



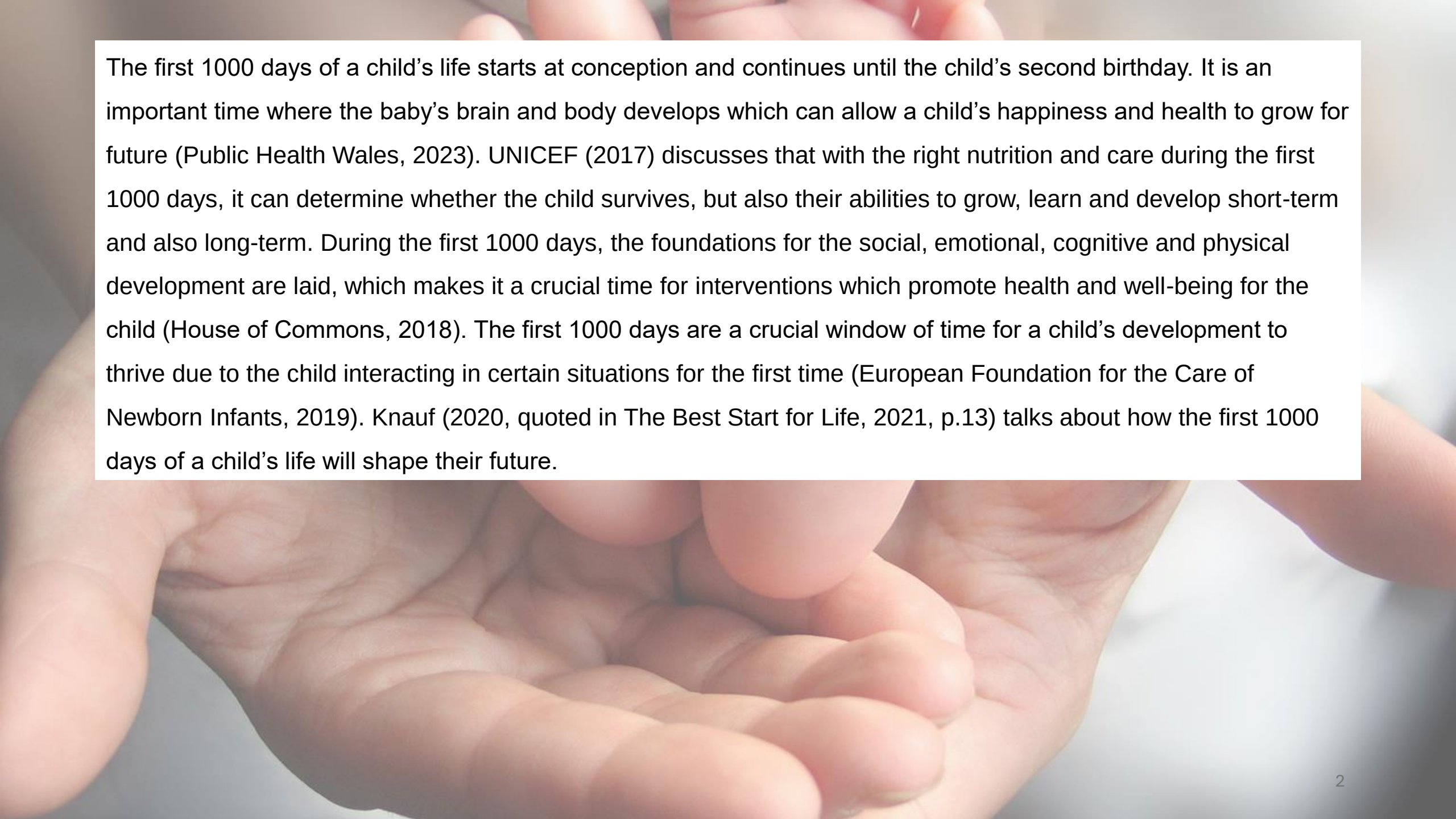
The First 1000 Days

Meg Evans

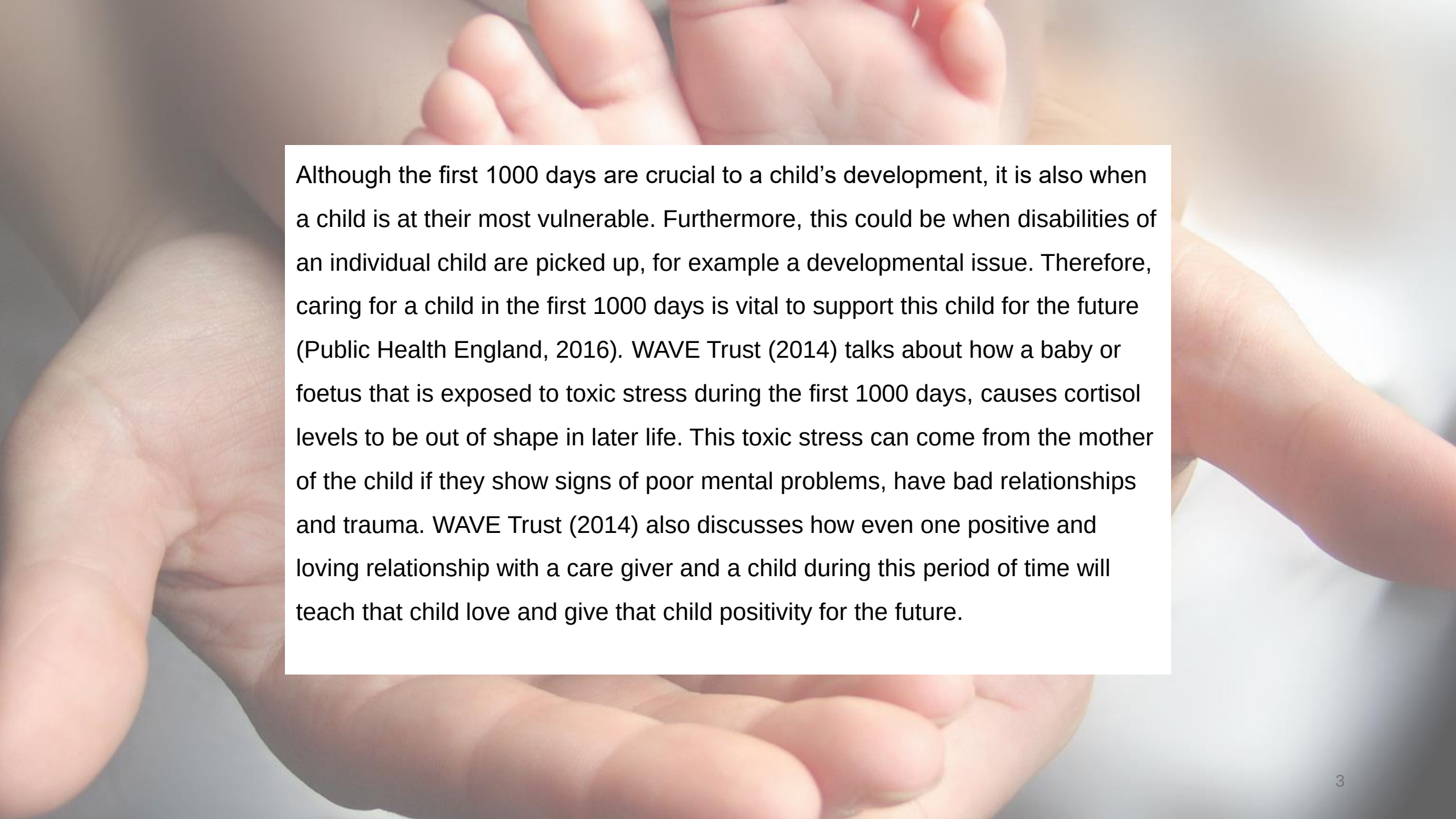
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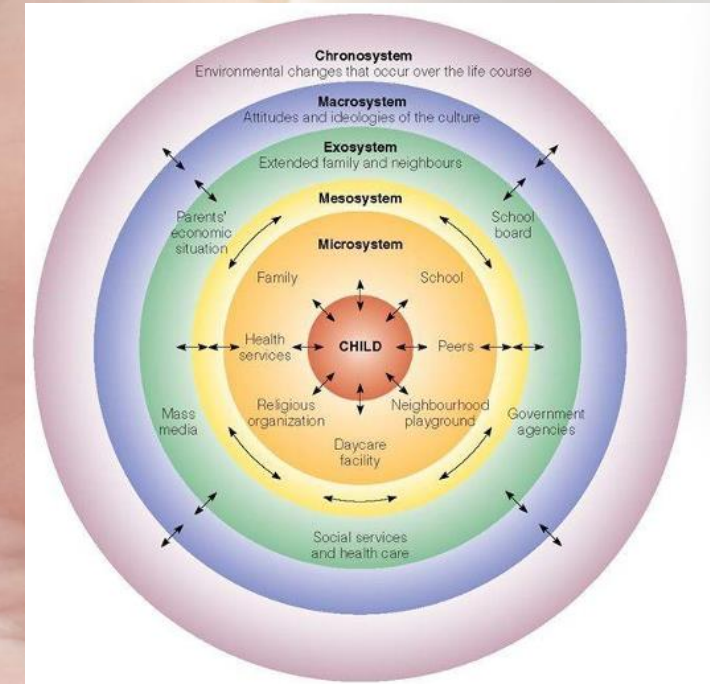
The first 1000 days of a child's life starts at conception and continues until the child's second birthday. It is an important time where the baby's brain and body develops which can allow a child's happiness and health to grow for future (Public Health Wales, 2023). UNICEF (2017) discusses that with the right nutrition and care during the first 1000 days, it can determine whether the child survives, but also their abilities to grow, learn and develop short-term and also long-term. During the first 1000 days, the foundations for the social, emotional, cognitive and physical development are laid, which makes it a crucial time for interventions which promote health and well-being for the child (House of Commons, 2018). The first 1000 days are a crucial window of time for a child's development to thrive due to the child interacting in certain situations for the first time (European Foundation for the Care of Newborn Infants, 2019). Knauf (2020, quoted in The Best Start for Life, 2021, p.13) talks about how the first 1000 days of a child's life will shape their future.

