



Exceptional Care in the First 1000 Days

The First 1000 Days



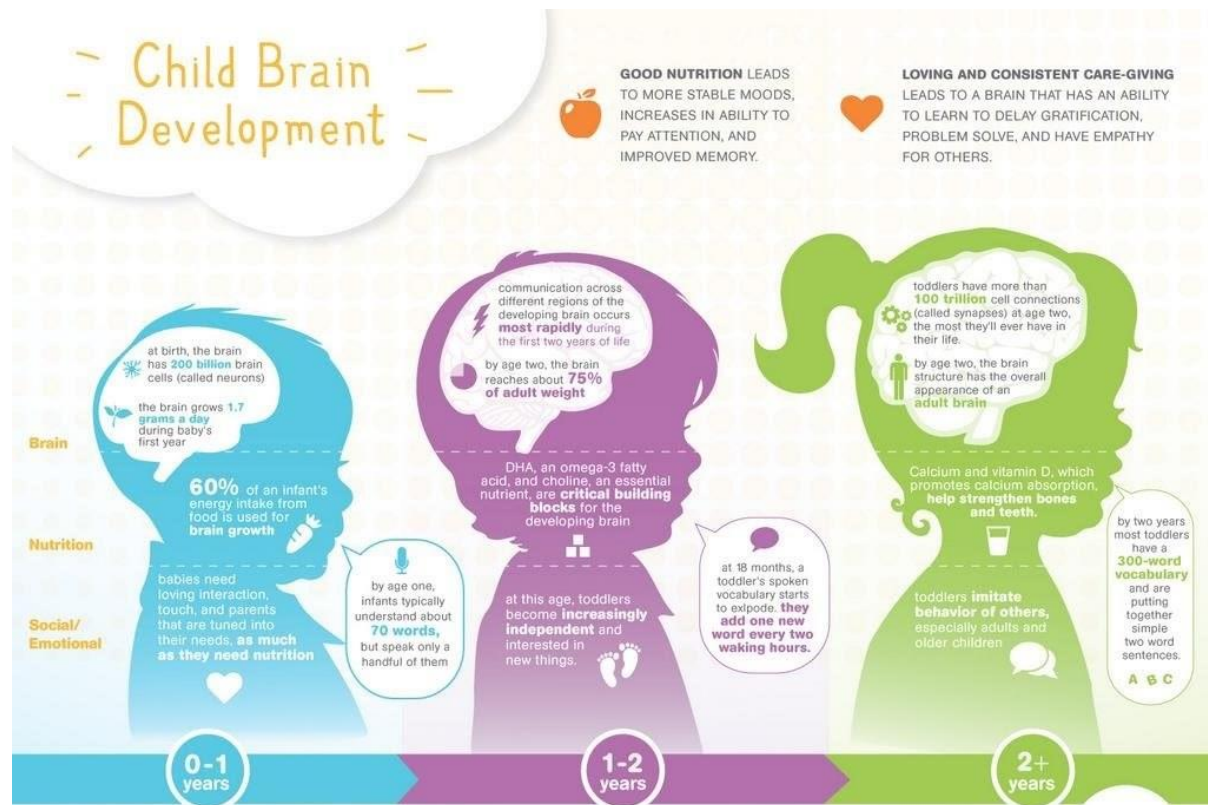
According to H.M. Government, (2021) the first 1000 days is the period from conception to the age of two years, which is such an important time as it sets the foundations for the cognitive, emotional and physical development of the child. Experiences during this time can affect the next fifty years. Babies are vulnerable and at risk of 'adverse childhood experiences' (ACES). Parental drug misuse, poor mental health, abuse and neglect can contribute towards traumatic events causing damaging and everlasting effects. Developing physical and communication skills supported by parents and carers is essential during this time and is when any developmental concerns are identified. If they are not identified during this period with correct support put in place, it can lead to problems in the future.

From conception until age two children are uniquely aware of their environment and development is affected by the attachment they have to their parents. Attachment, according to Bowlby (1965) develops during the first months of a baby with their mother and children can be at emotional risk if that crucial attachment was disrupted.

The Cross Party Manifesto (2019) states that a healthy pregnancy can set the child up for a healthy life. The baby whilst in the womb is aware of the environment, what their mother can hear, consumes what the mother consumes and can be affected by stress that the mother undergoes. Factors that can contribute to the effect of a teratogen on an unborn baby include health conditions, illnesses and age of the mother, nutrition and stress.

