



THE FIRST 1000 DAYS



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The first 1000 days refers to the period of time from a child being conceived to their second birthday. According to the Australian Governments Department of Health and Aged Care (2021), this is a pivotal period of time in the child's life as it is a time when their brain, body and immune system grows and develops significantly. They go on to say that during the first 1000 days a baby will need things such as healthy food, loving relationships, safety and security, time to play and a healthy environment which includes the womb.

[The first 1000 days of life | Sergio Pecorelli | TEDxHECParis](#)

HM Government (2021), agree by saying that the first 1000 days are indeed a critical time for the baby's development. However, it is also a period of time where the baby is at their most vulnerable. They note that some babies have disabilities diagnosed within the womb, some have a developmental need that could possibly develop into a special educational need once they enter compulsory education if special provision is not made available. They acknowledge however that some children are not diagnosed for a longer period and as children do not have the language to advocate for themselves it is important the adult can do this for them.

Image 1



INTRODUCTION



Image 2



Maslow's theory of hierarchal needs looks at what a child needs to develop and reach their full potential, and this can be clearly linked to the first 1000 days. Maslow states that in the very earliest stage of a child's life they require basic needs, and he categorises these in to physiological and safety needs. Physiological needs include food, water, warmth and rest. Within the first 1000 days of a child's life their parent's need to provide food, warmth and rest for that child to thrive. If these things are not provided, then the child will not survive the first days of their life. Safety needs must encompass security and safety. These needs are all things that an adult can provide to a baby during their first 1000 days, by providing these needs the adult is giving the baby the best opportunity possible to develop and grow to reach their full potential. Giving them a safe and secure place to live initially and us as practitioners giving them a safe and secure setting to learn in will allow the child to develop as much as possible.

Following on from physiological and safety needs Maslow also believes that psychological needs such as love and belongingness are integral to the initial development of a child, and these can also be met in the first 1000 days. Love and belongingness need to include intimate relationships, which a child can receive from parents, other family members and practitioners in early years settings. Finally, Maslow states that friendship is also a need that should be fulfilled early in the life of a child. Within the first 1000 days it is up to the adults in the child's life to facilitate and help initiate friendships for the child as they may not have the vocabulary or social skills necessary to do this themselves. Helping them build bonds and develop social skills will aid them in the future when it comes to making friends and building relationships further on in their lives.

[Why Maslow's Hierarchy Of Needs Matters - YouTube](#)

CAREGIVING

Many people try and pinpoint what exceptional care in a child's early life looks like however, to many the true definition of this can vary. Gerdhart (2015), is of the opinion that exceptional care should be given as soon as the child is conceived. She begins by saying that within a few weeks of conception the mother and embryo begin to work collaboratively on building the placenta, which works as both a hub for nutrients, hormones and oxygen, whilst also being a protective shield or barrier to filter anything toxic in the mother's system, which in turn prevents it from reaching the embryo.

The healthier the lifestyle the mother leads the more efficient this system works. On the other hand, if the mother is consuming chemicals such as alcohol or nicotine this will have a significant detrimental effect on the development of the placenta, in turn damaging the embryo. This shows that even from the earliest stages of development the mother taking exceptional care of herself will lead to exceptional care being delivered to the embryo, which will give the child the best possible start to their lives when they are eventually born.

As a child grows up, they may begin attending an early years setting during their first 1000 days. Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) (2021), argue that a child being given a high-quality education alongside exceptional care will reap huge benefits as the child progresses through their education. They are of the opinion that positive outcomes are strongly associated with the quality of ECEC alongside the child's home learning environment and the care they receive there opposed to the quantity of ECEC the child receives. This clearly shows that exceptional care from both parents and practitioners is important in the development of a child even from an incredibly young age.

They claim that high quality ECEC has the capacity to narrow the disadvantage gap. This means that irrespective of how affluent a family is, as long as the education and care the child is receiving is that of a high quality, the child will have capacity to develop at the same rate as a child from an affluent background, once again showing the importance of exceptional care within the first 1000 days.