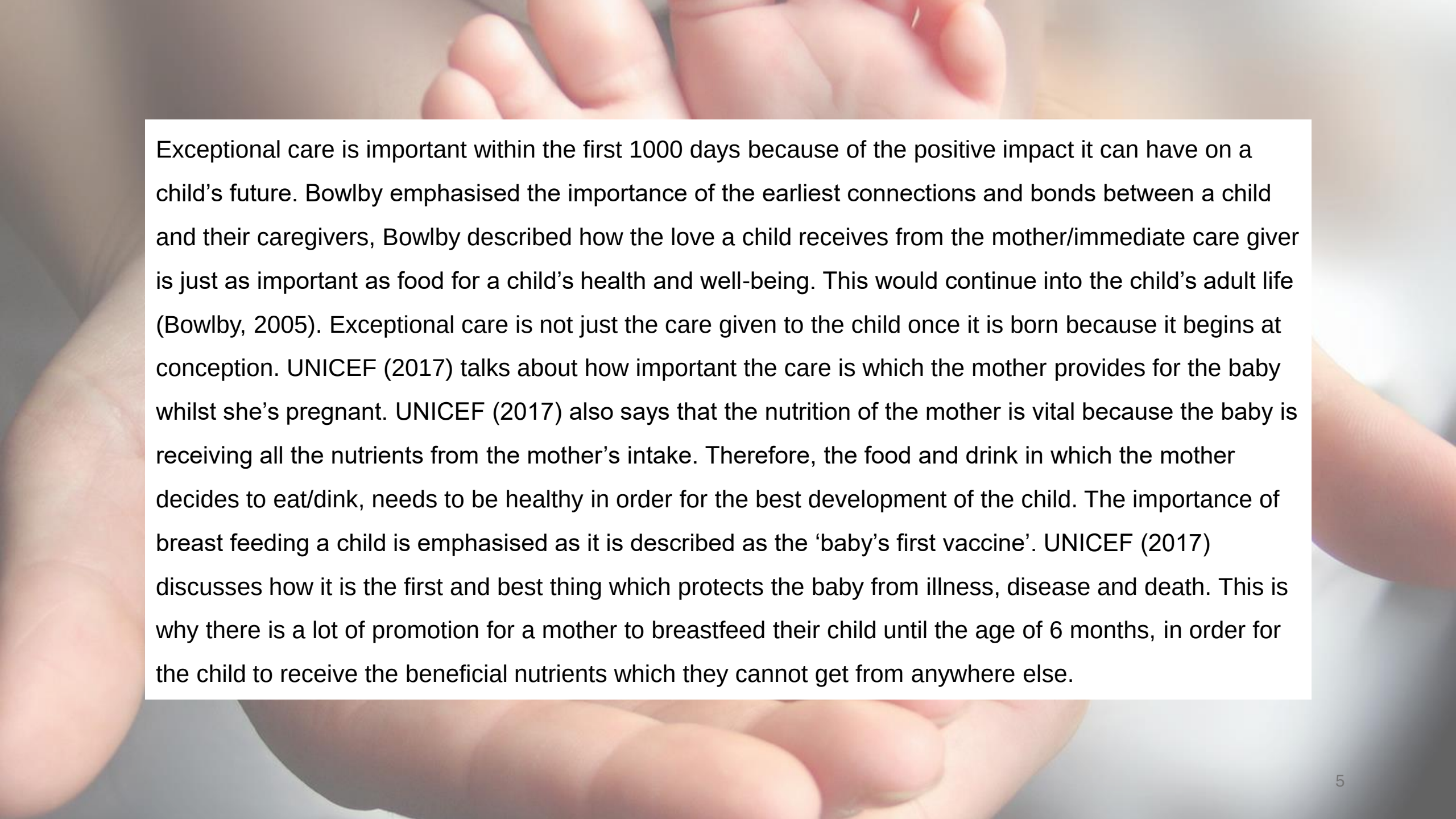


Although the first 1000 days are crucial to a child's development, it is also when a child is at their most vulnerable. Furthermore, this could be when disabilities of an individual child are picked up, for example a developmental issue. Therefore, caring for a child in the first 1000 days is vital to support this child for the future (Public Health England, 2016). WAVE Trust (2014) talks about how a baby or foetus that is exposed to toxic stress during the first 1000 days, causes cortisol levels to be out of shape in later life. This toxic stress can come from the mother of the child if they show signs of poor mental problems, have bad relationships and trauma. WAVE Trust (2014) also discusses how even one positive and loving relationship with a care giver and a child during this period of time will teach that child love and give that child positivity for the future.

Exceptional care is the respect, love and nurture which is shown to a child from the age of 0-2 from any immediate care giver. This is supported by Pickler's key principles which outline the 7 key things that a caregiver should provide a child with. Pickler suggests the importance of building trust with the child and how a caregiver should take the time to make daily routine tasks such as feeding, nappy changing and bathing, unhurried and a chance to create connecting bonds (Aspiring beginnings, no date). Hammond (2021) supports Pickler's theory as they suggest parents and caregivers must offer their child undivided attention as they are handling and tending to the bodily and emotional needs. It is said that if a parent/care giver gives unhurried attention each time they care for the child, they get 'refuelled' with human contact and attention, and the individual child is more likely to autonomously explore (Gerber, Greenwald and Weather 2012, quoted in Seeing infants differently: Magda