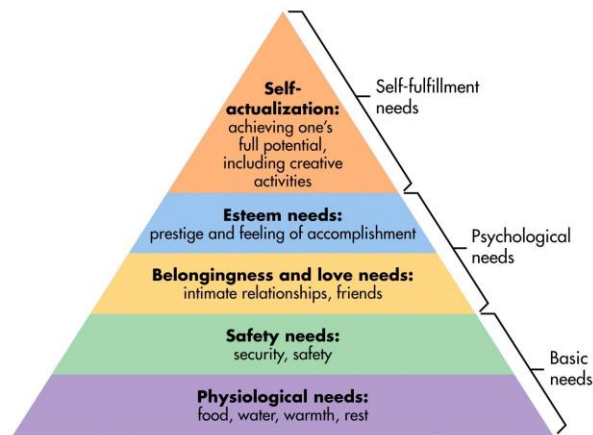
Parents and carers are the most important and crucial influences on the development of a child as is the home environment according to Save the Children (2016). Babies investigate from the very beginning and the way that parents and carers respond to them is significant.

Brain Development



Learning and Teaching Scotland (2005) states that babies brains start forming connections from birth and these crucial connections are made during the first three years of life. More connections are made forming development through interacting with other children and adults, and exploring their environment and investigating. The majority of the information processing cells in the brain are formed in the womb. It is during this time that connections in the brain are made and the elasticity of it is high. It is the experiences of the baby that build the connections and in terms of holistic development, all areas of the brain which are cognition and learning, movement, language and social and emotional, need to develop to work together. Save the Children (2016) state that how babies are handled, talked to, nurtured and empathised in the first ten weeks of life has the biggest impact on, and underlies the development of, the lives of the children.

Johnson (2018) describes how Maslow considered that basic needs such as being well fed, having shelter and warmth at the base of the pyramid enables them to build to their safety needs, social well-being, self-esteem and ultimately self-actualization. Without the help of an adult supporting the physiological needs of the child at the beginning, the child would not be able to move up the pyramid.



1 - Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Exceptional Care



The best way for a child to develop is experiencing a loving, interactive relationship from an adult who is speaking and listening to them and providing them with an interesting and imaginative varied play environment (Lindon, 2012).

Siraj-Blatchford *et al* (2002) are convinced that effective adult-child interaction is connected to good, positive outcomes for children.

Gopnik, Meltzoff and Kuhl, (1999) suggest that babies from one year old will look to a familiar adult for reassurance before playing with a new toy. If the adult does not give them confidence about it they may not play with it. This shows the importance of a familiar adult and how crucial they are in scaffolding the learning of the child. This shows how having regular staff and keyworkers for the

children is important so they can form relationships with the practitioner and the parents and carers too.

Brodie (2018) explains it is important to remember children need to be allowed to explore and activities should be child-led. Talking to a child whilst they are taking sand from the sand table across the room to the play kitchen and asking the child what they are doing, thinking, how heavy the sand is, encouraging the child to think about what they are doing and to lead their own learning. Talking in a language that is understood by all offers a rich environment to help children develop and build connections. The more connections, the more results. Being responsive to what the children need and want is important whilst encouraging independence.



2 - Exploring with sand

Enabling adults, experiences and environments enriches and supports holistic development. Experiences must be purposeful, hands-on and meaningful for the child. Modelling a happy and positive approach creates a rich environment for babies and children. The same equivalent opportunities should be offered to children of all ages to explore the environment around them. It is the duty of the Practitioner to ensure there is a balance between child-initiated and adult-led activities to enhance and deliver high quality interactions (Siraj-Blatchford *et al*, 2002) All opportunities should be grasped to enable the children to engage in meaningful activities, including eating, changing and sleeping. Talking through each routine as it happens will help the child to understand what is going on and build language development.

[Adult talking to baby about their walk](#)

Routledge (2018) emphasises planning in the moment, real-life, authentic activities, uninterrupted active learning and play and ensuring all children are engaged at all times. Even nappy-changing time can be a purposeful learning experience. Helping, supporting and talking to the children at all times is paramount.

Interaction, according to Vygotsky, affects the cognitive development of children. Adults need to ensure they interact at the right times to enhance this development of the child.

According to Johnston (2018), Erikson like Freud believes that personality develops through the stages so Early Years Practitioners need to be sensitive to the needs of the children at different stages.

Ephgrave (2020) points out that the adult should always go to the child rather than call the child to them and at their level. The adult should be interested, relaxed, open, smiling, watching, listening and waiting. Waiting being essential as they will be observing the child, watching, listening and

assessing before planning how and if they need to respond or if the child does not need anything, move away so the play of the child is not spoilt. If interaction is needed the child needs to initiate the interaction where possible and the adult answering rather than asking questions. Adults need to respond to children in ways to help them progress and then reflect on it.



