



Iechyd Cyhoeddus
Cymru
Public Health
Wales

The first 1000 days: a golden opportunity to build a fairer future

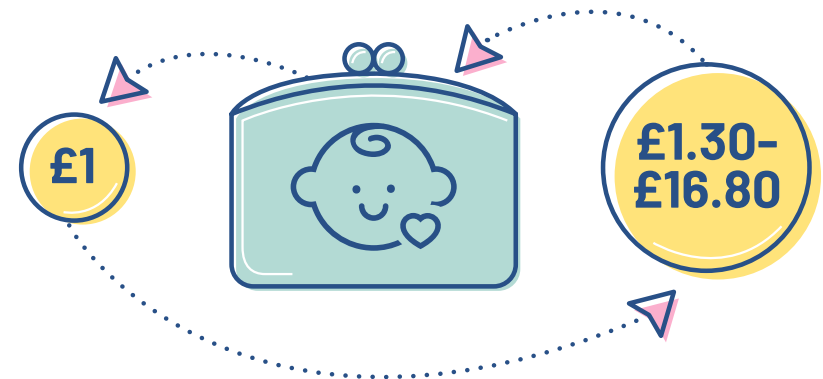
Every child in Wales deserves the best start in life. To be happy, healthy and have the care and attention they need to develop and grow.¹

By creating the conditions for families to thrive and making sure families get the right support at the right time we can help more children get the best start in life.

Getting things right from the start creates a strong foundation for the future. It can break cycles of disadvantage and is the best and most cost effective way to create a happier, healthier, fairer future for Wales.



Every **£1** invested in **early years interventions** returns **£1.30-£16.80**^{2,3}



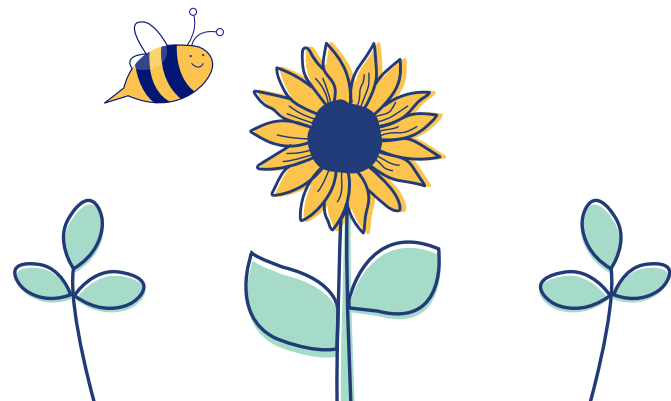
The foundation for a happier healthier future

Babies' brains and bodies are built during pregnancy and the first years of life.

This is when the foundations for the future are laid. A good start shapes how children feel about themselves and how they interact with others as they grow up. It gives them a solid foundation to build on and shapes how they will parent their own children in the future.

For the best start in life all babies need love, nurturing care and attention from the most important people in their lives.⁵

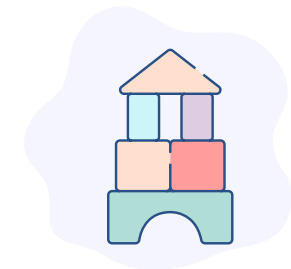
Good nutrition, playing, talking and responding to babies builds their brains and bodies.



A time of incredibly rapid development⁴



Shaped by relationships and experiences^{5,6}



A solid foundation helps get the best out of life. It helps children adapt to challenges and make the most of opportunities to learn and grow.



Looking after parents is important

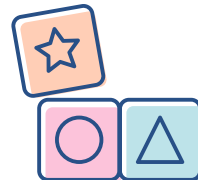
Being a parent is not easy and when life is challenging, parents can get overloaded.⁷

Families with young children face particular challenges when times are tough. Maternity leave and childcare can strain income and families often have to spend more on essentials such as food and energy bills. Finding time, energy and patience is hard when you are worrying about making ends meet, or struggling with health, housing or relationship issues.



Good mental wellbeing and strong social support can act as a buffer against challenges.

We all need decent places to live and work, a safe warm home, to be part of a community, enough money to live on, and easy access to support when it is needed. Families that are missing any of these building blocks will find it harder to give their baby the best start in life.



How are we doing in Wales?

We don't have all the information we need to understand if children in Wales are getting the best start in life.

We do know that inequalities start early and persist through childhood. Parents facing challenges with poverty or discrimination are more likely to die during pregnancy or just after birth.⁸ Their babies are also less likely to be born healthy⁹.

A safe and healthy birth gives children a better chance of good health, wellbeing and a bright future.



7%
of babies born in Wales have a low birthweight¹⁰.
(babies born below a normal healthy weight. These babies are more likely to have longer term health problems.)

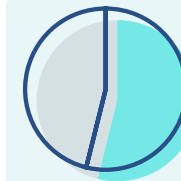
It is clear that many families in Wales are under pressure meaning that too many children may be missing out on the best start in life.



