



The First 1000 Days

Introduction



Every child born is unique and irreplaceable and has a different personality, set of characteristics, abilities which make him one of a kind. This is due to intrinsic and extrinsic factors, the intrinsic relates to the internal factor which is passed on through genes and one has no control over it. However, the external factors include the opportunities and facilities a child is provided with majorly contributes towards the development of a child. Every child is special, deserves love, respect, care and the best developmental opportunities. This booklet provides supporting information to anyone interested in the subject of child development during the first 1000 days, starting from conception till the age of 2 years. These first 1000 days have a significant and lifelong effect on child health and development. This booklet provides critical information essential for parents and care providers making sure a child gets a safe stimulating environment to meet social, emotional and cognitive developmental needs. (Duffy *et al.*, 2006, p vi-viii)

According to Barnardo's

'When a baby's development falls behind the norm during the first year of life, for instance, it is much more likely that they will fall even further behind in subsequent years than catch up with those who have had a better start' (UK Parliament, 2019)

What are the first 1000 days



The first 1000 days start from the time of fertilization until the child turns the age of 2 years. A fertilized egg divides into millions of cells which then turn into a baby. During, this time a child's body develops magnificently to supply a healthy environment in the womb a conceived woman must get proper nutrition, health and care facilities and avoid stress which has a positive impact on child development. When a baby is born it is the physical environment that has a quadratic effect on the physical and emotional well-being of a child. (Pregnancy Birth and Baby, 2019)

Why are the first 1000 days important



In the early 1000 days, a child requires food, safety and security, love, care, time to play and learn. The brain of a child develops more rapidly during the first 1000 days provided with good nutrition, care, affection and a better environment to learn and develop will leave a lifelong positive impact. However, on the contrary, if a mother is exposed to harmful materials during her pregnancy or if a child observes any form of domestic abuse during the first 1000 days it will have a long-lasting traumatizing effect on a child's emotional and physical development. (Pregnancy Baby and Birth, 2019)

According to John B. Watson Theory of Behaviorism, our behaviors are greatly influenced by external factors and the environment is more powerful than genetics. Every human learns from their surroundings merely by observing. An example of this would be the Watson experiment, well known as the Little Albert Experiment. In his experiment, he presented a rat to a nine-month-old baby named Albert. Little Albert was not afraid of the white rat in the beginning but when Watson made a loud noise every time when the rat appeared, it made Albert scared. After this incident whenever Albert sees a rat or any furry thing he gets scared for his whole life. This experiment proves that fear is learned and not inherited. This theory shows the importance of care, emotional and physical development at an early age. If a child is exposed to any form of abuse, neglect, or even observed anything inappropriate, it would have a lifelong traumatizing effect. (American Psychological Association, 2010)

Role of Nutrition



To provide the best possible care and support for a child, a mother cannot be neglected. It is essential to provide adequate nutrition to pregnant women, easy access to health and care facilities. Getting good nutrition in the womb helps organ development and a well-built immune system. Lack of proper nutrition in the womb could cause serious health issues for a child later in life. When considering proper nutrition, the importance of breastfeeding cannot be denied, it has many health benefits for both the child and the mother. (Pregnancy Baby and Birth, 2019)

Breastfeeding is essential for the physical and emotional development of a child. It builds a strong emotional bond between a mother and her child, also protects from childhood tummy troubles, obesity and cardiovascular diseases when an adult. Breastfeeding a child reduces the risk of certain types of cancer, helps in losing weight and aids in the contraction of the uterus to normal size etc. The Government of the UK has been taking measures to create awareness and promote breastfeeding. (NHS, 2020)



