

I acknowledge the use of Chat GPT on 25th January 2026 to place my references into alphabetical order.

I used the prompt(s):

1. Put this list into alphabetical order & keep the media list as it is.

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.

I acknowledge the use of Chat GPT on 10th January 2026 to research theories.

I used the prompt(s):

1. I would like to research Pikler and what her theory is.
2. Who links with Pikler
3. Where can I find credible sources of information within the last 10 years

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.

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I acknowledge the use of Chat GPT on 24th January 2026 to creat me an image.

I used the prompt(s):

1. Create me round images of poverty, housing uncertainty and social stressors
2. Remove the background

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.

I acknowledge the use of Chat GPT on 25th January 2026 to proofread my work.

I used the prompt(s):

1. Proofread this piece of work

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.

I acknowledge the use of Chat GPT on 10th January 2026 to research framework in the Uk.

I used the prompt(s):

1. I would like more information on UK & Welsh Government frameworks or policies regarding high-quality care and the first 1000 days.

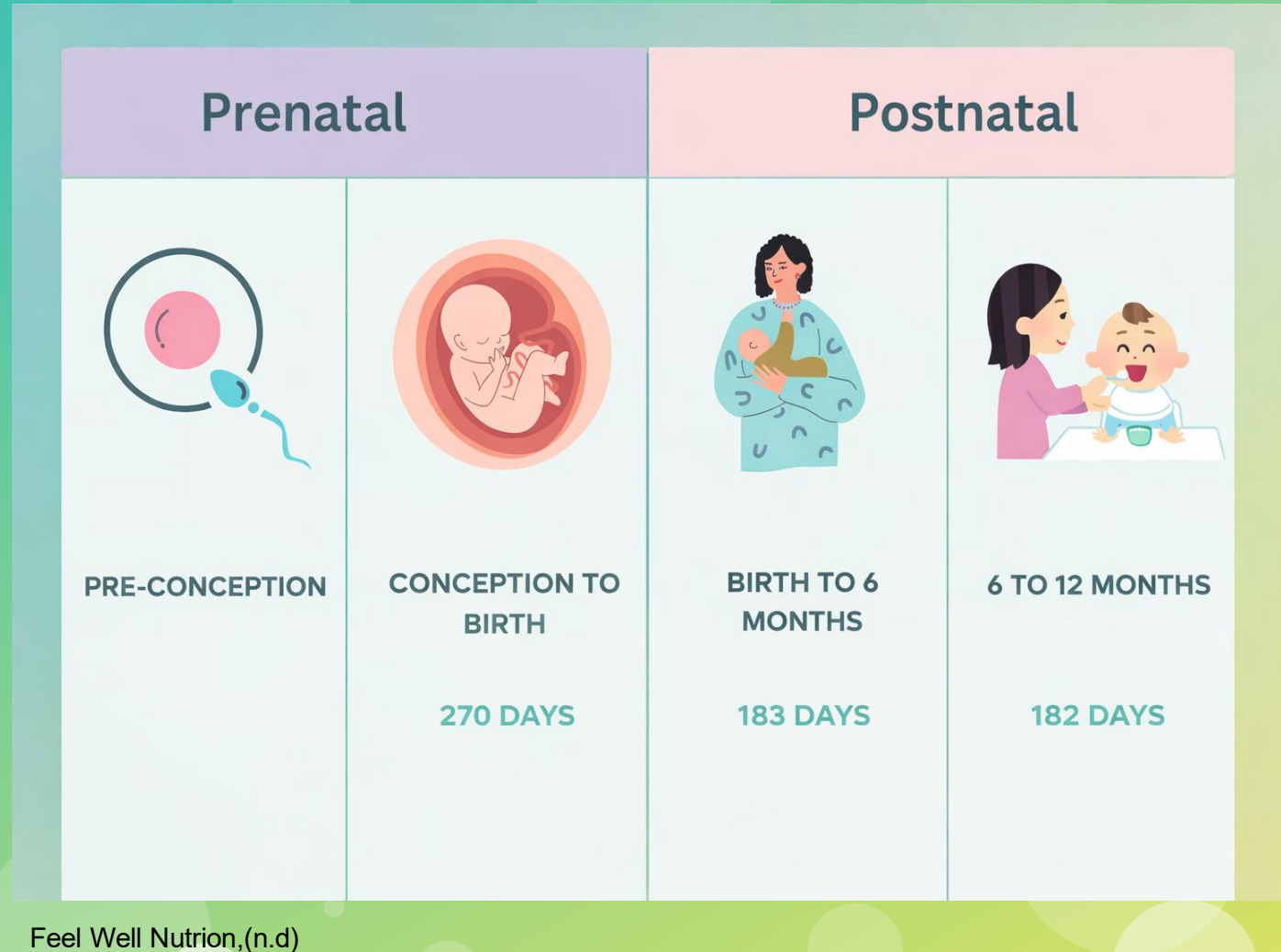
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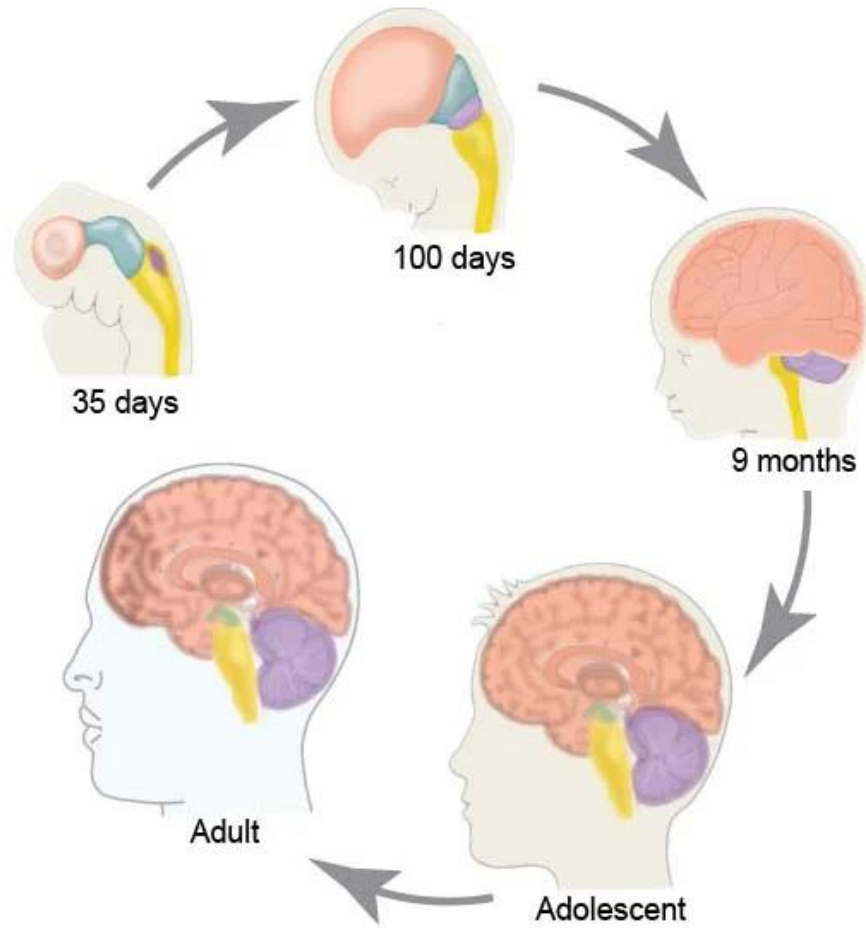
The First 1000 Days

