



The journey of the child and family

The key time of an infant's life

According to Pregnancy Birth & Baby (2022) and Stirling-Reed (2023) the child's life starts from pregnancy up to the second birthday. During this period, the child grows mentally and physically at their fastest rate, this timeline shapes the toddler's life and provides the best opportunity to thrive. During pregnancy, the mother's health, and nutrition, as well as the mother's stress levels can have an impact on the child. Once the child is born, other factors come in to play, such as the environment, nutrition, safety, and the relationships they build can also determine the future of the child.

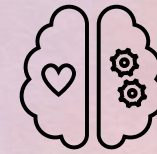


(First 1000 Days Ireland, 2015).

Monmouthshire County Council (2023) claims that this period has a fundamental influence upon human beings and their family. It can form the child's future as they develop their academic performance, this could determine their career and salary as well as having an impact on the child's well-being.



Brain Development



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Pregnancy Birth & Baby (2022) claims that the brain develops at an extraordinary pace. By the twenty fourth week, an estimated Ten billion cells are created. This development period is reliant on the nutrition and diet of the mum for the child's cognitive development.

During the initial period of an infant's life, the mind shows extraordinary capability to understand and learn. When the child reaches the age of two, the bonds are created in the mind and they build at twice the rate of an adult (cited in Finnegan, 2016).

According Bushell (2020) the child's brain grows rapidly towards the end of the pregnancy up until the child reaches the age of two. This period underpins the structure to influence the ability to communicate with others, the movement capabilities, the emotional and mental development to understand.



Nutrition



The importance of nutrition is highlighted by 1,000 days (no date a) who suggests that a healthy nutrition throughout maternity and childhood allows the child to develop, discover and succeed. Providing sufficient nutrition to the mother and child from conception provides the child with the best development path, it also aids their immune system and wellbeing.



Safety and Security



Pregnancy Birth & Baby (2022) mentions that having a caring, assured relationship with the child can help aid development. The child may find it easier to socialize with others, express feelings as well as assisting with communication abilities. The connections made with others can influence how the child perceives the world around them.



What care is needed?



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European Foundation for the care of newborn infants (2018) claims exceptional care starts with the mother of the child. Prior to pregnancy, it is advised that the mother should pay attention to many aspects of their health to help aid a successful pregnancy. This ranges from having a healthy lifestyle and physical exercise, maintaining any preexisting medical conditions with sufficient medication, a healthy diet with sufficient nutrients and supplements and a balanced work life.



Western Cape Government (2023) mentions that creating the environment for the child to develop is beneficial. The child should receive sufficient physical and social support from their parents to feel secure. Showing signs of love comfort and celebration of any small wins to allow the child to understand appreciation and success. Having the correct resources and a routine supports the development of the child, allowing the child the option to explore safely, establishing daily routines, sufficient exercise for the child and mum, suitable facilities and toiletries for maintaining the child's health and referring any issues immediately to a specialist.

Alberta Family Wellness Initiative (2023) claims that the serve and return is like a sport among the child and the carer. The child starts the serve by showing signs of interactions in various forms such as, visual contact, signals, babble and physical interactions. The responding carer will interact by returning the serve and answering back, acting out peek-a-boo as well as giggling. The Serve and return Metaphor helps to understand situations to help create an improved brain architecture.



Quality Care

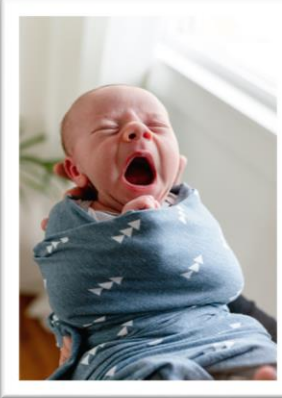
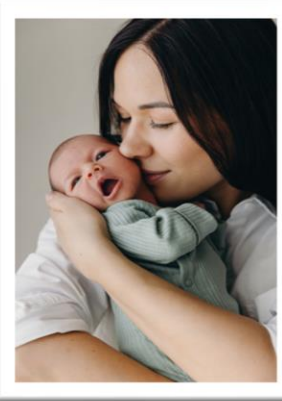


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1,000 days (no date b) indicates that care givers are influential during the initial stages of the child's life, supporting the infant's health during development. Providing sufficient dietary needs and having valuable information in a timely manner to make the best decisions.