More than 1 in 4 (28%)
of children in Wales are living in Poverty.¹¹ (2020-2022)

Without a solid foundation to build on, babies that don't get a good start often fall behind. It is harder for them to catch up later on, and they are more likely to need additional support.

We do not consistently collect information on children's developmental milestones in the first 1000 days. But we do know that too many children are falling behind before they start school.

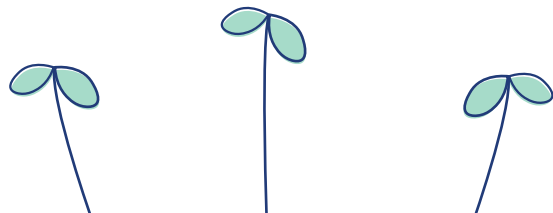


In 2022, just over half of UK children* (54%)

were developmentally ready to learn when they started reception.¹³

* without a special educational need or disability.

We can make a difference. A modest investment in training early years practitioners, for example, can have a huge impact on children's speech, language & communication outcomes¹²



Building a society that gives every child the best start in life

A society where all children can be healthy, happy, and develop to their full potential values babies and children.

It creates the conditions for families to flourish and makes time for enriching relationships and interactions between babies and the adults in their lives.

Best start in life

Happy, healthy, and developing to their full potential

Love, care & attention

Positive experiences and relationships, good nutrition

Strengthen families

Health & wellbeing, knowledge, skills, confidence

Reduce pressures

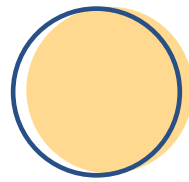
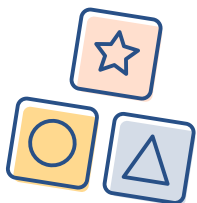
Supportive policy & practice, address stigma, tackle inequalities

Act early

Identify & address problems at the earliest stage

Create the conditions for all families to flourish

Safe warm homes, family friendly built and natural environment, fair work and income, accessible transport



Priority areas for action

There are some simple yet powerful solutions. Small changes to the way we do things can make a huge difference.

Have a clear strategic focus

Strong leadership and shared priorities across policy areas and partnerships.



Build on existing work

To strengthen local systems of support for families.



When something works, do it really well

Focus on improving implementation of existing policy and services such as the Healthy Child Wales Programme.



Involve parents and families

Use the perspectives of parents, families, babies and children to create and improve policy and practice.



Tackle child poverty

Reduce poverty and minimise its impact on children through effective mitigation strategies.



Improve data quality and availability

To shape action, monitor progress and drive improvement.



Information sources

- 1 Welsh Government, Children's rights in Wales, <https://www.gov.wales/childrens-rights-in-wales>
- 2 James Heckman, 'The Heckman Equation. Invest in early childhood development: Reduce deficits, strengthen the economy.' <https://heckmanequation.org>
- 3 Public Health Wales, Making a Difference: Investing in Sustainable Health and Wellbeing for the People of Wales. <https://phwwhooc.co.uk/resources/making-a-difference-investing-in-sustainable-health-and-well-being-for-the-people-of-wales>
- 4 The Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University. What Is Early Childhood Development? A Guide to the Science. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/guide/what-is-early-childhood-development-a-guide-to-the-science>
- 5 World Health Organisation. Nurturing care for early childhood development. <https://www.who.int/teams/maternal-newborn-child-adolescent-health-and-ageing/child-health/nurturing-care>
- 6 Welsh Government, Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care (ECPLC) [Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care \(ECPLC\) | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales/early-childhood-play-learning-and-care)
- 7 Public Health Wales. The First 1000 Days programme. <https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/the-first-1000-days-programme>
- 8 MBRRACE-UK, Saving Lives Improving Mother's Care: Lay Summary [MBRRACE-UK_Maternal_Report_2023_-_Lay_Summary.pdf \(ox.ac.uk\)](https://www.mbrpace-uk.org/~/media/MBRRACE-UK_Maternal_Report_2023_-_Lay_Summary.pdf)
- 9 FUSE. A Fair Start in Life. <https://www.fuse.ac.uk/resources/whatdrivesinequalitiesinpregnancyoutcomes>
- 10 StatsWales. Live births by birthweight and gestational age group <https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/NHS-Primary-and-Community-Activity/Community-Child-Health/livebirths-by-birthweightandgestationalagegroup>
- 11 Welsh Government. Child Poverty Strategy for Wales 2024. <https://www.gov.wales/child-poverty-strategy-wales-2024-html>
- 12 Welsh Government, Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) needs: infographics. [Speech, Language and Communication \(SLC\) needs: infographics | GOV.WALES](https://gov.wales/speech-language-and-communication-slc-needs-infographics)
- 13 Kindred². School Readiness Survey <https://kindredsquared.org.uk/projects/school-readiness-survey/>



Further information

If you would like to find out more about the First 1000 Days Programme, please visit our website [here](#).