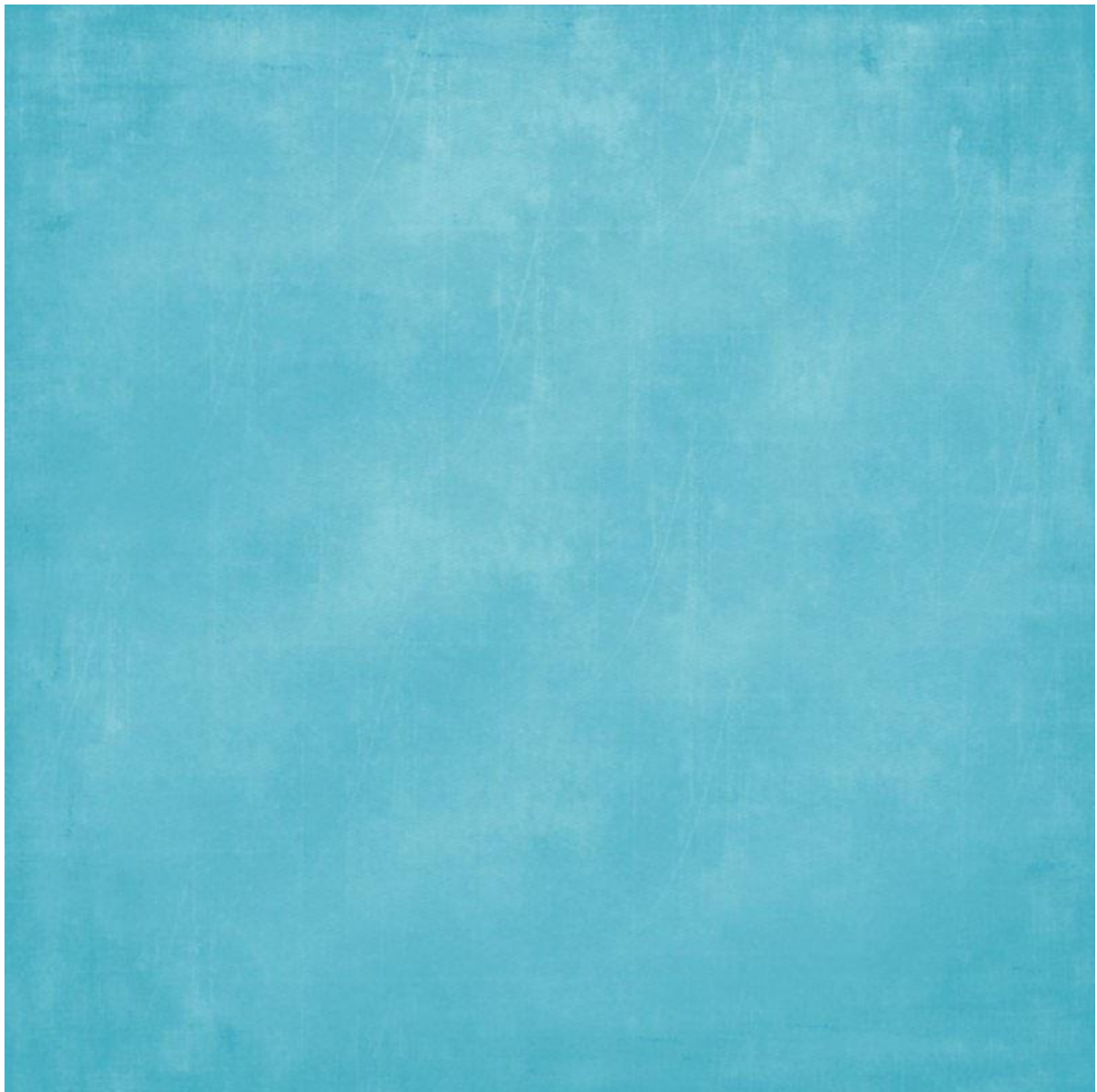




Exceptional Care in The First **1000** Days



What are the First 1000 Days?

The first 1000 days of life from conception to age 2, is the most pivotal stage to a child's development, it is a stage that sees rapid development and a significant period of growth thus according to Unicef 'The first 1000 days can shape a child's future. we have one chance to get it right'. A child's first two years of life are the most dramatic and rapid in terms of change compared to any other phase of their life, fostering quickly in all areas of development such as physical, cognitive and emotional which not only create the foundation for brain development but also allow for the addition of new information and skills.