Raising children (2022) points out that providing the child with affection, physical care, and building the trust between the caregiver and the child is helpful, as this creates a bond with the child, especially when the child receives the interactions from the carer, this could range from a facial gesture, or various forms of visual or physical interactions.

Nutricia (2023) has indicated that breastfeeding is beneficial for both the mother and the child. It provides a protection barrier for the child during this period as it enhances the immune system, also providing positive health benefits for the child such as decreasing the risk of obesity.



Teach Early Years (2024) has provided research which has evidenced the benefits of the Pikler approach, which was based on providing a great relationship between the caregiver and the child throughout their care, providing a natural environment and free movement without interruption and time for the child to explore on their own allows the child to experience and learn at a natural pace which helps the child naturally develop. This method has been used and has shown positive outcomes for the child.

According to Thrive Early Learning Centres (2023) the Bowlby theory of attachment has become an essential component and a method of survival during the brain development period, the lack of attachments has shown signs that the child could be negatively affected cognitively, emotionally, and socially.



Supporting the children and families



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Brodie (2018) highlights that the practitioner is required to be fully aware of the progress of each child, as the transformation from a newborn to a child physically, emotionally and mentally within this timeline is extraordinary, and to ensure the progression is gradual and to continuously evaluate the situation and analyse as well as adjust to the expanding requirements of the child. The early years practitioner uses a variety of immensely advanced expertise when caring for children, starting with recognising the needs of the newborn's health, managing care routines, maintaining knowledge around the families as well as becoming the key figure. Each of these elements of care are challenges of which the carer must face furthermore, the conditions change practically day by day for instance, moving from a non-mobile infant, to crawling and then to walking means continuously reviewing physical surroundings, as a well as observing the continuous transformations during the development, this ensures the child, and the family have sufficient support.



Stars (2023) highlights the components associated with effective partnerships, providing a trusting environment for parents and the child is the responsibility of the setting. The practitioner should keep the families informed at each stage of the child's development. The care giver must maintain and provide equal expectations to allow a clear development path. Keeping the parents informed at each stage allows the carer to provide full exposure and implement any changes and to collaborate within each area to allow the successful nature of partnerships with parents to work effectively

Hodgekiss (2018) highlights that there are clear links between utilising effective partnerships with Bronfenbrenner's theory, which places importance on the systems used during the early stages of life. The child naturally develops over time based on the environment they are in, and the relevant systems used. These systems help determine how successful a child develops based on the strength of the partnerships and connections created throughout their education.

Brodie (2018) claims that the setting should ensure the family has the knowledge of the activities the child performs, and to provide the support for additional learning needs. This enables honest, confident and collaborative association with the family to provide consistent engagement throughout the development of the child.



Maternal Factors



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Mutsaerts *et al.* (2014) claims that there are maternal factors that can influence the development of the baby during pregnancy, the medical history of the parents, the diet, drug use, alcohol use, environmental affects, mental health of both parents.

One of the factors raised by Gerhart (2004) and National Health System (2023) is that the consumption of alcohol during maternity could adversely affect the development of the baby as it significantly impacts the embryo during pregnancy which may cause foetal alcohol spectrum disorder and have a lasting effect on the infants visual, motor and communication abilities, as well as organ growth and bone development.

Lifespan Development (no date) identifies that a mother who is distressed throughout maternity can lead to increased pressure which may introduce complexities for instance, premature birth as well as neonatal growth restriction. Increased stress levels on the mother can lead to poor habits such as smoking, drinking and drugs which are used as coping mechanisms for elevated stress levels which can affect the infant's brain growth, health immunity and social skills.

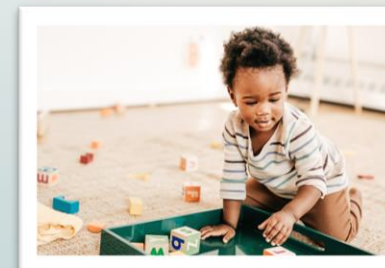
Public Health England (2021) suggests that the health visitor can aid quality and effective cooperation between the mother and father to provide the bond needed to navigate a variety of problems and provide advice on health. Thus, keeping everyone safe as well as engaging directly to complete a comprehensive assessment with the families, which can support the resilience and to identify any challenges with the child's requirements.



