



Professional Practice: Supporting  
Children and Families during The First  
1000 Days.

## The First 1000 Days



The first 1000 days are based on the timeframe of **conception up until the age of two**, within this time, the foundations of an infant's **cognitive, emotional and physical development** are set. This time is most critical in a child's development and is the most vulnerable (HM Government, 2021).

Babies are unable to verbally communicate during this time, therefore rely on their primary caregivers to **advocate** on their behalf. During the first 1000 days, some infants may have their disabilities or learning difficulties diagnosed, but for others when primary care givers/parents do not recognise these, their developmental needs are not met until they attend an education setting where other care givers should notice. This could be an early years practitioner or other care giver (HM Government, 2021).

## The Best Start

Babies are susceptible to their environment and are fully dependant on their caregivers to offer them the best start in life. Their development is **influenced** by their **attachments** with parents/primary care giver and the information and skills they have been taught within those first days.

A parent must provide their baby with encouragement and support during their development to aid the correct development according to age. Infant's who do not receive this type of support, are

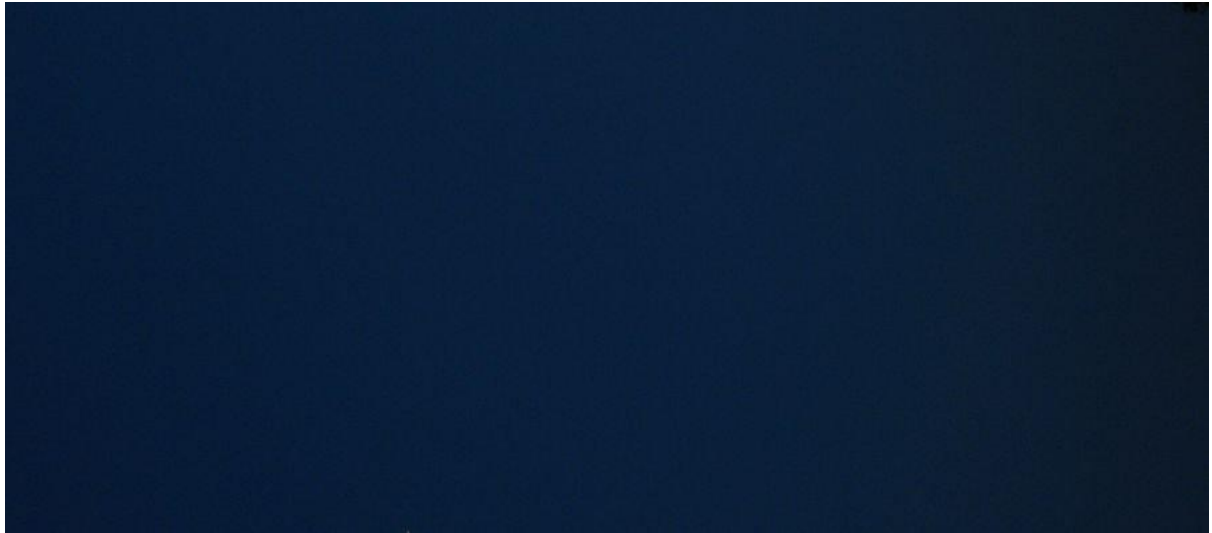
more likely to have their developmental delays unnoticed, further causing problems in their future (HM Government, 2021).

## Current Challenge in The Early Childhood Education and Care



During current times and difficulties, the world is facing, due to the global pandemic of Covid 19, a child's whole experience during their first 1000 days would have been affected in some way, if not many. Many families found that during the pandemic, raising their babies was a difficulty due to a **lack in support** offered to them and inequalities in babies' early experiences, all related and affected by Covid 19. It was recognised that, 7 in 10 mothers found it difficult to cope with their pregnancy or baby and that the changes brought in during the pandemic had an **effect on their unborn baby, baby or child**. Mothers discussed a lack in access to **mental health services** available to them. Families were unable to co-parent efficiently and **babies were lacking in interaction** with primary caregivers. These issues identified are of great importance when supporting babies and their development in the first 1000 days (Best Beginnings, 2022).