Why are the first 1000 days important?

The first 1000 days of a child's life is a period of opportunity to lay the foundation for optimum growth and brain development, the role of parents and caregivers along with the home learning environment at this stage play a crucial part ensuring those foundations are laid. Save the Children (2016). To create those strong bonds and connections a baby must feel safe and secure in a healthy environment in which they can thrive. According to 1000 Days (no date), a child's developing brain can suffer irreparable damage through poor nutrition within the first 1000 days resulting in a child's ability to cope later in life, impacting such things as school and work life. Moore *et al.* (2017) examine the challenges young children face including poverty and discrimination, which threaten their rights and negatively impact their well-being, evidence suggests clear links that poverty in pregnancy can increase the use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs, as well as poor nutrition and obesity, thereover all place children at risk for health and developmental issues. This is a shared view of (Larson, 2007).

Pregnancy should be a time to engage parents and caregivers to think about their health and wellbeing, as a mother's circumstances, experiences and behaviours can all have a negative impact on the baby's development. It has been said that exposure to alcohol or drugs during pregnancy have been linked to a variety of health problems including premature birth, low birth weight and even miscarriage, Nidirect government services (no date). Additionally, high levels of stress or tension and factors such as poor housing and even poverty equally contribute to the under development of both foetus and child, placing the child in grave danger of thriving nutritionally and socially. Jenkin (no date).

[\(Wallis, 2020\)](#) [video] *First 1,000 days*

www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Child-%E2%80%A9-Maltreatment-%3A-%E2%80%A9-A-%E2%80%A9-Neurodevelopmental-%E2%80%A9-%E2%80%A9-Perry-Beauchaine/c863f8115673b42ef0efcb54e04d7e1d137e7094

(UNICEF India, 2017) [clip] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yign2ZAepEo>

www.smallpocketlibrary.com/2020/02/infographic-child-brain-development.html



What is Exceptional Care

“...the pathway followed by each developing individual and the extent to which he or she becomes resilient to stressful life events is determined to a very significant degree by the pattern of attachment developed during the early years.” John Bowlby

(Adam *et al.*, 2000, p.33)

<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/serve-return-interaction-shapes-brain-circuitry/>

[Guidesheet](#)

Positive engagements and memorable experiences are subsequential to a child’s development, the experiences that parents and caregivers provide during the earliest years of a child’s life have a

powerful impact on behaviour throughout life. According to The Education Hub (no date), babies enter the world with an anticipation to seek attention and connect with the people around them, this happens through naturally occurring interactions such as babbling and facial expressions in which the parent or caregiver responds to known as “serve and return” creating a rally of back-and-forth responses. Positive rallies between children and adults have a positive effect leading to the development of vital social, language and cognitive skills.

(Doherty and Hughes, 2009, p.379) believe that earliest interactions such as the child recognising its mother’s voice in the womb to those first feeding rituals all link to developing sensory capabilities, signifying babies are innate to align with others and the outside world with the ability to differentiate smell, sound and look. Additionally (Macblain, S. 2014, p. 69) maintain that it is critical to engage with a baby from the earliest moments as this engagement is pivotal in the development of senses and reflexes, enabling their ability to touch and hold objects. Furthermore, interactive engagement at this stage will pique curiosity in a baby’s tendency to imitate, provoking a capability and understanding of the world around them. When a parent or caregiver interacts and notices the signs that are on offer it creates a sturdy foundation for emotional and wellbeing states enabling future responsive relationships. According to Harvard Centre on the Developing Child, (no date), research suggests if an adult’s responses to a child are inconsistent or absent this may cause disruption to the developing brain having adverse effects on physical, mental and emotional health. Bowlby’s theory of attachment (1969) highlights the importance of a child’s emotional bond with their primary caregivers, his theory derived from his belief that children come into the world ready to form attachments, if those attachments are positively made then the child will feel safe to explore the world and are more likely to develop those positive cognitive outcomes. Mcleod, S. (2023). Establishing a key person will help a child to feel emotionally secure when away from home additionally making the parent feel reassured, they are safe.

