

The First 1000 Days



What is the first 1000 days and why is it important

The first 1000 days is one of the most important developmental phases a child can experience. Thousand Days (No Date) states "The 1,000 Days from pregnancy to age two offer a crucial window of opportunity to create brighter, healthier futures". The first 1000 days (No Date) also states that during the first 1000 days a child's brain develops much quicker than it will at any other point of development in their lives. While the brain is absorbing the knowledge and information of the world to guide them throughout their lives, their brain is at risk of exposed to Toxic Stress. The administration for Children and Families defines Toxic Stress as a situation in which stress is extreme and drawn out. This could be caused by a variety of factors such as neglect and insufficient nutrition. It is vital for parents, carers and Early Years Practitioners to meet the holistic needs of a child/children within their care.

During the first 1000 days fetus' and children will learn life skills from their closest attachments, their parents/guardians. Some of the life skills in which children start to learn from fetuses range from attachments and relationship, health habits, brain development and social interaction skills needed to help them during their life. According to Parliament (2019) Parents play a crucial part in their child/ children's development. Children are constantly learning a variety of holistic life skills from their parents, although there are many factors which also influence the development of children it is the parent's role to support the children's development to give them the most sufficient foundation for their life. One way a parent can do this is by providing positive experiences for their children. By providing positive experiences, Children's brain will develop in a positive manner which will help them make good neurological connections which will positively influence the brain to make more positive connections through other experiences.

Another positive life experience a parent can give their children is by providing good nutrition for both themselves and their child/ children. Parents can begin doing this during pregnancy and continue it after their child/ children are born throughout their lives. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Hopper, 2020) explains that there are 5 stages of needs in which parents, guardians and Early Years Practitioners must meet in order for a child to develop well holistically. The stages of the Hierarchy of Needs are Physiological needs such as food, water and rest. The next level on the hierarchy is Safety. This refers to needs such as safe environments, health and employment. The next level on the hierarchy of needs is Love and Belonging. The level refers to needs such as relationships and feeling connected to those around them. Afterwards, the next level of the hierarchy is Esteem. Esteem refers to needs such as self-esteem and respect. The final level of the hierarchy is Self-actualization, which is the need of wanting to do well and feel fulfilled in their lives. This reference helps show that parents providing good nutrition for themselves, and their child is not only meeting The Hierarchy of Needs in which all humans need to sustain themselves, it will also provide the children with good habits which will influence them throughout their lives and encourage brain development to assist them in developing life skills. Holistic needs being met along with stimulating activities will help lay a promising foundation for further development.

Caregiving

When working in an Early Years setting it is important for the staff within the settings to strive to achieve exceptional care. The Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years* (*PACEY) identifies high quality care as settings which are meeting the National Minimum Standards of the local area and settings who are actively striving to create a safe, nurturing and enabling environment for those within their care. PACEY also states that another way of identifying a high quality care setting is by ensuring all Early Years Practitioners working within the setting are well trained and have an in-depth knowledge and understanding on their role and the standards set within the Early Years Setting. By ensuring Early Years Practitioners have an in-depth knowledge and understanding it will allow them to provide a stimulating and enabling environment for all children within their setting which will allow the children who attend the setting to continue their developmental journey. This will additionally, assist with Early Years Practitioners being able to build strong and nurturing bonds with the children who attend the setting, and it will allow the children to feel comfortable and able to lead their own learning and development.

The benefits of providing high quality care within an Early Years Setting are plentiful. One benefit of providing high quality care could be having more engaged children within the setting, allowing them to use it to its full potential. An additional benefit is that providing high quality care provides a good foundation for development and future of the children exploring and utilizing the setting, this will continue benefitting the children as they will be able to continue developing holistically. Another benefit is by ensuring that all staff are well trained and up to the National Minimum Standards, Estyn standards and the setting standards, it may help identify and intervene with any ALN issues or safeguarding issues.

Professional Partnerships

Early Years Practitioners play a vital role in the first 1000 days of a child's life. It is in the role of the Early Years Practitioner to support the development of children but to also provide support to their families, especially during this crucial developmental period. Public Health Wales (2023) explains that there are a variety of external factors which can affect the parenting style and approach taken by the parent. A few named external factors vary from the area that they live within, the social group and habits of the parents and poverty. There may be occasions in which Early Years Practitioners need to work alongside other professionals in order to fully support children and their families. Early Years Matters (No Date) suggests that a successful professional partnership means that multi-agencies can work together to share information in a confidential manner to ensure the holistic needs of a child and their families are met. GOV.UK explains the number of ways a Early Years Practitioner can support and communicate with families of children within the setting effectively.

