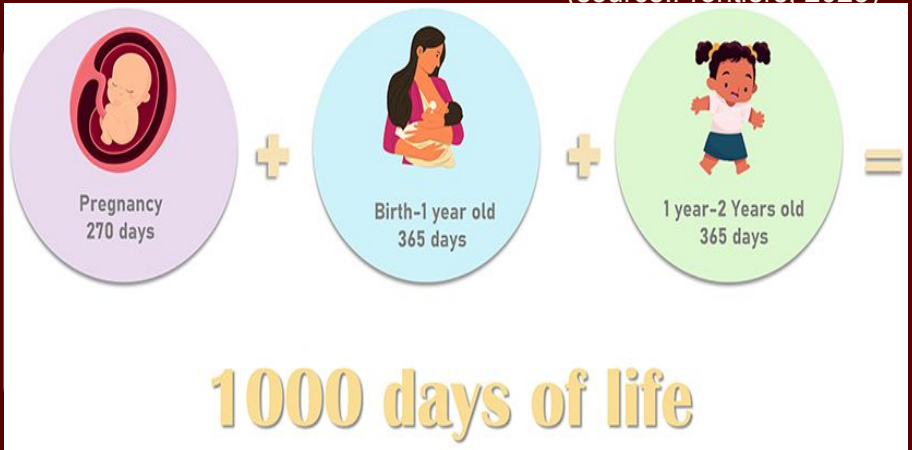
The First 1000 Days

(source:Frontiers, 2025)



Student number- 2521446
Module code- ECEY4005

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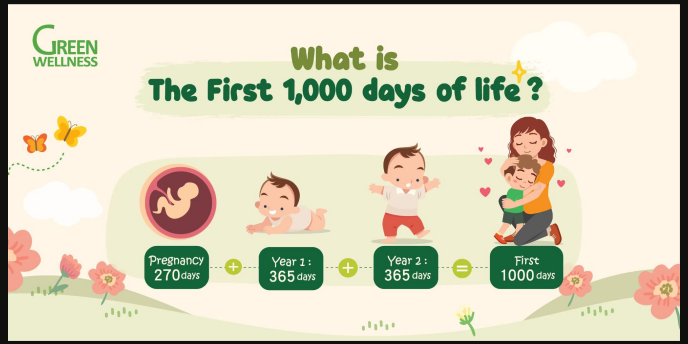
What students feel exceptional care could look like in the first 1000 days

Introduction (500 words)

‘The first 1,000 days relates to a child's life from conception until they turn 2 years old (24 months). This is a time when their brain, body and immune system grow and develop significantly’ (pregnancybirthbaby, 2025).

The experiences a newborn has throughout the first 1,000 days of life can have a lasting impact on their health and well-being. A baby may suffer negative health effects from stress, trauma, poverty, and violence throughout the first 1000 days of life. During the first 1000 days of life, it is crucial to give the baby a loving home environment, safe and secure surroundings, and a healthy diet (pregnancybirthandbaby, 2025).

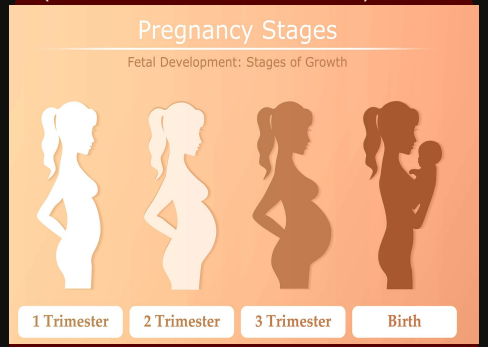


(Source: greenwellness, 2023)

What is the First 1000 Days?

The first 1000 happen from day of conception to Birth

(source:HealthBanks, 2022)



Pregnancy

The first trimester (weeks 1–12) is when the baby's organs form and the mother may experience early symptoms like fatigue and nausea. The second trimester (weeks 13–26) is often referred to as the "golden period" with increased energy. Finally the third trimester (weeks 27–40+) is when the baby grows significantly, preparing for birth, and the mother might experience pressure, shortness of breath, and more discomfort (jacksonhealthsystem,2023).