The 'first 1,000 days' refers to the time of conception until a child reaches their second birthday and represents a vital time of human development that influences a child's physical health, emotional well being and learning outcomes (Karakochuk *et al.*, 2018; Public Health Wales, 2023). Research indicates that during this period that there is an abundance of neural development occurring. Research shows that the first 1,000 days involve rapid neural development, with the brain forming around one million neural connections per second, shaped by nutrition, relationships and environmental conditions (Centre on the Developing Child, 2016).



Historically, most developmental interventions were focused on school age children based on the belief that this was the critical time for healthy growth. However, recent research has shown it is during the 'first 1,000 days' that children experience the greatest and quickest rate of development.

As stated by Bust and Pedro (2022), this is a critical time as the speed of development is at its peak, and also because the developing brain is very adaptive and can adapt neural connections (plasticity) based on early experience. For example, children with supportive and nurturing caregivers build many of the pathways that develop emotional regulation, resilience, and the ability to learn. Conversely, children who are neglected, under nourished or subjected to chronic stress may develop disrupted neural pathways for emotional regulation, resilience, or the ability to learn, and the effects of such experiences may persist into adulthood.



The timeline illustrates how human brain development begins before birth, grows rapidly during infancy with most neurons already formed at birth, and continues to expand and refine neural connections through childhood and adolescence, reaching around 80 % of adult size by age two and continuing to rewire into early adulthood (University of Queensland, n.d).

Galinato (2019), explains brain plasticity, the brain's ability to change in response to experience, is most pronounced in early childhood. During this time, experience expectant plasticity allows important sensory and social experiences like language exposure, facial recognition, and physical interaction to shape normal brain development, whereas experience dependent plasticity reflects ongoing neural changes caused by individual learning and life experiences throughout the lifespan (Galinato, 2019).