Gerber's contributions to the early care and education field and their continuing relevance, 2021, p.1305). However, Bronfenbrenner discussed how exceptional care was not just the care for the child from the immediate care givers, it was spread into 5 different parts. These are the Microsystems, Mesosystems, Exosystems, Macrosystems and Chronosystems. This shows the care of the child from immediate environments but goes broadly out to government agencies and social and cultural values (The Education People, 2021).

Source: Public Health Wales
(2023)





Exceptional care is important within the first 1000 days because of the positive impact it can have on a child's future. Bowlby emphasised the importance of the earliest connections and bonds between a child and their caregivers, Bowlby described how the love a child receives from the mother/immediate care giver is just as important as food for a child's health and well-being. This would continue into the child's adult life (Bowlby, 2005). Exceptional care is not just the care given to the child once it is born because it begins at conception. UNICEF (2017) talks about how important the care is which the mother provides for the baby whilst she's pregnant. UNICEF (2017) also says that the nutrition of the mother is vital because the baby is receiving all the nutrients from the mother's intake. Therefore, the food and drink in which the mother decides to eat/drink, needs to be healthy in order for the best development of the child. The importance of breast feeding a child is emphasised as it is described as the 'baby's first vaccine'. UNICEF (2017) discusses how it is the first and best thing which protects the baby from illness, disease and death. This is why there is a lot of promotion for a mother to breastfeed their child until the age of 6 months, in order for the child to receive the beneficial nutrients which they cannot get from anywhere else.

