



ECEY4005 - The First 1000 Days

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Introduction



What is the first 1000 days?

The first 1000 days is a period of development which begins when the child is conceived and concludes when the child is 2 years (24 months) old. This is the period of development where a large amount of development takes place. Out of the 86 billion neurons in an adult brain, most are formed in the first 1000 days. Pregnancy, Birth and Baby (2022) further supports how important this stage is for development by stating that this period is where their brain, immune system and other parts of their body grow and develops at a significant rate. From conception to birth, there are many factors that can affect development such as the mother's health, nutrition, and stress levels. Once the child is born, there are more factors that affect their future development such as the environment they are born into and the relationships they form. Being hungry or being exposed to abuse, stress, or neglect at any point during the first 1000 days can have a prolonged effect on a child's development. An

unsafe or unhealthy environment during this period of development can also affect a child's physical health in later life. An example of consequences of a poor environment or exposure to abuse or neglect is shaken baby syndrome which is a condition where a child has suffered a brain injury from being forcefully shaken or jolted. It can also be known as abusive head trauma.

Why is the first 1000 days important?

The First 1000 Days offer a crucial role in development and an opportunity to shape your child's future and create bright and healthy futures (1000 Days, no date). 1000 days continue to state that the first 1000 days are a period of significant potential as well as enormous vulnerability. The future of the child depends on the quality of care and nourishment that the mother gives the child. This is because the foundations of the child's growth and development are made during the first 1000 days. There are many factors that can affect a child's future development, these are:

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- Nutrition - 1000 Days (No date) states that nutrition plays a foundational role in the development and that failure to supply the child with the correct amount of nutrients can result in irreversible damage to the child's brain which will affect the child's ability to succeed in school, resulting in complications in later life.*
 - Abuse and stress - If a mother experiences stress and trauma during pregnancy, the baby's nervous system can be affected as well as growth. This can lead to other health problems later in life such as heart disease, obesity, and diabetes (Pregnancy, Birth and Baby, 2022).*
 - Relationships - Secure relationships are key for a child's development. This is because babies learn how to think, understand, communicate, show emotion, and how to behave from their relationship's. They also affect how they see the world and how they fit into society. Parents who are experiencing domestic violence may struggle with forming a loving attachment with their baby. (Pregnancy, Birth, and Baby, 2022)*
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Caregiving

What is exceptional care?

Exceptional care can be described as providing a child with the appropriate factors that affect their development in a positive way such as providing the child appropriate nutrients, raising the child in an environment that is free of abuse or stress, thus strengthening the secure and loving relationship that a mother should have with their child. providing exceptional care can also mean engaging in meaningful learning opportunities and ensuring that the child is an active participant in the task such as eating, sleeping, and changing. The Pikler Theory discusses this, stating that for babies to develop

in the way that nature had intended, certain aspects must be understood (Aspiring Beginnings, no date):

- The long-term impact of free movement on a baby's intelligence and physiological wellness.*
 - How important the way a baby must be touched and supported in the first 1000 days.*
 - That babies do not need help when reaching milestones, they instead need support through other means such as altering their conditions and other factors that affect them.*
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Pikler believed that caregivers must allocate time to make changing, feeding, bathing, and dressing a period of quality time with the caregiver and the child. Aspiring Beginnings (No date), states that Pikler emphasises that 100% undivided attention focuses us in a way that babies notice this and see it as an embodiment of love. They also say that it is much easier to prioritise a time for the child than divide our attention.

Why is exceptional care important?

