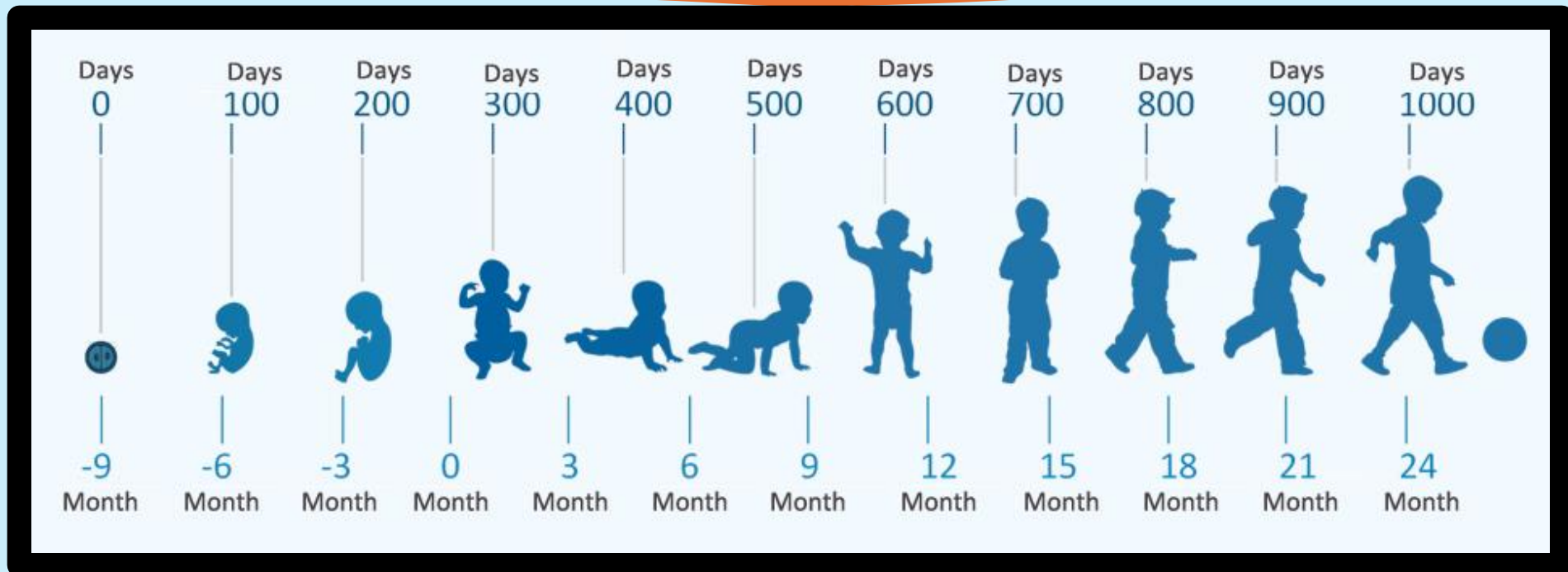


The First 1,000 days

‘Understanding the Critical Early Days of Child Development.’



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2858 words

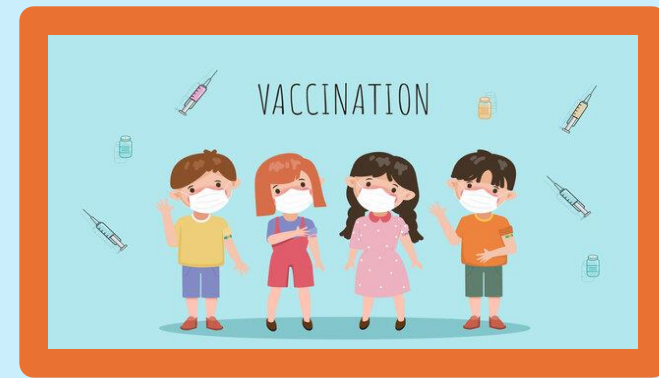
Introduction

What are the First 1,000 days and why are they important?

According to Karakochuk et al. (2018), the first 1000 days begins from conception to the child's second birthday. This stage is fundamental to a child's emotional wellbeing, physical growth, and the development of the brain. Additionally, Parliament UK, (2019), believe that throughout this period of increased exposure, the basics of a child's health and growth (physical, cognitive, social, emotional and behavioral growth) are placed, and a route is established. Barnardo's stated that: When a baby's growth decreases behind the norm of the first year of life, it is highly more likely that they will fall even more behind in the following years than draw closer with those who have had a healthier start.