1 - Breastfeeding

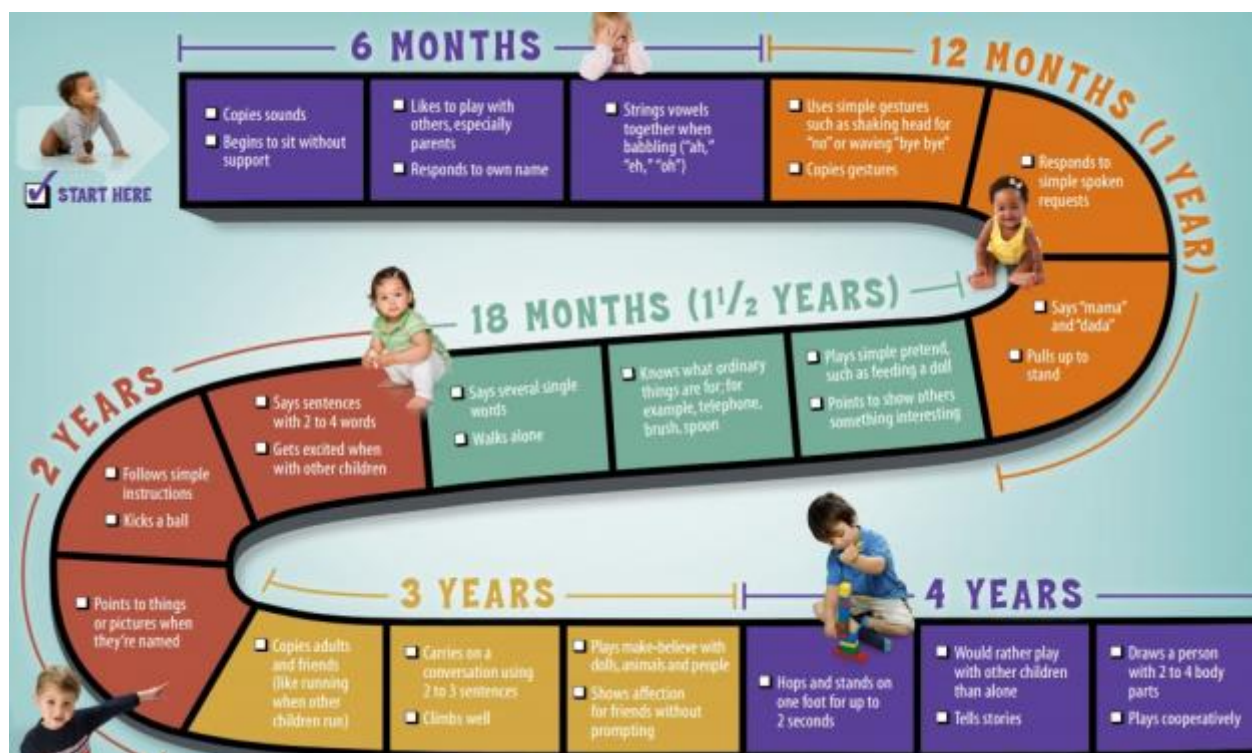
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Flying Start in Wales and Sure Start in England are the two programmes that target the parent and children from deprived communities and supply many services including free breastfeeding support sessions. Flying Start Health Service provides support to the parents before and after birth till the age of

3 years. The deities team provide accurate information, create awareness about healthy food options, baby feeding, weaning, the importance of solid foods as the child grows including cooking sessions to gain cooking skills. The food and nutrition teams aim to provide practical support to the parents from deprived areas and build a sense of strong community. (Flying Start Cardiff, 2020)

