurodevelopment which include protein, iron and certain vitamins, as well as other nutrients, and failure to provide these in the first 1000 days, during the critical period of development could lead to lifelong deficiencies in brain function. They believe a healthy diet and sufficient nutrients are priority for ensuring optimal neurodevelopment during the first 1000 days.



(Source: Michael Corthell, 2023)

Experiences.

A baby's experiences can influence how and when their genes are expressed. Interactions with adults can be some of the most important experiences that will contribute to the shaping of brain architecture. Responding to a baby's cues appropriately, also known as serve and return, is important for this. High levels of stress regularly can have long term consequences for a child's learning and physical and mental well-being (HM Government, 2021).

All the previous factors can contribute to the holistic development of a child therefore, it is important to give them the best start in life during the first 1000 days.



(Source: Centre on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2011)

Caregiving & Exceptional Care

Enabling adult.

In the first 1000 days it is important to do what is best for the child. According to Pecorelli (2019) during pregnancy everything that the mother experiences the foetus feels too. Therefore, the mother should do her best to ensure that stress is limited and that she and the foetus are receiving as many nutrients as possible to enable good brain development for the foetus.

When a baby is born the exceptional care can be delivered by more than only the mother. This could be other family members, early years practitioners or multi-agency workers such as health visitors or doctors. All carers should support baby as much as possible to ensure optimal development holistically. Enabling adults are expected to ensure the child receives nurturing care to allow for them to reach their full potential. This consists of:

- adequate health and nutrition- ensuring that baby is getting what it needs to become a healthy individual.
- responsive care- responding appropriately to babies' cues and satisfying their needs, physically and emotionally.
- Opportunity for learning- providing appropriate and meaningful activities.
- Protection- ensuring they come to no harm, always keeping them safe and secure (Raghavan and Ruta, 2022).

Emmi Pickler.

Pickler (cited Kayir, 2022) states she believed that there are seven key principles that are based on two main ideas for babies in the first 1000 days and beyond. These two main ideas are the importance of a respectful relationship and the freedom of movement depending on the child's developmental stage. Pickler's key principles state that:

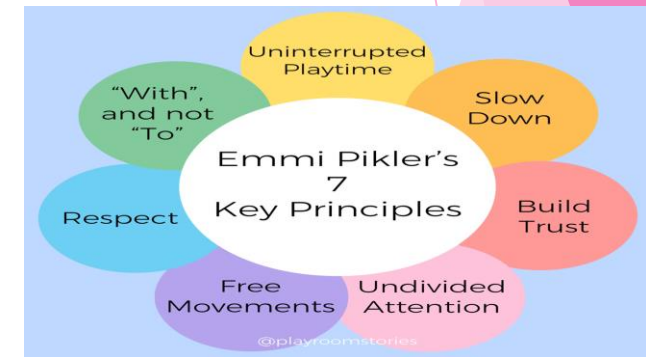
- It is important to give your full attention to the child especially during caring activities as babies perceive attention as love. If babies receive full attention during these times, it is more likely that they will learn to focus on one thing at a time without becoming overwhelmed by things occurring at the same time. Enjoying mealtimes together without interruptions can also give opportunity for bonds to form and relationships to build.
- A slow and calming environment should be provided as overstimulation caused by sensory overload or too much happening at once can be stressful for all involved, including the baby.
- During caring activities, it is important to build trust. The adult should try to use these caring opportunities as quality time together so that the baby can receive security and freedom, allowing them to learn what they need to do, so that later in life they can become actively independent in things such as feeding, bathing and dressing.
- Doing things 'with' baby and not 'to' baby will help them feel more involved and help build the relationship with the adult. Adults should try to explain each step to the baby, so they are aware of what to expect giving them a chance to cooperate. The caregiver should be patient and allow baby to respond.

- Babies should not be put into positions that they cannot get into themselves. Allowing a baby, the freedom to move and learn how to position themselves is important as it allows the baby to feel the satisfaction from doing so. It also allows them to accomplish things alone and gives them independence and encourages patience and perseverance.
- Allow babies uninterrupted play time by letting them explore the environment and toys alone. This gives them the chance to learn new things and solve problems for themselves. Giving them time to explore independently encourages them to develop confidence and self-esteem.
- Tuning in to their cues and responding respectfully can help build a baby's sense of self-worth. Ignoring their cues can lead to them becoming more defiant to things expected of them as they get older.



(Source: Google search, 2024)

Caregiving should always be inclusive to each individual and the needs of the child should always be main priority.