Early years professionals have an underlying duty which must be provided to children in their care. This is ensuring good health of the child, providing meaningful learning experiences, supporting adequate nutrition and providing safe and secure environments. This is supported by the Childcare Act (2006) which states how local authorities must improve the well-being of young children in their area. The term well-being refers to physical, mental and emotional well-being, education, protection from harm and neglect and social and economic well-being. Early years practitioners should be enabling adults, in order to promote the best practice. An enabling adult is someone who is responsive, patient, flexible, supportive, understanding, an observer and someone who is knowledgeable about the early years (Do-be Limited, 2025). The role of an early year's practitioner is to provide enabling environments for a child within the first 1000 days of life. An enabling environment is a physical indoor/outdoor space which provides a child with space, high quality resources, displays, accessibility and stability. It is these factors which promote a child's physical, mental and emotional development (Hodgman, 2012). These enabling environments provide a child with stimulation and challenges, they allow the child to be able to explore and experiment promoting the child to take risks and make mistakes and to develop an imagination. These environments also allow a child to become quiet, reflective and promote focused learning. Birthto5matters (2024) also supports how enabling environments play a huge part in the development of children within the early years. It is emphasised that children's learning is best supported when a child has opportunities which allow movement, action, creativity, imagination, independence and collaboration.

Early years professionals do not only have a duty of care to the child in the first 1000 days, but they also have a duty of care to the child's immediate caregivers. This care is to help guide the parents in the best way possible in order to promote the child's health and well-being, as well as the caregiver's health and well-being. This is underpinned by the Childcare Act (2006), where this emphasises that professionals working in partnership ensure that families receive holistic support which is tailored to their needs. Public Health Wales (2024) also highlights that early year's professionals should enable families to flourish rather than telling them exactly what they 'should do'. These are some ways in which early years professionals would work with parents and carers: communicating effectively, work with the parents/carers to understand how the child behaves at home in order for the setting to mirror what home looks like, regular phone calls home to update the parents/carers and build trust, and to allow the parents/carers into the setting to help settle the child and to make the parents/carers aware of how the setting runs. The Mid and West Wales Regional Safeguarding Children Board (CYSUR) have produced 'The Right Help at the Right Time Framework' which shows and explains the support that can be provided to children, young people and families. It is split into 5 different support sections which are Universal Support, Enhanced Support, Targeted, Assessment for Care and Support and Protective Support. For example, within the Enhanced Support, these children can be defined as needing some additional support or extra help to improve education, parenting, behaviour or mental health needs. This support could be provided by a Flying Start, Chat Health and an Additional Learning Needs team (Carmarthen Family Information Service, 2023).



Source: Carmarthen Family Information Service (2023)

Some practitioners use the strategy of a 'stress bucket', which is a way of visually accepting and dealing with stress (Mental Health UK, 2018). Practitioners use this with parents/carers to allow them to be able to offer them guidance and support when it is needed, which can lighten the load on a parent's shoulders. Similarly, practitioners use an app called Padlet to help support parents/carers. Early years practitioners use this app to provide parents/carers with information about agencies and other job titles which can offer them and their child support (Padlet, 2024). Early years practitioners also have a responsibility to care for mothers who are suffering with post-natal depression. It is important for early years practitioners to look out for the mothers who show a persistent feeling of sadness and low mood, who are withdrawing from contact with other people and who are finding it difficult to look after themselves or/and their baby (National Health Service, 2022). A way in which an early year's practitioners can support these mothers is providing them with information about support groups for post-natal depression. This is where they are able to talk about how they are feeling and share their experiences with other mothers who are experiencing the same thing. The Solihull Approach (2010) highlights that one of the most effective ways for a mother to deal with post-natal depression is engaging in 'talking therapies. These therapies could include listening visits with health visitors, counselling sessions with trained psychologists and community support groups. Within the first 1000 days, there are number of agencies and support givers who care for a child and their parents/carers such as midwives, early years educators, speech and language specialists, social services, GP's and health visitors. It is vital that partnership working is effective, this has a massive impact on providing exceptional care to a child and their families. Working together with different agencies allows practitioners to share knowledge and understanding, be consistent, engage with and support families, share workload, improve outcomes, and individualize planning (Open University, 2024). Community Change (2010) describes partnership working as a coming together of different people/organizations to achieve a common goal.



