



info about FTD

FTD month
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Key Info Regarding the First Thousand Days:

Introduction:

For many people, they have not yet heard of the first thousand days and how important it is. This resource is to help you communicate key pieces of information that we have found to be useful in reaching people who are new to this topic. You can use one or many of these statements: you choose what you think people will be interested in. If you are preaching into this topic, calling a prayer meeting, or hosting a baby shower, you can help people understand the big idea of why you and your church are supporting families in this crucial stage of the first thousand days.

The importance of the first thousand days of life

The first thousand days is the period of time from conception to when the child turns two years old. During this time, there is never-to-be-repeated brain development.

In the womb, the baby's brain starts to develop. From week 5, the brain stem starts to take shape. Neurons (the cells that make up the brain) grow at a rapid rate. In the womb, they are forming at a rate of 250 000 per minute. Over the first thousand days, the rate of brain development changes, but by 2 years of age, a child's brain will be about 80% the size (weight) of what it will be as an adult.

The way the neurons connect with each other is really important, as it is the basis for learning and growth. At key times during the first thousand days, the neurons in the brain can connect at a rate of a million times per second.

This rapid growth and development of the brain is the foundation for future learning and wellbeing. You could compare it to construction: if you want a tall, strong building, you need to have a deep, solid foundation. The first thousand days is that foundational time for a child's life long healthy development.

The foundations of language development are laid in the first year of life – long before baby can speak or read. The number of words baby hears during this time has an impact on their vocabulary later on – which affects their school readiness.

There are social and emotional foundations laid in the First Thousand Days. In this period, baby learns to bond, to trust and to make connections with others – especially the adults in his or her life. The experiences a child has during the first thousand days will have an impact in their future relationships during childhood and adulthood.

Because the brain is developing so quickly, the baby is very sensitive to the experiences he or she has during this time. This is both a risk and an opportunity. It is a risk because if baby does not consistently get enough of the right kind of care during this time, the foundations of brain development are negatively affected, and baby will be placed on a path of mere survival. Baby is more likely to have a smaller vocabulary, won't build good relationships, will have health challenges, and not be ready for school, will be more likely to drop out of school and is at a higher risk of earning less and engaging in antisocial behaviour.

The opportunity is this: if baby is provided with the right kind of care, they are getting the foundation they need. They are set on a pathway in life that has more flourishing. They are more likely to reach their God-given potential and not be trapped in cycles of poverty and suffering. There is no other time of such rapid brain development – why it is referred to as a “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity” to get it right.

What do all children need to thrive?

During the first thousand days of life (conception to the age of two), all children need five things in order to have an effective brain foundation laid and be on a pathway of reaching their potential. This is called nurturing care. ([explore nurturing-care.org](https://www.nurturing-care.org) to find out more)

Good health: Refers to the health and well-being of the children and their caregivers. Why both? We know that the physical and mental health of caregivers can affect their ability to care for the child.

Adequate nutrition: Refers to maternal and child nutrition. Why both? We know that the nutritional status of the mother during pregnancy affects her health and wellbeing and that of her unborn child. After birth, the mother's nutritional status affects her ability provide adequate care to her young child.

Safety and security: Refers to safe and secure environments for children and their families. Includes reducing or eliminating physical dangers, emotional stress, environmental risks (e.g., pollution), and access to food and water.

Opportunities for early learning: Refers to any opportunity for the baby, toddler or child to interact with a person, place, or object in their environment. Note that every interaction (positive or negative) or absence of an interaction is contributing to the child's brain development and laying the foundation for later learning.

Responsive Caregiving: Refers to the ability of the parent/caregiver to notice, understand, and respond to their child's signals in a timely and appropriate manner. This is the foundational component because responsive caregivers are better able to support the other four components.

Parents need support

Every parent has strengths and skills. But parenting a young child is difficult. The challenges that parents face can negatively impact their capacity to provide what their young child needs. These barriers or challenges might be internal, in the household and in the broader community. Every family story is unique and support for parents at different levels is necessary.

One of the most powerful factors to help parents bounce back from difficulty is the presence of a positive, supportive adult in their life.

Everyone starts parenting from what they know (what they experienced, or what they observe others doing). This can include positive parenting behaviours. But may also mean that parents do not yet know how to provide the five building blocks of what their young child needs to thrive.

All parents need support to consistently provide what their young child needs: responsive, nurturing care. All parents need encouragement to know that they are brain builders and that they have what it takes to grow greatness in their child.

Realities of children living in South Africa

1 in 4 children do not get enough protein for effective brain development

1 in 33 children die before their first birthday

55% of children aged 5 are falling behind or falling far behind their school readiness milestones

1 in 5 babies are exclusively breastfed at 6 months of age (the ideal nutrition for this stage)

1 in 7 babies are born to teenage mothers

Investing early is important

It is important to remember that even in the toughest of situations young children can still thrive and have healthy, successful and flourishing lives. What about those children who are out of the first thousand days, who didn't get all they needed for good brain development? Incredibly the brain has the ability to change and build new connections. So, if a child is exposed to environments that stimulate the brain, they can move from surviving to thriving. However, the challenge is that it just takes a lot more effort and it takes longer.

The best time for the foundation to be formed is in the first thousand days– so let's not wait until they are older. Let's start from the very beginning of life.

The negative things that are impacting our children – especially children in the FTD – have long-lasting negative consequences. It is far easier to change this early in a child's life than to try fix it when a child is older or an adult.

“When you pay attention to the beginning of the story, you can change the whole story” by Raffi Cavoukian

We need a whole of society approach

There are many role players involved in making sure that young children thrive. But it does require all of us – individuals, community, churches, non-profit organisation, government departments like health, social development, business and more. We all have a role to play to see that mothers, fathers and young babies are being cared for well.

Find out more: ✨

To grow in your understanding and find out more, go to our [FTD web page](#).

Encourage others to attend our free “The Church & Early Life” workshop on WhatsApp. Find out more and [register here](#).

Keep up to date with videos and information via WhatsApp. Visit www.sikunye.org.za/contact/.

Sources:

[Nurturing Care Framework](#)

[South African National Integrated ECD Policy](#)

[Hold My Hand Campaign](#)

[Harvard Centre on the Developing Child](#)