[Serve and Return Interaction Shapes Brain Circuitry \(harvard.edu\)](https://www.harvard.edu/serve-and-return/)

https://interprofessional.ubc0.ca/files/2017/01/Serve_Return_for_caregivers.pdf



Why is Exceptional Care Important?

Birth to 5 Matters (no date) suggests effective caregiving should be at the heart of everything, in order to provide care and protection for children we must feel a sense of responsibility, love and respect for their rights. As stated in The Convention on the Rights of the Child, children have a right to access the best health care possible, clean water to drink, healthy food, and a healthy and safe environment. Article 24 Unicef, (no date).

All care experiences have a big impact for a child, whether it is changing a nappy, putting on a coat or even brushing their teeth. They should be memorable and enjoyable for parent or caregiver as well as the child. The best thing we can give a child is our time and attention, stand back and be patient, this will not only allow for a wide range of development such as fine motor skills, but also provide opportunities to develop confidence and capability in their abilities physically and emotionally which will help to build those secure, trusting relationships that put them at ease to explore freely. Bowlby's theory of attachment (1969) also modelled this behaviour.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WjOowWxOXCg>

Enabling Adults

It is said that by age two, children have developed basic communication skills contributing to their cognitive development. Understanding arises from the atonement of the body, environment and the

brain which creates an awareness of the world in a whole-body experience, thereafter children come to understand themselves through their bodies (Marshall, 2016). By giving a baby the basic needs for survival is embodiment, if we teach children to learn how to survive, move and understand the world around them so it creates an embodied way of learning. (Marmeleira and Santos, 2019).

To create those positive, trusting relationships we must place children in the centre of the setting, much like Bronfenbrenner's theory (1977), this will allow them to feel confident in their ability and wellbeing. Evidence of this being part of today's practice is seen in a commissioned independent stocktake of the foundation phase in Wales (Welsh Government, 2014). Bronfenbrenner's theory stipulates that any disruptions to the social ecology systems can have detrimental effects on children's health and well-being, Pediatr, R. (2021) researches the disruptions known as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) spanning from insecurities to, abuse, neglect, general life changes, and how they contribute to physical, cognitive, social and socioeconomic outcomes, furthermore Children from disadvantaged backgrounds will find it harder to succeed.

www.simplypsychology.org/bowlby.html

www.developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/serve-return-interaction-shapes-brain-circuitry/

[Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems: 5 Forces Impacting Our Lives \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5F0Z0Z0Z0Z0)

Parents, carers and siblings are the most crucial relationships for a child as they provide children with the warmth, security and comfort that is needed for survival. A child is totally dependent in the knowledge of someone being there, much like Bowlby's attachment theory which stipulates a child's tendency to seek security, Maslow prioritised human needs in a hierarchy (below). The basic needs at the bottom of the pyramid need to be fulfilled before moving onto the need above, if the basic needs at the bottom are not being met children simply cannot thrive, they are not going to feel safe, secure or comfortable in their environment to be able to express and be themselves.

www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/282812051579327960/

[Quality Interactions Early Years \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5F0Z0Z0Z0Z0)

A report commissioned by the (House of Commons, 2019) attempts to address inequalities considering the needs of the most vulnerable, it is believed that improvements in support and services available for children, parents and families need to be sustainable and long term to reduce adverse childhood experiences. As a result of this the Government launched the Universal Healthy Child Programme in 2009, to improve and limit these inequalities with a revision made in 2019 calling for the urgent need of targeted support of those in need as early as during pregnancy such as the Flying Start programme in Wales which offers assistance and support to families with children under the age of 4. Government legislation (*Well-being of Future Generations Wales Act 2015*) aims to improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales thus together with the curriculum guide for funded non-maintained nursery settings, we can ensure that every step is being taken to offer opportunities to all children, allowing them to express themselves physically and creatively. (Welsh Government, 2022).

According to Birth to 5 Matters (no date) caregiving within a setting requires through organisation and respectful interaction. Planning and giving sufficient time should be given to make every aspect of care both enjoyable and valuable. Physical care such as dressing, washing hands, feeding, nappy

changing is just as important as children's play and learning. Provide children with attentive love and care, make them feel included and most importantly keep eye contact! This will go a long way in creating patterns and imprints for a child. Experiences should be viewed as significant opportunities to attune and connect to a child, teaching them what it is like to have a relationship.