## Affects on the setting



Workers within Early Education and Care have had to face issues within the setting due to the pandemic. The Early Years settings received an increase in children attending and research has shown the **positive impact** this has had on those children. From attending, the infant's **receptive vocabulary** and **cognitive development** was positively affected. The setting suffered with staffing issues and shortages prior to the pandemic but many settings suffered a lack of demand at some point during the pandemic which led to staff redundancies in the workplace. Although since then, the **demand has increased** for the need of service and the setting has found staff shortage a problem again. A further issue to add to this problem, is that staff currently working within the setting are known to be suffering with mental health and this has resulted **staff leaving the sector due to their stress** (Hobbs & Bernard, 2021).

## Professional Values



Those who work within an early childhood setting commit to approaching their practice in an ethical way; the childcare, policies and procedures. Practitioners must understand their role in providing positive role models for the infants, parents and carers (Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years, 2022).

Within the Code of Ethics, professionals commit to meeting the values, principles and behaviours required of them in practice.



In order for practitioners to ensure they are following procedures and policies of practice they must ensure they, follow and promote the **principles for the children's workforce**, follow and promote the **values of the children's workforce**, aim to provide **high quality service** in practice that **supports each child** to reach their full potential and ensure their practice is in line with the following **ethics**:

- Honesty; being truthful when communicating with others.
- Integrity; acting in line with beliefs and values, keeping to moral and ethical principles.
- Transparency; communicating in an open manner with explanations ready.
- Reliability; being dependable and reliable.
- Accountability; being answerable for personal decisions and actions.
- Confidentiality; only disclosing information to third parties when needed to ensure child's needs are met.
- Objectivity; no side taking and being fair to all parties.
- Respectfulness; valuing the views, beliefs and behaviours of others.
- Lawfulness; following regulations, guidelines and laws.
- Reflection on practice; considering and monitoring own actions and reflecting on these to ensure they are in the best interest of the child

(Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years, 2022).

## Holistic View of the infant



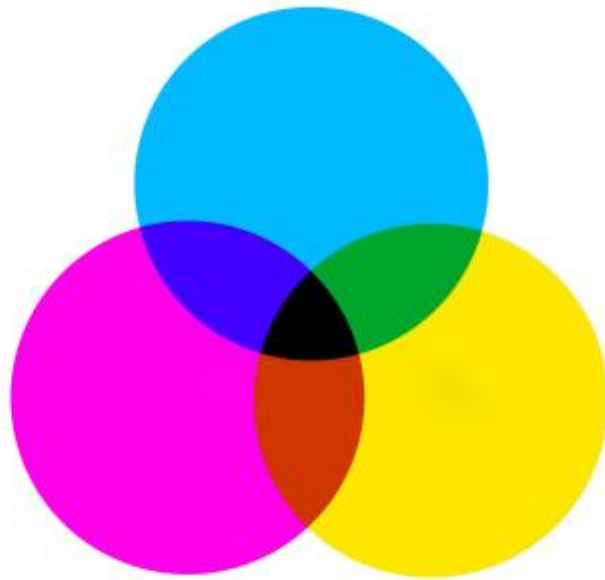
A child's holistic development is catered for in early years when practitioners, create learning experiences for a child's whole sphere of learning and development.

The **holistic development consists of the physical, emotional and psychological well-being** of children (Early Education, 2021). Using the holistic approach to teaching and supporting an infant means that, practitioners focus on their development as a whole, embracing their culture, socio-economic background, age and gender. When supporting this development, infants must be offered

- **Strong and trusting relationships**
- **Environments that are inviting and stimulating**
- **Practitioner's time to understand their interests and needs**
- **Use of open-ended questions.**

When children develop in early childhood, they should be supported to be able to develop at their own pace. A practitioners' role, is to aid this steady development and spend time exploring the infant's interests within a natural and welcoming environment.

This holistic approach when teaching, encourage practitioners to supply children with the opportunity to learn and connect with the natural world and in order to do this, they should offer the child with opportunities to interact, develop socially and take risks (Foundation Education, 2018).



