



## The first 1000 days

The first 1000 days refers to the time from conception up until the child second birthday, this is a crucial period which will influence the child's cognitive, emotional and physical development, as well as future health and wellbeing. (HMG0V 2021). (Nutbrown, 2005) suggest that babies are learning whilst inside the womb before birth.

During this period of rapid growth a child's brain development for the future is set up. (UNICEF 2013). However, there are many factors that can influence this process some of which will be discussed in this document.

## Current challenges



The covid-19 pandemic which hit the United Kingdom in early 2020, saw both schools and early years settings close their doors, with provision only being available to the children of key workers and those who were vulnerable, with either additional learning needs or at risk. (Welsh Assembly Government 2021 a).

(WAG 2021b) The Delphi study which was commissioned to show the impact of covid-19 on children under the age of 5, highlights how the pandemic has had an overall detrimental effect on the cognitive, social and emotional, speech and language and physical development across all ages considered in the actual study, with social and emotional development reported as being affected the most negatively followed by speech and language development.

Language is an intrinsic part of a child's holistic development as language is needed to communicate social and emotional needs of a child. (Brodie, K. 2018). Practitioners can support language development by supplying an environment that is interesting and rich in language, an example of this in practice could be singing, the repetitive nature of nursery rhymes means that the child can become familiar with them in a brief time, and quickly become confident enough to take part.

Similarly early years practitioners also found that the restrictions in place to combat the spread of covid-19 had influenced the development of children returning to the setting after the first National lockdown. Children were anxious and reluctant to be separated from their parent or carers, which was not surprising considering how much time they had spent in the home during the preceding months. Some having even regressed in certain areas of development, particularly personal, social and emotional development, practitioners saw some children returning to using dummies for

comfort, and even using nappies when previously toilet trained. (Office For Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills 2020) OFSTED . In practice by having a key worker system in place allows the child to build and develop a relationship based on trust with the practitioner enabling them to become more confident in being away from the main caregiver.

Fox, L. *et al.* / University of York (no date) Suggests that after the lockdown had ended and early years settings were once again open to all, many parents who were at this time still working from home decided to keep their children at home also, as a result the home environment will have bigger impact on children's development and their outcomes than if they were accessing play opportunities in a setting.

Many parents find that putting their child into an early years setting can be emotional and challenging time, for both the parent and the child. (Tassoni, P. 2014). A good relationship and trust between parents and the setting essential not only during the settling in process but throughout the family's journey. (Cardiff Council 2021). However, during the pandemic many families have been apprehensive about sending their child to setting deciding that they would be safer at home.

In Cardiff, the Welsh Assembly Government Programme Flying Start, allowed parents to put their child's placement on hold until such time that they felt confident to allow them to attend. ( Hannay, J. 2020). This situation made it less than ideal for families and the setting to connect and build on the relationships. To lessen the impact of this barrier the practitioner could, keep in regular contact with the family by telephone and or other means of digital communication, such as Teams and Zoom, give the family a virtual tour of the setting, send pictures of setting staff, particularly the child's key worker, so they become familiar with the practitioners and the environment. It would also be good practice to share the risk assessments and cleaning routines of the setting relating to the prevention of covid, reassuring parents that everything is being done to keep the children safe .

## Respectful care and adults



At the time of birth babies are born with around 100 billion neurons in the brain, connections between the neurons are formed through repeated experiences and routines, as well as forming attachments with the adults around them. Graham, G / University of Maine (2011).

( Ebbeck, Warriar and Goh 2018) Agree that babies are born with a brain ready and able to learn, however, to do so they will need an adult or adults to engage in meaningful interactions, and care practices based on their individual needs to begin making connections for cognitive development. It is the role of the early years practitioner to provide these opportunities.

Although born vulnerable and helpless babies can communicate their needs to the adults around them through cues for example a baby may display rooting or sucking this could be a sign that they are tired, yawning or rubbing their eyes can show that the baby is tired, while if the baby is seen to be straining and making a grunting noise could suggests that the baby is going to the toilet and may need a nappy change soon. (National Health Service 2018). It is therefore the role of the practitioner to have an in-depth knowledge of the child they are caring for, by understanding these cues and consider that all babies are different, and they all have individual need. In practice the practitioner would learn about and understand the baby's needs and the signs associated with them through ongoing observation. And though information provided by the baby's family, such as likes and dislikes, as well as their routines

Babies will also communicate their needs by crying, when they feel, fear, anxiety, hunger or pain. When the baby cries the brain will release a chemical called cortisol which will increase both the baby's heart rate and blood pressure. In small doses cortisol can be helpful for the body's fight or flight system, as well as regulating blood pressure and the release of insulin. (University of Utah 2017).

However, experiencing elevated levels of cortisol over a prolonged period of time could be detrimental to the baby's future health including the possibility of behaviour issues and stress related disease in later life. (University of Utah 2017). As babies are unable to regulate their emotions or feelings, they will need an adult caregiver to do this for them. When their needs are met the baby's stress levels will regulate to normal levels once again. By responding to and meeting the baby's needs the practitioner is not only taking care of their physical needs the repetition of the routine will allow the baby in time to learn how to self-regulate. (Michigan state University 2018).

In practice it is vital that the practitioner always respond to the children's needs on an individual basis, as not all children are the same, for example they will not all need their nappy changed at the same time, or to sleep at the same time. Practitioner must meet the needs of the child and not the setting.