(Source: University of Wales Trinity Saint David, 2024)

Professional Partnerships

During the first 1000 days, the role of the early years practitioner in supporting the child is to primarily be an enabling adult. Welsh government (2023) state that a practitioner's role is to ensure that they are giving consistent care and professional love to support the emotional development of the child whilst always modelling kindness and compassion. Loving relationships for babies during the first 1000 days are essential for early brain development and can have a lasting affect for emotional and physical health later in life. If brain emotion and immune systems are affected by early stress, they can become less effective, allowing for vulnerability to later difficulties including depression, anti-social behaviour, addictions and physical illness (Gerhardt, 2014). Welsh Government (2023) also state that as an enabling adult, a practitioner must ensure that they create an emotionally safe environment that will support children to express and regulate their feelings and behaviour positively. Helping to make children aware of different feelings and explaining that its ok for them to feel certain ways can help them to understand and manage their feelings and later recognise the feelings of others allowing them to become empathetic children (Empathy Lab, no date).



(Source: thebelayfoundation.org.uk, 2024)

Aral (2020) agrees that a practitioner should have a good understanding of developmental stages of a child to ensure that any possible needs or delays can be noticed, and help can then be planned and presented. She believes that the knowledge of child development is vital for achieving future goals and for the children's health and well-being.

Welsh Government (2022) state that an enabling adult should ensure that they encourage and support the natural curiosity of a child whilst allowing for best use of teachable moments that naturally occur, make the most of every moment to give the child as much learning opportunity as possible. This is supported by Montessori's theory where she believes that children should be free to move around and decide for themselves which activity they would like to do. This ensures each child can follow their own interests and helps to keep them motivated and more engaged, whilst allowing them to develop a sense of self direction (O'Donnell, 2013).

Welsh Government (2023) believe that it is important that practitioners make strong bonds and communicate with families and multi-agency workers to ensure that all children's individual needs are being met and to allow the child's sense of belonging to strengthen. This is also supported by Bronfenbrenner (1996) in his Ecological system, that states all care givers should communicate effectively so they can support the holistic development and well-being of the child together. Good communication between one and other will ensure that all practitioners involved in the care giving of the child and the parents can better understand with the support of others knowledge and professionalism.



(Source: Early Years Training, 2015)

Factors that could impact development.

According to Gilbert, Richards and Rose (2016) there several different factors that can influence children's health and well-being which can in turn impact their development.

Poverty

They believe that poverty can have a major effect on a child's health and well-being. Children who live in poverty can have the poorest of health physically and emotionally and their well-being can then suffer. If the basic needs for a child, such as food and warmth cannot be provided then children can struggle to concentrate on activities which can then stunt their holistic development. To give children the best start in life there are options such as food banks, that can help to provide essentials such as milk or food, to ensure that children get a good nutrition to allow for the best start during the first 1000 days and beyond.

Adverse Childhood Experiences. (ACE's)

ACEs are known as traumatic experiences that children have, that expose them to high levels of stress such as neglect, domestic violence or bereavement. As ACE's can have a long-term impact on children, it is important that practitioners keep children safe from harm. By delivering consistent, positive relationships in emotionally safe environments and helping children to build resilience, practitioners can help to reduce the impact of adverse experiences. Welsh Government (2022) believe that practitioners at early years settings should deliver an open-door policy to ensure that families or carers who need support will be more encouraged to ask for help and share experiences that may affect a child's behaviour or mood so that practitioners can be aware of how they may react to certain things and what interventions may need to be put in place ready to help the child deal with the emotion they will experience.

Inclusive Practice

Welsh Government (2022) state that it is important that practice is always inclusive of each child's individuality. To ensure that practitioners are enabling inclusion, all children and their families must receive the same treatment, opportunities and respect. It is important that the children and their families feel valued at the setting and that the children have a strong sense of belonging. For example, this could be achieved by asking certain words in other languages of children whose home language is not English, or by asking a parent in to discuss their culture to help everyone understand. Everyone is different but it is important that everyone is treated equally, and this should be mirrored between all who are involved in the care giving of the child.

Welsh Government (2022) also believe that practitioners must provide activities that can be accessed by every child whilst providing appropriate support to allow all children to participate in learning and ensure they are developing holistically.



(Source: nurserystory.co.uk, 2021)



(Source: [Youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com), 2023)

Challenges of providing high quality care

There can be many challenges to providing high quality care that may need to be overcome as an early years practitioner.