Learnbehavioral, (n.d)

Research conducted by ARACY (2024), emphasises that children's development is not only shaped by their own experiences, but also by their parents health, stress levels, and their early life experiences, can influence a child's development via epigenetic, social, and environmental pathways. These parental factors can impact a baby's brain and body development, stress response, and the strength of their foundation for future cognitive, emotional, and physical well being. This video emphasises the necessity of assisting families during conception, throughout pregnancy and early childhood to improve outcomes for children and future generations.

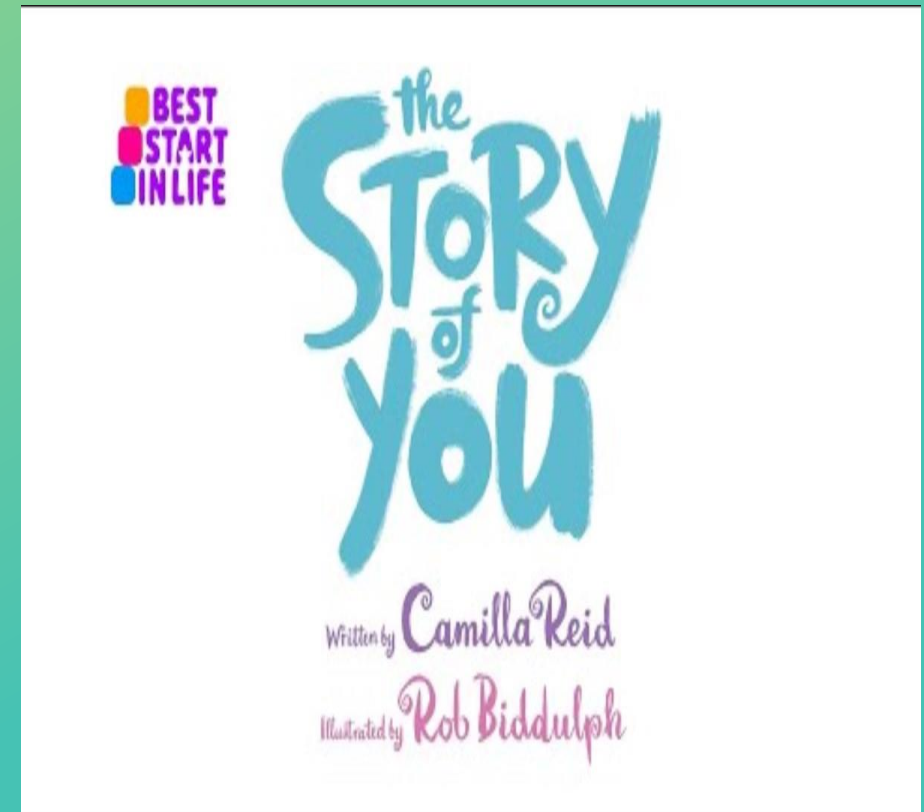


ARACY, 2024

There was a limitation to previous studies as explain by ARACY (2024), as evidence on preconception pathways remained exceedingly limited, primarily due to the scarcity of cross generational cohort studies globally. Consequently, preconception social determinants are not well characterised, substantially constraining public health and clinical strategies aimed at disrupting entrenched intergenerational patterns of risk.

The HM Government (2021), also agrees with ARACY as in their framework 'The Best Start for Life' review outlines how parent support relates to supporting the infant by considering issues such as mental health, poverty and providing social support (HM Government, 2021). Without adequate support, the likelihood of children thriving is reduced.

"Your Story: The Best Start in Life" is a video that highlights the importance of childhood development and support to the family in the early stages of life. The video presents all the beautiful childhood experiences which demonstrate how motherly support during pregnancy and child playtime and early education experiences lead to a solid base for learning and health development in children. The Best Start in Life Campaign includes this video to teach parents and caregivers about available early childhood support while motivating them to use childcare and community resources and demonstrating that every child interaction shapes their development (Department of Health and Social Care, 2025).



(Department of Health and Social Care, 2025)

Previous research has demonstrated that the total effects of disadvantage in early childhood are cumulative; disadvantage in the first 1,000 days has life-long impact on health and education. The first 1,000 days therefore represents an opportunity that is special and distinct, a unique window of opportunity to tackle disadvantage and offer pathways to equality.

Research states that the benefits to children of providing this support in the first 1,000 days can be made significantly long-lasting, that children and families can be made more stable in the long term.

The purpose of this scrapbook is to demonstrate why the first 1,000 days are so important, and how we can all support each other and our children in that period (Van den Hof *et al*, 2025).

Cdc, (n.d)



Mums and babies, (n.d)



Megfaure, (n.d)

Bowlby believed that warm, engaging and respectful caregiving is facilitated by secure relationships enabling exploration by the child. This is supported by research showing that good caregiving in the first 1,000 days is not dependent on expensive or complex interventions, but can be everyday, consistent, and responsive.

