FROM CONCEPTION TO TWO YEARS
Development, Policy and Practice

AMANDA NORMAN
Recognising the importance of ‘the first one thousand days’, from the beginning of a woman’s pregnancy until her child’s second birthday, this comprehensive guide takes a fresh look at the role of the practitioner in supporting families and children from conception through to early infancy.

A period of dramatic physical, social and emotional change for both the parent and child, an infant’s experiences during his or her first two years of life have a significant impact on later development. *From Conception to Two Years* brings together key research, theory and experiences from practice to further practitioners’ knowledge and understanding of this critical period, and it informs professional approaches to providing care. Offering an explanation of key issues affecting the care of very young children, chapters feature reflective questions and promote discussion and further thinking on topics including:

- understanding and supporting parents and families during the transition to parenthood
- building a positive practitioner–parent relationship
- development, growth and care during the prenatal period
- approaches to care in the perinatal period
- attachment and the development of emotional connections
- ethical issues surrounding the care of infants
- creating playful care opportunities with infants and their families.

Giving Early Years practitioners and students the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to effectively support and care for children and their families from the very start, *From Conception to Two Years* is an essential guide for the provision of high quality infant care.

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From Conception to Two Years
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Amanda Norman
This book is dedicated to Diana
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As a therapeutic play specialist, I want to send thanks to my tutor Shalini Lilley who challenged me to critically think about emotional care, theory and practice beyond an educational frame. This was extended further with support and gratitude to Jenny Byrne, my doctorate supervisor at Southampton University.

I would also like to extend my thanks to the management and practitioners at Tiny Tots Day Nursery for enabling me to continue sharing experiences with the infants and young children cared for.

As a Senior Lecturer at the University of Roehampton I was given the opportunity to lead and teach modules, focusing on children under three for several years, so extend thanks to the Early Years team and their inspirational work, relating theory to practice. I would also like to acknowledge and include students who studied the Top-up degree at the University of Winchester. Together we have shared anecdotal stories and issues about caring for infants in a variety of ways. Additionally, I am very fortunate to be given the opportunity of writing about infancy and with this I give thanks to my supporting colleagues who have continually provided encouragement at the University of Winchester.

Finally, I give thanks to my four children, my husband Phil and family who have shaped my thinking and encouraged me in the writing of the book. They have motivated me to continually reflect on how I am as a parent, practitioner and professional in contributing to the dialogue of caring for infants from conception within Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) contexts.
This book seeks to illuminate, explore and bring critical attention to some key issues relating to the period between conception to two years. It includes the complexities of emotional relationships and care approaches between parents, practitioners and infants, attending early childhood educational and care (ECEC) settings. The overall intention of the book is the opportunity to submerge into the world of infants from conception, assimilating and appreciating the magnitude of this transitional period of life.

Why conception to two?

Babies are a bit boring really. They are ok when they get older and can respond through language, having a joke. I think many people find babies don’t do much.
(Anon, 2018)

This view suggests infants are passive recipients within relationships, with little to offer. However as research has progressed and we now recognise and confirm development is influenced from conception by the environment and the infant perceived as dependent yet active learner. Communicating, imitating others and having a rudimentary sense of self, new-born infants continue to actively contribute to the parenting relationship. Through the consistent care received by the parents, a sense of self emerges. Brain development is also dependent on stable and secure relationships with parents or primary main carer. When care is sought beyond the parents, practitioners may also share this role (Trevarthen, 2005). In recent years the regular caring of infants and young children has been increasingly sought beyond the home. Many parents place their infants into ECEC settings as they return to work or opt to share their childcare. Subsequently many settings who traditionally would have cared and
educated children beyond two years have opened their doors and expanded, providing ‘baby rooms’ and facilities to enable them to include the care of infants under two within their settings. These have grown substantially and in 2018 most group ECEC settings accommodate infants, with some being able to care for large groups of infants in their care. Parallel to this is the rise in understanding the inner world of infants and the potential concern in adverse childhood experiences and long-term health risks. The study of neuroscience and its connections to emotions has also become part of the discourses in caring for children within this age period. Therefore, there is rising recognition of the importance and value from conception to two and I believe the book is a timely addition. It centres on high quality intimate infant care, understanding and valuing emotional interactions of relationships between infants and practitioners.

The purpose of the book for practitioners

This book is primarily for supporting and promoting positive practices and well-being with parents and their infants. Drawing on a broad range of themes the book includes concepts discussed to navigate the reader toward specialist subjects. The aim is a greater appreciation of studies and discussions that celebrate this unique period as valuable in the present and future context of healthy growth and well-being. Within each chapter there are examples for practice and reflective questions to discuss and consider in relation to the topics outlined. I have widened the lens to include the value of working with infants as part of a family group and the significance of parent relationships. In discussing those practitioners working with infants, I consider family practitioner to be a relevant term used highlighting the role within a family dynamic. In defining family practitioner, the term bridges the triad relationship of practitioner, parents and infant. At the end of each chapter I have included narratives of practitioners to illustrate their thinking on the topic discussed.