Practitioners can encourage **holistic development** in early childhood, through providing infants with

- activities, displays and stories that encourage children to investigate and discuss
- resources and furniture suitable to age and development stage
- writing opportunities in both indoor activities and outdoor
- physical activities that offers challenges, risk managing and motivation to explore
- opportunities to develop sensory awareness
- making good use of indoors and outdoors
- good planning so that all children have access to all resources
- cosy corners to encourage communication
- daily activities such as fruit time, circle time and story time
- considering each child's individual needs
- display of regular, positive images
- encouragement to explore and be imaginative when learning, especially during role play (WJEC CBAC, 2019).

## Inclusive practice



Each child and their needs when developing can differ for a number of reasons dependant on **nature or nurture**. Practitioners must recognise this when creating environments for infants from new-born to the age of two. The learning environment must meet each child's **individual needs and be holistic** in nature. Practitioners must recognise and celebrate a child's **uniqueness** when learning and treat each child and family with **equal respect**, regardless of backgrounds, cultures, socio-economic background and disabilities. The activities should be suitable for **each child and their needs**. Through an **inclusive practice**, children should feel safe and welcomed, feel as though they belong, learn and develop at their own pace and **reach their full potential** (Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years, 2022).





Infants enjoy playing with simple things, even their own toes, but enjoy toys, sounds and interactions with others. A child as young as two years old, is able to **imitate adult's behaviours** and enjoy doing so during play. They thrive when looking and listening to stories, rhymes and songs. When practitioners interact in these activities, the infants become familiar with sounds and words. These words, sounds and gestures that have been learnt from interaction, **encourage infants to relate** with others and have learnt and developed, **social and emotional skills**. From this type of development, they are able to sense and understand positive or negative attitudes and emotions of others around them (Early Years Matters, 2022).

## Theorists of Learning



**Bandura** proposed his Social Learning theory and recognises how **children imitate learnt behaviours**. The theory recognises how infants learn behaviours and actions when observing others in the same environment. They are capable of learning and imitating both good and bad behaviours. This is something practitioners must be greatly mindful of (Brodie, 2018).

**Vygotsky's** theory believes that learning and development is greatly influenced by **interactions with others**, for children in early years, these interactions are between their peers and adult practitioners. Practitioners must encourage social interactions in the setting when planning activities. In order for children to interact with others, language is the form of communication. Babies are able to communicate when reacting to demands and use language to control their needs, this is the beginning of their social interactions (Daniels, 2017).

## Outdoor Learning and Holistic Development



In order to plan **holistic activities** for infant, the outdoor learning environment must be used and considered, alongside indoor activities. Children are being provided with the best holistic environments when learning outdoors. Practitioners must consider the outdoor learning environment and carefully lay out activities when teaching infants outdoors, a need to fence off certain learning areas or greenery may be necessary, when following safety measures.

Being outdoors for an infant **stimulates their senses** tremendously. They are able to carry out their learning activities whilst being able to feel the weather, smell and hear their outdoor surroundings, which **feeds their holistic development** in the best way (White, 2008). In order to offer infants a rich and satisfying outdoor provision which aids holistic learning experiences, there are six areas of learning that must be offered when outdoors:

- natural materials
- experiences of the living world outside

- water play
- physical play and movement
- creative and imaginative
- construction and dens (White, 2008).

Being outdoors is beneficial to a child's holistic development, children feel calmer when learning outdoors. They feel able to **play and learn freely** without guided learning by adults, it is enabling young infants to learn more **independently** (Brodie, 2018).

## Working with families



When working with families, practitioners must follow the **Code of Ethics** appropriately. Being ethical when working with families, consists of developing **trusting and honest relationships** and being able to **communicate** information on their child's development, to **support the development** of the parents' skills to enhance their understanding of their child. Practitioners must be respectful to these families and their **decision making** over their child, also respecting their rights to confidentiality.

Respect plays a huge part when considering preferences and **dignities of families**, practitioners should learn about their lifestyle, cultures, language, religions, beliefs and take time to learn from the families in order to support and build strength when **supporting the nurturing of the child** (Early Education, 2011).

## Positive Relationships



Creating positive relationships with **parents** is crucial when working so closely to their children. The partnerships between them and practitioners, play an important role when **creating enabling environments for children**. When there is good communicating and the sharing of relevant information between both parties, they are both able to cater to the **child's needs** more efficiently and aid development and learning for the child.