Needs of the child

The needs of the child could make it challenging to ensure that a practitioner is delivering care to a high standard. For example, if a child had a physical disability and needed specialist equipment, according to the Welsh Government (2023) the setting would need to contact the local authority to gain support with this. This can be time consuming as they would need to wait for funding which would then result in the best care of the child being delayed.

Staff Ratios

Staff ratios can prove difficult in providing high quality care during the first 1000 days. Sometimes at early years settings there can be several babies or children who will need the support and care of a practitioner at the same time, for example, changing of nappies or feeding which can prove difficult depending on staff ratios. This can then affect the quality of care as they may not always be able to deliver the exceptional care as and when a baby provides their cue for allowing the opportunity of change for example (Pickler, cited Kayir 2022).

Communication

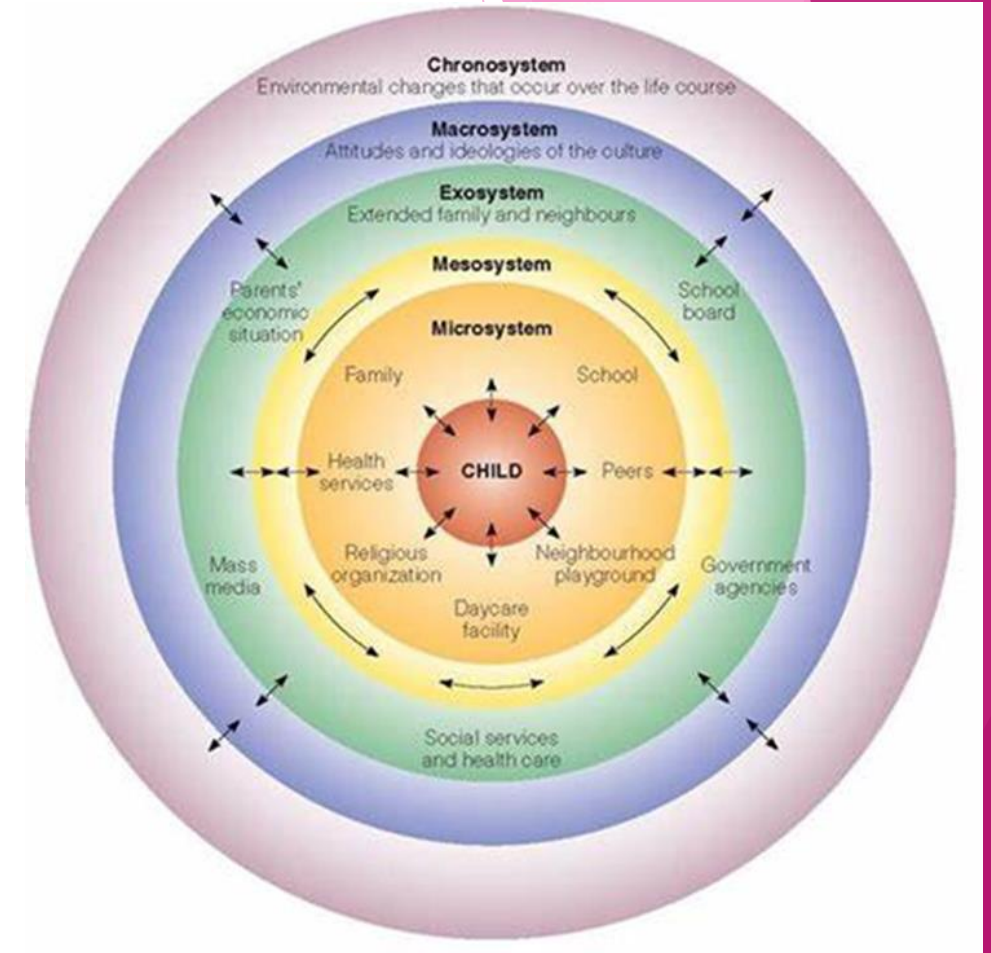
Effective partnerships involve good communication between the family and the practitioner (Brodie, 2018). It can sometimes be difficult to communicate with some families that rely on others to deliver and collect their children to and from the early years setting due to work commitments, for example. To overcome this barrier of communication there are digital ways of communicating such as email, to ensure that the family are kept up to date with all information regarding the child, but it can sometimes be overlooked or missed, meaning that some important information may not be known by the family.

Community

The community a child is raised in can cause some challenges in providing high quality care. For example, there can be many cultural differences that may not be known to practitioners which can hinder the exceptional care being delivered to the family's preference. It is therefore vital that communication between both parties is as effective as possible to ensure the best quality care for the child. (Welsh Government, 2022).

