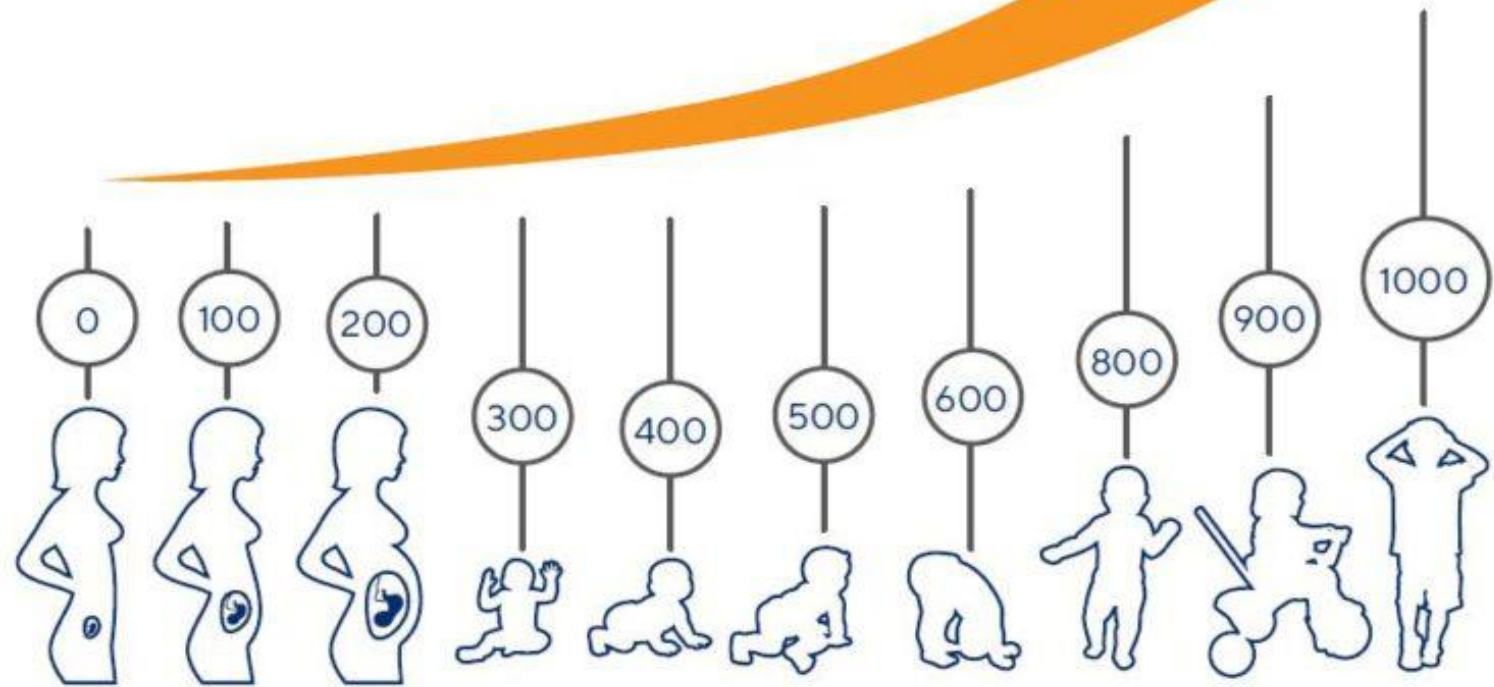


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First 1000 Days



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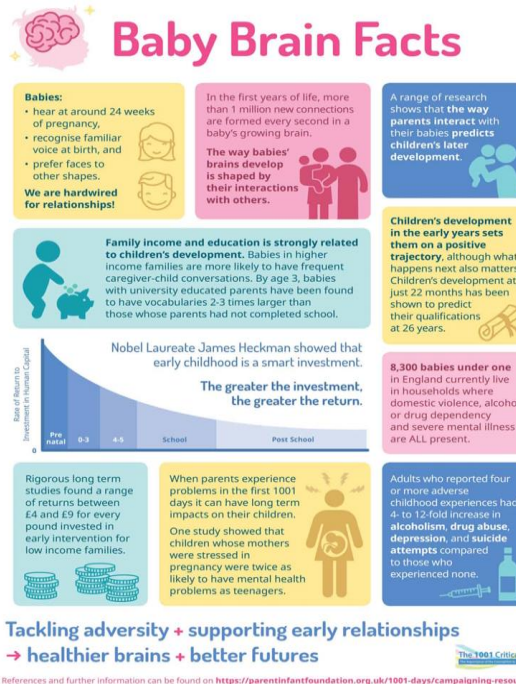
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AI Cover Sheet

- I confirm that i have not presented any AI generated text as my own work. I confirm i have copies of my drafts, notes and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.



(Parent-Infant Foundation, 2024)



Introduction

The first 1000 days of life depict the period between conception and up to the age of two years. During this time, the framework for both physical and mental growth is established. Burton (2015, quoted in Brodie, 2018, p. 1) describes the first years of childhood as a crucial time for any child. It enables them to develop and provides an opportunity for building healthy resilient individuals.

What is also important to highlight is the first 1000 days will focus on a child's future and how that will be shaped individually depending on outcomes.

Why is it important to focus on the first 1000 days.

The development of the brain's fundamental architecture and the sensory pathways necessary for fundamental abilities like hearing and vision start before birth (GOV.UK, 2021). An essential area of attention is a woman's nutritional state as she approaches pregnancy. The regulation of implantation, placentation and cell differentiation by specific micronutrients may have both immediate and long-term impacts on a woman's pregnancy.

From the moment of conception, the fetus actively responds to environmental changes from signals they receive from the mother depending on her physical and emotional state. This can predict the kind of world they will be born into (www.firstfiveyears.org.au, n.d.).