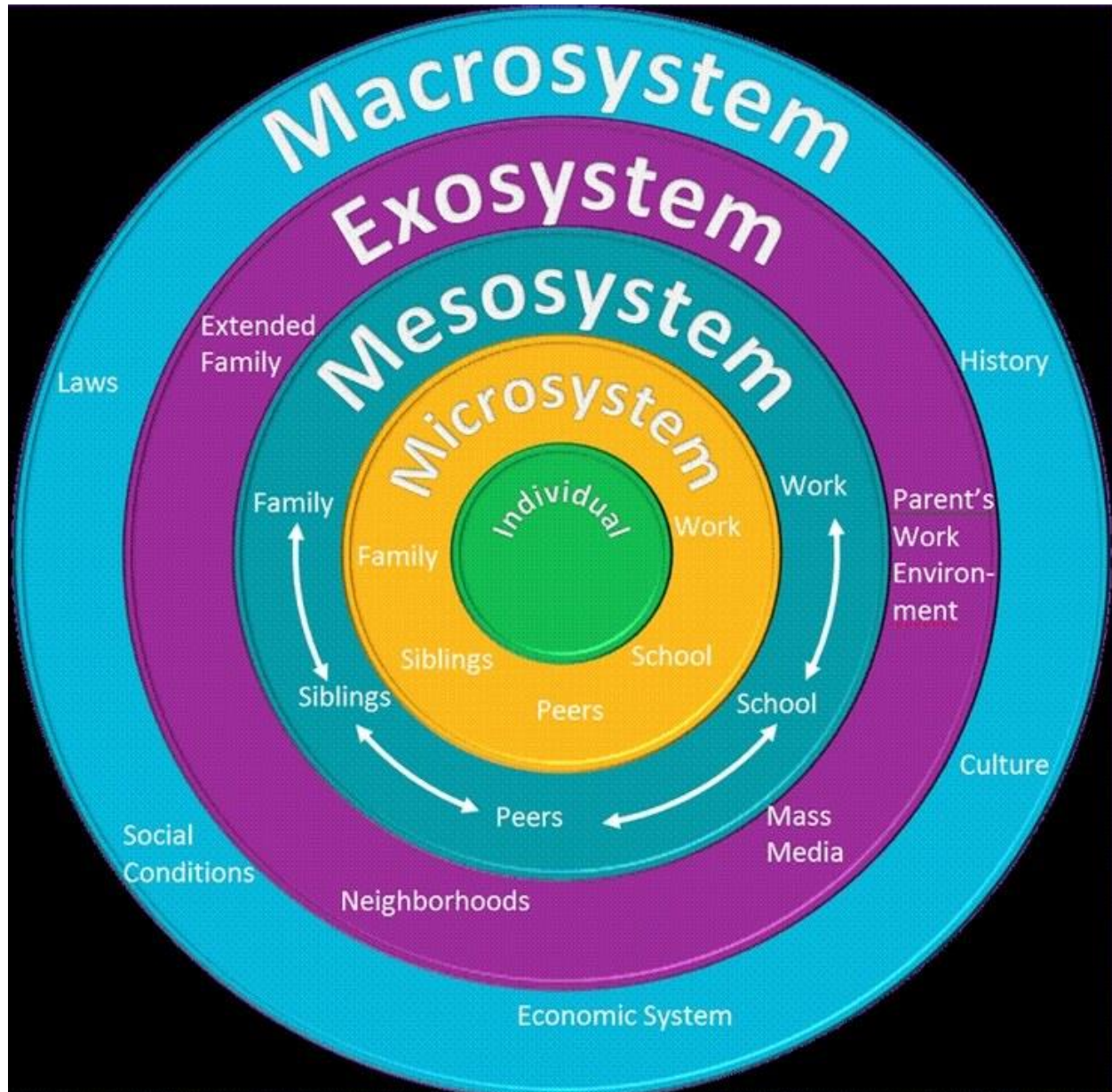
Healthy Start Voucher are also available to children from deprived communities. It is an initiative taken by the National Health Service of the UK to support nutrition in children. These weekly vouchers are only available to children under the age of four that can be used to buy milk, fruits, vegetables and vitamins. (Healthy Start, 2022)

Social and Emotional Development



A child during the first two years needs a safe, loving and nurturing environment to grow and develop. The first attachment he builds is with the mother, through sense of touch and smell with immediate contact after birth. Babies also learn and communicate from their environment. The kind of love, respect and attention they get in the first two years affect their confidence development and ability to build relationships. (Pregnancy Baby and Birth, 2019)

Relationships



According to Bronfenbrenner Theory of Child Development

Bronfenbrenner's theory is based on the effect of ecological factors on the development of a child. It consists of a set of four layers in the form of circles. The innermost layer called Microsystem, explains the relationship and interaction of a child with immediate surroundings such as parents, siblings and childcare providers. The second layer explains the extended family, neighbours and community etc. The third layers explain the effects of a bioecological system that does not have a direct effect, however; it has an indirect influence on a child's life. The fourth and outermost layer called Macrosystem depicts the

influence of social, economic, religious and cultural beliefs. This theory helps professionals working with children to understand their role and the influences of the environment on a child's life. An example to support this theory is children born during Covid lockdowns. (First Discoverers, 2021)

Impact of Covid-19 on Children and Families



Children born after March 2020 know the world from a unique perspective. They have not gotten the chance to see many people except their parents and close family members. The rate of brain development during the first 1000 days is extraordinary, a major part of this development depends on observation and experiences. However, babies born during this time did not get the opportunity to interact and explore the outside environment which has a profound impact on their social, emotional and language development skills. During Covid times the support system for the babies was greatly disrupted and it affected the children from deprived communities. This reduction in professional contact with people (such as health visitors, children centre staff, early years practitioners, social workers and community groups) posed a threat to the health and safety of babies. It could have a long-term impact on children's ability to learn, develop and pose a threat of maltreatment, malnutrition, neglect, physical and emotional abuse. Researchers are still working to find out the long-term effects of lockdowns on children's development. However, there is a lack of enough data and research to arrive at the conclusion. In early Covid times when everyone was confined to their homes during lockdown and parents started to work from home it also influenced a child's development from another perspective. When Parents were working from home and the older siblings were confined to online studies it resulted in more family time which has both positive and negative impacts on young babies. (The Conversation, 2022)



Since the time of Covid, more practitioners are working virtually resulting in reduced home visits.