(source:Structural learning (2024)

Infancy

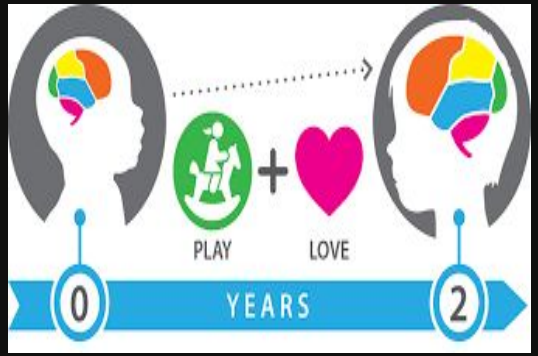
The earliest stage of life, known as infancy, is the time between birth and roughly one or two years of age. It is characterized by very rapid physical growth, significant development of motor skills (such as sitting, crawling, and walking), cognitive developments (such as learning to grasp, babble, and speak first words), and strong emotional bonds with caregivers. A baby's weight might triple during this period of intense learning, and fundamental skills for future growth begin to take shape (Britannica, 2025).

(source:ZerotoThree, 2025)

Toddler

The toddler stage, which lasts from one to three years old follows infancy, it is a time of rapid development, independence, language, and motor skills. It is characterized by walking (toddling), exploring, vocabulary building, self-awareness, and frequently experiencing strong emotions and tantrums as they learn to control impulses. As children move from infancy to preschool, it's a time of important developmental milestones, such as improved coordination, and the start of pretend play (gov,.wales, 2025).

Why is the First 1000 Days Important?



(source:NannynMe,2019)

From conception to their second birthday, a child's first 1,000 days of life are a critical time that impacts their general well-being, cognitive development, and health into the future, (Frontiers, 2025). During the first 1000 days there is a few key developments that take place such as Rapid Brain Growth where Billions of neurons join to construct the structure of the brain at a rapid pace. Another is physical development in which Rapid organ development and body growth are supported by vital nutrition and finally the Immune Systems foundation where a robust immune system is developed, providing defense against disease in later life, and overall health (unicef, 2017).

(Grandmothersadvocy, 2025)

‘A person’s first 1,000 days, or the period from conception to age two, are the most crucial for the development of their body, brain, metabolism, and immune system. Malnutrition is associated with numerous health problems, such as obesity and impaired growth’ (NIH, 2022).

Caregiving (500 words)

What is exceptional care?

(source:OECD, 2024)

(source:OECD, 2024

Exceptional caregiving throughout the first 1,000 days involves building strong brain foundations for long-term physical, cognitive, and emotional health through nurturing relationships, good nutrition (iron, folic acid), stimulating settings, and supportive care which ultimately prevents toxic stress. As Well as establishing resilience through actions like gentle touch, responsive communication, and access to strong family support services' (UK Parliament, 2025).

Through their movements, facial expressions, and chattering, babies naturally reach out for social engagement. The adults who look after them make noises and make gestures in return. This process, is known as "serve and return," it is essential to the development of a child's brain wiring. It involves providing warm, responsive interactions, such as talking, playing, comforting, and reacting to cues, as well as meeting a child's basic needs, such as appropriate nutrition, health care, and safety. Good caregiving lowers stress, promotes healthy brain development, adopts safe connection, and builds a solid foundation for resilience, emotional stability, and lifelong learning (HM Government, 2021). Appropriate diet and care is crucial for children's physical growth and health, aswel as including having access to the medical treatment they need to avoid or treat disease. Nurturing parent-child relationship, in most situations, trustworthy bonds between a parent and child forms naturally but occasionally extra assistance is required. It is crucial for a child's mental health now and in the future. Being able to protect a child from harm including illness, body and psychological harm, as well as seeing abuse and violence all need to be avoided for care be seen as exceptional. Children learn to make sense of the world through continuous supervision and boundaries, emotional support, and familiar routines. Having positive interactions with a range of individuals, locations, and items promotes learning, growth, and self-assurance. Playing with books, singing, reading aloud, and discussing everyday activities with the child are all examples of a language-rich environment. Early language, communication, and social development all benefit from interactions with spoken and written language (nhs,2023).