Everyday activities such as nappy changing provide a rich context for positive interaction when caregivers respond with playfulness, talk, singing, and positive facial expressions, creating a “serve-and-return” interaction that supports the child’s brain and emotional development. These types of predictable and responsive daily caregiving interactions enhance emotional security and social-emotional development in the early years (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, n.d.; Li and Ramirez, 2023).



Ecommunity, (n.d)

This supports the theory of respectful caregiving, which emphasises predictable, responsive, and supportive care and recognises the role of emotional security and respectful adult–child interactions in promoting emotional well being. However, it is important to acknowledge that a sole emphasis on caregiver responsiveness may overlook broader structural factors such as poverty, parental stress, and limited access to support services, which can constrain caregivers’ capacity to consistently provide high-quality interactions (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021).

This perspective aligns with Pikler's Theory of Respectful Caregiving, which emphasises respectful and predictable care while underscoring the need for systemic supports that enable families to provide such care in practice (Belza, Herrán and Anguera, 2024).

A powerful example of exceptional caregiving in action is offered from Pikler's approach. Children are not passive recipients of care but are actively invited to collaborate in routines such as feeding, dressing, and movement.



Love to know, (n.d)

Understanding psychotherapy:
Attachment Theory

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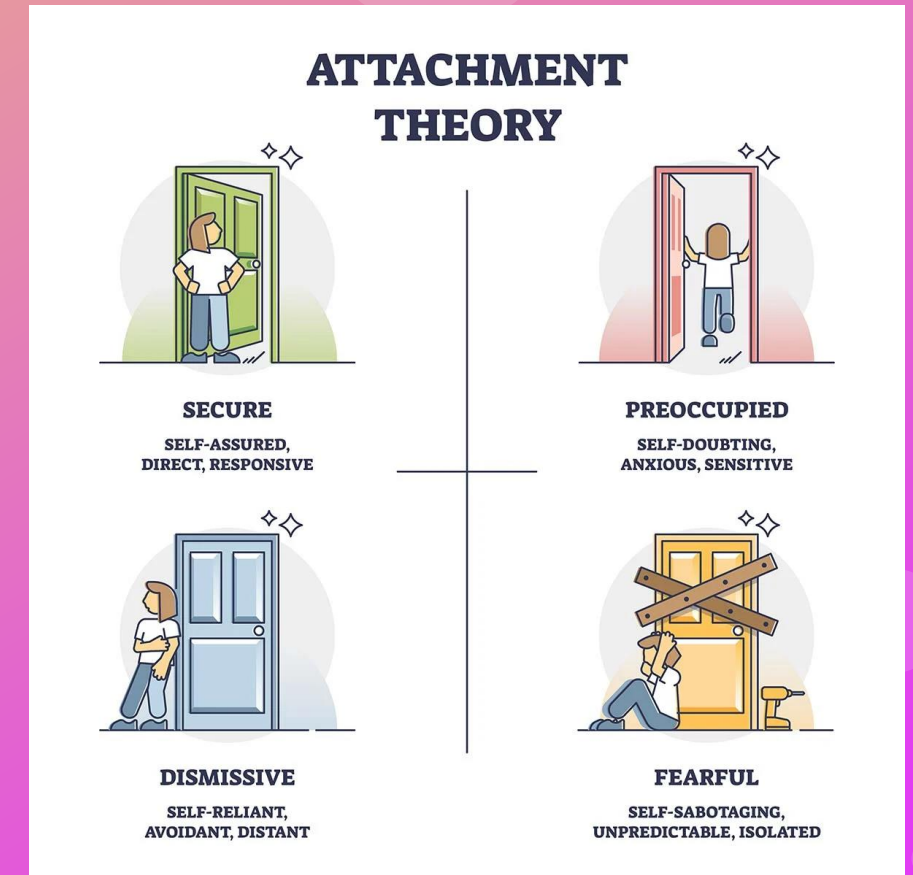
Hamilton, 2021

Hamilton (2021) produced a video explaining the attachment theory, developed by John Bowlby. Bowlby asserts that children have a biological drive to become emotionally attached to their caregivers in early life to assist their survival and development. Attachment theory states that infants have a need for comfort, security, and protection from their primary caregiver.

Children establish exploration abilities through their secure base which these attachments provide them. The attachment influences affective regulation, relationship patterns, and behaviour throughout life. The study shows that children who receive consistent and responsive care will establish secure attachments but those who receive inconsistent care will develop insecure attachments which lead to social difficulties during their later years.

Other researchers would later build on this work. Mary Ainsworth established four distinct attachment styles which infants develop during their early years: secure, avoidant, ambivalent and disorganised. Children who develop secure attachment relationships learn to trust others while learning to share their need for closeness in both directions.