Before Covid, all interactions of early years teams with parents were face to face. The flying start teams in Wales use to visit a child's home before the child starts the funded childcare. It allowed the practitioner to build relationships, access the risks and analyses the kind of support needed. Since the time of Covid, more practitioners are working virtually resulting in reduced home visits. The early year's staff are concerned about how to develop a relationship and assess the health and safety of a child by only viewing them through a screen of a smartphone. (Parent Infant Foundation, 2020)

Covid-19 had a profound impact on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). Some of these include lack of experienced staff, staff absences, reduction in the demand of places needed due to more people working from home, closure of private childcare settings due to extreme losses, increased number of daily attendances, lack of funding due to delay in the processing. Moreover, children with special educational needs are one of the most impacted groups. At the current moment, all the staff must have

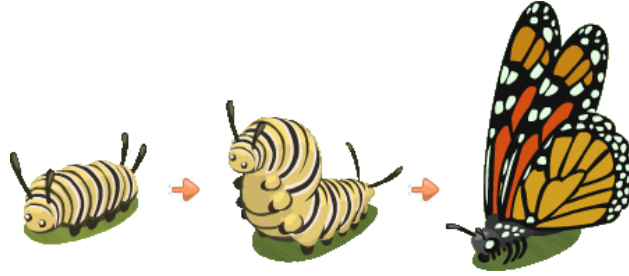
lateral flows daily, using increased amounts of disinfectant products, and a reduction in the number of activities at the settings that incorporate families. (UK Parliament, 2021)

Care, Education and National Minimum Standards



The Government of the UK has set national minimum standards that must be followed by every childcare provider. It ensures regulated childcare allowing quality care, minimum standards to be assessed for the quality of provision and to improve the service provided. These standards include but are not limited to care with respect and compassion, support, inclusion and independence. These provisions made are further divided into three phases according to their age named as foundation phase for three to seven years old, key stage 1 age five to seven years old and key stage 2 for children ages seven to eleven years old. The childcare care provision in Wales is regulated by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) and every childcare practitioner is required to register with it. The early childcare provision falls into two categories childminding and daycare centres. The daycare centres include public and private settings, playgroups, and after school clubs. However, despite having a set of standards to provide the best possible care and emphasis on learning and development through play there is a lack of information and guidance provided for children aged under the age of two years old. (Care Inspectorate Wales, 2016)

Enabling Pathways



*In 2020 the Welsh Govt published a guide to schools and early years settings to design the curriculum according to the needs of their learners and inclusive to everyone, known as Enabling Pathways. According to this guidance, learners should get support according to their needs and should be allowed to progress at their own pace. The settings should design their curriculum based on these four principles ambitious, healthy, confident, capable learners, creative and ethical individuals ready to contribute to society. This guidance consists of the three principles necessary for holistic learning and development of a child called 'Enablers' are **Enabling Adults**, **Enabling Environment** and **Enabling Experience**. (Welsh Government, 2021)*

Enabling Adults



Enabling adults are respectful, joyful, kind and consistent practitioners that set achievable targets for learning, development and providing support to a child through transitions. They provide a safe and secure learning environment enriched with respectful communication. (Welsh Government, 2021)

A child is born with the ability to communicate and has every right to be respected. Respect means acknowledging the needs, treating with kindness and being heard and responded to pleasantly. It has a great influence on the development of a child if a child is treated with respect regardless of the age would allow him to learn to respect others and become a better individual. Children can develop a sense of respect when they are appreciated and praised. Babies communicate through crying for their needs to be met. It is the responsibility of an adult that a child is fed, clothed and well-rested. (Child Development Institute, 2018)

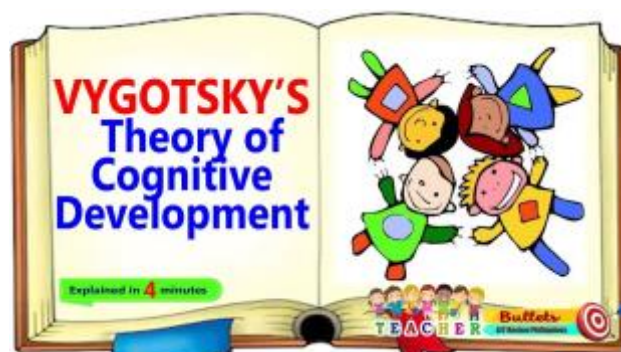
According to Abraham Maslow theory called 'Hierarchy of Needs'

