

First 1001 Days Movement – Consensus Statement

About us

Our vision is that every baby has loving and nurturing relationships in a society that values emotional wellbeing and development in the first 1001 days, from pregnancy as the critical foundation for a healthy and fulfilling life.

As a movement of organisations and professionals, our mission is to drive change together by inspiring, supporting and challenging national and local decision makers to value and invest in babies' emotional wellbeing and development in the first 1001 days.

The case for action in the first 1001 days

People value happiness, health and prosperity. We want our families to thrive. We want our children to enjoy their childhoods, to achieve at school and to progress into the workplace. We want our young people to have good mental health, to develop positive relationships and contribute to their communities. We want a strong economy and a compassionate society.

As a movement, we are convinced that valuing and investing in our youngest children and their families is key to securing this future. UNICEF, The World Bank and the World Health Organisation agree that children need nurturing care to develop their full potential. This includes conditions that promote health, nutrition, safety and security, responsive caregiving and opportunities for early learning. Investing in early childhood will bring benefits to individuals, families, communities, society and the economy. And it is the right thing to do; giving every child the care they need and the best start in life.

“The period from pregnancy to age 3 is when children are most susceptible to environmental influences. Investing in this period is one of the most efficient and effective ways to help eliminate extreme poverty and inequality, boost shared prosperity, and create the human capital needed for economies to diversify and grow.” UNICEF, World Bank and World Health Organisation, *Nurturing Care Framework*.

There is clear, compelling evidence that the first 1001 days, beginning in pregnancy, are a significant and influential phase in development. This is an age of opportunity. What happens during this period lays the foundation for every child's future health, well-being, learning and earnings potential. It sets the groundwork for children's developing emotional wellbeing, resilience and adaptability; the competencies they need to thrive. During this period, we can lay a foundation of health and wellbeing whose benefits last a lifetime – and carry into the next generation.

Alongside the moral and social case, there is an economic case for investing in the first 1001 days. Economists have shown that money spent on interventions in early life brings the greatest dividends. It is more cost-effective to act early, rather than pick up the pieces when problems occur. Effective early action leads to accumulated savings by preventing other services being required later in the child's life and improves the child and family's participation in the economy.

The importance of emotional wellbeing and development

The first 1001 days is a period of uniquely rapid growth when babies' brains are shaped by their experiences and environments. Babies develop in an environment of relationships: sensitive, responsive care is the most fundamental element of optimal emotional development.

By supporting early relationships, we can put children on a positive developmental trajectory, better able to take advantage of other opportunities that lie ahead. Conversely, if babies have a difficult start it can have widespread

effects on multiple domains of development, leading to an increased risk of a wide range of poor physical and mental health, social, educational and economic outcomes.

Most often, parents are the best providers of nurturing care. Parents' wellbeing is therefore essential for babies' wellbeing and development. Parents are most able to provide the care that babies need when they have positive relationships themselves, when they are emotionally, financially and socially secure, when they have family-friendly employment, and when they are in families and communities that nurture them and attend to their needs. When families use childcare, it is important that care is high quality and also provides babies with the sensitive, responsive, consistent relationships that they need to thrive.

Policies and local services play an important role in giving parents, caregivers and families the knowledge and resources to provide nurturing care to their babies. Mothers, fathers and other caregivers benefit from information, affirmation and encouragement. Some families need more support from services. It is vitally important that these families can receive the right support at the right time. When a baby cannot be given the nurturing care that they need at home, services must act quickly and effectively to protect their wellbeing and development.

Stress factors, such as – but not limited to - domestic abuse, mental illness, substance misuse, unresolved trauma and poverty can make it harder for parents to protect, support and promote young children's development. Income-related inequalities in outcomes are both wide and deep. These gaps present early in life and steadily increase as children grow. Giving babies the best start in life involves a two-pronged approach: both tackling adversity – including poverty - and supporting early relationships.