Source: Mental Health UK (2018)

In order to provide high quality care to children within the first 1000 days of life, the parents/immediate caregivers need to have access to information and support from the conception of the child. In Swansea, there is an organisation called Jig-so which is there to provide support to young mothers from the age of 16-24 from 17 weeks of pregnancy and throughout the infant years of life (Swansea Bay University Health Board, 2024). The team in Jig-so is made up of midwives, nursery nurses, family support workers and early language development workers. The support is offered to provide holistic support for young and vulnerable parents, to promote the importance of early attachment and to educate parents on optimum overall care for a child (tidyMinds, 2024). Without this service of support for parents, there is a possibility that young and vulnerable parents will go without the important knowledge of care and love that should be given to their child. Article 7 from The Rights of Every Child, shows that every child has the right to be cared for by their parents (UNICEF, 2016).



Another possible challenge in providing high quality care within the first 1000 days of life could be if any organisation involved with the child or parents/carers within this timeframe, was financially unstable. This could mean lack of funding, which could result in issues with staffing, poor working environments, lack of training and a lack of enabling environments. As previously discussed, without having enabling environments for a child within the first 1000 days, there can be a gap in the child's holistic development. For example, having a lack of space for the child to be able to move easily and explore, resulting in delays in physical development (Birthto5matters, 2024). The Health Foundation (2018) highlights how poverty in organisations that support children and their families within the first 1000 days, should be non-existent due to the level of impact these services have during this time. It is seen that there should be 'priority goals' in place to help remove child poverty, in order to achieve a high level of development before the age of 5. A scenario which could cause challenges in providing high quality care within a childcare setting, would be if a child who was attending, came from a financially poor background and their basic nutrition needs were not being met. This could mean that they are not being fed regularly, which is causing that child to constantly feel hungry. Prado and Dewey (2014) emphasise the necessity for a child to have adequate nutrition in order for 'normal' brain development. This is especially in infancy because it is a crucial time for the formation of the brain and laying foundations for the development of the cognitive, motor and social emotional skills throughout childhood and continue into adulthood.

Meaningful learning is when learned information is understood by the individual person, which can then be used in making connections with other known information, this can then aid further understanding of information. Meaningful learning is important within the first 1000 days. This is supported by a growing body of research which suggests that children learn more deeply and perform better with complex tasks if they have the opportunities to engage in more accurate tasks and activities (Barrell and Darling-Hammond, 2008). These activities can create a growth in problem solving skills, support language development, build relationships, create a sense of world around them, enhance their memories and develop fine motor skills. A children's entertainment program which has become popular in recent years for children within the first 1000 days is 'Cocomelon'. Cocomelon is a visual way for children to learn, it is age suitable and repetitive. When a child is learning how to talk, it is important for them to have someone talking to them regularly because it makes the child familiar with the language. Cocomelon is a good way to keep a child's attention focused on speech. The NHS (2023) talks about how a child learns to talk and how it is so important that there is someone talking to them for the child to copy. It is also seen that singing to your child is extremely important for the child to tune in to the rhythm of language. This could be seen as meaningful learning as children are learning from what they are seeing and hearing, which will then help them to develop further understanding.