Engaging Experiences

A practitioner must consider the unique needs of each child when they are planning for their setting, there are several approaches and theories which have contributed to understanding child development. The work of Jean Piaget according to (Smidt, 2002, P.5) shows that if the adult or caregiver can provide interactive stimulation in a challenging environment, this will encourage the brain to make sense of their surroundings and adapt, therefore the experiences on offer in the early years should be full of purpose and meaning. He believed the infant is an 'active learner' with the desire to do rather than to be fed experiences. Although Piaget's work contributed to the change of methods of teaching, he saw educators essentially as an observer or guide, and children should be free to explore, learn and build their own skills. However, we can look at other theorists such as Lev Vygotsky or Jerome Bruner who believed that the adult had a vital role to play, essentially viewing learning as a social activity in which a child can gain mastery, fine motor skills. They argued that learning should be scaffolded providing children with appropriate guidance for them to learn, repeat and master. That is to say that the experiences on offer to a child should be challenging enough for the child to feel independent and gain success but also have a risk factor attached which will teach them to be resilient, and confident in their ability think ahead and potentially preparing them for setbacks later in life. (Welsh Government, 2022).

The Reggio Emilia approach is reflective upon the idea that all children are capable, intellectual, creative ready to explore. It is a socio-constructivist model influenced by Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner, with an established reputation for forward thinking and excellence in early childhood education, the approach has a worldwide reputation. Education Scotland, (2006) and Te Whariki model this approach demonstrating positive relationships between school and community placing the child in the centre, emphasizing the creative, intelligent centred child, capable of exploring and discovering independently, with the right and intention to make meaning in a variety of ways. The Education Hub (2020).

The Pikler approach developed by Dr Emmi Pikler to support parents and caregivers in providing a respectful relationship is the epitome of this and according to Marlen, (no date) this approach is still influencing the understanding of young children. The care approach is an experience which creates a level of trust between the carer and child as all aspects are carried out with, not to the child. Pikler babies should be free to move and trust their own abilities to explore in their own time. Observations showed parents generally rush their children, by remembering all children are different and unique thus will develop at their own rate. With no restrictions, they can learn from experiences unhindered which will create a desire for activity, exploration and readiness to discover the world.

[The Pikler Set for Your Child's Growth and Development by Lily and River - Issuu](#)

<https://youtu.be/LL3sSKtBVZY>

Activities

Sensory Play

Sensory play is beneficial in helping to build and encourage the development of motor skills and problem solving. According to Action for Children (2014) it is an activity that helps children make sense of the world around them by stimulating the 5 senses touch, sight, smell and taste.

<https://youtu.be/qUGR1Y6fxz8>

<https://www.todaysparent.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/sensory-development-1.jpg>

https://th.bing.com/th/id/R.b89b24e5c3f4eb56cd08388e702c9971?rik=qvV9VUoirB8qaw&riu=http%3a%2f%2f3.bp.blogspot.com%2f-8jTbpdUbitg%2fUZxGjYIWdcl%2fAAAAAAACoDg%2f1-xwnKFX_T0%2fs1600%2fIMG_3498.JPG&ehk=Fml%2f8XnmOF%2fusdijalWxCeyu9toTa4Q%2bbMRHC7oMfEk%3d&risl=&pid=ImgRaw&r=0

<https://artfulparent.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Sensory-bin-for-kids%E2%80%93ice-corn-filler-with-flowers-e1581699001325.png>

Loose Parts

Loose parts is a variety of materials and parts that can be moved around, carried, lined up they promote a child's problem solving and reasoning skills.

<https://youtu.be/d6oRv6XKXJo>

Effective Environments

Adults play a crucial role in the first 1000 days in the aid of the learning development of a child, setting safe environments that a child can feel safe and able to express and regulate their feelings is imperative and plays a vital part in preparing a child for change. (Welsh Government, 2023). As a practitioner it is imperative to provide an authentic indoor and outdoor environment in a setting that is not restrictive thus enabling children to explore freely and be physically active. PACEY (no date) suggests that a setting can still be inviting or inspirational whether the area is big or small as little minds thrive through exploration of their environment. Providing those opportunities for a sense of awe and wonder encourages a range of critical and creative skills laying the foundations for fruitful development later in life whilst bringing them a sense of belonging of their world around them, helping them to achieve confidence in their ability and capability. As research and evidence suggests an untidy, restricted setting will lead to underdevelopment, frustration and can often be damaging for a child's health and wellbeing this is supported by Early Years Support Service (no date), Ofsted (2021) and Estyn (2021).