Babies need advocates

Babies are amongst the most vulnerable members of our society and they do not have a voice. They are citizens with needs and rights, but their needs are not well understood and are easily ignored in favour of other issues that are perceived to be more urgent. We must all be advocates for babies. They cannot wait. If we do not invest in building strong and resilient children we condemn ourselves to spend money on services required to pick up the pieces when problems occur. Much lip-service has been paid to the importance of prevention and early intervention. It's now time for action.

Governments must invest in our future, by giving every child a strong foundation in the earliest years of life.

Together, we call on decision-makers across the UK to:

1. Make a high-level strategic commitment to improving outcomes for all children, starting in the first 1001 days.

Each nation of the UK should appoint a cabinet-level Children and Families' Minister, who is responsible for developing and overseeing the delivery of a clear and ambitious cross-government strategy for improving outcomes for all children and levelling up to close the gaps in outcomes between more disadvantaged children and their peers.

This strategy must begin in pregnancy and include commitments to both tackling adversity – including poverty - and supporting early relationships to improve emotional wellbeing in the earliest years of life.

The strategy should set out clearly what every baby and family in the country can expect from policies and services. It should be:

- Outcomes-focussed.
- Based on the best evidence and practice, and committed to outcomes measurement and research to develop the evidence base.

- Informed by insights from families and the services that work with them.

2. Invest in the “age of opportunity”

Governments should make clear, concentrated, sustained enhancements to funding to make sure that babies (from pregnancy to age two) and their families get the support they need. This includes funding across maternity, public health, children’s and mental health services. Public spending must be rebalanced to ensure greater investment in prevention.

3. Encourage joined-up local action

Tackling adversity and supporting early relationships involves a range of policies and services. National government departments must incentivise and enable local services to work in partnership to develop and deliver integrated local strategies that give babies in their area the best start in life. National governments should take action to enable local commissioners to pool or align funding and work together towards shared outcomes. Local commissioners must be held to account for the quality and sufficiency of services and the outcomes for babies in their area.

4. Ensure every baby and family can access a continuum of care

Babies and their families need a range of support including universal, targeted and specialist services that support early relationships, improve family wellbeing and tackle stresses and adversity facing the family. Families benefit from effective public services and a strong voluntary sector, and a diverse offer including professional services, informal drop-in groups and peer support.

It is important that local services work together and develop clear pathways of care to enable babies and their families to receive the support they need at the right time. Colocation of services in children’s centres or family hubs can help to ensure services are joined-up, accessible and non-stigmatising.

Health visitors are a critical part of a universal offer to all families in the first 1001 days. It is essential that governments invest in the delivery of the Healthy Child Programme and that this programme supports babies’ emotional wellbeing and development. We believe that all families should be able to access care from a named health visitor who offers them a high-quality service that is proportionate to their needs.

There must be well-targeted, evidence-based, highly-skilled interventions – particularly home-visiting interventions such as Family Nurse Partnership - to support those parents who need help to meet their children’s needs and support their development.

There must be clear integrated pathways of care to identify and support families where babies’ emotional wellbeing and development are at risk. Specialist services, including parent-infant relationships teams and specialist perinatal mental health services, offer vital support to families who need additional help as well as improving capacity in the wider system through offering training, consultation and supervision. All families who need them should be able to access this support.

5. Develop the workforce

Governments must ensure there is a sufficient well-trained workforce with the capacity, capability and skill mix to support children, parents and families during the first 1001 days. This includes investing in a workforce development strategy that covers universal, targeted and specialist services, addresses issues around recruitment, pay and retention, and sets out improvements to both pre-qualification training and continuing professional development. This strategy must describe what will be done to ensure that professionals at all levels have the required understanding and skills to understand early child development, support early relationships and promote nurturing care (including responsive feeding) and to deliver trauma-informed, compassionate services that are effective in improving outcomes. Professionals working with families in the first 1001 days should meet the relevant level on the AIMH competency framework so that they have the knowledge and skills to promote babies’ emotional development.