(Nurturing-care,2018)



Caregiving

Exceptional caregivers

During the first 1000 days of a child's life, it is crucial that exceptional caregiving is fostered to help support a child's development. Parenting plays a key role in influencing a child's outcome. The first 1000 days are important for the child to discover emotional connections with their caregivers and interactions with the environment around them. It is said that social support perceived by mothers during their pregnancy plays an important role (Capitani *et al.*, 2022).

Why is it important: It is important and essential that good nutrition during pregnancy along with good health, safety and security are all essential to aid healthy growth and development, along with nurturing interactions with a responsive caregiver (Burden 2019).

Lancet (2016, quoted in Public Health Wales, 2023, p.3) states that one of the most important aspects of a child's healthy development is the way parents and other caregivers raise and assist them during their early years. This has long-lasting and generational advantages for social cohesion, productivity, and health

Another important aspect to consider is the role enabling adult's play in creating environments that nurture growth during the first 1000 days of life.

A child's development can be significantly impacted by the setting in which they play. That is why it is essential that early year's professionals create a sensory rich setting to enhance their cognitive development. Lichtenwalner & Hertenstein (quoted in Stead, 2024, p. 3) states that infants that are exposed to a variety of sensory experiences showed improved cognitive skills later in childhood.

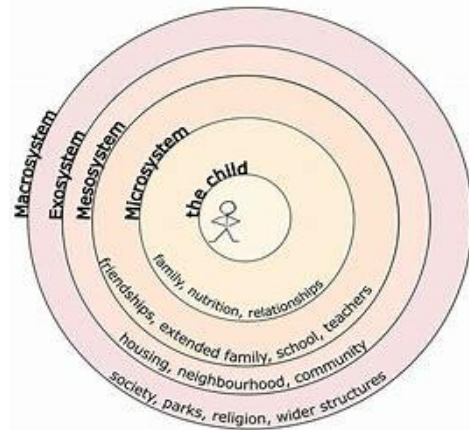




Professional Partnerships

Mavink.com.(n.d.).