People with Avoidant, ambivalent and disorganised styles reflect differing patterns of insecurity. The study of these topics enables researchers to apply theoretical concepts to actual situations and scientific studies from the real world (Hamilton, 2021).



Simply psychology, (n.d)

Although Bowlby's attachment theory emphasises consistent caregiving as key to emotional security, it largely positions responsibility with caregivers and does not fully account for wider structural influences such as poverty or parental mental health. Recent research suggests that attachment theory's influence in practice has sometimes been uncritically dominant and that complementary perspectives are needed to fully understand children's developmental contexts (Foster & Duschinsky, 2025).



The montessori room, (n.d)

This understanding of attachment and emotional security provides a foundation for relationship based caregiving approaches that translate theory into everyday practice, as demonstrated in Pikler's approach. A powerful example of exceptional caregiving in action is offered from Pikler's approach. Pikler's Nursery School exhibits how considerate, measured routines become rich learning opportunities, support freedom, and trust (Sagastui, Herrán, & Anguera, 2020; Belza, Herrán, & Anguera, 2019). Children are not uninvolved in their care but are actively welcomed to collaborate in their care such as in feeding, dressing and movement.



National db, (n.d)

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory posits that children's development is shaped by multiple interacting systems, from immediate family and education settings to broader community and policy environments (Rahman, 2025).

Contemporary research extends this perspective by emphasising how these systems collectively influence resilience, motivation, and learning outcomes (Wang *et al.*, 2025) .



Center on the Developing Child at
Harvard University, 2017.

Furthermore, to develop enabling environments and provide nurturing care, it is imperative that practitioners implement systems that support the concept of valuing relationships, providing consistency and ongoing care in ways that focus on the elements that promote children's well being and developmental progression. This is illustrated through the concept of "serve and return" interactions, which demonstrate how consistent, responsive relationships between practitioners and children support emotional wellbeing and developmental progression (Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2017).



Istockphoto, (n.d)



Inspire my play, (n.d)

Children develop at various speeds; however, their cultural background, language skills and sensory experiences create essential elements which form the base for delivering high-quality care to children. The practice of inclusion requires practitioners to build learning spaces which support educational goals (McGowan, Chandler, and Gerde, 2024).

Moss *et al* (2023), explain that an enabling environment becomes more accessible to children through the combination of low-level furniture and the provision of open-ended learning materials which help children with different motor skills to move freely while providing a stable environment for children who experience sensory overload or anxiety.



Community play things, (n.d)



Teach early years, (n.d)

Infants who receive stable, predictable, emotionally nurturing interactions will develop secure attachments, giving them confidence to build relationships and trust in their latter years beyond the initial 1,000 days (Tabachnick et al., 2021).

Infants who receive stable, predictable, emotionally nurturing interactions will develop secure attachments giving them confidence to build relationships and trust in their latter years beyond the initial 1,000 days (Tsappis *et al.* 2022)



Better start, (n.d)

The support system for parents and caregivers aligns closely with Bowlby's attachment theory, which asserts that children develop secure attachment when their caregivers show emotional availability, maintain sensitivity and responsiveness. The latest research shows that caregiver sensitivity is strongly linked to children's attachment security and developmental outcomes, reinforcing the importance of caregiver wellbeing for sensitive caregiving (Nivison *et al*, 2026). Further evidence suggests that parents' mental health and wellbeing influence attachment transmission across generations, meaning that when caregivers' wellbeing is supported, their capacity to provide sensitive care increases, leading to more secure attachment relationships (Risi, Picard and Bird, 2021).

The systematic review by Risi, Pickard and Bird (2021) reports that parental mental health and wellbeing affect how attachment patterns pass from one generation to the next and by providing support to parents can support the development of secure attachments.



Community care, (n.d)



During this important period practitioners play a significant part in supporting children and families. Their role extends beyond caring for children but acting as advocates, trusted partners and bridge the gap between families and wider support networks (Department of Health and Social Care, 2021). This partnership-based role is reflected in contemporary professional discussion, such as the “Little Minds, Big Ideas” podcast, which highlights how early years practitioners work collaboratively with families, advocate for their needs, and support access to wider networks of support (Little Minds, Big Ideas, 2024).

Every parent deserves a place where they know they're welcome, respected, appreciated, and supported. During hard times such as financial hardship, postpartum depression, and divorce, it's common for parents to experience feelings of judgment and emotional overload (HM Government, 2021).

For parents to develop trust and create an environment conducive to developing a relationship with their children, professionals must adopt a compassionate, relationship oriented manner rather than strictly by virtue of their professional title. However, this expectation places significant emotional responsibility on practitioners, and without adequate organisational and systemic support, compassionate practice risks becoming aspirational rather than consistently achievable (Dickerson, Fenech & Stratigos 2025).



