



RESEARCH REPORT: 7 reasons to invest in the first 1,000 days

1: Brain development

Everything a child sees, touches, tastes, smells and hears during their first 1,000 days helps to grow their brain for thinking, feeling, moving and learning. To encourage this growth, they need plenty of nourishment, a healthy and secure environment and the right amount and type of stimulation.

Plunket helps by providing advice, information, support and reassurance to parents through home visits, family centres and clinics (including mobile clinics for those with access problems), as well as PlunketLine, our free telephone advice service.

2: ‘Hard-wiring’ the brain for social competence

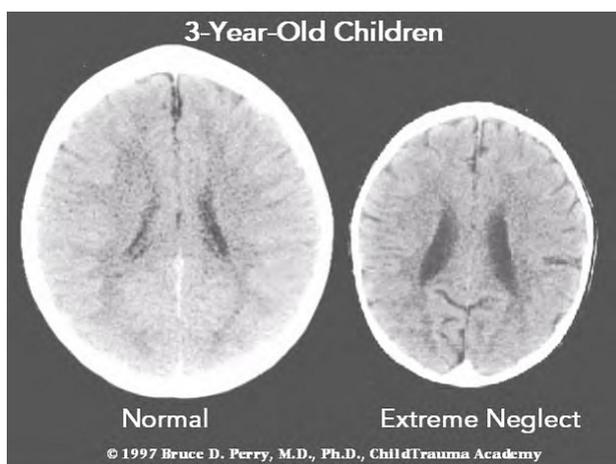
Youngsters need loving, secure relationships in which to develop strong emotional attachments and learn to trust and love others. Without these, they may grow up unable to establish firm, trusting relationships with others.

Plunket helps by providing additional home visits if required, and offering parenting education programmes and tools for families. If parents need extra support, we can refer them to other social services and health specialists.

3: Learning physical skills

During the first 1,000 days of their life a baby learns basic physical skills and confidence. In a lovingly supportive and stimulating environment these lessons will be well learnt, and the child will grow into maturity both confident in their physical abilities and with an aptitude for picking up new physical skills.

Plunket helps through our toy libraries, which are a great way for parents to get safe toys for their child, at little or no cost – enabling them to develop skills, stretch their imagination and learn about sound, touch and how things work.



“These images illustrate the negative impact of neglect on the developing brain. In the CT scan on the left is an image from a healthy 3-year-old with an average head size. The image on the right is from a 3-year-old suffering from severe sensory-deprivation neglect. This child’s brain is significantly smaller than average and has abnormal development of cortex.” These images are from studies conducted by a team of researchers from the Child Trauma Academy (www.ChildTrauma.org) led by Bruce D. Perry, M.D., Ph.D.

"The best scientific research in the world now tells us the greatest social good will be achieved by investing in a child's earliest years."

Professor Richie Poulton MSc, PGDip CIPs (Otago), PhD (NSW), FRSNZ

4: Learning to talk

Babies and toddlers need adults to talk to them constantly. By hearing people talking to each other and by being talked to, they discover how people communicate and learn that certain sounds (words) have meaning.

Plunket helps by offering parents opportunities to meet and socialise through parent and coffee groups and children's play groups. These offer a great way for children to interact with adults and each other and begin to develop their social skills.

5: Learning right and wrong

The first 1,000 days provide the foundation for youngsters to learn the difference between right and wrong and about self-control. They also develop feelings for people that will grow into a

sense of empathy and, finally, a mature understanding of others' feelings and sympathy for them.

Plunket helps by offering education courses to help parents understand how their children develop and learn, and how they can best help them to reach their full potential.

6: Health

Children's health is particularly vulnerable during their first 1,000 days – they need warm, dry housing, plenty of nourishing food, protection from contagious diseases and access to primary health care.

Plunket helps by checking on young children's health and wellbeing by weighing and measuring them, undertaking general health assessments, and referring them to appropriate health and social service providers if required.

7: Economic

For a child to realise their full potential and become a loving, socially engaged, well educated adult who contributes to our social and economic community, we must ensure that their first 1,000 days are the best they can be. This will protect them from the damaging effects of poverty, and produce proven good returns in later years.

Plunket helps by being dedicated to helping Kiwi families raise loving, confident and productive members of our society. Everything we do aims to achieve this goal.

* Sources: www.everychildcounts.org.nz; 'Understanding the Effects of Maltreatment on Brain Development', Child Welfare Information Gateway, Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, United States (www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/issue_briefs/brain_development/brain_development.pdf).