The bio-ecological model.



The role of an early year practitioner is to help aid parents by supporting them through the developmental milestones. It is important that practitioners ensure that both mother and child receive the correct nutritional information.

By working closely with parents and families' practitioners can offer guidance on parenting skills, while also promoting a child's social skills and self-esteem. In addition to providing developmental support, practitioners are essential in laying the groundwork for early education (Public Health Wales, 2023).

One theorist who highlights this is Bronfenbrenner bioecological model. His model has four main components micro, meso, exo and macro. Each has direct or indirect influences on a child's development. The microsystem is the innermost level of the model. This consists of family, friends, day care, school and neighborhood. This component has the most immediate and earliest influence on a child Bronfenbrenner (1979, quoted in Krishnan, 2010, p.7) called it bi-directional since the child's family can influence the behaviour of the child and vice versa.

Having a close connection with parents and caregivers during the first 1000 days is critical to supporting not just the child but the parents. It can be very daunting for new parents and can have an impact on the mental health and wellbeing of both parties. When practitioners maintain open communication with caregivers, they are providing essential knowledge and experience

According to one theorist Pickler parents and other caregivers should take the time nappy changing, feeding, bathing and dressing their children, this should be a relaxing and enjoyable time in which the child plays an active part (Aspiring beginnings, no date).

There is numerous interventions during the first 1000 days professional partnerships play an essential role in leading the parents in the right direction. By making sure that the mother attends pre-natal care along with any vaccinations that are needed. Providing guidance on lifestyles and the correct supplementation with folic acid until the end of the third month of pregnancy (Indrio *et al.*, 2023).

Practitioners play a vital role not just before birth but also when a child starts to attend a childcare setting. It is important that parents understand the importance of allowing their child to freely explore the environment they are in. Keeping parents invested in their Childs's early learning along with understanding the part they play in their child's success and retaining interest in their early education (Stead, 2024)

Stead (2024) states for a child to thrive the underlying neural pathways created in the first 1000 days through caring nurturing relationships, play, and engaging experiences are all important for a child to flourish in a formal learning setting.

According to Public Health Wales (2023), for the best start in life all babies need love, nurturing care and attention from the most important people in their lives their caregivers.

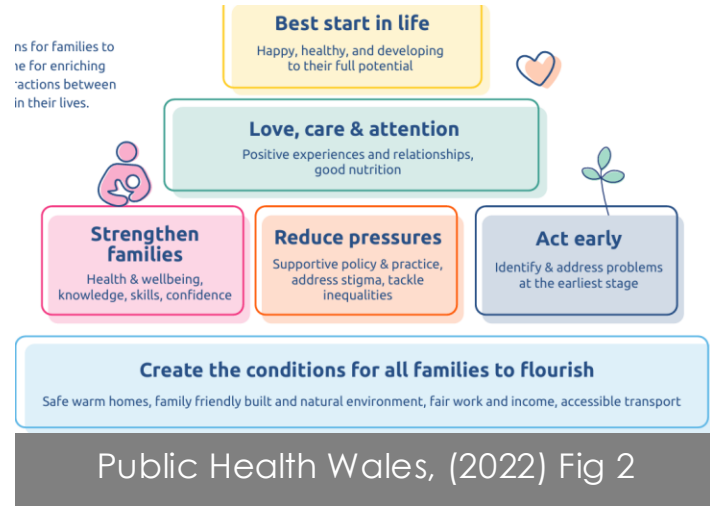
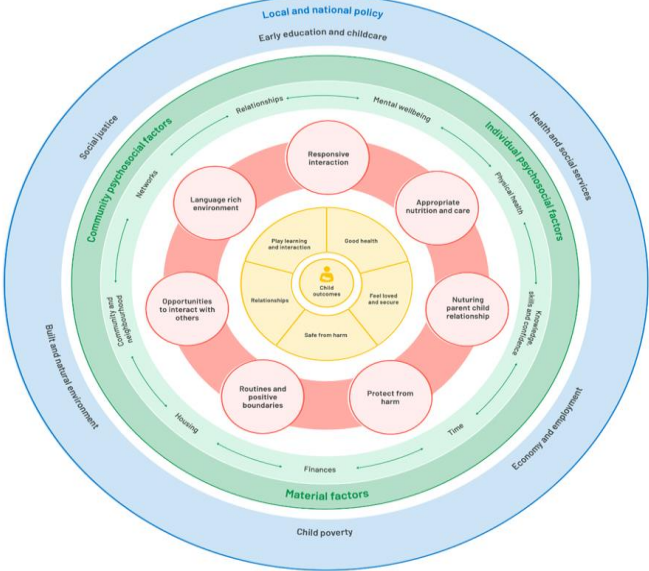
Public Health Wales (2023), states that more than 1 in 4 (28%) of children in Wales are living in poverty (2020 – 2022). They also state that a safe and healthy pregnancy and birth also gives a child a better chance of good health, well-being and a bright future. Creating a community where every child has the best possible start to life. Public Health Wales created a model of parenting support please see figure 1 for reference. This model identifies the crucial role the wider components play in improving outcomes and reducing inequalities. Local governments are required under the Childcare Act to provide enough childcare for all parents who choose to work or are undergoing training in preparation for employment (Crown database, 2011).