3 - Practitioners going down to level of child

Current Challenges



Covid-19 has brought challenges to the childcare setting and whilst there is data, there is not enough to fully understand the full effects. Tyre, Knight and Borrás (2021) suggest that development has been impacted on social, emotional, cognitive, physical, speech and language development and health. This is due to some children suffering from bereavement, having parents with long Covid, not being able to attend settings to get their usual support and living in low income and poverty affected families. This is supported in settings by offering opportunities they may have missed and supporting them as well as their parents.

Another challenge is finding staff with the necessary qualifications due to the low rate of pay that childcare staff get. According to Weale (2020) one in eight childcare workers in England is paid less than the minimum wage with many staff leaving their roles.

Professional Relationships



A happy child who is interacting, developing and learning needs to have a stable relationship with the adults who are interacting with them and responding to each of their needs (Brodie, 2018). Children are astute and they gravitate towards the person who cares for them. Adults show they care in different ways, some are more compassionate and caring than others and children notice this.

“Professional love is about adults’ sensitivity towards the very young in their care and “reading” what is needed to make a child feel loved at any moment in time”. (University of Sheffield, 2015) This shows how all adults in the life of a child make a difference and how it should be a positive one.

Effective partnerships cater to all areas of holistic development. Children’s development is crucially influenced by parents and carers and learning at home is an important role in development according to save the Children (2016)

The experiences children have during their early years shape who they are and how they feel about themselves. They look for interactions from others who are modelling them and they learn how to mirror interpersonal interactions. Dellinger-Bavolej (1996) maintains that adults tend to exaggerate when speaking to babies with their voices and facial expressions. Without these social interactions, the children would struggle with communicating. These social interactions extend their learning opportunities.



4 - Exaggerated facial expressions being copied



5 - Montessori nursery

Montessori (1912) focuses on independent learning in a more structured setting whereas Malaguzzi, whose pre-schools in Reggio Emilia focus more on collaborative learning and have flexible, open-ended settings. Montessori children have the choice of pre-prepared activities and work independently at their own pace, be child-centred not child-led and decide when to snack, play and break, building on practical, sensorial, language and cultural skills. Reggio Emilia children choose what they want to learn and how and tend to work collaboratively in groups. The philosophy of Reggio Emilia involves all concerned with the development of the child leading to effective home-school partnerships and relationships (Thornton and Brunton 2005).



6 - An example of the different experiences within a Forest School.

Respectful Care and Meaningful Learning



Care and education come hand in hand. There is not a definitive line between the two. The Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings maintains the five developmental pathways, which are belonging, communication, exploration, physical development and well-being. Practitioners need to have skills to be able to observe the children and provide them with authentic, engaging experiences in an interesting environment. It also highlights the fact that the “experiences, knowledge and skills needed for lifelong learning, active citizenship and future employment begin in the early years”. [A Curriculum for Funded Non-maintained Nursery Settings](#) (2021).

Every child is unique and holistic development is important in developing the needs of every child, through pedagogy. This enables children to become ambitious, capable learners, enterprising, creative contributors, ethical, informed citizens and healthy, confident individuals. Professionals showing happy, compassionate attributes model to the children how to challenge themselves, to encourage risk-taking and to take to the next step. This helps their resilience, independence and confidence. [A Curriculum for Funded Non-maintained Nursery Settings](#) (2021).

One of Pikler Principles is a respectful relationship with a trusted carer especially bodily care. To facilitate natural gross and fine motor progression, the environment needs to be appropriate. A Pikler Style nappy changing table encourages the baby to move safely and freely. Duncombe, (2019)

mentions that loose clothing rather than tight trousers or skirts enable the baby or infant to move more freely.

According to Vamos (2015), Pikler babies are free to move about without time limits with a little risk. These children learn from experience and the supporting adult supports and does not lead.

United Nation's Children's Fund (2011) state children need at every stage of their development, to be listened to. They are encouraged to have a 'voice' and be supported with holistic development, unique needs and skills and listened to with respect and empathy.

Roberts (2010) points out the first stage of play is to watch and explore, followed by the second level of acquiring new skills and the third level of play, imagination and creativity. This is about putting the experiences of the children and their own perceptions together with their skills and using it. They have their own thinking patterns and need the opportunity to use these patterns, connecting, enveloping, enclosing, rotation, trajectory and transporting into play.