Everyday care routines such as nappy changing and feeding are ideal learning opportunities for babies. As these periods are usually quiet and a chance to have one to one time. Although babies are not able to speak this should not stop us from talking to them, in fact talking to babies can start whilst they are still in the womb during pregnancy. Talking to babies early and often will be beneficial to not only language development but also social and emotional development. In practice by keeping eye contact with the baby it lets them know that the practitioner is interested and ready to engage. Talking to the baby and giving them an opportunity to respond allows for a two-way interaction between both baby and practitioner, serve and return technique. The practitioner using descriptive language about what they are doing and what the baby can see and hear, will allow the baby to start making connections to objects and sounds.

During the feeding time routine many of the baby's senses are engaged.

Touch- The practitioner holds them.

Taste- bottle of milk they are consuming

Smell- Baby can smell the milk, and the scent of the practitioner, which will become familiar through repetition, fostering a relationship of trust and nurturing.

vision- Baby can focus on practitioner's face

Hearing – As the practitioner talks to the baby.

By becoming attuned to the baby and repetitive care routines the practitioner is not only able to satisfy the baby's physical needs but also reinforce the relationship with baby.

Pickler States, that hand gestures by adults are a baby's first connection to the world around them. And that babies need a secure and gentle touch. An example of this in practice is how the practitioner handles a baby whilst changing their clothes, they must be respectful and gentle, and communicate with the baby throughout the process telling them what is happening or what we would like to do. Practitioners need to be aware of the hand gestures being used and how they have the impact to negatively affect the baby.

## Experiences



Enabling experiences should provide the children with choice and independence offering learning opportunities that build and expand on their already existing knowledge. (Aubrey and Riley 2018)

These experiences should be through choice and not the schedule of the setting, allowing children to explore and learn at their own pace and provide the children with the ability to make connections between different areas of learning.

In practice a treasure basket would be an ideal activity as it will initiate curiosity from the child, promotes decision making as the child can decide independently which item they want. With young children who are only just starting to sit up, a treasure basket activity will give them the opportunity to practice the skills associated with sitting. The child will try to understand the object through their senses, such as holding, smelling and putting into their mouth (orally). and maybe most importantly the child is the decision maker, making independent choices without the influence of the practitioner but with their support. Both Vygotsky and Piaget believed that children should learn at their own pace and adults are there to scaffold and support moving that process. (Aubrey and Riley 2018)

Singing is also greatly beneficial to the development of young children. Singing to children can not only promote their communication skills, but also strengthen muscles found in the mouth, which encourages clear speech. (BBC 2022)

National Minimum Standards Sets out that in Wales all early year's settings must meet the adult to child ratio in relation to the age group being cared for, and that the environment is safe and secure. However, an enabling environment goes far beyond supplying safety.

To support the holistic development of the child the environment should be considered both indoors and out. Exploring the outdoors is beneficial to children in all areas of learning, particularly for physical development and well-being, by being outside children can move freely and explore the space around them, according to Welsh Assembly Government suggests that the outdoors should be the focus for learning. In practice the setting should show an ethos of free flow, where doors to the outside area remain open throughout the setting allowing the children to choose where they want to be, where practitioner lead by example and role model being outdoors.

Being outdoors will provide children with different sensory experiences, and therefore different learning experiences than they can perhaps have inside. An example would be taking the children outside on a windy day, the children would be able to see leaves and trees blowing in the wind, they would be able to understand how it feels against their skin and hear the howling noise made by the wind.

Connecting with the outdoors and nature can give children a more empathetic understanding of the environment and the natural world around them. In practice something as simple as planting seeds, taking care of them by watering them daily and watching them grow will help a child to learn how to care for and take pride in something.

The environment should be rich in language not only between practitioners and children, but also between the staff, this is an opportunity to role model respect and empathy towards others.

A relaxed and calm approach in the environment is needed in to ensure that the children themselves are relaxed, in turn promoting more positive learning opportunities. However, children are individuals, and whilst some children may like the large scale of construction play, or become engrossed in the wonders of messy play, some especially those who are new to a setting may like a little quiet time at some point through the session. So, careful and flexible planning needs to be given to the layout of the environment. For example, in setting the practitioner would want to place the quiet area of book corner next to a small world activity of dinosaurs, jungle animals or large block play all of which can be quite noisy.

The environment must be inclusive to all that encounter the setting, this includes children and their families, and the staff working at the provision. An example of this in practice would be to build a picture collage that includes the children their families and staff. To give children and the family a sense of belonging.

## partnership



The Te Wariki approach of New Zealand is a curriculum which is developed to reflect the local community, which incorporates the views of the people, things and places that make up the child's environment. Meaning the families of the children and the local community are involved in the planning process of the curriculum, this in turn reflects the cultural perspective of the local area. The curriculum has a bicultural approach, where Indigenous people have a place and a voice in society and can contribute actively on the implementation of the curriculum in ensuring that their cultural is part of the learning process. (Lee *et al.* 2013).

*Similarly, the Reggio Emilia approach* views children, parents and the teacher as working together as a partnership in collaboration with one another. Where the parents/ families are defined as a prominent factor with regards to the child's learning. The Reggio teachers, work closely with parents and consider helping better the development of the children. (Reggio Emilia 2015).

Bronfenbrenner's social ecological system theory strongly suggest that the child although the child is at the centre of the theory, the wellbeing of the child depends on many of the systems surrounding it, for example parents and the early years setting. (Hess and Schultz 2008).

In practice the practitioner will know and appreciate that the parents and families take the primary role in the child's life and understand and know them best. The practitioner will need to listen to the parent on how best to promote the child development. Taking on an inclusive role to ensure that the parent feels valued and respected.

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