

ECEY4005- the first 1000 days

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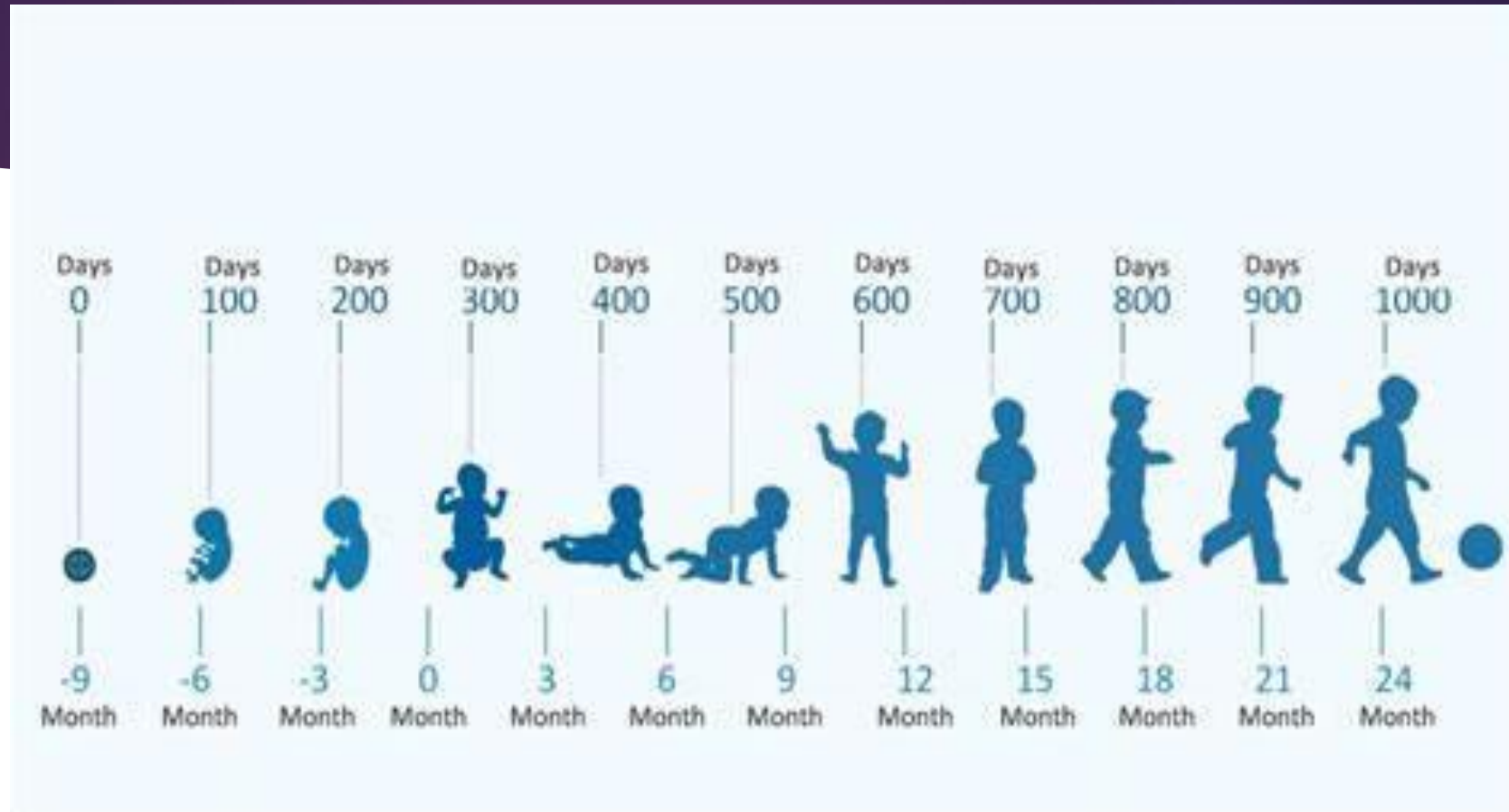
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What is the first 1000 days?

The first 1000 days of a child's life is the fundamental stage between conception and two years of age. There is in-depth research that supports that the foundations for a child's development start. During this time there are many factors that influence the child's overall health and determinative nutrition. During this time, it is vital for the child to get good nutrition to enable the child to develop their cognitive skills emotional development and motor skills. This is possible due to the child's speedy growth and development (nursery kitchen, 2024).

Mercieca (2024) agrees that the first 100 days are of great significance and are vital for the child to have the foundations for a healthy future. Mercieca (2024) also states that a child's future health can be impacted by influences with emphasis on the importance of nutrition. It is essential that a child has good nutrition during the first 1000 days of their lives.