Community can also provide challenges to high quality care by the environmental changes that occur that are out of human control, for example, flooding. Flooding could cause damage to a building or equipment which in turn could provide problems for providing the best care. These issues would need to be addressed which could be costly or time consuming, allowing for high quality care to be disrupted.

All these factors are recognised by Bronfenbrenner (1996) and can be linked into his ecological system. This shows all the factors that can affect a child holistically, on a positive or a negative side.



(Source: Simply Psychology, 2022)

Activities

Sensory/Messy Play

Sensory play is any activity that consists of using the five senses, touch, taste, sight, smell and hearing. Children begin using these senses from the minute they are born, and they can help them to gain knowledge and understanding of the world around them whilst promoting a sense of belonging and a sense of curiosity. Sensory play can have lots of benefits for children providing they don't have sensory sensitivity to the activity that is provided. Some of the benefits of sensory play include supporting brain development, enhancing memory skills and helping to promote language and communication skills. It can also help to develop a child's fine motor skills and help to encourage creativity and imagination. Sensory play can have a calming effect on children so can also benefit children who struggle to manage anxious and angry feelings (Action for Children, 2024). Therefore, sensory play can support the holistic development of a child.



(Source: earlyimpactlearning.com, 2021)



(Source: sarahchesworth.com, 2020)

Sensory play is supported by Piaget's theory of cognitive development who suggested that children between the ages of birth and two, are at the sensorimotor stage, explaining that they experience the world through discovery learning and exploring using the five senses. He believed that children in the early years learnt most effectively when using their senses to discover the world around them (Halpenny and Pettersen, 2014).

Sensory play for children can be completely independent. Although the child might need an enabling adult nearby for reassurance allowing them the freedom to explore, the child could indulge in the activity alone. However, the adult would need to be readily available to respond to any communication they try to make so that it enhances language development.



(Source: theimaginationtree.com, 2012)

Enabling Environments

First and foremost, an enabling environment should always be a safe space for children (Welsh Government, 2022). This involves the physical safety of an environment, ensuring that the adult to child ratios are correct so that each child can be cared for and supported to an acceptable standard and following an appropriate curriculum so that the full potential of holistic development of the child is encouraged (Centre on the Developing Child, 2024). An enabling environment also needs to encourage children's authentic experiences indoors and outdoors. The main factor for development during the early years is exploration of the environment and this can help children to appreciate the world they live in (Welsh Government, 2022).



(Source: teachearlyyears.com, (2022))



(Source: theempowerededucatoronline.com, 2022)



(Source: theempowerededucatoronline.com, 2019)



(Source: youtube.com, 2014)

According to Montessori an early years environment should be well prepared by the practitioner to create optimal learning opportunities for the children that help promote development in all areas. She agreed that the space should be open plan with flexible learning spaces and all the equipment and learning materials at child's level for easy access. Montessori believed that the safety of the child is paramount so all equipment must be developmentally friendly and must not restrict the child's movements. She stated that the décor should be natural and neutral in order to create a peaceful and calming space, consisting of aids for easy movement, for example, bars that they can use to pull themselves up. (American Montessori Society, 2023).

According to Vygotskys Theory it is important that the early years setting is language rich, which includes appropriate language for development stages, good communication including being responsive and ensuring use of serve and return, and engaging in story telling (First Discoverers, no date).

International Approaches

Forest School

According to Forest School Association (no date) Forest Schools is about getting children out into the natural environment and allowing them to explore the world around them. This can be linked to sensory play as the senses are enhanced whilst outside. Children can feel the sun or wind on their faces, smell the scent of flowers or mud during messy play or see the different colours of leaves during autumn and hear them crunch beneath their feet. Being outdoors allows for different textures like bark, sand or mud, to be explored using senses. The outdoors can also be used to develop gross motor skills and coordination through activities such as climbing trees, balancing on logs, jumping across boulders or swinging and hanging from branches or rolling down grass banks. Using the outdoors can have its own challenges as there is always the weather to rely on. However, children usually enjoy the wind, rain and muddy puddles and will still manage to adapt a sense of awe and wonder regardless, providing they are wearing appropriate clothing and shoes. Adults' reluctance can sometimes be more of a problem to hindering outdoor activities.

Vamos (2015) agrees that children who are free to move will learn to take risks, be more attentive to activities and enjoy exploring the world more.



(Source: telegraph.co.uk, 2016)

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