Enabling Environments

Learning (Community Plaything 2011)

Birth to 5 matters (no date) claims that an enabling environment can provide protection for the child, assistance and involvement. This creates an opportunity for the child to gain knowledge throughout their own choice to learn, as well as enquire within their play and environment by allowing the child the option to move freely among activities and encounters. This helps the child connect with others within their environment and is supported by the theory of Froebel, which looks at independence in collaboration and providing freedom with guidance to move within the activity with structure from the encouraging practitioner.





Challenges

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National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Learning (2021) claims that there are numerous parents with mental illness difficulties which could influence the child's growth, depending on the intensity of the mental health issues and the age and developmental stage of the child. There are several challenges that can influence this which include, divorce, unemployment, financial difficulty, lacklustre housing, limited social assistance, drug use as well as domestic issues. If the parents are facing multiple challenges at the same time, it can hinder the parents' ability to provide the child with security, affection and devoted care.



Davis (2021) highlights that professional love is a fundamental part of the quality of support provided by the carer. Providing care in practice can be linked to professional love, who Dr Jools Page relates to as a caring relationship which can develop in the classroom among the child and adult. This is viewed differently to maternal affection, as it does not replace the maternal love and is an alternative, defined as professional love through showing a caring relationship between the practitioner and child. The practitioner can show signs of affection, kindness and contact which can provide reassurance and support when the child is not at home.

Schoenmakers *et al.* (2022) has highlighted the coronavirus which has had a substantial impact on expectant mothers towards anxiety, the mother-to-child transmission, the lack of communication between others as well the lack of the father's presence during the appointments and birth. These factors could influence emotional health as well as cause stress upon the mother and baby. Hogg and Mayes (2022) claims that the effect of the virus on the children born during the pandemic, has had a detrimental influence on development through the delay of communication skills, several children have fallen behind academically. Kids Inc Nurseries (2022) has indicated that there was a decline in social interactions for the parents and children. This has isolated the children to only have their nearby close family as support, losing the opportunities to interact with grandparents, friends as well as the world outside. Having more opportunities for the child to spend time with people who are not their direct family, promotes the child's speech and communication developments.



Enviroment

Care for kids (2023) has used examples of the Froebel theory to claim that nature is an educational environment, it is considered that being outdoors is an ideal environment for improving the child's senses, inquisitiveness as well as having the option to appreciate the environment. Outdoor activities are equivalent to gardening and being surrounded by flowers, animals in addition to inspecting realistic materials which are all fundamental aspects of the Froebel method. Creating connections with nature enhances the child's awareness with science and furthermore, the atmosphere encourages the physical well-being and emotional attachment to the natural world. Natural Resources Wales (no date) claims that Wales has the greatest holistic learning environment due to its greenery surroundings, which has been proven to support development and clear focus as well as enabling children to concentrate and perform mind mapping activities and thinking critically.



Different types of activities

Terrific Teaching Solutions (2019d) identifies that having an area with black and white items to explore a variety of sensory items will provide the child encouragement to early developing schemas. This offers a safe space and enhances the child's sensory experiences. During this time, children need a great deal of stimulation and encouragement. Providing sensory items such as, textured materials can ignite the children's curiosities. Tiny love (2024b) identifies the benefits of black and white visual illustrations, as this stimulates the growth of an optic nerve which could motivate the infant with cognitive development without over-stimulating them. When providing the visual stimulation for babies, the greatest way to support them is to increase tummy time which engages the muscles in the eyes and brain to coordinate and function correctly.



National health service (2021) point outs that reading books to the infant creates a connection as well as providing a good psychological well-being, just prior to the infant learning to talk they will appreciate the early years practitioner or parents reading as they are hearing the sounds, rhythms as well as the speech.