Caregiving (500 words)

Why is Caregiving Important?

‘Early experiences effects a child's ability in the long term, well-being, and mental health. Caregiving is essential because it creates the brain's foundation for learning, behavior, and health through responsive interactions (serve and return), developing attachment, emotional regulation, and social skills’ (NSPCC, 2021). The neurological and behavioral development of children are significantly influenced by their caregivers. According to years of study, children's health, social and emotional growth depends on consistent caregiving early in life. On the other hand, big disruption with early caregiving has a negative impact on long-term development and increases the likelihood that they may experience mental health problems later in life.(NIH, 2021).

Professional partnership (750 words)

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

Parents have a crucial role in a child's life especially throughout the first 1000 days, impacting their experiences and interactions with the outside world. Positive, resilient, and self-assured parenting contributes to better learning, health, and wellbeing for children both now and in the future (Nhs wales,2023).

Gov . uk (2025) suggests that the transition to parenthood begins before and during pregnancy. Relationships may be strained at this time of transition as families expand. Relationships may be affected at this time of transition as families expand. Planning, encouraging healthy habits, and lowering or controlling variables risks are crucial to improving the outcomes of pregnancy because they provide the chance for behavior change interventions while parents are highly motivated.A person's resilience as well as their physical, mental, and socioeconomic consequences in later life can be affected by preventing and addressing attachment and parenting issues early on.Pregnancy increases the likelihood that domestic violence and abuse may begin or worsen in a relationship.Early recognition of the hazards involved and prompt intervention may reduce the likelihood that these issues will worsen and have an impact on the parent-child bond.Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), a cycle of lack of ambition, alcohol and drug abuse, or emotional health disorders can all have an impact on new parents capacity and confidence (GOv.uk, 2025). Due to the fact that behavior modification interventions are most likely to be successful during this period, preconception to age two offers a special opportunity for professional involvement.Parenting courses that begin during pregnancy, boost outcomes by helping parents understand and communicate their feelings on the emotional change to parenthood and developing positive relationships between parents and their unborn child.Home visiting programs, such as the Family Nurse Partnership, assist young, first-time parents and their families in planning their own futures, improving the health and development of their children, and ensuring a safe pregnancy.The function of health visitors as public health nurses, is too use positive approaches and independent relationships to encourage productive and successful interactions between parents and families with the aim to help with change behaviors, improve health care, and ensure children's safety.Health visitors work with the family to perform a comprehensive assessment that identifies any challenges and highlights the family's strengths. It includes the impact and influence of wider family, community, and external factors in addition to the parents capacity to meet their child's needs. This is a crucial time for introducing early intervention, safeguarding, and health promotion techniques. Health visitors work with families and parents to determine the best level of intervention and support for their specific needs. It is more likely to encourage positive behavior change and enhance health outcomes when individual attention is provided together with parents and caregivers, this has been suggested by GOV.UK (2025).

Professional partnership

(sourceDSPI, (2023)

The importance of effective partnership working

In order to assist children's growth and wellbeing, many experts, services, and organizations collaborate with one another as well as with families. This is referred to as professional partnership. During the first 1,000 days, when children and caregivers frequently need coordinated support across health, education, and social sectors, effective partnership working is particularly crucial (GOV.Wales, 2024).

Estyn(2024) suggest that the provision and standards for the children have been significantly impacted by working in partnerships. Leaders have created very effective communication that promotes open discussion between parents and staff by creating strong working connections.'This has resulted in a more proactive approach to addressing issues and concerns, ensuring that they are promptly identified and effectively resolved. As a result, parents feel empowered to engage with staff, fostering a sense of trust and transparency within the setting' (Estyn,2024).

As no single professional can address every need, effective partnership working is essential for holistic child and family support. This allows various experts (health, education, social care) to share knowledge for coordinated, consistent, and comprehensive care, preventing disorganized services and improving outcomes by building a complete picture of the child's life. By fostering mutual understanding, establishing trust, sharing resources, and guaranteeing a cohesive approach, this collaboration improves support and increases efficiency for the child and family (CBD, 2025).