The House of Commons (2019) are of the opinion that if a child's body and mind develop as well as possible then subsequently their life chances are improved. They go on to say that being exposed to stress or adversity within this period and not experiencing exceptional care can have a huge negative impact on the child and result in a child's development falling behind that of their peers. Left unaddressed, negative experiences and poor care, such as conflict or abuse between parents or the mother abusing alcohol or nicotine during pregnancy can not only cause harm to them, but to the next generation after them too.

Www.careforkids.co.nz (no date), looks at Pikler's approach to care in early education. They state that Pikler's approach is built on the foundations that a child can only truly learn when they emotionally satisfied and that this approach advocates authentic, trusting relationships between the child and their caregivers. Pikler was of the opinion that carers should always give the children in their setting full attention, especially when involved in caring activities. By giving them 100 percent attention, babies will interpret this as love, and this will bring peace to an otherwise hectic life. He also believed that trust and bonds are built during caring moments. When a carer shows respect and carries out activities in a pleasant and unrushed way, the baby becomes an active partner and learns what they need to do in a more competent way.



PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

During the first 1000 days professional partnerships between the parents of the child and practitioners including doctors, midwives, health visitors and early years practitioners is integral in the child's development.

Clare (2012) is of the opinion that all babies are born with the need to learn and the best way in which they can do this is through interaction with adults. Whilst admitting that early years practitioners need to show professional love and patience towards the children in their settings, she believes that you need to find a balance between enjoying being with the children, but also have a good understanding of how babies and children develop. Finding this balance as a practitioner and having a depth of knowledge will allow the practitioner to understand what they are observing and assessing, and as a result work out the best way on how to help the child develop and move forward. As a practitioner it is important that you build a relationship with the parents and families of the babies or children in your setting. As Clare (2012) states babies learn best through interaction with adults. Parents whether first time parents or otherwise can only benefit from advice on how to help their children develop as best as possible.

[How a child's brain develops through early experiences - YouTube](#)

GOV.UK (2021) are of the opinion that sharing information with parents and carers is key to building a strong partnership and as a result the child has the best opportunity possible to develop to reach their full potential. Sharing information creates the opportunity to set up a two-way dialogue with parents or carers about their child's learning and development. They offer the example of observing a child learning something new in nursery, for example a child becomes interested in building towers or lining things up, this could be an indication that the child is interested in numbers or positioning. By sharing this information, it will allow the parents or carers to facilitate something similar in the home environment which would continue to develop the child's interest and ability at this skill.



Fitzgerald, Hor and Drake (2020) consider how an optimal early life environment is essential for ensuring neurodevelopmental outcomes. They suggest that the evidence shows that brain development may be vulnerable to factors such as maternal nutrition, infection and stress during pregnancy. During pregnancy it is crucial that the mother builds partnerships with professionals such as midwives, doctors and health visitors. Having these partnerships develop over pregnancy will aid the mother in understanding her body more during this period of significant change. By furthering their understanding via the professionals, they have built partnerships with will allow the mother to reduce stress levels, increase their knowledge of what nutrition their body needs in order to carry the baby and also reduce risk of infection due to understanding what to avoid whilst pregnant thanks to the input from professionals around them.

HRF (2017) breaks down Bronfenbrenner's Theory of Child Development which shows a clear link to the importance of professional partnerships to how a child develops. According to Bronfenbrenner there are five different levels to environment firstly, is Microsystem. Microsystem is the system closest to the child and consists of those who have direct contact, this includes family members, teachers, nursery workers and other caregivers. He believes that these relationships are bi-directional, meaning that the how the child is treated by the people within this environment will affect how the child treats them in return, this is the most influential environment within the theory. This clearly shows that both parents and teachers alike have an incredibly important role to play in the child's early life and creating a strong partnership can only make this role easier to play. Bronfenbrenner then goes on to look at a second environment that he calls the Mesosystem. HRF (2017) state that this environment involves relationships between the individual who are in the child's Microsystem. Although these may not be direct relationships with the child, these do indeed have a direct influence on the child on a direct level. Relationships between the parents or carers of a child and an Early Years Practitioner is a clear example of this. If these relationships work against each other, the impact they could have on the child could be negative and profound.

[Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems: 5 Forces Impacting Our Lives](#)

The House of Commons (2019) believe that social stresses such as poverty, poor standards of housing and unstable employment provide huge challenges to parents trying to give their children exceptional care. They argue that these factors act against the abilities of parents and families to create a safe, healthy and nurturing environment for their children to grow up and develop in. As early years practitioners we can attempt to counteract these challenges the families and child may face by providing exceptional care within our settings. By making the setting as nurturing, safe and healthy as possible it will not only benefit the child, but their parents and families too.



Image 6

WBG (2023) note many challenges in providing high quality care in the first 1000 days. Firstly, they acknowledge the retention and recruitment crisis as a significant challenge in early years settings. They specify that the severe lack of adequate funding and recognition means that salaries within the sector are low. Approximately 1 in 4 early years practitioners aged 25 and above, working in group-based providers, receive wages either at or below the national living wage. This is a huge challenge as this means that many don't see working in an early years setting as a viable career path, and those that are currently working in those settings may lack determination or passion to deliver high quality care as the wage they receive is so poor.

CHALLENGES

Another challenge that WBG (2023) acknowledges is that of unavailability. They state that in 2023, only 48% of local authorities in England have enough childcare for those parents who work full-time, compared to 68% in 2020. The significant lack of childcare available to parents is a huge challenge as some may not be able to access childcare until the child is 3 meaning that the quality of care, they receive in the first 1000 days may not be to the same standard as some children who do experience childcare within the first 1000 days. High quality childcare encourages cognitive, emotional and physical development within the first 1000 days, meaning that children who miss out on the opportunity to access childcare could then be behind in their development compared to their peers.



Image 7

Clare (2012) claims that one challenge that faces early years practitioners is making the environment suitable for children in the first 1000 days instead of children aged 3 and above. She suggests that many practitioners are more concerned with the aesthetics of the environment rather than how the environment can nurture the children within it, finding the right balance is a challenge that faces practitioners. She goes on to advise that overcoming this challenge within settings will help nurture the baby or young child, to make them feel safe and secure, to enable them to form attachments and to give opportunities to make links with experiences. She believes that only when the environment is suitable to the children within it, then high quality care can take place leading the child to grow and develop emotionally, cognitively and physically.

Working inclusively and making the environment inclusive is also a challenge that faces Early Years Practitioners. The Early Years Alliance (2015) believes that attending a high-quality, inclusive setting can really help support young children who are at risk of discrimination or inequality. The challenge for Early years practitioners is ensuring that the environment is as inclusive as possible. The Early Years Alliance (2015) are of the opinion that early years settings need to be proactive at addressing barriers to inclusion such as negativity and stereotyping. To overcome this challenge, they advise making sure that settings are confident, committed and competent in their ability to be equal and inclusive. As previously stated, working in partnership with parents will also help overcome this challenge as they may have advice on how best to support their child and make the setting as inclusive as possible for their child.

There are a number of activities that can be facilitated by Early Years Practitioners that can provide meaningful learning to the children in their settings. Daly, Beloglovsky and Daly (2015) are huge advocates for the use of loose parts. They are of the opinion that when children interact with loose parts, they enter a whole new world of 'what if' which in turn promotes a type of thinking which lends itself to problem solving and theoretical thinking, both incredibly important and meaningful skills to pick up from a young age. They believe that it enhances the child's sense of adventure and brings real excitement to children's play. Loose parts being open ended is a big factor in increasing both excitement and adventure. Daly, Beloglovsky and Daly (2015) believe that there are infinite play possibilities with loose parts, and they offer multiple outcomes. There are no specific directions to accompany them, and no single result is inevitable. A possible challenge of using loose parts with children in the first 1000 days include choking, falling and being accidentally hit by objects. Within the first 1000 days, children are inquisitive and often put new things in their mouths to 'work things out'.

It is up to the practitioners within that setting to ensure that children are either always supervised or that the loose parts resources put out are not the size of which could be considered a choking hazard. Moreover, they are also incredibly interested in exploring and climbing at this early stage, so it is vital that any loose parts activities are tailored to suit the ages of the children in the setting in an attempt to limit the possibility of danger whilst not squashing the child's imagination all together.

https://youtu.be/SWDqoFqcvUU?si=7cNavhLds7M_KQDq

ACTIVITIES

Image 8



Image 9



Gascoyne (2019) takes a look at how messy play can be implemented within early years settings. She admits that when we think of messy play, we tend to think of incredibly resources such as mud, slime and paint. She goes on to say that although these can undoubtedly be untidy, this is not their purpose, but rather a product of the child's material engagement, thinking and need of immersion. Gascoyne (2019) states that messy play can be exciting and fun, providing endless possibilities for the children in the setting to explore whilst also being captivating and calming. Messy play also lends itself to those children who may have sensory processing difficulties.