Local and national policy decisions affect both parents and parenting resources. Policies and decisions that are made by both local authorities and government lead to create the conditions that shape people's daily outcomes. Having a fair society with both good living and working conditions along with healthcare/childcare services provides a good base for our future generations to thrive.

Working in partnerships with other professional bodies enables practitioners to share knowledge and understanding along with remaining consistent in their approach with families. Working in partnerships encompasses a wide range of actions and can be defined as individuals or organisations joining together to create a shared coal (Community Change, 2010).

The achieved outcome an early year practitioner strives to accomplish in supporting children within the first 1000 days and beyond is to ensure that good health and nutrition has been maintained. That they have been responsive to the child's individual needs. Encouraged physical development by observing developmental milestones and that social/emotional support has been given to both the child/parents. Whilst also providing an enabling environment for the child to explore and learn.

Public Health Wales, (2022) Fig 1



Public Health Wales, (2022) Fig 2

Challenges

There are lots of challenges practitioners face in providing high quality care from low pay to challenging working conditions and lack of professional development, low levels of staff well-being and poor leadership. Many of these challenges practitioners face they have very little control over.

One important challenge is staff turnover finding the right level of staff is challenging not retaining staff can have a negative impact with a setting. Having different staff members on a regular basis means they may not be able to identify children's needs if they do not know the children well enough (Owston, Jones and Stanley, 2024). An inconsistency in care can have a fundamental impact on a child's development. Having a caregiver that a child feels safe and secure with is vital to enable an increase in both social and emotional interactions. Consultant, (2023) states that staff turnover is a complex issue in an early year setting this is influenced by numerous factors. Early years providers must understand the complexity of staff turnover.

Another challenge that has a negative impact is lack of funding from local authorities this means that salaries within the early year sector is low Owston, Jones and Stanley, (2024) states that 1 in 4 early years employees aged 25 and over receive wages below the national minimum wage. Funding plays an important role within education and early years in general. If schools and setting do not receive sufficient funding for appropriate resources and support within their setting this can cause a fall in standards which can have a detrimental effect to the early year sector.