The importance of Nutrition

Maternal nutrition must be focused on throughout pregnancy for the child's first 1000 days of life, or around conception and a child's second birthday. The baby needs just breast milk for the first six months of life. However, the child's wellbeing deteriorates when the mother's food and health are harmed. There is also a robust connection among diet, welfare and learning. The dietary consumption of infants, children and adolescents upholds the body mass and is adequate to withstand their natural growth and expansion. Some of the vital aspects motivating a child's growth is sustenance. Instant development takes place during infancy.





According to Likhari and Patil (2022), the ability of a child to grow, acquire and flourish is meaningfully obstructed by how healthy or how badly mothers and children are fed and looked after during this stage. This is due to the growing brain of the child developing and enhancing throughout the first 1,000 days. This is also the stage when the practicalities for their long-term health are set. Children's brains can produce 1,000 new neural connections every second during this period. The links that a three-year old brain forms deliver the practicalities for their future for it is twice as demanding as an adult's brain.

An individual's first 1,000 days, or the stage from conception to age two, are the utmost essential for the expansion of the body, brain, metabolism and immune system. Malnourishment is connected to many health issues, for instance obesity and impaired development. Research shows that an expecting woman's health, food and anxiety levels most likely disturb the growth of her unborn child. Following the birth of the child, the child's substantial atmosphere, diet and relationships could have a long-term result on their health and happiness. Throughout this period, a child's capacity to develop can be distressed by maternal and child diet and well-being. According to specialists, a child's growing brain and body endure permanent injury from not enough food in the first 1,000 days of life. (Likhari and Patil, 2022).

Caregiving

What is exceptional care?

Exceptional caregiving in the first 1,000 days basically entails supporting the growth of skills, offering inclusive chances to learn and enable environments for children.

Why is exceptional care important?

Exceptional caregiving is significant because it grants an exclusive window of opportunity to shape the child and their future. Exceptional caregiving is also essential for brain development, emotional security, language development and physical growth. (VNS Health, no date)

What is an enabling environment?

An environment must be enabling to promote exceptional care. For example, an ideal environment would be an environment that is warm, friendly and nurturing and enables a sense of belonging. An atmosphere should offer a variety of resources, which are familiar to the children and babies, as well as activities that are different to them. It must guarantee that the activities and environment offer space for outside and inside play, adequate space for children to move and work together, and support adventure and risk-taking. (Early Years Alliance, 2019)

An environment must deliver a variety of activities which aid diverse purposes: encourage creativity and role play, discovery of personal relationships and thoughts, problem solving, quiet time and thinking time. It is also essential to consider having a building area, home corner, numerous games and books, storytelling times, songs and painting. It is also valuable to confirm that the activities and atmosphere meet the requirements of all the children who are present, from very little babies to older children.



Enabling Environments

It is important to make sure the child is well and free from contagion or disease, breast feeding friendly zones helps bonding, having visually inspiring places allows for growth of cognitive purpose, open and harmless spaces will let children crawl, being outside can increase general well-health, safety measures will avoid injuries and decrease the danger of harm and finally, offering quiet areas will allow better sleep.

Why is it important to promote an enabling environment?

We already are aware that children are influenced by their atmosphere and the adults near them and that they pick up from entirely everything they perceive, overhear and accomplish. We have a duty to impact children's growth optimistically amid constructing a user-friendly and inclusive atmosphere in our location, one that values and celebrates everyone. (Welsh Government, 2024)

What is inclusive practice?

Inclusion is described to be the procedure of accepting all and involves dealing with changes via adapting. (Knowles, 2018)

What does inclusive practice mean in the first 1,000 days?

Inclusive practice in the first 1,000 days involves fulfilment by understanding their purpose, ensuring every child gets the support they need to reach optimal development, gives every child the chance to thrive, respecting diversity, reducing barriers, creating a healthier society and better outcomes for future. (Whitters, 2019)



Attachment theory (Bowlby)

Secure attachment formed with primary caregivers is crucial for emotional development. Children who experience consistent love and care are more likely to develop trust in relationships. Attachment influences self-esteem and the ability to manage emotions. Early emotional interactions help in developing empathy and social skills. Challenges in bonding can lead to behavioral issues later in life. John Bowlby's attachment theory posits that the emotional bonds formed between child and caregiver significantly influence development. (NSPCC Learning, 2021)



Professional partnerships

What is the role of an early years' practitioner in supporting children and families in the first 1000 days?

The role of an early year's practitioner in supporting children in the first 1,000 days are to guarantee good health, to deliver meaningful educating experiences, supporting adequate nutrition, being approachable and offering safe and secure environments. It also requires the practitioner to be open, alert, patient, flexible, attentive, support independence, endorses resilience, is compassionate, kind, someone you can look up to, is helpful and knowledgeable.