A child has certain stages of needs to be met and the basic need of a child is food and shelter when this has been taken care of. The second stage is safety and security, the next stages are the sense of love and belonging. Fourth, one is respect and appreciation, once all these needs are satisfied a child reaches the highest level of the hierarchy of needs and achieves the sense of self-actualization and self-worth. (Duffy et al., 2006, p. 2-6)

*Furthermore, another example of providing care to children with respect can be supported by Pikler's Approach. Dr Emmi Pikler **Hungarian Paediatrician** talked about the importance of developing a healthy relationship with a child commonly referred to as 'Attachment'. She believed that giving respectful care, especially during the times of feeding and nappy changing rather than rushing out it should be carried slowly and delicately would develop a sense of trust. When a child is treated with respect during the most vulnerable time, it builds a relationship based on respect and trust. (Teach Early Years, 2021)*



Enabling Environment



Enabling environments are indoor and outdoor environments whose sole purpose is to provide a safe, stimulating learning environment through the exploration of surroundings. It develops a sense of belonging, appreciation and independence. Also have a positive impact on the physical, social and emotional aspect of learning and development, building a strong sense of community, relationships and independence. It allows the learners to explore freely and independently, being imaginative and creative. This environment should be safe; however, it is encouraged that the child should take risks in his capacity by challenging and testing themselves. It promotes a sense of inclusion and diversity learning through play with a vast range of activities. (Welsh Government, 2021)

For example: In a group activity, children are asked to pick different flowers from the garden. Then they were asked to hammer it under supervision on a plain white piece of cloth. This would create a blend of colours and shapes, that can be displayed as a piece of art in a setting. This develops a sense of inclusion, independence and ownership. On the other hand, this would allow the children to learn about the flower names, their colours, sizes, shapes. Furthermore, it results in a playful and positive learning experience that has an influential impact on the holistic development of learners. This activity provides a great example of Vygotsky theory of Proximal Development by allowing the learners to do a task independently while requiring assistance for the other, gradually increasing the level of difficulty.

Enabling Experiences



3 - Treasure basket



4 - Sensory Play

Enabling experiences are the experiences essential for the social, emotional, cognitive and sensory development of a child, could be in indoor or outdoor environments such as children should be allowed to play with sand and water to explore the nature and texture of different materials. Learners should have a meaningful experience in an educational setting that should be enjoyable based on learner's own choices and interests while developing their five senses. The practitioners should plan these activities while focusing on the sensory development of children under the age of two. Sensory, development of a child includes all five senses touch, sight, taste, smell and hearing. It also develops emotional stability by understanding the emotions of others and different facial expressions, for example happy, sad and angry. Through these experiences children also learn about concepts of weight, shape, size, height, coordination and control. The curriculum of Wales also promotes multiculturalism, when children arrive in an educational or care setting, they see people from different backgrounds while learning in a bilingual environment of Welsh and English promotes a sense of diversity and inclusion. To promote and celebrate the cultural diversity in Wales stories, songs, music and rhymes are picked up from all over the world. For example: playing music in different languages, celebrating Diwali in early years setting, making soap bubbles, making shapes from play dough, singing rhymes with a tap-tap box these activities contribute towards enabling experiences. (Welsh Government, 2021)

A treasure basket is also a thought-provoking idea for children under the age of two. It allows them to sit and focus on one place and learn about different materials and objects. A treasure basket is a small wooden basket filled with different kinds of materials like spoons, keys, small woollen blankets, seashells, buttons, rattles, wooden pieces, balls ribbon, pinecones etc. (Community Playthings, 2012)

Conclusion



This scrapbook provides an idea to the parents and early years practitioner about the importance of the first 1000 days in a child's life. According to Welsh National Curriculum provides frameworks to the practitioners to plan their curriculum according to the needs of a child in a fun and respectful way supported by theories and practical examples. Any experiences during this time would have a lifelong impact on the growth and development of a child. It also gives an idea of what a child needs, like food, shelter, safety and security. What is essential for raising a happy, healthy, independent and responsible individual? Furthermore, the importance of providing appropriate care and support to the mother and the impact of Covid on babies born after March 2019.

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