Challenges

- There are some measures that providers have put into place in some setting, by prioritising staff well-being and offering mental health support if needed. Encouraging staff to access training and development to strengthen their career progression. By creating a supportive environment where staff feel they are supported and valued. Encouraging Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care, (ECEC), n.d.) suggests that research has indicated that staff who are happy within their working environment will provide better quality and care along with improving their job satisfaction.
- Maintaining good leadership within an early year setting is provides positive outcomes for both staff, families and children within their care.
- Lastly one challenge that practitioners faced and are still dealing with the aftermath is the effect on the pandemic in 2020. This had a major impact on early year/childcare settings. This has also contributed to many of the challenges above. From increased workloads on staff to long waiting lists for Educational Phycologists and other additional learning needs referrals. This has caused support for those children to be limited due to the demands of funding and staff shortages. The early years sector is still reeling from the impact this has caused (Encouraging Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care, n.d.).
- Despite the challenges they face practitioners and caregivers will remain focused on the main purpose of the children within their care. Providing an enabling environment that will allow a child to explore their setting through play and by providing essential support and knowledge to parents are all key elements that can enable a child to succeed. Asl long as this focus is maintained within any early year setting along with the challenges highlighted above, practitioners are guiding their children in the right direction.

Activities that provide meaningful learning



(Inspire my play, 2024)

(Highcross primary, 2025)



Sensory play

- From conception to 2 years the brain develops more than at any other time in our lives. The dialogue between sensory stimuli and innate organising functions of the brain is known as cognitive development.
- The five senses play an important role for children during the first 1000 days of a child's life.
- This is the time when firm foundations are laid to form the child's developmental experiences. It is essential that all parents/caregivers nurture the sensory abilities of the newborn by encouraging them to use their senses and explore the diversity of their surroundings (5senses4kids.org, 2022). Children learn from all they see, hear, touch and do and they are impacted by adults and the environment in which they live. Sensory play is purposeful, it stimulates the senses and promotes learning through exploration, curiosity, problem solving and creativity.
- (Goodstart Early Learning, 2018) states, that research shows up to one in six children may have sensory symptoms that may be significant enough to affect aspects of everyday life functions. That is why it is essential that each child enjoys their sensory experience, by encouraging them to get dirty and messy with many different sensory elements.

Some parents can find it daunting all the information they receive and when sensory play is mentioned they assume this is something difficult to accomplish. This can be as easy as you make it sensory activities are what you make them. By a simple peek-a-boo game with a newborn and blowing raspberries all this is sensory development. It can be as hard or simple as you make it.

Activities to support a child in the first 1000 days

- Talking, reading and singing are all important ways to stimulate a child's senses and encourage healthy development.
- **Activity 1**
- Reading aloud with a caregiver will help a child from an early age regardless of if that child is unable to verbally communicate yet. By reading with them caregivers are helping lay the neurological groundwork for effective language use and literacy. Sheldon-Dean, (2023) states that children who have been read to from an early age and daily have been exposed to at least 290.000 more words by the time they enter a school setting. Reading to a child is not just about the activity of reading, it's also about having the time to bond with the child, having time to be together. It provides a calming and nurturing environment. The sensory experiences of sitting down with a caregiver, hearing their voice and feeling a book in their hands and all the sounds that the pages make are all important to aid a child's brain development (Sheldon-Dean, 2023). Using a texture book at an early age can help your child to understand words like fluffy, silky.
- **Activity 2**
- Changing singing and stretching game. This is an excellent activity that can be done during nappy changing time and after bathtime to help aid the baby to feel calm and relaxed. By laying the baby on the floor they are engaging in the environment around them and observing their surroundings by sight. By stretching and moving their body and holding their hands while singing to them softly. This is a lovely activity to begin at an early age.
- **Activity 3**
- Making a texture board. This is a good method of play as it focuses on both the child's sensory needs but also communication and their interactions with the caregiver. Learning through touch is a great way to strengthen a child's motor skills, while also developing good hand to eye co-ordination (BBC Tiny Happy People, 2022).
- It is recommended that when providing enriched play activities that caregivers/parents follow the play cycle and do not intervene unless necessary. It is important for adults to allow children to explore and interact individually. The play cycle has six elements: metalude, play cue, play return, play frame, loop and flow, and annihilation. All these play an essential part in the flow of play
- The play cycle has proven to be a useful tool for tracking and observing the play process (K Lion, 2022).

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