



# THE FIRST 1000 DAYS OF LIFE

## What are the first 1000 days?

The first 1000 days of life is the period from conception until a child's second birthday.

During this period the brain is developing at its fastest pace - it's twice as active as an adult brain.

The neural connections formed during a person's first 1000 days of life will determine his:

- physical health
- mental health
- lifelong capacity to learn
- ability to adapt to change
- psychological resilience

## The first 1000 days in practice

The care and nutrition an individual receives has a direct impact on their brain development during the first 1000 days.

The care needs of an individual during this period can be grouped as follows:

Care	Rationale	Examples of care in practice
Maternal and Child Health	The health care provided to young children and their mothers can strengthen or disrupt early development	Mother receives quality antenatal care; prevention of mother to child HIV transmission; child's growth is monitored; child is fully vaccinated
Nutrition	Inadequate early nutrition undermines brain development	Antenatal and postnatal nutritional support provided to mother; exclusive breastfeeding is practiced
Support for primary caregiver	How children are parented in the first years of their lives can affect brain function for the rest of their lives	Antenatal and postnatal mental health screening and treatment is provided to the mother; the caregiver is supported and educated on how to provide responsive care to child
Social services	Toxic stress and exposure to violence, abuse, and neglect during early childhood has a lifelong impact	State protection is given to children exposed to violence and abuse; Child Support Grant is offered to caregivers living in poverty
Early stimulation	Nurturing, stimulating interaction between children and their caregivers, positively and permanently strengthens ability to learn	Parents are equipped to provide their children with quality stimulation activities. Quality, subsidised early learning programmes are available

## Three cases for investing in the quality care programmes for the first 1000 days

### 1. Investment case on the basis of human rights

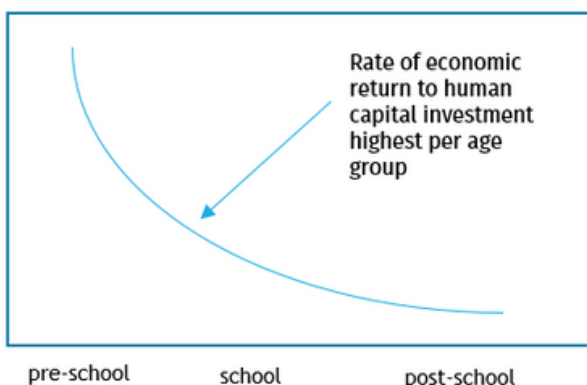
The United Nations' "Convention on the Rights of the Child", is a human rights treaty which came into effect in 1990. It sets out the civil, political, economic, social and health rights of children. Under the convention, investment should take place to give children the right to survive and thrive, beginning with those most likely to falter.

### 2. Investment case based on neuro-scientific evidence

Most of adult mental ability is formed in the first three years of life, and about half of that before birth. The development of mental ability is inversely affected by lack of quality care and nutrition. Internationally, one in 10 children has a deficiency or delay, and many could have been avoided with investment in early intervention.

### 3. Investment case based on the economic principles

Investment in quality early childhood programmes, which provide stimulation opportunities, prepare children for learning in school. The costs of investing in early learning opportunities are less than the socio-economic costs of a high dropout rate and resultant unskilled labour force. Meanwhile, the rate of return in investing in early learning is estimated at 13.7%. The multiplier effect of investing young lies in the opportunity to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty: children who receive quality early care and nutrition are more likely to offer it to their own children.



#### Sources:

Building Better Brains: New Frontiers in ECD, Unicef, 2014

[www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)

The Essential Package, Ilifa Labantwana, 2014 (2nd edition)

Human Capital Policy, Heckman & Carneiro, 2003