The Importance of Conception to Age Two

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Introduction - The first 1001 days are critical

This manifesto is a commitment to ensure all babies have the best possible start in life. It is a statement which puts forward the moral, scientific and economic case for the importance of the time from conception to two years old – the first 1001 critical days.

Organisations, professionals, parents and politicians from across the political spectrum have come together to acknowledge the importance of the first 1001 days. This time is a crucial opportunity to increase life chances for children.

It is so much better for everyone if we prevent problems before they start, and act at the earliest opportunity if they do. Too many children and young people do not have the start in life they need, at a high cost for them, as well as for society. It is vital that a focus on the early years, particularly the first 1001 days, is placed at the heart of policy making and services.

Every child deserves the opportunity to lead a healthy, happy and fulfilling life, and this is what the 1001 Critical Days Manifesto is all about – and why we want organisations, professionals, parents, families and politicians to pledge their support to the manifesto below.

The Manifesto – Our vision for West Sussex

Our goal is for every baby to receive sensitive, appropriate and responsive care from caregivers in the first years of life. We want parents to feel confident that they are raising their children in a loving and supportive environment. The professional relationships with services that parents have, before and after the birth of their child, provide a unique opportunity to support the family at a time that is vital to a child’s development.

We want seamless access for all families through ante natal (early pregnancy), perinatal (late pregnancy and birth) and postnatal services. This includes midwives, health visitors, GPs and other professionals. Children and Family Centres as well as other services will engage with families at the earliest opportunity – ideally during pregnancy. A radical change is needed to focus our services on the first 1001 Critical Days.
Specifically:

- Families that may soon or who are already experiencing difficulties will be able to get good quality services, which promote parent-infant interaction. We will work together to identify and address unmet need.
- Women who are at risk of, or who are already suffering from, mental health problems will be able to receive appropriate support at the earliest opportunity, with a range of services in place. Every woman with a history of past or present serious mental illness should have access to appropriate and timely support, with services committed to working together towards the ‘NICE’ guidelines.
- All parents will have access to antenatal classes and support, which address both the physical and emotional aspects of parenthood and the baby’s well-being; promoting attachment and brain development.
- Maternity services, health visitors, social care, adult mental health services and providers of children’s centre services will work in an integrated way to share vital data, enabling those who need additional support to receive appropriate, timely and culturally sensitive help.
- The health and early years workforce will have access to high quality training in infant mental health and attachment in order for practitioners to understand parent-infant relationships and the services required when difficulties arise. This will enable them to focus on the attachment needs of babies and infants.
- Local commissioning and decision making will consider the social and emotional needs of babies and include information about this in their Joint Strategic Needs Assessments and Local Health and Well-being Strategy. Underpinning this will be a cost-benefit analysis to capture the full extent of the costs to society that can be avoided through effective investment in the first 1001 days.
- Children and Family Centres will continue to provide universal services for all families, but with a focus on those families with the highest level of need. Centre registration will be promoted by all professionals in contact with families so that close to 100% of families engages with their local Children and Family Centre. Outreach and volunteer services will be used as they are important ways to engage the most vulnerable and isolated families.
- Parents will be supported and encouraged to respond and communicate with their children as an effective way of strengthening baby brain and language development.

Based on the national 1001 Critical Days manifesto

What happens next?

This manifesto was launched in March 2017 in West Sussex with partners from across the county. It will continue to be a developing vision and partnership as organisations and services pledge their support.

Together we will work on an action plan for West Sussex that will bring together activities in West Sussex for the first 1001 critical days, and show the difference they make. We will also work together to identify the gaps in services, share learning and explore opportunities to work in a more integrated way. We will identify a way to share the impact of 1001 Critical Days Manifesto.

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