



The First 1000 Days.

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1 - The first one thousand days of a child's life, from conception to the age of two, is the most critical period. It is important for Early Years Practitioners to recognise the significance of this momentous time of a child's life as this is when the foundations are created and building blocks are developed for lifelong cognitive, emotional and physical development. (The Best start for Life 2021)

Bushell, S (2022) states that this period of time is a unique window of opportunity, for the development of a child, therefore shaping the rest of a child's life for their future health and development.



2 - According to Cusick and Georgieeff, (2021) the first 1000 days is a unique opportunity when the foundations are built for the health, growth and neurodevelopment of the child. There are sensitive periods of brain development, the most rapid time of brain growth being in the third trimester of pregnancy and its highest period of plasticity during the first two years of life. This time frame is seen as the greatest period to provide optimal nutrition for normal development and although all nutrients are important for brain development, there are particular ones that are key at specific times of brain growth.

However, in developing countries where poverty and malnutrition is evident, it can weaken a child's development, inevitably leading to poor health, loss of essential neurodevelopment and sadly early mortality.



3 - During pregnancy the baby's human brain develops at an alarming rate, so when a baby receives the right nutrients from the mother this is the driving force that starts the process. Nutrients are required to create neurons in the brain, these neurons receive information and create synapses – this is key to the baby's learning ability. It is important to understand that if an expectant mother does not get the correct amount of calories, proteins and nutrients to pass on to the baby this can result in the baby becoming at risk of developmental delays and cognitive deficit.



4 - After the baby is born, nourishment the baby receives is essential. This is the time when the brain is developing balance, motor function, coordination and posture. It is important to recognise this essential development for the child. Breast milk contains a variety of nutrients that help with the development of the baby's brain. In the same way, the physical act of breast feeding involves mother and child interactions and nurturing. Experiences and interactions can strengthen and enhance a baby's sensory and emotional development which is critical for cognitive and social emotional development.

As the child enters the toddler stage, the brain is continuing to grow and develop at a quick rate. The child's neural processing becomes quicker and larger and can help the child to take risks and attempt more difficult tasks or activities. (Think Babies, 2021)

In conclusion, food is one of the most important areas to help with the brain development of a child in the first 1000 days. Without the key nutrients it can create long lasting damage to the child.

Communication



Care, A suggests that although babies can not communicate through speech, that does not mean that they are not communicating. It is essential to recognise that, as Early Years Practitioners, the language used, the body language and facial expressions seen, all help and support the development of babies and young children. Exceptional care and loving conversations make a child feel safe and secure but more importantly it is crucial for a child's emotion wellbeing. When babies hear the sounds they are making and the adult responds, this interaction supports the development of a child and self-confidence and self-esteem start to grow.

In addition to this, a key area of development identified in a child's life is communication and language. This can support a child's development and learning, making them curious and enthusiastic about their environment and forming relationships. If there is a lack of communication in a child's life it can become a disadvantage in all other areas of development, learning and forming positive relationships with adults and peers can be difficult because they do not feel safe and secure in the environment.



5 - Early Years Practitioners have a duty of care, to ensure that babies have an environment where there is language and communication, as it is an important part of child development. Babies need positive, happy experiences to develop and thrive.

Pikler - Key principles in child development.



Dr Emmi Pikler was a pediatrician in Hungary, who developed principles to support children associated with positive developmental outcomes. Her practices involved the relationship between child and adult,

experienced quality touch and interactions. Pikler's approach focused on supporting and respecting the child, opportunities to explore, learn and participate and feeling safe and secure with a trusting adult. Based on the ideas of Pikler, some of her approaches and principles are relevant and seen in the early childhood curriculum Te Whāriki in New Zealand.

Pikler identified full attention as one of her key principles. If an adult gives full attention to the child, it will receive this as love and can give a sense of calmness and stillness to a baby's life.

Creating a calm environment around a baby can be seen as relaxing and a baby can sense the peacefulness. The opposite of this can see the baby become over stimulated and the adult in care of the child can become stressed. (Hargreaves, V. 2019) .



6 - Pikler identified important times for building a relationship and trust with a baby. While changing a baby's nappy, dressing them, feeding them and bathing them are sensitive times, making the experiences in a baby's life pleasant and positive.

Pikler seen babies as being part of something, not just there to receive, when working with a baby. Communicating with the baby when doing something, not talking to them. (Hargreaves, V 2019).

Babies need to be free. If they are put in a position by an adult or carer, they should be able to get out of that position. If this is not the case, then the baby can feel trapped, which can result in distressed behaviour. The baby is no longer free to move in their environment. Children want to feel free, not restrained. When a baby is free to move, they become interested and inquisitive with their surroundings. They become interested to find things out and overcome difficulties, experience joy and satisfaction and build resilience. As an Early Years Practitioner it is important to recognise that some items can restrict the movement of a baby, this can result in poor development for a baby. (Hargreaves, V 2019).

Pikler observed children for many years while working in an orphanage and realised that babies need uninterrupted time for play. Some believe that babies need to be entertained, however if a baby has a safe, nurturing environment and freedom to move and explore, it has been recognised that babies can be quite content, entertaining themselves. These factors contribute to a baby building their confidence and self-esteem.

Finally, tune in to a baby. As mentioned earlier, babies do not need to speak to communicate. As an Early Years Practitioner, it is about paying careful attention to the baby's actions and noises and responding in a caring and loving way.