The picture on the next slide visually demonstrates how rapidly children grow within this time frame.



(IDSMed, 2024)

According to Likhari and Patil (2022), maternal nutrition plays a vital role during the first 1000 days of a child's life, or at the very least between conception and two years of age. For the first six months the child relies on breast milk, the production of breast milk and the quality is affected by maternal nutrition. If there is a deficit in the maternal diet the child's health may suffer.

According to Parliament (2019) the first 100 days is a critical period in a child's life. In this time children are at their most vulnerable. The basis for holistic development (physical, cognitive, social, emotional and behavioral) are founded in this time. Barnardo's suggests that if a baby's development does not meet the normative development expectations within the first year of life it is possible that they will have problems catching up in later life and potentially fall further behind than children who have the better start in life.

Brain development

During the first 1000 days of life the brain develops at a rapid pace. This enhances the child's holistic development. Within this time frame the child's brain forms attachments through being held, listening to language and exploring their environment (HM Government, 2021). Similarly, the House of commons (2019) agrees that brain development takes place during those early days. It is believed that the brain makes vital connections when hearing spoken language or hears a sound. If a child experiences seeing something new or is handled and can feel touch, they will develop strong connections. Macblain (2021, p80) believes that as a baby develops in utero their brains are already forming the skills to know how to get nutrition by suckling. Macblain (2021, p81) also states that there is a rapid development of synapses in the early days. As a result of this, the unborn child will already be developing reactions. When the baby is born the functions within the brain are fairly well developed and functional. 1000 days media (no date) agree that the brain grows more rapidly in the early days of life. 1000 days media (no date) states that brain development requires good nutrition. It provides what is needed for the child to develop their cognitive, motor skills and socio- emotional development. This would impact the child's later life. Nutrition plays a vital part in children's development. If a child does not get adequate nutrition in the first 1000 days, it can cause irreversible damage to their growing brain. 1000 days media (no date) suggests that brain development begins very early during pregnancy and develops rapidly. The food that the mother consumes is what fuels the baby's rapid growth.

Baby Brain Facts

Babies:

- hear at around 24 weeks of pregnancy,
- recognise familiar voice at birth, and
- prefer faces to other shapes.

We are hardwired for relationships!



In the first years of life, more than 1 million new connections are formed every second in a baby's growing brain.

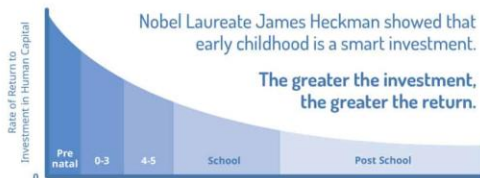
The way babies' brains develop is shaped by their interactions with others.



A range of research shows that **the way parents interact** with their babies **predicts children's later development.**



Family income and education is strongly related to children's development. Babies in higher income families are more likely to have frequent caregiver-child conversations. By age 3, babies with university educated parents have been found to have vocabularies 2-3 times larger than those whose parents had not completed school.



Children's development in the early years sets them on a positive trajectory, although what happens next also matters. Children's development at just 22 months has been shown to predict their qualifications at 26 years.



8,300 babies under one in England currently live in households where domestic violence, alcohol or drug dependency and severe mental illness are ALL present.

Rigorous long term studies found a range of returns between £4 and £9 for every pound invested in early intervention for low income families.



When parents experience problems in the first 1001 days it can have long term impacts on their children. One study showed that children whose mothers were stressed in pregnancy were twice as likely to have mental health problems as teenagers.



Adults who reported four or more adverse childhood experiences had 4- to 12-fold increase in **alcoholism, drug abuse, depression, and suicide attempts** compared to those who experienced none.



Tackling adversity + supporting early relationships
→ **healthier brains + better futures**



References and further information can be found on <https://parentinfantfoundation.org.uk/1001-days/campaigning-resources/>

Parent-Infant Foundation (2024) suggests that it is now well known that what happens within the first 1001 days of life is very important. When a baby is still in the womb and within the early years of a child's life, the brain develops at a rapid pace and at its fastest rate. Within this time, there are millions of neuron connections being formed.

According to the parent- infant foundation (2024) If a parent experiences issues within the first 1001 days of their lives, this can later on effect their own children. A study indicated that if a child's mother experiences stress during pregnancy, there is a heightened chance that the child could experience mental health issues in adolescence. This is displayed in the picture opposite.