National elf service, (n.d)

Successful partnership working relies on effective communication, shared decision-making and mutual respect, as both parents and practitioners identify these elements as central to developing trust and collaborative relationships that support children's learning and wellbeing (Kambouri *et al.*, 2021).

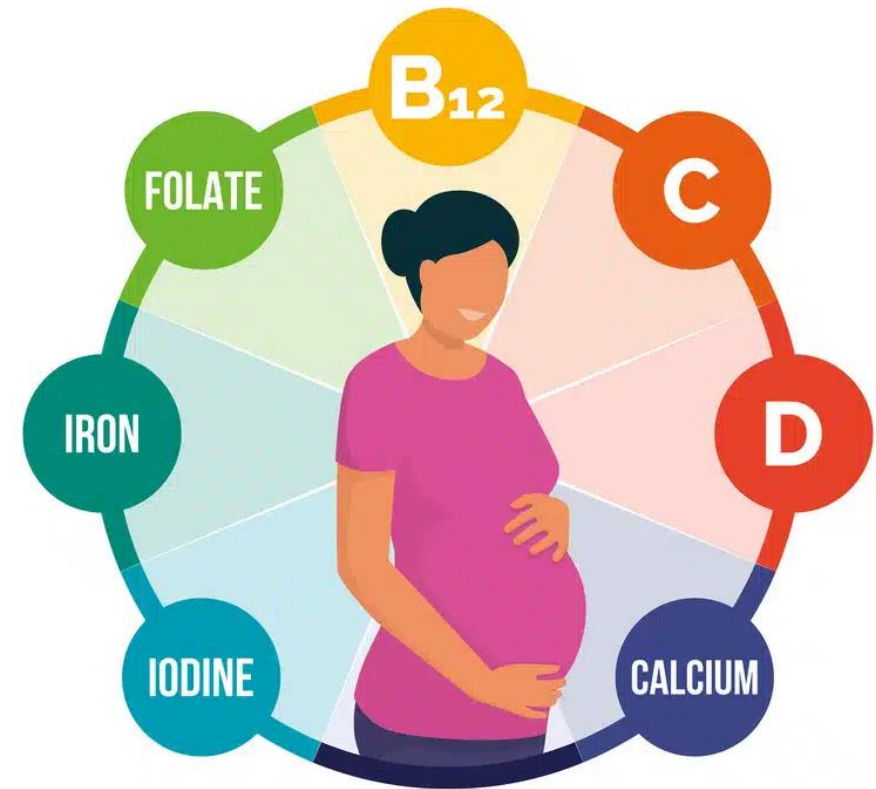
Public Health Wales (2023) further indicates that when parents and professionals work in collaboration, outcomes for children improve, as trusting partnerships support consistent caregiving, coordinated decision-making and timely access to appropriate services, strengthening children's development and wellbeing.



Kinderly,(n.d)

A mother's nutrition during pregnancy and early infancy has a direct influence on Brain development, the immune system and long-term health. This leads to maternal factors playing a vital role in early development and should always be approached with sensitivity and care.

Practitioners can support parents by communicating clear reliable information and signpost families to the appropriate services and creating safe impartial spaces with parents feel listened to and respected (Likhar & Patil, 2022; Karakochuk et al., 2018).



**NUTRIENTS AND VITAMINS
FOR PREGNANCY**



Poverty



**Housing
Uncertainty**



**Social
Stressors**

ChatGPT, (2026)

Another crucial factor is maternal mental health as anxiety, depression and distress can impact a parent's capacity to respond sensitively to their infant, thus increasing the risk of insecure attachment. Settings can provide consistent routines, emotionally available adults and referrals to specialist support when needed (Rost *et al.*, 2024).

Bronfenbrenner's theory again provides a useful lens, highlighting how stressors such as poverty, housing insecurity and social isolation influence parenting capacity. Practitioners cannot correct these challenges, but they can advocate for families, collaborate with health visitors and community services, and contribute to a shared system of care (Department of Health and Social Care, 2024).

Expert insights

Why is it important to work with other agencies and share information?



NSPCC Learning, 2024.

This collaborative approach is illustrated in expert insights from NSPCC Learning, which highlight the importance of effective multi-agency working and information sharing to support children and families (NSPCC Learning, 2024).

No single service can meet the complex needs of families alone making effective multi agency working and imperative role. When practitioners, community services and health professionals work collaboratively, families are more likely to experience continuity of care rather than fragmentation. This systematic approach reflects the understanding that by supporting infants means supporting the family and the environments that surround them (Public Health Wales, 2023).

Although there is robust evidence around the importance of the first 1000 days, there are challenges that can hinder the delivery of consistent high-quality care.