Multiple perspectives

This book aims to provide detail to warrant reflection and a spark for wanting to know more about emotional relationships. Therefore, I have created a story line around attachment and firmly believe attachment and close relationships are valuable in connecting care. I have chosen to focus on parental and practitioners’ contributions in enhancing an emotional frame of understanding. From this perspective I have wanted to illuminate the parent’s viewpoint and how a relationship approach with practitioners can enhance and reduce issues between them, when their infants are looked
after in ECEC settings. I have chosen to focus on how developmental approaches are perceived and considered within emotions, language and physicality. I have drawn on key theories including Bowlby, Bakhtin and Gerber and complemented them with contemporary practice and discourses around the role of the key person approach, professional love, emotional labour and care pedagogies. I have also included the way regular care practices can become special and an enriching experience rather than a mundane routine of care.

The political landscape

This book has been constructed in a way that it is not intended to espouse a political agenda but a wish to understand theories underlying connected care and its practice in real world situations. The landscape of the earliest years has gained increasing recognition to the importance of the first two years of age and its effects on later life from an individualistic and societal perspective. Pre-natal factors through to infancy that affect development and growth include maternal health, diet and lifestyle choices. Less optimum conditions can therefore increase the likelihood of poor health outcomes and it is from this position that legislation has been included to critically engage in understanding how parents and infants are supported during this period. Broadly outlined are three themes: maternity care, health and wellbeing and relational pedagogies of care:

Maternity care: This will include the wider professional roles that have involvement in the transition to parenthood. The choices parents make and the care they desire and receive will also be included.

Health and wellbeing: This will include how optimum health and well-being is aspired to from conception to infancy and the current political climate in relation to specialised support in the community.

Relational pedagogies of care: A critical approach to the ethics of care and the current position of early year’s practitioners will be included in the specific roles and expectations of settings. The focus will be on the connected care in practice rather than within a specific curriculum framework. A key implication of this pedagogy is also the necessity that practitioners remain reflective and critically engaged with their pedagogy and its potential for long-lasting impact (Papatheodorou and Moyle, 2009). Taggart (2011) argues that as a caring profession there needs to be much more transparency with practitioners critically understanding their emotional work, advocating care as central to their practice.
Boxed texts and images

Each chapter contains a boxed text with practitioner viewpoint and questions for discussion. The ‘practitioner’s perspective’ is written from an autobiographical position of almost thirty years working in early years. During these years I have encountered and shared many anecdotal stories, experiences and reflections with practitioners. These have been intertwined into the practitioner perspectives as examples of practice, interwoven with my own fictional and anecdotal contributions. Each ‘question for discussion’ is intended to encourage discourses between practitioner and those studying this age range. These intended to provide a process of discussion and develop reflection with further thinking about specific topics and issues. The images are included as a visual point of reference to the topic I am discussing, and I believe helpful in reflecting further. I have used images known and personal to me, as an auto/biographical researcher in education. The individuals within the images may not be persons directly affected by the topic itself.

The chapters

The chapters will be framed around a care lens focus with topics connecting each chapter. The first chapter, on family centred care, will include an understanding of parents and families in the transition to parenthood and their adjustment to family life, in all its blended form. Relationships rather than partnerships will be the focus, between parents and practitioners. Practical ways to enhance these relationships will be included. The prenatal care chapter will include details of the transition to pregnancy and focus on the value of understanding the development and growth within a nature nurture frame in supporting the prenatal period. Understanding the complexities as a practitioner within this period will also be included. Perinatal care, the period at birth and beyond, otherwise known as the fourth trimester, or arguably defined as quadmester, will be discussed in the following chapter. It will focus on the value of understanding the development and growth of the new-born infant and the role as practitioner in supporting this trimester. A further chapter will focus on how developmental care is perceived and the predominant discourse around development and measuring development during this period. Emotional connections, as a chapter will then discuss the emotional connections. Attachment and practices in supporting emotions will be included. This will be further explored in the practitioner role as a professional carer and the ethics surrounding care, love and intimate relationships with infants and their families. Connecting with care will further consider attachment, but this time the chapter will include an application to practice in early childhood and care (ECEC) settings. This will be enhanced with the chapter
on playful care, the connection to play and care with a focus of open-ended play, treasure baskets and musicality in various forms. The final chapter will include some topics from the previous chapters within a reflective perspective and promote the reader to think about the process of reflection as a subjective experience in further thinking alongside how reflection has been used as an objective approach in measuring professional success. A concluding note of the chapters will include areas of moving forward with recommendations for practice working and caring for infants in ECEC settings.

**Glossary**

- **Infants**: This has been used consistently rather than ‘baby’ as a generic term used with under two years, with a focus on the first eighteen months.
- **New-born infants**: Birth to one month.
- **Babies**: Specifically, those infants under one where clarity is needed beyond the term infancy. If a study has used the term baby then where appropriate this will remain.
- **Care**: Providing attention and attending to the needs of health and development through a connected approach.
- **Carer**: The term given when discussing both parent, primary adult carers of infants and practitioner as a shared voice.
- **Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)**: Educational and care arrangements in a variety of forms for children from birth to compulsory schooling, regardless of the type of setting, funding, opening hours, or programme content.
- **ECEC settings**: Predominantly focused on day care nurseries, childminders contexts unless specified otherwise.
- **Practitioners**: A holistic term for those individuals employed and /or studying conception to two, with a practical element. Used in examples of application to practice.
- **Family practitioners**: A term used for those working in ECEC settings with infants to highlight their status and relation to parents and families.

The words defined above are not aimed to confuse but to give consistency to the following discussion.
Bibliography


Introduction


Reflective practice in early care


Family centred care


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**Prenatal care**

Developmental care


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Emotional care connections


### Professionalising care


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Connecting with care


Playful care
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Conclusion □moving forward□