According to Daly and Beloglovsky (2014) providing loose parts which are items that can captivate, offer delightfulness and are tangible objects, in addition to items handled during the child's moments of play, Furthermore, these items can provide the child with complicated tasks and an educational opportunity, this can also initiate creativeness. Loose parts can provide an added temptation and moments of inquisitiveness by providing added interest with several objects which may include pebbles, acorns and many other items. This can strengthen the children's curiosity and understanding. Louv (2024) points out that children have shown signs of creativeness, strengthened social skills, improved ability to cope with problems and support inclusion, when presented with ordinary everyday items.



Activities

(Early Years Environment from TTS Group, 2019c).



Scoop (Teaching Littles 2023)



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Zone (Terrific Teaching Solutions 2019a)



Tales (Tiny Love 2024a)



Zone (Terrific Teaching Solutions 2019b)



Holistic Approach

Berg (2023) points out that Montessori theory is a holistic approach on the purpose of developing the child's physical, social, emotional and cognitive capabilities by investigating the planet along with them utilising their own inspiration. This allows the child the option to determine their own development rate to shape their self-confidence, independence and self-respect which can establish a foundation for continuation of learning throughout the child's life. The Montessori theory is a teaching approach which is proven to benefit the child's ability to discover during the initial years.

Inclusive Practice

Pacey (2024) mentions that early year's practitioners must guarantee that all children are involved. The children should not be treated in the same way. The teacher should provide reassurance that each child is treated fairly as well as being mindful of their personal interest and their requirements, in addition to supporting each child irrespective of national background, culture, language as well as economic situation. When providing activities for the children it is significant that all children can participate in the task, by contributing resources that reflect on the children's background.



Montessori

Wilson-Ali and Knaus (2020) claims that Montessori philosophy is a well-established approach which is used to directly monitor the child and to allow a clear connection with development, placing an emphasis on physical activities to inspire the children to mimic adults to allow engagement in real life situations. This enables the child the ability to carry out inquiry-based learning that can provide independence and choice based on resources they would like to utilize for their learning.

The materials create experiences for the child within the surroundings which are realistic life activities. This could incorporate pouring a variety of items, utilize utensils for instance, scissors and tongs, cleaning, the preparation of snacks as well as cleaning dishes. This can improve the child's independent skills as well as developing the fine motor skills and visual-motor coordination of the child. (Wilson-Ali and Knaus, 2020).



International approaches Reggio Emilia

Paques Dias (2023) claims that the Reggio Emilia Approach is child centred which uses the natural environment as a key area of development. There is a strong focus on Creativeness and Visual Arts. The model is directed by the interests of the child. The Teachers opt for a route of encouragement for the children to be inquisitive and the ability to express themselves in many artistic ways. The carers work in collaboration with the children to gain knowledge and interests of each child. This forms part of the requirements assessment of each child. This approach has been proven to offer a great learning experiences to accommodate many ways to learn.



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Waldorf

According to Croner-i (2022) the Waldorf approach uses a self-directed approach in education based on the child's interest which promotes problem solving, critical reflection, creativeness as well as social skills. This engages the child to be self-motivated by drawing, painting, modelling, telling stories as well as realistic day to day cooking, cleaning in addition to gardening. Furthermore, it could include creative arts which is stimulated by the Steiner approach. This curriculum contains physical, well-being, social, spiritual group-based activities working together to create an equal development path, which aids the child's progress helping them develop at their own pace in addition to time. Each child is encouraged to decide in addition to discover, their own method of learning within free imaginative play to provide independent learning.



Comparing



According to Our Kids (2023), there are similarities between the Waldorf approach and Montessori and Reggio Emilia which places a strong focus on the creative play of the children rather than the environment, which is based on a free form way of exploration in correlation to the child's interests.

Laurel Springs School (2022) claims that the Reggio Emilia method is comparable to the Montessori approach, which is based on mixed age settings that involve creating an environment centralised to the children based on several projects. Practicality and real-life scenarios are linked to the Montessori way of learning, while Reggio Emilia turns the attention of the children to other ways of learning such as creativeness and physical and visual imagination. The classroom may seem less organised within the Reggio Emilia setting because the practitioners encourage play based activities to be carried out anywhere within the setting. The Montessori setting may be built on a more structured way of learning, such as, having specific locations for the activities.

(My First Montessori School Online, 2023).



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