



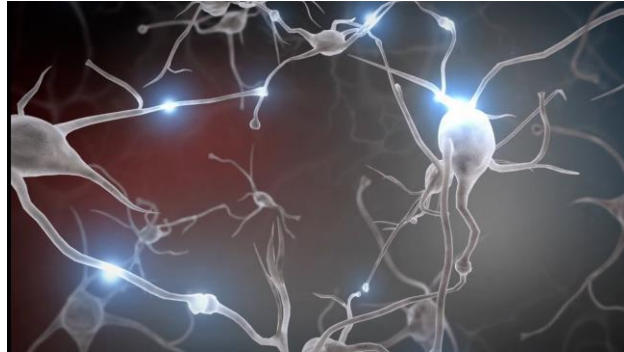
Understanding the factors which affect the first 1000 days.

The first 1000 days



The initial phase of a child's life, spanning from conception to the age of two, is a critical developmental period. According to Guardian News (2018), every experience encountered during these first 1000 days significantly contributes to the shaping of a child's brain, body, metabolism, and immune system.

As highlighted by the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2002), this time-frame is vital, as it presents a unique opportunity to establish a foundation for future learning and overall well-being. The key experiences that children have in these early stages of life, is crucial for optimizing the brain development, which can have lasting impact on the brain.



1 - Why is this important for development?

This period is marked by rapid development, requiring a holistic approach. As suggested by sprouts (2021), Vygotsky's cognitive development theory emphasizes that social interactions are vital for brain development in the early stages of life. The early years are especially significant as the brain undergoes major development, shaping vital skills like motor abilities. This stage is also a prime time for early intervention in case of issues like disabilities. Early brain development forms essential structures, and without it, a child's future development can be hindered, as suggested by TedxWinhoek (2016).

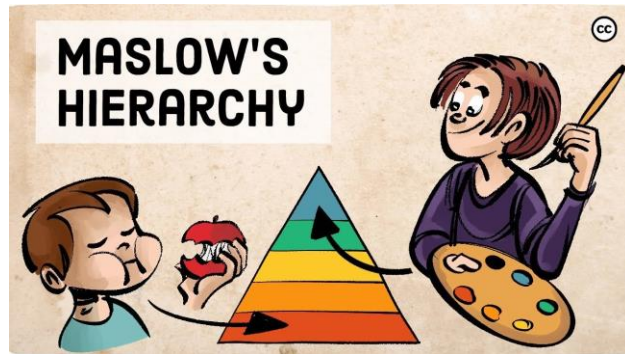
Exceptional care



An equally important aspect is creating a safe and joyful environment that welcomes everyone for learning and growth. Spouts (2019) expands on Jean Piaget's theory, arguing that being patient and understanding with babies/infants is what allows each child to reach their milestones at their own pace, based on their abilities. Employing a child-centered approach to support everyone's development. Being accessible to everyone, involving them in all activities to foster their overall growth.



2 - The 'Serve and Return' method, suggested by Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2020) has been proven effective to aid brain development in the early stages of life. This plays a crucial role in building pathways in children's brains, ensuring all needs are met and utilizing interactive methods, we contribute to the overall well-being and development of individuals.



3 - As mentioned by Sprouts (2017), Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs emphasizes that exceptional care involves addressing all human needs. This includes providing positive experiences for babies and infants to support their brain development.

Role of the practitioner



There are two points that can be considered to ensure that children and families are being supported in the first 1000 days.

The first point is Understanding and addressing everyone's unique needs and desires. To illustrate this point, one might refer to Bronfenbrenner's Theory. As discussed by Spouts (2022), practitioners can have a broader context and collaborate with families to provide support which is tailored to their needs and lives.

The second point which can be made is working with outer agencies in order to further support the children and families. An example of this is to work with specialists and other agencies to offer further assistance to families. This allows practitioners to collaborate with staff and families to support and engage with their learning.

Challenges



What sort of challenges do practitioners and families face?

Lack of training and qualified staff:

Insufficient training or under qualified staff are essential for providing quality care for children.

Limited support for children with needs:

Providing additional support ensures inclusivity and addresses the diverse requirements of every child, promoting their overall development.

Staffing ratios:

Maintaining appropriate ratios is crucial for ensuring the safety, supervision, and individualized attention necessary for each child's well-being.

Development-Enhancing Policies and Procedures:

Well-crafted policies provide a framework for creating a nurturing environment that supports the developmental needs of the youngest learners

Communication challenges:

Open and clear communication is essential for building a collaborative and supportive environment, benefiting both staff and families in understanding and meeting the needs of children.

Alternative Approaches



4 - Forest Schools:

Teach Early Years (2024), argues that outdoor play fosters physical development, enhances motor skills, and provides a natural environment for exploration and learning. Inspired by a Scandinavian approach, they believe that nature can provide better learning experiences and encourage outdoor exploration.



5 - Sensory Activities/Messy Play

According to Sprouts (2019), Jean Piaget's theory claims that sensory activities can promote cognitive physical development through a hands-on exploration. Piaget believed that in the early stages of life children have a sensory motor-stage, in which needs to be encouraged in order to further develop the brain.



6 - Montessori Classrooms:

Another popular approach that is used today is the Montessori classroom. This approach is typically known as the 'prepped environment' designed to optimize the learning experience for children. Montessori Academy (2024), expands on the ideas of Maria Montessori characterizing the classroom as an open-plan layout, giving children the Independence to use what is provided in order to further develop themselves.

This common approach is used worldwide today. It is designed to create community spaces of learning known as 'the third teach'. The education hub (2020), discusses the original beliefs of Reggio Emilia, emphasizing that displaying drawings, photographs and work can allow children to see the progress of their own work as a part of the learning process.

What are the benefits of these activities?

Enabling Environments



What is an enabling environment?

This is an environment which is warm and welcomed towards both children and families. An approach like this lines with the Welsh Curriculum for Wales (2022) ethos as it aims to foster an open-minded and inclusive atmosphere for all families and staff.

The Welsh Curriculum for Wales (2022) is new curriculum recently adopted into the education system, and it gives children the opportunity to explore and develop children's experiences in creative ways. An example worth mentioning would be 'learning through playing'. This can be compared to other approaches like Montessori's theory, especially in the early stages of life. Montessori Academy (2024) maintains this point and emphasizes the importance that role playing has on a child's development. They continued by highlighting that children must have the appropriate equipment and environment in order to have these benefits. Therefore, by adopting approaches likes The Welsh Curriculum for Wales (2022) and Montessori Academy (2024), practitioners are able to enrich the learning experience by offering a variety of resources and activities to young minds, in order to further their development. To enrich the learning experience, we offer access to a diverse range of resources, including everyday items like tweezers

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