The role of an early year's practitioner in supporting families in the first 1,000 days are to be someone that offers assistance and care when needed, whether it be through them or other professionals. For example, parents could face problems such as financial issues, job problems, lack of sleep, poor diet, anxiety, family/relationship stress, health issues and so forth. The role of an early years' practitioner wouldn't necessarily be to find the parent a job, but to help them find solutions to their problems, provide general advice/encouragement and just make them feel better. Enable families to flourish rather than telling them what they 'should do' (Public Health Wales, 2024).



The importance of effective partnership working

Partnership working in the early years sector is essential for creating a nurturing and effective learning environment for children. By collaborating, practitioners can leverage diverse skills and resources to enhance educational outcomes and child development. Partnership working refers to collaborative efforts between different stakeholders in early years education including schools, parents and community organisations. It aims to create a unified approach to child development by sharing resources, knowledge and expertise. (Community Change, 2010).

Partnerships can vary from formal arrangements to informal collaborations, tailored to meet the unique needs of children and families. This concept emphasises mutual respect and shared goals among participants. Effective partnership working can lead to improved educational outcomes and well-being for children. Partnership working is crucial for addressing the holistic needs of children, promoting their emotional, social and cognitive development. It fosters a supportive community for families, allowing parents to engage actively in their children's education. (Department For Education, 2024).

Collaborative efforts can provide access to a wider range of services enhancing the resources available to children. Strong partnerships can help bridge gaps between home and educational settings, ensuring consistency in care and learning. Research shows that effective partnership strategies lead to higher levels of school readiness among children. (Open University, 2024).



Challenges in providing high quality care

There are a variety of challenges whilst providing high quality care. It is essential to recognise these influencing factors within the first 1000 days because you can find practical solutions and be able to achieve exceptional care. These challenges are:

- Financial struggles/ lack of funds
- Stress and burnout
- Lack of understanding
- Lack of support/staffing
- Health issues
- Lifestyle

Working in early years education can be greatly beneficial but faces several other challenges that must be addressed to ensure successful collaboration. Understanding these challenges is crucial for enhancing partnership effectiveness.

(GOV.UK, 2024)

Communication barriers

- Miscommunication can lead to misunderstanding between partners.
- Inconsistency in message delivery hampers collaboration.
- Differences in professional jargon and terminologies can create confusion.
- Limited communication channels can hinder effective dialogue.
- Language barriers, especially with families from diverse backgrounds, can affect engagement.



Differing perspectives

- Diverse professional backgrounds can lead to conflicting priorities.
- Varying definitions of success among partners can cause friction.
- Imbalances in power dynamics may skew decision making processes.
- Cultural differences can influence perception and approaches to early years education.
- Resistance to change can emerge when partners have entrenched viewpoints.

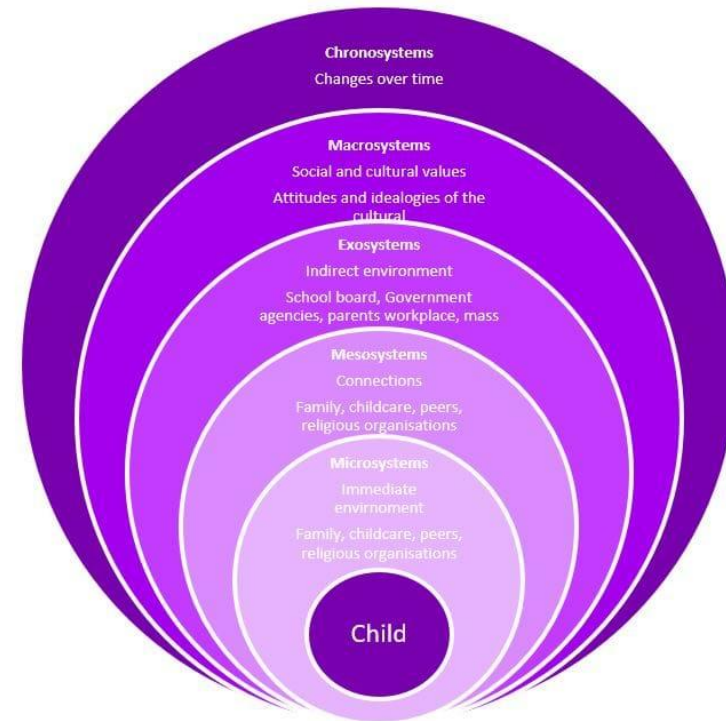
Resource Limitations

- Inadequate funding can restrict collaboration efforts and initiatives.
- Limited access to training and professional development opportunities affects partner effectiveness.
- Physical resources, such as facilities and materials, may not be equitably distributed.
- Time constraints often limit the availability of staff for collaborative activities.
- Variability in organisational priorities can lead to competition of resources rather than collaboration.