The Department of Health and Social Care (2021) identified that one significant barrier is structural inequality. When families experience additional stressors such as poverty, housing instability or limited access to services, this can erode wellbeing, regardless of parental intentions.

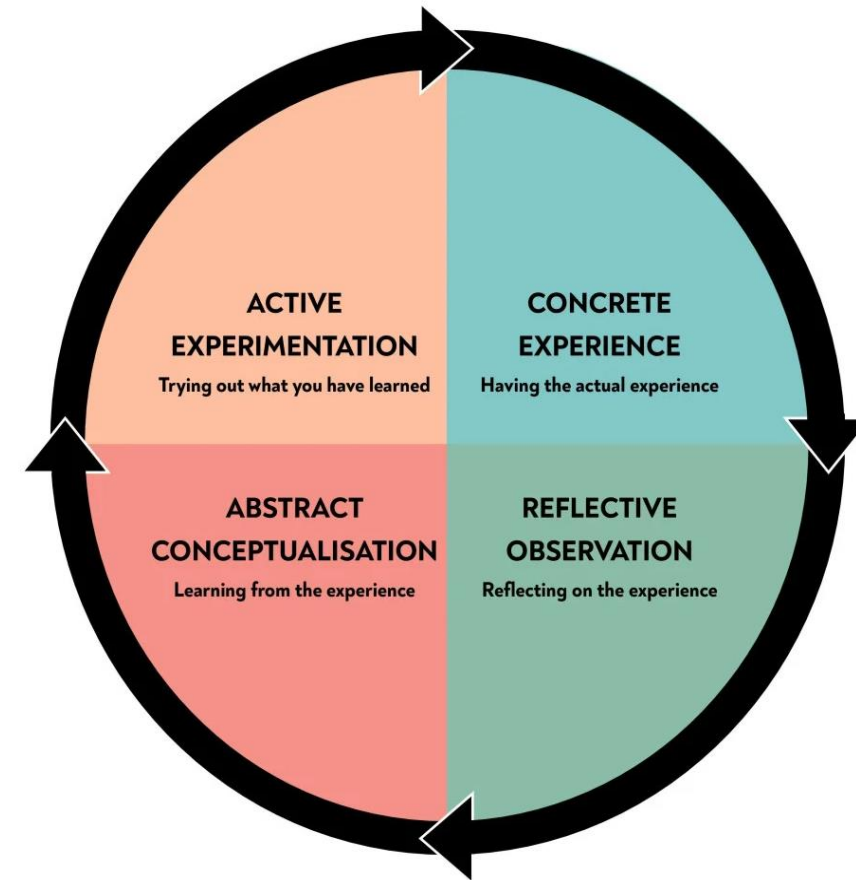


With high ratios, limited training opportunities and relational labour that is often overlooked, early years practitioners often work in under-resourced environments which has an impact on quality within settings.

The affective laborious nature of early years work requires time, reflection and emotional availability, all of which are restrained by systematic pressures (Center on the Developing Child, 2016).

There is also tension between policy expectations and practice realities. While frameworks emphasise attachment, inclusion and child-led learning, practitioners may feel pulled towards documentation, outcomes and compliance. This can risk reducing care to a checklist rather than a relational process.

A further complication of care may be cultural misunderstandings as families may have differing standpoints around sleep, independence and feeding and without reflective practices, these differentiations may lead to judgement rather than partnership. Comprehensive practice requires practitioners to reflect on their own assumptions and have openness to the multiple ways of nurturing children (Stewart, MacDonald, and Waters-Davies, 2024).