Effective partnerships also helps in early detection and intervention. Concerns like developmental delays, health problems, or family stress might be detected earlier by exchanging information effectively and studying children from many professional viewpoints. Early intervention throughout the first 1,000 days can greatly enhance children's outcomes and stop minor problems from developing into major ones (NIH, 2021).

Professional Partnership

Consider material factors that could impact development and what support could be offered

To improve health, learning, and well-being through shared knowledge and individual interventions with families, schools, health, and social services, professional partnerships are important for managing material factors (physical, economic, and environmental) impacting child development. Understanding and focusing attention to the different environmental factors influencing children's development is essential to promote healthy outcomes for a child in later life. To ensure that the child grows up in a supportive environment where they may develop and thrive, everyone involved, parents, carers, family, healthcare, education, social services, and the community must work together.(CBD, 2024).

‘Poverty and low household income are significant factors that severely impact individuals and families by limiting their ability to afford essential goods and services; (CPAG, 2026)
Access to healthy meals, suitable clothing, educational resources, and the required transportation to vital services like healthcare and job opportunities are all impacted by a lack of funds. Families can receive recommendations to financial assistance services, including welfare advice, benefits help, and more, through professional partnerships. Food banks, and community charities. Health visitors, social workers, and early years practitioners can work together to ensure families receive consistent guidance and practical assistance.

During the first 1000 days of life, child's development can be affected greatly by poor housing conditions, which can result in lifelong behavioral issues, developmental delays, and serious illness. To guarantee that children have a safe, comfortable, and stable home environment, support must be holistic, incorporating social, health, and housing services (shelter, 2006).

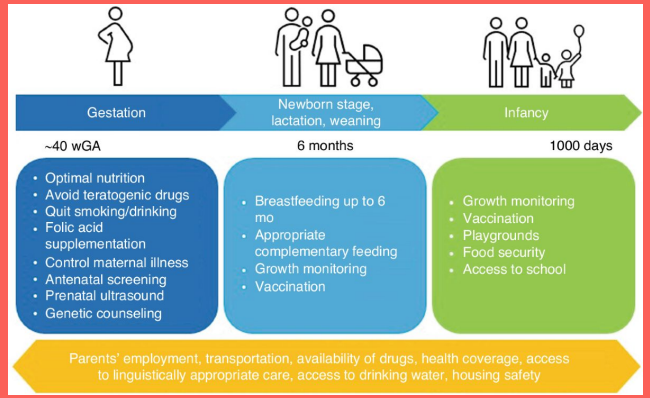
Food insecurity and lack of food during the first 1000 days of life reduce physical and cognitive development, impairing lifelong learning, health, and economic potential. However, support involves multi sector interventions such as encouraging breastfeeding, offering nutrient-rich foods, responsive feeding education, clean water, healthcare, and addressing social determinants through women's empowerment and financial aid (Fronteris, 2025).

Lack of access to healthcare and services severely slows cognitive (learning and behavioral issues) and physical (stunting, illness) development, resulting in lifelong challenges. However, support involves integrated, holistic care, strengthening primary health, providing nutrition and vaccines, ensuring safe environments (clean water, housing), empowering parents with responsive care training, and addressing underlying social factors like poverty through "health in all policies" strategies (NIH,2025).

Cognitive, social, and emotional development are limited by a lack of educational resources and safe play during the first 1000 days, which can result in long-term risks like poor learning and behavior. Support includes holistic parenting education, effective health visitor services, trauma-informed care, and addressing social factors like poverty through national strategies, community-based programs, and guaranteeing access to nutrition and responsive care (NIH, 2025).

Challenges (500 words)

Challenges in providing high quality care?