A useful approach to supporting families of children within the setting may be by having regular meetings with parents, both formal and informal. This may allow parents the opportunity to express their thoughts and opinions on their child's development and give them the opportunity to express any concerns they may have. Another approach that may be used by Early Years Professionals may be that an Early Years Settings may provide parents with Parent Packs for parents to fill in for Early Years Practitioners to understand and know the children within the care. This action and good parent handovers allow the parent to be involved in their children's development and once again allows the opportunity to build good relationships, and communication between Early Years Practitioners and families.

It is the role of an Early Years Practitioner to support the parent if any ALN concerns may arise within the child's development. NSPCC (2023) states that it is the role of the Early Years Practitioner to work together with other Multi agency Professionals when necessary. By engaging in meetings to discuss and develop an IDP for a child we can support parents by reinforcing techniques suggested by other professionals. This will aid a child's development and encourage stronger relationships between families, Early Years Practitioners and other Multi agency Professionals.

Challenges

When providing high quality care in Early Years Settings, Early Years Professionals may face some challenges. Local Government association* (*LGA) explains some of the challenges that Early Years Practitioners may face. Early Years Settings may face challenges with staffing. If a setting has an insufficient staff ratio, it may not allow room for allowing new children to join the setting. Another issue which can arise from insufficient staffing is poor management. If staff are unsuitably trained or over stretched in their job roles, they may not be able to perform effectively in their role. This could lead to job roles not being fulfilled to their full extent. Similarly, lack of staff may affect the development for any children who may need additional support. If a child with ALN or language barriers are attending the setting, they may benefit from 1-1 support. However, if there is lack of staff and lack of support for current staff, they may not be able to provide to this need and the child's development could be affected in a negative manner. However, staffing issues could also link into another challenge that some Early Years Settings face which is funding. Funding could be a major challenge that an Early Years Setting could face. Lack of funding and support given to Early Years Settings can be problematic to the day to day running of the setting. If a setting has insufficient funding it can affect the holistic progress of an Early Years Settings.

UNICEF (2022) explains that funding provided by local governments are being over stretched in a number of areas. This and other factors such as the rise of the cost of living and minimum wage make it harder for Early Years Settings to be able to comfortably afford all the necessities which are needed to provide a successful Early Years Setting. As a result, this could result in the cost of the Early Years Setting increasing which may make it unaffordable to families in the local area who use it. As a result, this may result in fewer families using the services being provided at the Early Years Settings. This could have a negative impact on the Early Years Setting and the families in the area in the result of the closure of the Early Years Setting.

Activities

When supporting the holistic development of children within the first 1000 days it is important to provide appropriately challenging activities for the children to engage with. Play Matters (2022) explains the different stages of play children may experience within the first 1000 days. Early Years Practitioners should take into consideration the stage of play a child is experiencing and provide activities appropriate to them.

Nubabi (2017) suggests sensory play as an engaging and stimulating way to involve children in play. Sensory play activities have many benefits to children who partake in them. One benefit of sensory play is, being able to introduce children to new textures from an early age. This will allow children to explore the new materials in a safe and controlled manner. Early Years Practitioners can expand the activity by allowing the children to taste new textures and adding child safe scents to the textures to further the play. This will encourage the children to explore appropriately and take controlled risks from an early age. As a result, a child who is experiencing the activity may notice an increase in their confidence and be encouraged to take more risks and continue to lead their learning, development and their knowledge and understanding of the world.

Early Education (2022) explains that loose parts are another way for children to become more engaged in their activity. This is a way young children can explore natural resources in the world and can be added to sensory play activities to expand upon them. Early Education (2022) continues to explain Reggio Emilio approach, founded in Italy in 1945, believes in adapting and reusing loose parts to explore their further use and potential in other ways, additional to the ones intended for it. By allowing young children to use natural materials it will educate them on how to interact with them in an appropriate manner and explore a wider range of resources, which may assist with their developing brains and the knowledge they will gain from these experiences.

Reference List

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