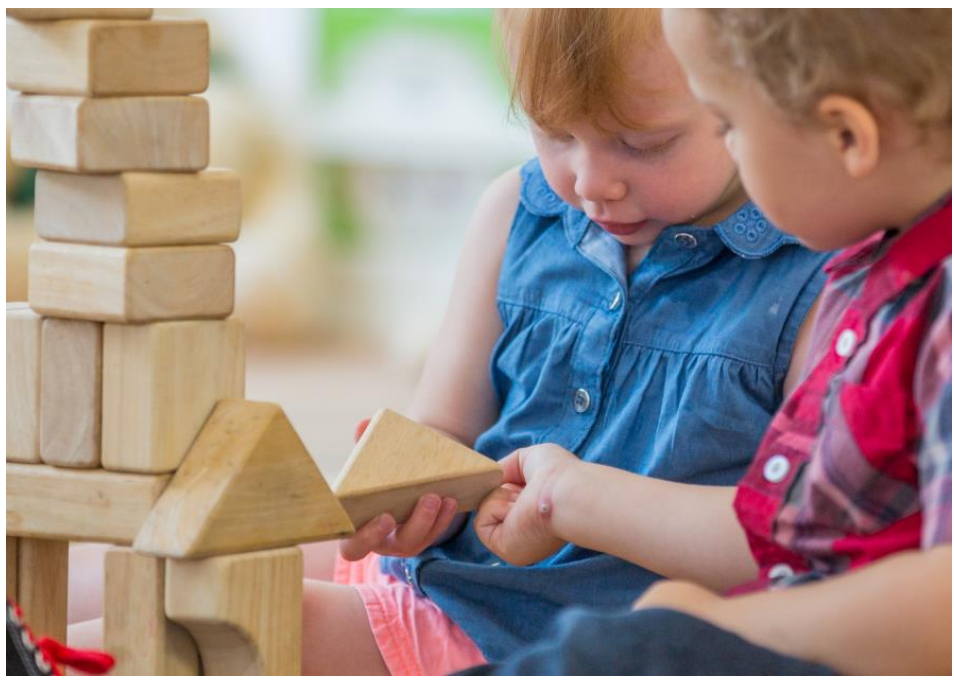


Simply psychology, (n.d)

Notably, support for families experiencing anguish presents emotional challenges and practitioners may experience parental mental health distress, domestic violence or substance misuse, which can evoke feelings of helplessness or burnout (Purper *et al*, 2023). Without adequate support, this emotional load can impact practitioners' wellbeing and quality of care.

Recognising these challenges is not about lowering expectations, but about advocating for systems that support both families and professionals. High quality care in the first 1000 days requires investment, trust in professional judgement, and a shared commitment to relational practice.





Early childhood Australia, (n.d)



Cariad wood crafting, (n.d)

To create significant learning, children's activities should be outcome-free. Open-ended materials, such as wooden blocks, shells, fabric or metal objects can be played with 'on their terms' as opposed to adult-led play which is an outcome-driven approach to early years play (Daly and Beloglovsky, 2015).

Loose parts play is similar to child-led pedagogies which promote uninterrupted child-led play with observing adults instead of intervening adults (Daly and Beloglovsky, 2015). Children have been shown to cultivate focus, autonomy and intrinsic motivation in a free-range within limits environment (Sagasti et al., 2020).



Baby centre, (n.d)



Cariad wood crafting, (n.d)

Children that participate in purposeful learning activities benefit from experiences aligned with their interests, abilities and individual needs. For example, a child repeatedly dropping a spoon may be engaging in purposeful learning, observing cause and effect and testing stability in their environment. When children explore open-ended materials that allow them to build problem solving skills, and test cause and effect, this aligns with the Curriculum for Wales emphasis on exploratory, play based learning that responds to the children's interests (Welsh Government, 2024). An effective practitioner recognises this meaningful learning and remains present and observant, rather than intervening, which supported the child's curiosity and investigative process.

International frameworks of early learning offer insights into how learning can be supported. The Forest School model and the Reggio Emilia approach, though different in their contextual settings, both prioritise enabling children to have autonomy and control in their learning. The Forest School uses an outdoor curriculum that is process-focused rather than outcome-focused, enabling children to develop their physical skills, resilience and problem-solving through play that is directed by the child and in which they are allowed to take supported risks (Knight, 2013). As illustrated in practice, Forest School can develop early learning skills, where educators describe how nature-sessions promote holistic development through sustained, child-driven experiences (Loughborough University, 2017).



Loughborough University, 2017

The Reggio Emilia approach focuses on the importance of relationships in learning, the role of interactions and the environment as the 'third teacher' and takes the view of children as active participants in knowledge construction, rather than passive recipients waiting to be taught (Agnew-Tally, 2012).

Both models, despite their differences, reject an outcome-focused and adult-led learning experience and instead propose that learning is socially constructed as a result of children's experiences and interactions with one another.



Pstt, (n.d)



Baby spa aus, (n.d)

Comparatively, the Pikler approach places greater emphasis on everyday care routines as meaningful learning moments, which is particularly relevant during the first 1,000 days. Activities such as dressing, feeding and resting are not viewed as interruptions to learning, but as central opportunities for connection, communication and relationship-building between the child and caregiver (Belza et al., 2019).

Despite these differences, all three approaches position the child as an active participant in learning and emphasise the importance of autonomy, trust and responsive adult support in fostering holistic development.

- The approaches converge on a shared idea that children are at ease, feel respected and engaged when they are in a nurturing environment. Children will learn more from simple activities as
- compared to costly, elaborate activities, as the main components of learning are the amount of attention given, the timeframe allocated to explore, and the emotional climate created by the adults in their lives (Center on the Developing Child, 2017).

Meaningful learning in the first 1000 days is being with children rather than doing to them. It is about noticing the small moments such as eye contact, shared laughter, quiet concentration that build the foundations for lifelong learning and wellbeing (Center on the Developing Child, 2017).



Scientific American,
(2017)

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