



WHAT ARE THE 1,001 DAYS, AND WHY ARE THEY SO IMPORTANT?

During early childhood, from pregnancy to the age of five, our brains develop at an amazing rate – faster than at any other time in our lives. Our experiences, relationships, and surroundings at that very young age, shape the rest of our lives.

This is when we start to understand the world in which we live. How to manage our emotions, build relationships with the people around us, believe in ourselves, develop resilience against adversity and have trust in others.

The first 1,001 days, from conception to age two, is a window of opportunity. It is a time of particularly rapid growth and brain development. Leading child health experts agree that the care given during the first 1,001 days has more influence on a child's future than at any other time in their life.

Providing your child with proper nutrition, a safe and nurturing environment, and opportunities for play and exploration will give them the best start possible.



DO

Provide a safe and loving environment: Responding to your child's needs promptly, sensitively, and lovingly will create a secure attachment bond. Your little ones will feel safe, which will give them confidence and allow them to explore the world around them.

Provide a balanced diet: Nutrition is critical for supporting a child's growth and development during the first 1001 days. Aim to provide your little one with a healthy and balanced diet.

Create 'Yes' spaces: Create "yes" spaces where your little one feels empowered to explore, choose, create, and express themselves freely, with safe materials and toys to encourage independent play.

Embrace cuddles: Cuddling and holding your little one helps to release oxytocin, a hormone that promotes bonding and attachment. It also helps to calm and soothe your little one.

Foster independence: Allow your little one to make choices and take on age-appropriate responsibilities, such as dressing or helping with chores, to build confidence and self-esteem.

Read, sing, and talk: These interactions are an excellent way to bond and expand your little one's understanding of the world, exposing them to language, ideas, and communication rhythms.

Routines: Introducing daily routines for meals, sleep, play, or other activities can provide structure and stability, fostering a sense of security and predictability for your little one.

Embrace emotions: Teach your little ones about emotions and help them recognise and name their feelings. Encourage them to express and validate their feelings, teaching them that all emotions are natural and valid.

Encourage Sensory Exploration: Support your little one's natural curiosity by providing opportunities for exploration and discovery. Expose them to various everyday objects, age-appropriate toys, music, books, and materials that stimulate their senses.

Encourage outdoor exploration: Outdoor exploration fosters curiosity, confidence, and appreciation for nature, engaging your little one's senses and promoting physical activity and a sense of wonder.

Use positive language: Avoid using words such as no, stop, etc., focusing on what to do rather than what not to do. For example, instead of saying, "No running," say, "Let's walk, please" "No hitting," say, "Let's use gentle hands."

Ask for help: Parenting can sometimes feel overwhelming and lonely. Please know that you are not alone in feeling like this. Reach out to professionals, friends and family, or parenting groups that can support you.

Be kind to yourself: Use positive self-talk and practice self-compassion. Treat yourself with the kindness and understanding you would offer a good friend.

DON'T

Compare your child to others: Every child is unique, developing at their own time and pace. Avoid comparing your little one to others, as they might not be ready to reach certain milestones yet.

Overprotect: It's essential to avoid shielding children from challenges and risks. Instead, supporting them in overcoming obstacles is critical for building resilience and problem-solving skills.

Neglect self-care: Remember to prioritise your well-being and self-care. Your mental and emotional health is essential; taking care of yourself allows you to better support your little ones.

For more tips, tricks, hacks and advice on how to raise happy, confident children visit the [BBC Children in Need website](#).