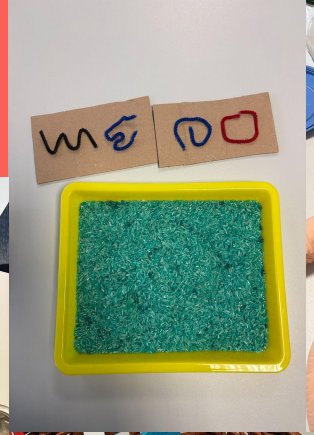
(source:Nature , 2025)

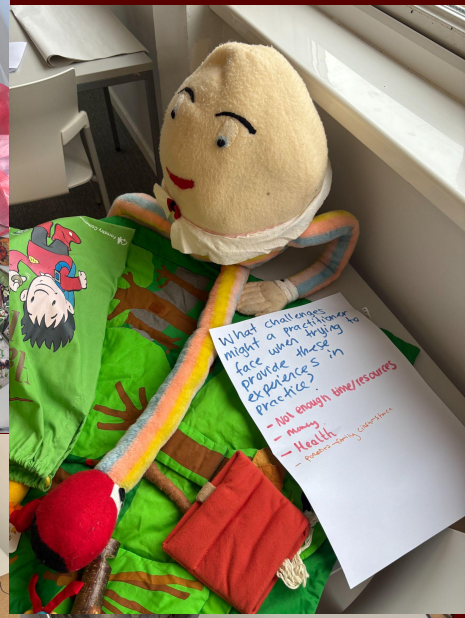
UK Parliament (2025) suggest that Limited funding, significant financial strain on parents, and fundamental resource shortages such as a lack of workers are financial and economic barriers to providing high-quality care within the first 1,000 days. The communities most likely to gain the most from early intervention are frequently the least able to access services, which worsens these problems. 'Time constraints during appointments can prevent a professional from identifying a family's needs and providing effective early childhood support' (UK Parliament, 2025). Research has found 'There is currently a shortfall of approximately 2,500 midwives and 5,000 health visitors in England, following a 40% reduction in staff since 2015' (UK Parliament,2025).

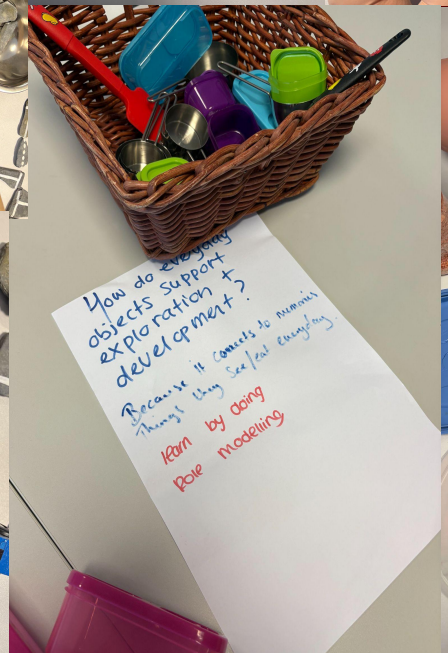
Caregiver mental health and well-being problems, are a major factor in the difficulties in delivering high-quality care growth of the child and the quality of the parent-infant bond are directly impacted by poor caregiver mental health. The demands of providing care, particularly for children with complex needs or disabilities, can result in ongoing stress, exhaustion, and burnout, leaving little time for social activities, personal needs, or self-care. Mothers during the perinatal period are more vulnerable to mental health issues such anxiety, sadness, and signs of post-traumatic stress disorder.Caregivers frequently complain about insufficient outside support from professional and government organizations. Feelings of loneliness and overwhelm might be worsened by a lack of counseling, little financial assistance, and a lack of community appreciation of their job (NIH, 2023).

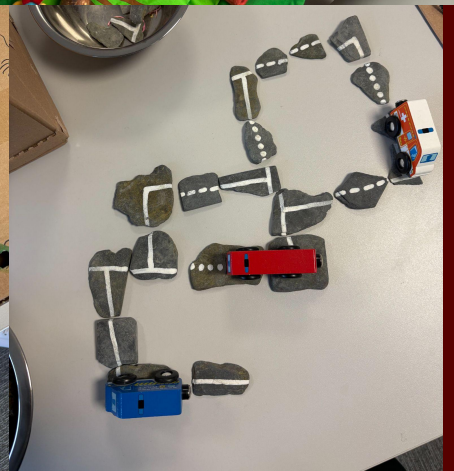
Activities

(Source: Maccreath, 2025)