It is important as an Early Years Practitioner to understand how important an environment can be to a baby. Piaget identified this while studying children and recognised how intrigued and inquisitive children were by their environment and the ability to communicate and interact, developing their cognitive development. (Aubrey, k and Riley, A 2019)



7 - As an Early Years Practitioner, it is important to create an emotionally safe environment to support the child, this can help the child to express and regulate feelings and behaviours in a positive way. Working with babies and young children it is important to show care, compassion and kindness. This can help support with transitions and times of changes and uncertainty. It is important in this role, to have good knowledge and understanding of child development and the individual, to observe, respond and attune to the child and know when it is the right time to support and encourage the child to explore or leave the child to explore and investigate independently. Creating an environment that is communication rich, creates numerous opportunities of communication for babies and young children. Adults modeling positive communication and interactions in a caring and understanding manner will encourage the child to make connections with its surroundings, people and places, building resilience, independence and confidence. This will support the development of the child and support them to explore, take risks and challenge themselves. (Welsh Government, 2021).

Experiences for babies and young children are key to their development. All experiences can support independence and give opportunities to succeed and progress. For Early Years Practitioners, creating successful experiences for a child, will result in the child feeling safe and secure and support their social and communication skills. Positive experiences are required for children to develop and build their emotional resilience. Time is needed to be given, for children to recognise feelings and emotions and how to regulate what they are feeling. Experiences are vital for a child's cognitive development and an Early Years Practitioner has to allow opportunities for problem solving to take place. (Welsh Government, 2021).

Environments are imperative to a child's development as it can be the start of a child feeling a sense of belonging and awareness. Environments that are created for the need of the child support the development of physically, and help develop creativity and imagination. Early Years Practitioners who observe the children in their care, can identify and follow the child's interests with others or independently and plan future activities to support the development of a child in their care. (Welsh Government 2021).



8 - In the Birth to three matters framework, (2019) it is important that all adults working with babies and young children give exceptional care and understand child development. It gives guidance for effective practice when working with babies and young children and has four key aspects within the framework and four components are linked to each aspect. A strong child aspect focuses on the child's individuality and it is essential to support the child to develop a sense of awareness and identify for the child to understand it is different from other children. Babies and young children need to be recognised and most importantly feel cared for, a relationship with the child will result in the child feeling safe and secure which leads the child to have trust in that adult. The outcome from all this exceptional care and good practice will result in the child having a sense of belonging.

In a document by the Welsh Government, (WG) A curriculum for non-maintained nursery settings, (2021) there are five developmental pathways, one of them is Belonging. The WG states that Belonging is essential for a child to feel and experience happiness and well-being. All children start to develop a sense of self and with a strong and trusting relationship, this can help in the development of the child. These factors and experiences can contribute to a child having positive feelings and connections of the environment around them. It is important for Early Years Practitioners to have an understanding of a child's experiences, past and present, to build and support a child's self of belonging. Exception care in a childhood setting should involve consistent care and understanding, show respect towards the baby or young child. Ensure there are opportunities for a child to play, independently or with others, to develop social aspects of development.

With regard to play, child theorist Froebel suggests children learn best when play is at the heart of a child setting. He believed children are curious and when a child feels emotionally secure it is this sensitive time that play becomes a form of development. Furthermore, if there is a well-planned environment and rich provision, this will support children in interactions, developing autonomy and discipline. (Tovey, H)

The second developmental pathway by the WG is communication. This important pathway is described as fundamental to a child's development. It can be seen that communication is the foundation for building positive relationships, play and social interaction. There are a variety of important skills linked to communication to support the development of a child, for example, listening and attention skills which is then linked to building vocabulary and speaking skills. Equally important is the way an Early Years Practitioner can support a child's language development by modelling speaking and listening within a child setting and creating different activities to extend a child's vocabulary. An environment to suit the need of the child will give numerous opportunities for a child to develop expression and communicate their needs, feelings and thoughts. The link to effective communication will result in the child developing a sense of self and builds strong social relationships with adults and others. (WG, 2021)

The third developmental pathway is exploration. The WG recognises that children are very curious and like to explore their surroundings, investigating and problem solving. Therefore, it is essential that Early Years Practitioners identify and create rich inclusive environments, inside and out, for children to be given endless opportunities to examine and investigate. This can support a child's development, build their knowledge and understanding of the things around them and with the correct amount of support from the adult, the child will be able to extend the attention skills for longer periods of time. (WG, 2021).

Physical development is another developmental pathway which identifies a multitude of development for the child. It supports both gross and fine motor skills development which encourage children to take part in activities such as dance and art. Subsequently, Early Years Practitioners delivering physical activity understand that it supports a child's balance and strong core which supports the motor skills mentioned above. Repetition and variety in physical activity will support a child's physical capabilities, movement is linked to cognition development and learning, having a sense of self and well-being. A child will develop a greater level of concentration, motivation and memory. (WG, 2021).

The final developmental pathway is Well-being. It is essential to identify that the adults, experiences and environments in a child's life shape their well-being. It is important to recognise, if a child feels connected, safe and secure this will support the development of well-being. Environments, for a child, require to be emotionally safe for a child to recognise and manage emotions and behaviours in a positive way. The relationship between an Early Years Practitioner and child is paramount for child development. Children with positive relationships with a significant adult will have resilience, the confidence to make better choices and participate happily in activities, new and old. (WG, 2021).

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