(Parent-Infant Foundation, 2024)

Caregiving

Exceptional care

Early education (2021) states that effective care not only focuses on care but also looks at the child as a whole, this includes play, learning and development. Exceptional care also includes preparing for physical care routines, such as dressing, changing, toileting, feeding, washing and sleeping. Providing a high level of care is a vital part of being an early years practitioner. As a part of this role, it is important to care about and for babies and young children. The practitioner will have feelings of responsibility, love and concern for all children within their care. Children should receive nurturing behaviors from their care provider, this may include ethical treatment, respect and respecting the child's rights. Within the first 1000 days this can be seen by nurturing the child and providing provision for them.

According to the education hub (2018) effective caregiving is a vital aspect of pedagogy for babies and young children. The education hub (2018) agrees that caregiving should be more than just carrying out a series of tasks and more about the holistic child. Within the first 1000 days there is neuroscientific evidence that both the body and brain are closely interlinked. This makes it evidential that physical care is an important part of children's and babies learning and development. The education hub (2018) also agrees that it is vital that children receive nurturing care and that they should involve mealtimes, intimate care for example nappy changing and sleep. This links to the Pikler approach theory.

Pikler

According to Pikler UK association (no date) Pikler believed there is a significance in having healthy attachments to enhance the general well-being of the child and their emotional and physical development. Pikler theorised that when providing care to a baby when changing, bathing and feeding presented important opportunities for both the baby and the parent to develop a secure and trusting relationship. When doing these tasks, it takes up a large portion of time throughout the day. While this routine is undertaken, it is vital that the baby feels safe, secure, valued and recognised as an individual. How the baby experiences care will affect their physical and emotional well-being throughout the early years. The image opposite demonstrates the Pikler approach and the 7 key principles.



(The bright explorers, no date)

Enabling environments

Brodie (2018, p191) believes that enabling environments are enriched more so than creative ones. It is important to be able to address where the strengths lie and improvements can be made through evaluation of the environment. Parent-Infant Foundation (2024) suggests that a babies development is highly subjective by their environment and what is experienced in the world around them. This is shaped by the babies primary care givers. A positive relationship between the parent and their baby is imperative. Welsh government (2024) suggests that children affected by the environment and adults around them. Children learn from what they hear, see and take part in. A child will not learn to walk if they do not attempt to. Professionals have a very important role in ensuring they have a positive impact on children's development, this can be done by ensuring the environment provided is enabling and inclusive.

Inclusive practice

Within the first 1000 days caregivers should make sure each child is supported so that they can reach their full developmental potential. Every child should be provided with opportunities to thrive. Within inclusive practice every child should be respected, this includes diversity. When providing inclusive practice there is an opportunity to reduce barriers and form a beneficial environment for both parents and children. Children that benefit from inclusive practice early on in life have better prospects in later life (Whitters, 2020).

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) states in article 6 that children have the right to survival, life and development. This is important in the first 1000 days as it states that children have a right to life, and they must be supported to ensure they are able to survive and develop to their highest potential. The UNCRC also states in article 3 that the best interests of the child are paramount, this is relevant within the first 1000 days as it ensures children have their needs met and that they receive any support they may need. This may be anything from feeding the baby a bottle to providing support to the child to further develop their skills.

Early years alliance (2019) suggests that the result of inclusive practice delivers access to both support and opportunities to all children within those early years and have an influence on their learning, development and growth. Inclusive practice can also have an impact on the child's future through enabling them to be confident in their aspirations in later life.

The Reggio Emilia approach (2022) proposes that practitioners choices should be guided by the child when they make decisions regarding the children's learning and environment. Within the first 1000 days this could be regarding the child's interests, if a child likes lights the practitioner could base an activity around this.

Bowlby

Macbalin (2021, p35) suggests that Bowlby supposed that newborn babies were born with the ability to form attachments, therefore giving them a sense of security and safety. It is also suggested that Bowlby believed that it is important for babies to form an attachment to their mother within the initial five years of their lives. If this does not happen the children may have issues in later life developing affectionate attachments with others. Bowlby also suggested that a lack of attachment in these early days can also result in behavioural issues during their adolescent years.

Attachment

Parent-Infant Foundation (2024) states that babies rely on their parents to meet and respond to their needs. Parents that are in tune with their babies' needs are able to support the baby's early development in insightful ways. They can do this by responding to their needs, this will shape the baby's emotional development and how they express and regulate them. When a baby gets adequate care and comfort, the baby will feel more secure and safe. The development of relationships starts before birth. A baby's brain in utero is developing at a rapid pace, this is predisposed by the environment both within the mother's womb and the external world.