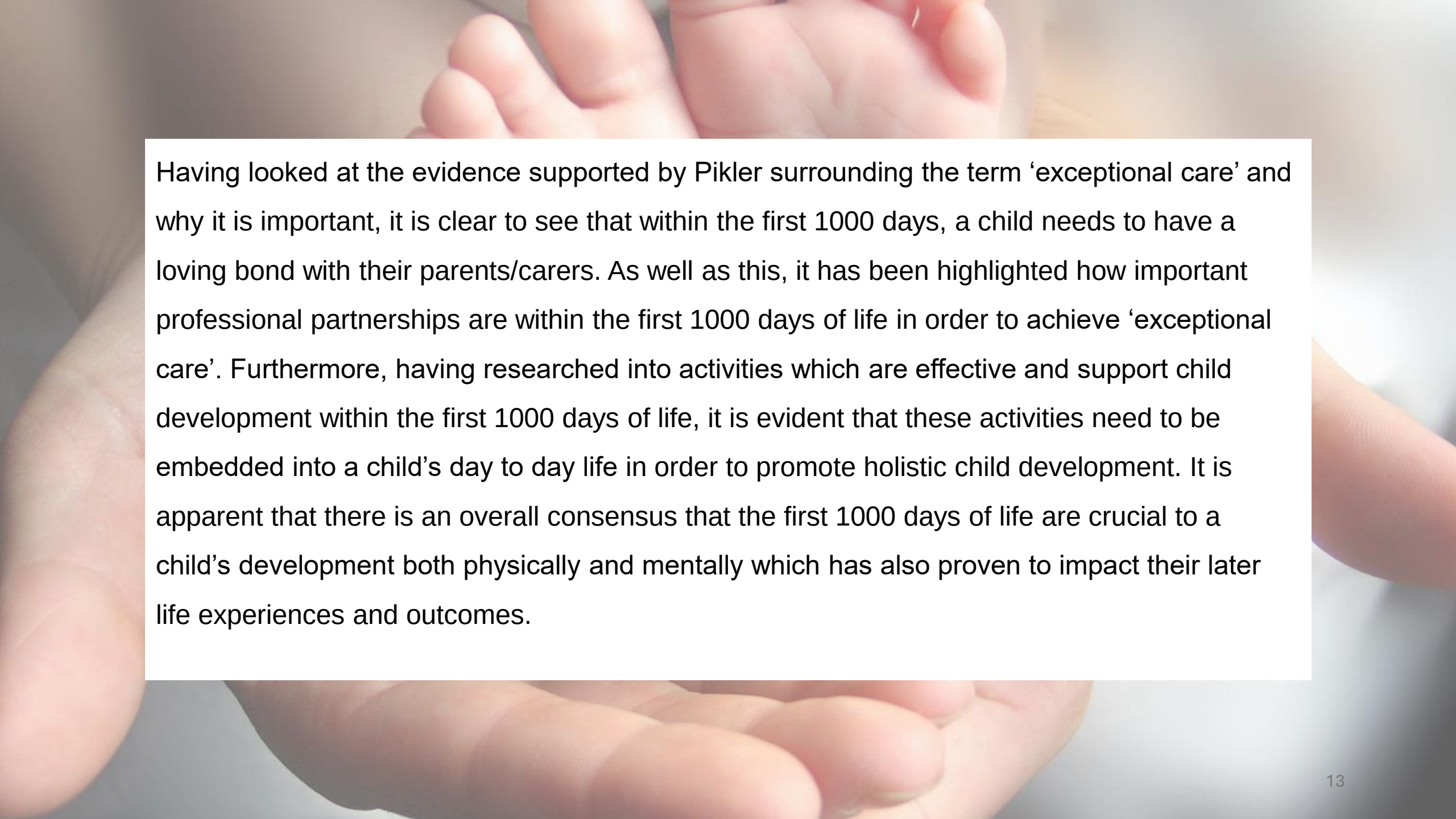


Source: Cocomelon (2025)

Even though Cocomelon is seen as a positive for a child's holistic development, it does have some negative effects on child development as well. When a child is watching Cocomelon excessively without any supervision, it could lead to having a negative effect on the child's language development. Studies have highlighted the importance of parental involvement in monitoring and limiting screen time for children to ensure that educational content like Cocomelon is used effectively to support language development in children (Ayu and Hadiwijaya, 2024). Storytelling with a child within the first 1000 days is also seen as an activity with meaningful learning. Nursery World (2019) talks about how stories can help children by entertaining and informing, developing their empathy for other people's situations and expanding their vocabulary and patterns of language and imagination. It has been discussed that telling a story to a child needs to be engaging for them, in order to catch the child's full attention. A way to do this is to make sure that you are talking in a child friendly voice, this makes the story sound more exciting to the child. Another way to catch a child's full attention could be using props such as finger puppets which are relevant to the story. 'Loose parts' is a type of play which is typically seen in the early years, it involves variable objects such as materials, shapes, smells, and other physical phenomena. Play Scotland (2019) highlights the main benefits to children due to the 'Loose Parts' play. These are happier children, better behaviour, improvement in cognitive development, greater creativity and imaginative play, learning about risks and challenge and more time in outdoor environment. As mentioned above, meaningful play is play that encourages children to develop their knowledge and skills. 'Loose parts' play is showing it does this through the development of children's risk taking and challenging.



Source: Play Scotland (2019)



Having looked at the evidence supported by Pikler surrounding the term 'exceptional care' and why it is important, it is clear to see that within the first 1000 days, a child needs to have a loving bond with their parents/carers. As well as this, it has been highlighted how important professional partnerships are within the first 1000 days of life in order to achieve 'exceptional care'. Furthermore, having researched into activities which are effective and support child development within the first 1000 days of life, it is evident that these activities need to be embedded into a child's day to day life in order to promote holistic child development. It is apparent that there is an overall consensus that the first 1000 days of life are crucial to a child's development both physically and mentally which has also proven to impact their later life experiences and outcomes.

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