The child's safety and wellbeing needs will also be met through great partnerships. The **communication and trust** in the relationship will **support the child** during their settling in process. Parents feel more comfortable to seek support off practitioners and practitioners are more comfortable in approaching difficult or sensitive conversations they may need to have when good relationships are formed.

In order to create these positive relationships, a two-way communication of **listening** and responding accordingly must take place. **Trust, mutual respect and transparency**, play their role in supporting a positive relationship.

In order for practitioners to aid these positive relationships they must show empathy, show warmth and sensitivity, be non-judgemental and always show interest when communicating with parents. They should demonstrate these qualities right from the initial meeting of the child and parents in order for this relationship to develop (National Day Nurseries Association, 2019).

### Child and Practitioner

A child will develop attachment feelings towards adults who regularly consider **meeting their needs**. This adult would be a practitioner, when an infant attends an early years setting. The relationship that forms between the child and practitioner is important for the child's **learning, development, wellbeing** and their future success. A solid key relationship between them both is **fundamental** to the child's wellbeing, cognition and learning.

Within the Early Years setting, a child is provided with a 'key person' to form a special relationship with. That 'key person/worker' will work closely with the child and family in order to gain a great understanding of the child and **view the infant holistically**; considering their home environment, knowledge, needs and interests. The 'key worker' is then able to plan activities for the child accordingly to encourage their development.

The practitioner can use a **range of activities** to encourage the formation of the relationship. One useful activity is the use of a 'Family Board'. The child can create a fun and exciting board, filled with images of their nearest and dearests. The child should use the board within the learning environment, where they can observe and approach the board and the key worker is able to then prompt conversation about the board and family members, further leading to in-depth conversations. The child should feel reassured from these conversations and interactions, further aiding a **positive relationship** to form with their 'key person/worker' (UK Government, 2022).

## Supporting infants with 'Care Routines'



The relationship between the practitioner consists of an **element of touch**; babies use touch to **communicate**, therefore the element of touch is important to them. A sense of touch such as hand-holding and gentle hugs can help with the infant's **sense of security**.

The practitioner will be needed to touch when offering **support** to the child during 'care routines' and the relationship formed between them would have offered the child with enough **respect, security and comfort** to make these routines less uncomfortable. These 'care routines' are known to not only be necessary to the infant's health, but they also encourage them to **learning and develop** overall. The routines can play an important role in the infant's holistic development. Nappy changes, eating, dressing and sleeping are all 'care routines' that practitioners would need to support an infant with in their first 1000 days (MA Education, 2018).

### Self-efficacy

**Bandura's** theory recognises how important 'self-efficacy' is for an infant. He recognises that self-efficacy is an important component in an infant's **development of self-esteem** and that a child's development of self-efficacy begins in their early years and is developed from their **experiences or reactions of others**. Practitioners are able to encourage self-efficacy during care routines.

Encouraging a child to carry out some personal care routines, such as wiping their face or feeding themselves are able to **support the infant's sense of competency**. A child can learn to become more independent and gain confidence during care-routines, when encouraged by practitioners (MA Education, 2018).

### Interaction, communication and language

Babies tend to learn and develop early language during everyday routines such as changing and feeding. Phrases and words care givers may use during care routines such as 'You're all cleaned up' are used regularly enough for the baby to understand and begin to use themselves. The infant is able to **associate actions or objects with key words** or sentences when listening during these routines.

During the routines, there is opportunity for an infant to **interact** on a one-to-one basis, supporting their chance to **develop language and communication skills** with the practitioner (MA Education, 2018).



### 3 - Hand-eye-coordination skills and motor gross development

*A child can improve their motor gross skills during care routines, when confidence is **encouraged** by practitioners to carry out tasks such as putting their own hat or scarf on. The putting on of socks can encourage a child to balance correctly.*

*These 'care routines' are also opportunities for an infant to carefully carry out the task, encouraging hand-eye co-ordination. Practitioners should **aid this development** by observing the child as they carry out a task such as feeding themselves, rather than take over and do it on their behalf. The infant should be **supported** and given enough time when carrying out tasks **independently**, as they are focusing carefully on their hand-eye co-ordination skills (MA Education, 2018).*

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