Role of the practitioner

According to the university of greater Manchester (2024) practitioners play a vital role within the early years of life. Practitioners lay down the foundations for the child's later life and development in the first 1000 days. They do this by providing enabling environments and having a positive impact on the child's holistic development. Cardiff and vale regional partnership board (2024) suggests that within the first 1000 days is the prime opportunity to start laying the foundations for good health and a happy life in the future. It is imperative that practitioners provide support to families in appropriate ways. When a society places worth on young children and babies, they are able to develop, grow up healthy and happy and reach their full potential. This may be done by providing environments where families are able to thrive and form positive and productive relationships between babies and the adults around them.

According to the open university (2024) when practitioner's form relationships with other practitioners/ professionals and parents they are able to share understanding and knowledge with them and plan for each child as an individual. When doing this it provides support for the parents of the child in various ways, this could be help with breast feeding or support in meeting the child's growing needs. When practitioners work together, they learn from one and another and therefore further develop their own skills. This is vital to provide consistency for both the parents and the child.

Community change (2010) suggests that partnership working signifies a wide range of services, organizations and people working together to ensure that the support that is needed by all is either planned or already in place.

Crown data (2011) states that the children's act (2006) that parents have a duty to find adequate childcare arrangements for their children when they are training or working. This reflects within the first 1000 days as when maternity leave ends many return to work. Crown data (2011) also states that professionals should work together with parents and other professionals to ensure that the families holistic needs and development are reinforced that is individual to them.

Maternal factors

Biomed (2025) suggests that there are many maternal factors that may impact development. Some of these factors are pre-existing medical conditions, obesity, stress, mental health, environmental exposures, genetics, nutrition and breast feeding. Some of these can be monitored by a doctor. pre-existing medical conditions may already be treated but may require monitoring. Stress, obesity and mental health would need to be monitored again by a doctor or medical professional. Environmental exposures may be down to smoking, there may be some support groups to help the mother cut down and eventually quit. Nutrition and breast feeding may have a positive impact as previously discussed. Good nutrition is required to aid breast feeding.

Challenges

According to Archer and Oppenheim (2021) there are many factors to consider when providing care for young children. Some of these factors could be distance, affordability, parental choice, parental work arrangements and hours.

HM government (2021) states that there may be a variety of safeguarding issues that can have a detrimental impact on a baby. These issues could include poor parental mental health, substance abuse or domestic abuse.

According to UK parliament (2025) there are challenges in the childcare industry based around affordability and availability. There is an on going issue with nurseries closing and staff leaving their positions, therefore leaving a deficit in staff and availability of places available.

Activities

According to the raising children network (2025) tummy time is a good activity to do with babies. This should be started shortly after birth, and it should only be for a few minutes to begin with. It is important to build up the time as weeks go on. The raising children network (2025) states that babies should not be left on their back and in one position when awake as this can cause flat spots on their head. The benefits of tummy time according to safe to sleep (no date) are that the baby will gain strength in their neck shoulders and arms. Later on in life this will give them the muscles to sit up independently, crawl and finally walk.

Laura England (2021) suggests that loose parts play is beneficial to children's holistic development as they are developing skills whilst playing. This can be done through having a treasure basket with various items in them and can be adapted to age and stage. Loose parts play gives children the opportunity to lead their own learning and thrive without intervention.

International approaches

Reggio Emilia

According to day nurseries (2025) the Reggio Emilia approach is a child-led approach and no two settings will be the same. Children withing Reggio Emilia discover the world in many different ways. Children are natural communicators. Children that are educated under the Reggio Emilia approach learn at a fast pace. This links to the first 100 days as this is the most rapid time for development in a child's life.

Te whariki

New Zealand government (2017) states that children are born with huge potential. The New Zealand government (2017) agrees that having positive experiences in the early years helps to build a strong foundation for later life. There are 5 strands within the te whariki education system. These are wellbeing, contribution, belonging, communication and exploration. This is applicable within the first 1000 days as it enhanced holistic development. The te whariki system encourages children to lead their own learning. This can be done at any age, for example the child may be presented with many toys, if they favor a certain toy, they are more inclined to lead their own learning by interacting with that toy. Te Whariki places importance on holistic development and emphasizes that the cognitive growth and development are more rapid during infancy (pound, 2005).

The education hub (2020) suggests that the Reggio Emilia approach and te whariki are fairly similar. Both education systems place emphasis on being child led. Both Reggio Emilia and te whariki place importance on the child's individuality, communication skills and competence. Similarly, Hatching Dragons: Education for a New World (2024) agrees that both education systems are child led. It is also suggested that there is emphasis on the significance of the family in the child's learning. Reggio Emilia places importance on the child's interests and community involvement. However, te whariki places a higher importance on cultural relevance and inclusivity.

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