The Environment and Activities



An enabling and inclusive environment is fundamental (Early Education 2012). Settings must offer resources that are stimulating and relevant to all cultures and communities of the children. All children must be treated equally and resources including toys, books and activities to enable the children to explore their environment and develop their identities. Equal opportunities must be provided to all children whatever their needs according to The Additional Learning Needs Code of Practice for Wales (2021) which supports children from birth.

The environment needs multi-sensory experiences for children to investigate and be inspired by, whilst encouraging them to communicate and express themselves. Offering a variety of materials and objects such as loose parts encourages crucial thinking, problem-solving and creativity (A Curriculum for Funded Non-maintained Nursery Settings 2021).



7 - Sensory

The outdoor environment, including forest school, is important to the holistic development of children (Ephgrave, 2020).

According to Ephgrave, (2020), the calm and consistent environment plays an important part of the setting, supporting the children to be fully engaged in play that is purposeful, of their own choice and interest. This included indoors and outdoors. Children should have access to outdoors at all times. Children all have different interests and rather than trying to meet each one by giving a cardboard box that can be turned into a car, ship, rocket, it will be much more beneficial. Tuft trays with different bits and pieces offer lots of imagination and ideas for children.

Pikler invented the Pikler triangle allowing children to be hands on and develop skills. They can risk assess themselves. It makes a vast difference in their physical development but also in other areas. Scarves and musical instruments can be added. Pikler believed a baby should not be made to stand up, sit up and walk but to do as and when it was ready. Encouraging the child to reach without adult intervention develops motor development. He disagreed with the use of walkers, chairs and prams to encourage the child to learn through experience.



8 - Pikler triangle

Outdoor areas containing sand, mud and mixtures, investigation opportunities, water, spaces to run and jump, bit and pieces, music and dancing, mark-making, reading area, role-play and woodwork all contribute to the enabling environment (Ephgrave, 2020).



9 - Water play

Tovey (2007) suggests that being in the outdoor environment provides the young children with fresh air and open spaces contributing to the health and well-being of the child including their sense of freedom.

Watts (2013) claims that outdoor environment offers learning opportunities for holistic development. However, Roger and Evans (2006) argues that outdoor provision is more complex and sustained than indoor play.

Moss (2012) and Ephgrave (2020) place an emphasis on outdoor learning to enable children to connect with the natural world.



10 - Outdoor sand play

Smith (2002) points out that according to the Bruner 1960 theory of cognitive growth, the development of a child is influenced by environmental and experiential factors so positive experiences should be offered to the child. Treasure baskets containing all sorts of sensory items offer these experiences.

According to Ephraive (2018), Planning in the Moment displays the critical role of the adult in promoting child-initiated learning. It helps Early Years Practitioners develop their confidence, enabling the children to live, learn, play and develop. To make a difference, adults need to seize the moment when children show curiosity and support their next steps right away.

Solly (2014) and Andrews (2012) believe that adventure, risk and challenge in the early years has been around many years as illustrated by McMillan(1930) who stated infants need a rich, stimulating environment together with a holistic approach. They develop playing indoors and outdoors and with a variety of tools and equipment. Activities include loose parts, water play, sensory play to support brain development – touch, smell, thoughts, hearing, seeing, use of every day objects (natural real world items) which are risk assessed.

Tummy-time is all about visual stimulation, brain development and building strength and eventually the baby can roll over, sit and crawl (Mama Makes Books, 2022). Laying at angles and on sides to develop primitive reflexes forms the basis of what comes next with their development.



12 - Tummy-time and sensory

Children need to be encouraged to be capable, confident individuals and the environment is key (A Curriculum for Funded Non-maintained Nursery Settings, 2021). Goldschmied (2004) suggests putting together a selection of everyday objects with the idea that they will enhance the sensory experience offering opportunities for exploration. This could include a treasure basket containing safe and interesting objects all chosen for their multisensory nature.

Comparison with International Approaches



Carr (2001) was involved with Te Whariki, the bicultural early years curriculum for New Zealand. This involves feelings and helping children develop in confidence to help them learn. Practitioners create a learning environment that enables and promotes positive dispositions in children. Te Whariki is described as a complex spider web with the criss-crossing of strands, representing strands of development, reinforcing and supporting each making a strong, resilient whole.

Dowling (2014) suggests how seeds to enable positive learning dispositions can start at home with the practitioners developing these skills through nurturing via interesting experiences.

Wall, Litjens and Taguma (2015:41) state that Germany, Denmark and other Nordic countries also encourage a holistic perspective and objective for Early Years Education and Care, promoting socioemotional development.

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