Touching and playing with different substances may help them overcome some of the sensory challenges they face alongside having fun and learning. Gascoyne (2019) advises that messy play experiences are incredibly varied and shaped by the messy play materials a practitioner chooses to use, the individual child and context and the physical and emotional environment. This shows that the scope of messy play is huge and if used correctly, it is a tool that practitioners could use to develop the children in their settings substantially and aid meaningful learning.

<https://youtu.be/R4t4JgpT4bM?si=lx-nCBwUedx6XyT5>

ACTIVITIES CONTINUED

There are many international approaches to learning that have been adopted by practitioners in the UK. Loughborough University (2017) take a look at how Forest Schools have been taken from countries in Scandinavia and implemented in early years settings. As previously stated, Forest Schools originated in Scandinavia, where schools use local woodland areas to hold outdoor activities which helps develop children's problem solving and teamwork skills, as well as their self-esteem and confidence. Loughborough University (2017) initial findings suggest that engagement in Forest Schools can contribute to the development of collaborative skills, by encouraging children to work with others on challenging outdoor activities.

Within the first 1000 days it may not be possible to expose a child to a Forest School environment. However, practitioners can use resources such as sticks, grass and moss in the classroom to give the children within the setting early exposure to things they may use in Forest Schools later on in their educational journey.

[What is Forest School? - YouTube](#)

Image 10

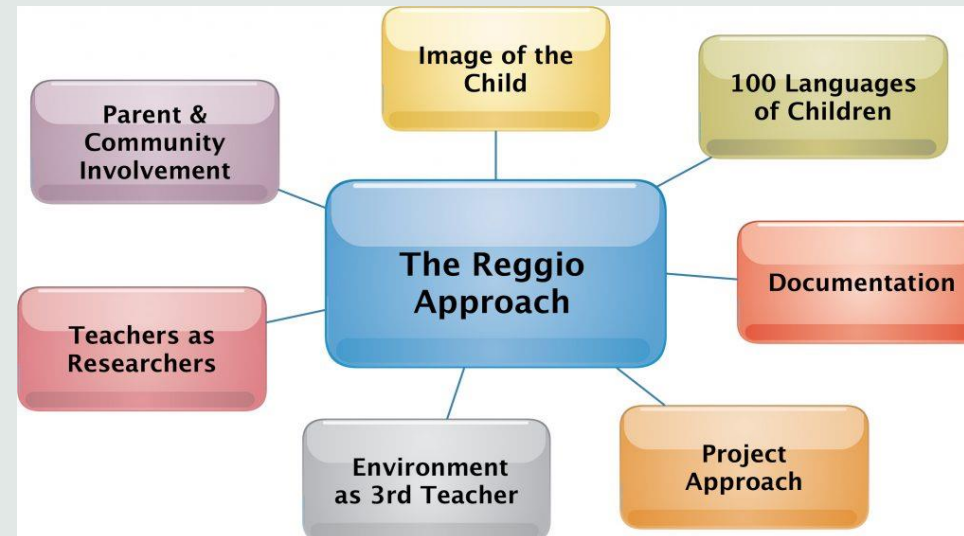


Another international approach that is often used in early years settings, is the Reggio Emilia approach to learning. Gaines (2023), looks at this approach and states that it focuses on providing children with creative, collaborative and expressive education, not too dissimilar to that of Forest Schools, messy play and loose parts. This approach believes that all children have individual rights and potential whilst encouraging children to use and learn using all their senses.

This style allows children, with and without disabilities alike, to thrive in the classroom irrespective of their age. Conversely, Forest Schools may be limiting to children with certain disabilities. The Reggio Emilia approach seems more inclusive and less limiting possibly than that of Forest Schools so may be more likely to be used in settings where children in the first 1000 days attend.

[Reggio Emilia Education - YouTube](#)

Image 11



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