<http://www.pacey.org.uk/working-in-childcare/inspiring-environments/> (inspiration video)

<https://cdn.fs.teachablecdn.com/KdDXnQ6T6OkQ9TWi6tF4> (untidy space picture)

Bronfenbrenner's theory advocates the importance of the environment in influencing a child's development, so ensuring the environment is well prepared and equipped for exploring little minds both indoors and outdoors alike will help a child to feel a sense of belonging. This can be promoted by offering a variety of resources in a homely welcoming setting enriched with vocabulary, photos

and authenticity an example of this the Montessori method of education which uses a variety of authentic tools designed for all abilities, using her observation to assess a child's development. Montessori Guide (no date) believe that the engagement of this hands-on repetition learning will give the child best chance of mastering and manipulating the object. It is said that Montessori classrooms offer a more holistic meaningful approach to learning, however many find this approach undervalued in social interaction, with the predominant individual learning style.

[Why Montessori is Bad: Examining the Potential Drawbacks of this Educational Approach - thekeyfact](#)

[Montessori criticisms, problems, and disadvantages \(ourkids.net\)](#)

[Reggio Inspired Creative Studio | Reggio emilia classroom, Reggio emilia, Reggio classroom \(pinterest.co.uk\)](#)

blog.fms.org/observing-a-montessori-classroom-what-can-i-expect

<https://www.montessoriguide.org/assessment>

<https://youtu.be/H1jxkzL1pAA?si=uHxAg9HvHd7bmuVn>

<https://tgescapes.co.uk/blog/education-10-tips-creating-engaging-outdoor-learning-and-play-environments>

Professional Partnerships

Developing those relationships between practitioners, parents and other professionals are imperative giving peace of mind whilst ensuring hand on support and advice in the event of any development concerns, or child protection issues. PACEY, (no date). The first 1000 days of a child's life hold significant value in their learning journey, if milestones are being delayed or even missed, they can be efficiently recorded and observed through the child's Health visitor.

It is important that a practitioner builds a strong relationship with the parent or caregiver as they will be entrusting their Children into their setting with high demands of meeting the care and educational needs. (Brodie, K. 2018 P207-208) In order to achieve the best outcomes practitioners need to involve parents and show them the setting ethos.

Hubbard.E, (2023) *Don't Miss These 7 Signs of Motor Delays in Your One-Year-Old*

Available at: <https://youtu.be/yXOKN0yVu3I?si=cmzh4H75pHzHlfgE> (Accessed: 20 January 2024).

Challenges for Effective settings

<https://youtu.be/wLPQQA75I0> - Interactions - challenges – Non-verbal, hearing loss ASD, cultural, songs in another language, get to know culture. Children who find listening and attention difficult....

[Listening and understanding - Help for early years providers - GOV.UK \(education.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/education/government/early-years-providers)

- Underlying problems – physical, mental – observe and access: not feeding, colic, tummy allergies.
- Poverty
- ASD
- Communication, non-verbal
- Routines
- Covid impact
- Separation
- Emotions
- Some practitioners see it as a job only and time restrictive
- Some have no under pinning knowledge
- Cost of living
- No Funding
- Culture
- NON Verbal
- Visual or hearing impairments
- Parents don't like muddy play = muddy clothes.
- Practitioners don't like muddy play.

Reflection

- Children-led planning – discuss with children to see if they like current setting, what would they like to see?

- Evaluate effectiveness of play spaces.
- Inclusive – suitable areas for all?
- Can children move freely?
- Consider all senses during sensory play.
- Visual timelines for routine.
- Employ like-minded employees willing to get involved with the ethos of the setting.
- Ask for donations for resources.
- Open days for parents and caregivers to explain setting ethos.
- Think about setting – information from parents on their routines, nap times, soothing, food likes, dislikes.
- Culture – include culture in setting to bring a sense of belonging – participation... expand knowledge in setting of heritages, cultures as well as surrounding areas culture.
- Ensure the setting has a record of the health visitor for every child.
- Keep in contact with local authority – up to date with new legislation, training.
- Links with other settings to make sure transitions run smoothly. For example Baby to toddler rooms, or toddler to Nursery.

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