Exceptional care is incredibly important in relation to the first 1000 days of development since the quality of care that a child receives can greatly impact their emotional and physical well-being as well as determining whether they are more or less likely to develop conditions based on their quality of care. Some reasons as to why exceptional care is important are:

- Exceptional care sets a high standard for caregivers and allows them to understand the importance of appropriate care and how their child will benefit.*
 - Exceptional care is important as it raises awareness on how important the first 1000 days are in relation to the development stages from conception up to their 2nd birthday.*
 - Exceptional care supplies a child with all the tools that they need to develop appropriately into a contributing and functioning member of society.*
 - Supplying a child with exceptional care also gives them a supporting and loving environment where they will benefit from the quality of care given, thus allowing them to develop into the best version of themselves.*
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The first 1000 days are where child's path is set for them through the quality of care that they receive. A child's ability to learn and thrive developmentally is considerably impacted by the quality of care, nutrients, and relationships that they develop. This is because a child's brain grows and develops significantly during the first 1000 days. a child's brain can form 1000 new neural connections every second throughout the first 1000 days, the connections that a three-year-old brain forms provide the foundations for their future self because at this point the child's brain is twice as busy as an adult's brain. the first 1000 days are crucial for the body, brain, metabolism, and immune system. on the other hand, lack of exceptional care can lead to malnutrition which can be associated with numerous health problems such as impaired growth and obesity (Likhari and Patil, 2022).

Professional Partnerships

What is the role of an early years practitioner in supporting children and families in the first 1000 days?

Partnership with parents is crucial as an early years practitioner, Gasper (2010) supports this by mentioning the during consultations whether it be with medical professionals or other agencies, the key person assisting with this may enlist the help of the parents or carers. Parents and carers can help during observation as they can identify what signals the child is giving to show emotions such as happiness, displeasure, signs of anger etc. Working in partnership can also enable the parents to have an active role regarding consultations and seeking the views of others. Some settings acquire the help of parents trained in the desired sector as figures within the community as a first step in seeking wider views.

Working in partnership with parents and carers is key to the Early Years Foundation Stage. Including them when discussing the child's experiences can aid practitioners when planning for effective learning within the setting and in turn, it helps them support the parents to continue developing their learning outside of the setting. (Early Years Alliance, 2019)

As an early years practitioner, there are many ways to support children during the first 1000 days. once they reach a suitable age (typically around their first birthday), some ways to support children in your setting are:

- Ensure that children's daily physical needs are met. these are things such as feeding, nappy-changing, first aid and learning to use the toilet.*
- Engaging the children in a range of stimulating and enjoyable activities such as reading or messy play.*

- *Developing relationships with the children who are in your care.*
 - *Safeguarding children and reporting any concerns*
 - *Monitoring children's progress and reporting any praises or causes for concern back to the parents.*
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(All About Children, no date)

The importance of effective partnership working

Partnership between the parent/carer and the key worker is essential in regards to providing essential care for the child and ensuring that the carer feels heard and a part of the process of their child's education. There are many ways that the child and other stakeholders benefit from effective partnership working, some of these are:

- *With the parent/carer and key worker showing effective partnership, therefore communicating and understanding each other as well as being able to support each other in through their environments, the child will benefit from this emotional and academically, as the child is being supplied with the exceptional care from their carer and from their key worker.*
 - *The parent/carer and the key worker can improve their relationship if their relationship was negative to begin with, regardless of reason. If both parties can communicate effectively and help each other through their settings, their relationship may benefit as a result.*
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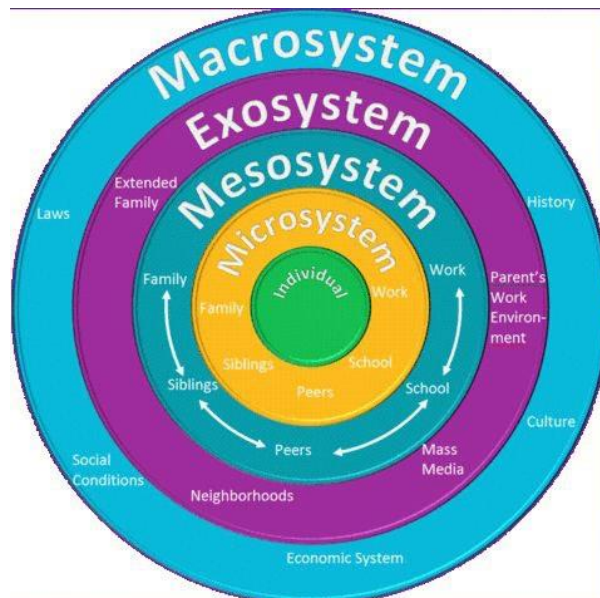
On the other hand, if the parent/carer and key worker aren't working effectively, it can adversely affect the child in many ways such as:

- *If a parent/carer and key worker cannot work in partnership effectively, the child's wellbeing may start to decline and build a dislike for the organisation, therefore resulting in their emotions not being understood and discussed and the academic side of themselves will start to decline, which will not give them the best opportunity to thrive in society.*
 - *The parents/carers opinion of the key worker and the school may deteriorate, causing their peers (who may be other parents) to share that opinion, this could be a result of a staffing change which hasn't been communicated, or an incident that they believe has not been handled accordingly. This will give the organisation a bad reputation, which may pose prejudice in other agencies working with the organisation.*
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There are some theorists that support the idea of effective partnership working, they all have different theories but they all personify the importance of partnership. The 3 theorists that will be discussed, with their view on effective partnership looked at are:

- *Bowlby - Bowlby's attachment theory is based on the belief that the type of attachment that a child holds with their caregiver can positively or negatively affect a child's need being met. Bowlby says that there are 4 types of attachment, secure, avoidant, ambivalent, and disorganised attachment. This theory can be linked to partnership in the way that how practitioners interact with a child, as well as how their caregiver interacts with them can shape how they function in later life. It is imperative that the caregiver and the practitioner work in partnership in regards to how to interact with them such as what triggers them and what makes them happy, sad, etc.*
 - *Winnicott believed that a child's development is solely reliant on the aspects of care. He also believed that there is no such thing as a baby alone, and that if you try to describe a baby, you may find yourself describing a baby and the person caring for them. In relation to partnership in the Early Years sector, this theory can be relevant as it describes the child and caregiver/family as a unit that cannot be separated, personifying the importance of working with the child as well as the family.*
 - *Bronfenbrenner - Bronfenbrenner's theory of ecological systems is the theory that each environment a child is in is part of an ecosystem, there are five ecosystems which are:*
 - *Microsystem - This is the system closest to the child and involves the things that are important to them/have the most impact on the child's life such as school, family, and friends.*
 - *Mesosystem - This system is how the people within the microsystem work together, affecting the child's development, for better or for worse.*
 - *Exosystem - This system is the things that effect the child, but not in a major way due to them not correlating with the individual such as extended family, mass media, the parent's work environment and their area of living.*
 - *Macrosystem - The Macrosystem is the cultural elements that that affect the child such as laws and history.*
 - *Chronosystem - This system references the stage of the child's life where they are thinking of the situation they are going through.*
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Bronfenbrenner links to partnership as the mesosystem displays how the school and family can work in partnership to either positively or negatively effect a child's life.



1 - (Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems)

Challenges



What are the challenges to providing high quality care?

In an Early Years setting, there are many factors that can prove to make it difficult to provide high quality care, these can be within the environment, or it can be related to safeguarding issues. Some examples of these factors (According to Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2021 and Teach Early Years, no date) are:

- Staffing - In an Early Years setting, there may be staff shortages or other staff may be unavailable for a number of reasons. This can affect the quality of care that a child receives as it means that the child will not be able to have as much quality time with a practitioner due to them having to stretch themselves between more children than they would have been with an extra staff member.*
 - Physical space - Physical space in a setting can have a significant effect on the quality of care. For example, if a nursery or reception class lack the space to include all of the breakout tasks that they want to offer such as cutting skills, a reading corner, a home corner and a tuff tray, they may have to choose which areas are more important, therefore sacrificing an area that could positively or negatively affect the quality of care.*
 - Access to books and play materials - If a setting lacks the funding to offer play materials that could be used in relationship based play sessions, or other toys that children could use to play using their imagination with other children, this could result in them not getting the opportunity to further improve their social skills to their potential, which could affect the way that they interact with others in their later stages of life.*
 - Family background - Regardless of the quality of care that your setting is providing, the child's family environment can also affect the quality of care they receive. If a child is being raised in a high stress environment, potentially where the child could be experiencing disorganised attachment, where the child has no strategy on how to have their needs met.*
 - Quality of Staff - Occasionally, within an Early Years setting, it can be difficult to find high quality staff and can often find a setting with a number of staff that are from an agency they either do not possess the correct qualifications or do not have the relevant experience to be a high quality staff member that can supply high quality care*
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Activities