(GOV.UK, 2024)



Bronfenbrenner developed the ecological systems theory to explain how a child's environment influences a child's development. In his model, there is a hierarchy of influence levels. He puts the child, who comes with his own temperament and conditions, in the middle, or micro system. The nuclear family or Meso system has the greatest influence on a child's emotional development, since his first attachment is to his mother, or other primary caregiver. The community a child lives in and the school he attends, the Exo system, also have a substantial amount of influence of his social emotional development, in particular the early childhood program he attends and the relationships he establishes with his teacher or provider. Bronfenbrenner's Macro system or society, which includes culture, government and public policies comes next. The final system, the Chrono system includes transitions such as moving, changing schools, divorce and other life changes that can affect a child's social emotional development. (The Education People, 2021)



Activities



Loose parts

Play is a vital mechanism for cognitive and emotional development in early childhood. Through play, children practice problem-solving and decision-making skills. Social play encourages communication skills and emotional regulation. Creative play allows children to express their feelings and understand themselves better. Active play promotes physical health and brain development through movement.

Loose parts (or open-ended materials) can be used in different ways by children. There aren't any rules about what they can and can't use, and it is good to add many new materials and mix things up.

Benefits of loose parts

Time for exploration

- Loose parts provide the opportunities to the children to explore new and different things by themselves.
- Young children need time to explore the possibilities for creative play that these materials afford. Objects found in nature may seem new and unique to children; something they have never seen before.
- Children with special needs benefit from unlimited time to practice new skills
- Loose parts encourage creativity and innovation in all types of play and at each child's development level.

Space for problem solving

- Time is not only the most important thing for exploration and problem solving but having enough space.
- The right kind of space is equally key to helping children do activities and explore their learning more.
- It is important to provide enough space for children to explore large items as well as the right kind of space for spreading out smaller items.
- It is important to keep in mind that space is an important component of children's engagement with loose parts.

(PlayScotland, 2025)

Examples



Recognising the value of loose parts

- Taking the time to observe how each child uses the loose parts available is an exciting way to understand how children are thinking and reacting in their environment.
- By describing the activity to the child, you can gradually attach new vocabulary to the child's own experiences.
- It brings new meaning and innovation to the environment.
- It provides more opportunities for cooperation, discussion, innovation and imitation.
- Loose parts indoors and outdoors inspire and engage children at all developmental and ability levels.
- Providing enough time and space for children to explore and problem solve with loose parts helps children learn and grow.

Importance of loose parts

- It is easy and cheap to get from anywhere, even when you go for a walk, you can collect some loose parts on the way.
- It will help children create something from their imagination.
- It provides an opportunity for the children to think and talk about the material they collect which will help to develop their language skills.
- It provides the opportunity for children too see material they have never seen before.
- It creates the opportunity for children to be creative and develop innovation skills in them.
- They provide an open space for the children to create something out of their imagination.

(Play Scotland, 2025)



Montessori approach

- Prepared environment supports, invites and enables learning
- Children educate themselves – self-directed learning
- Sensory materials invite and promote learning
- Set curriculum regarding what children should learn
- Children are grouped into multi-age environments.
- Children learn by manipulating materials and working with others.
- Learning takes place through the senses.



International approaches:

Forest School

Forest school can support a variety of positive outcomes for children. These are:

- Improved confidence and well-being
- Greater independence and self-belief
- Collaborative learning and social and emotional skills.
- Language and communication
- Enhanced physical confidence and ability to take risks.
- Improved physical health including reduced obesity levels.
- The development of knowledge about the environment.
- Improved motivation and concentration
- The development of creativity and imagination.
- Greater respect for and understanding of responsibility for our world.

(Day Nurseries, 2025)



Reggio Emilia approach

- Theory is based on Piaget, Constructivism Vygotsky and Dewey.
- Emergent curriculum is one not planned beforehand.
- Curriculum is based on children's interests and experiences.
- Curriculum is project oriented.
- Hundred languages of children – symbolic representation of work and learning.
- Learning is active.
- Co constructors of knowledge – Children interact with other children and adults, sharing their unique identities and experiences learning as individuals whilst contributing to the learning of the group.

(Reggio Emilia Approach, 2022)



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