Activities to support a child in the first 1000 days

A child's experiences impact the development of their unique brain. The activities provided, the surroundings in which they are cared for, and interactions with adults all influence these experiences (communityplaythings, 2024).
From an early age, books can be read to babies, this will benefit their future education. In addition to strengthening your relationship with your child, spending time with them through books is beneficial for their mental health. Babies will love to be read to them even before they can speak. They will get a sense of the rhymes, rhythms, and sounds of language by listening to you. Even tiny infants like reading picture books. Children's books are typically well-stocked at local libraries. Some conduct storytime programs for young children. Looking at books with your child, even for ten minutes a day, will encourage their enthusiasm in reading and help them develop essential skills (NHS, 2024).

During the first year of life, babies' interactions with books develop. An infant may like to sit on your lap and look at the photos as you read out slowly during the first three months. An infant may only focus on the book for a short while. The baby will begin to participate more actively in story time by the time they are six months old. Books may be grabbed, patted, handled, or even chewed by the infant. An infant may use cooing, chattering, and smiling to communicate .An infant will begin interacting more directly with the words and illustrations in books by the time they are nine months old. They may attempt to raise flaps or talk while gazing at pictures. Additionally, they will want to handle books and attempt to turn pages.An infant will begin interacting more directly with the words and illustrations in books by the time they are nine months old. They may attempt to raise flaps or talk while gazing at pictures. Additionally, they will want to handle books and attempt to turn pages. A baby will enjoy participating in story time by the time they are 12 months old and are able to point to pictures, turn the book correctly, and make noises like cars and trucks or animals. They may even take pleasure in reading books on their own. If the baby is walking, they will enjoy carrying books with them and will likely want the caregiver to read their favorite books several times (rasising children, 2023).

(Source: Storytime foundations, 2024)

(Source : Maccreath, 2026)

International Approach

Regio Emelio

’The Reggio Emilia Approach is an educational philosophy based on the image of a child with strong potentialities for development and a subject with rights, who learns through the hundred languages belonging to all human beings, and grows in relations with others’(Reggio children,2022).

The Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education is an Italian method of teaching focusing on self-guided development, teamwork, and respect for the child as a key actor in their own learning, with the environment and family as essential partners. It sees children as capable, curious learners with "a hundred languages" (art, movement, and drama) to express ideas. The "third teacher" (environment), adaptive curriculum, and thorough documentation of learning procedures are important components (progressiveeducation, 2022),

Children are not separate individuals they are part of a community. Interactions with other children and adults is how they learn.Words, movement, drawing, painting, building, sculpture, shadow play, collage, dramatic play, and music also known as the "hundred languages" are all examples of symbolic representation skills that children have the right to use because they are communicators..The third teacher is the surroundings, which are created to promote interactions, discussion, and relationships. Teachers are collaborators, nurturers, and mentors, they support children's inquiry and direct what they learn with problem-solving and exploratory learning. They watch and listen closely to children to gain more understanding of their thoughts and how they work together (progressive education, 2022),

(source:Community plaything, 2023)

(source:Stepbystepnursery, 2025)

How can this theory be used to support child development within the first 1000 days

By seeing infants and toddlers as capable learners, encouraging exploration through varied and stimulating environments, focusing on strong relationships, using the "hundred languages" (art, music, and movement) for expression, and observing their growing understanding, all guided by children's interests to build confidence, complex thinking, and deep connections. The Reggio Emilia approach supports development during the first 1000 days of life (day nurseries, 2025). Applying this technique can be done by developing brain pathways through sensory exploration of natural materials such as leaves, silky textiles, and smooth stones is known as sensory exploration.Open-ended play involves giving babies basic tools like dough, bricks, and scarves so they can solve problems and create their own stories.Creating spaces with mirrors for reflection, light for intrigue, and quiet corners for peaceful observation are examples of responsive environments. Taking part in straightforward, repetitive tasks that enable in-depth understanding and learning from several angles, such as drawing on paper or constructing towers (Daynurseries, 2025).

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