Loose Parts

Loose parts are when children interact with loose parts, they enter a world where there is a type of thinking that is promoted by saying "what if?" to every decision that leads to problem solving and theoretical reasoning. The loose parts idea enhances a child's imaginative thinking to see solutions which, in turn, brings a sense of adventure and excitement to children's play (Daly, 2014). The Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (2019) supports this and adds that loose parts enable children to use everyday objects rather than toys.

Montessori Education - Montessori Northwest (No date) mention that Montessori Education is a method of teaching that is based on self-directed and independent activity as well as hands on learning. In a Montessori classroom, children have the opportunities to make creative choices while the class teacher provides age-appropriate activities to guide the creative process. They continue to mention that children work in groups as well as individually to discover and explore the world to reach their maximum potential.

Froebel carefully considered the role of the setting in a child's play and learning, this was stated by Clement, in Waters-Davies, (2022, cited by University of Wales, Trinity Saint David, 2023). The Froebel Trust (No date) Adds to this idea by saying that Friedrich Froebel was the inventor of kindergartens and a pioneer of early childhood care and education. Froebel's ideas and theories were considered revolutionary in the 1850s, however, since the early years sector has modernised, Froebel's ideas have been adjusted and applied accordingly.

International approaches

According to Forest School Association (no date), Forest school is a child-centred and inspirational learning experience that offers opportunities for holistic growth through regular sessions. Forest School is a long-term program that promotes play, exploration and taking reasonable risks. This particular program aims to develop confidence and self-esteem through child inspired, hands on experiences in a natural setting. The Forest Schools concept was originally introduced in Scandinavia and the approach was widely adopted in Denmark in the 1980's as a solution to the lack of indoor facilities for children in pre-school settings.(Kindling Play and Training, no date)

Reggio Children (2022) state that the Reggio Emilia approach is an educational theory where the overview is that the image of a child with strong potentialities for development and a subject with rights, who learns through multiple languages belonging to many human beings, growing with relations of others. This particular educational project, which has become a reference point throughout the world, develops and evolves every day in The Reggio Emilia Infant-toddler centres and preschools. They continue to state that this particular approach to learning is based on the environment being an educator, regular documentation for making progress visible, and the participation of families, among other fundamentals. Clement, J. (2022, Cited by University of Wales, Trinity Saint David), adds to this by mentioning that spaces all have a purpose and are designed to enhance pedagogy, and that implementing community spaces is key. The Reggio Emilia Approach was first implemented in Northern Italy post World War 2. At this time, working parents were looking for a new form of childcare for their children, one that would improve critical thinking and collaborative skills. (Weebly, 2015)

On the one hand, these approaches to learning are similar as they both are focused on optimising space and using them towards learning, they are both theories that originated in Europe and were later a widespread form of practice in many countries. Both theories are focused on children being independent through developing key skills that work towards this goal. However, these Early Years theories have many differences such as:

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- Reggio Emilia optimises indoor areas whereas Forest School are more focused on outdoor areas.*
 - Reggio Emilia was introduced post World War 2 and Forest School was introduced during the 1980s.*
 - Forest School is a program that doesn't need its own school to be implemented, but Reggio Emilia is adapted as its own setting.*
 - The Forest School approach is focused around hands on learning whereas Reggio Emilia is focused on critical thinking and collaborative skills*
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An Introduction to Forest Schools - Forest School Association

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5gCN0JHeR-Y&t=45s>

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