

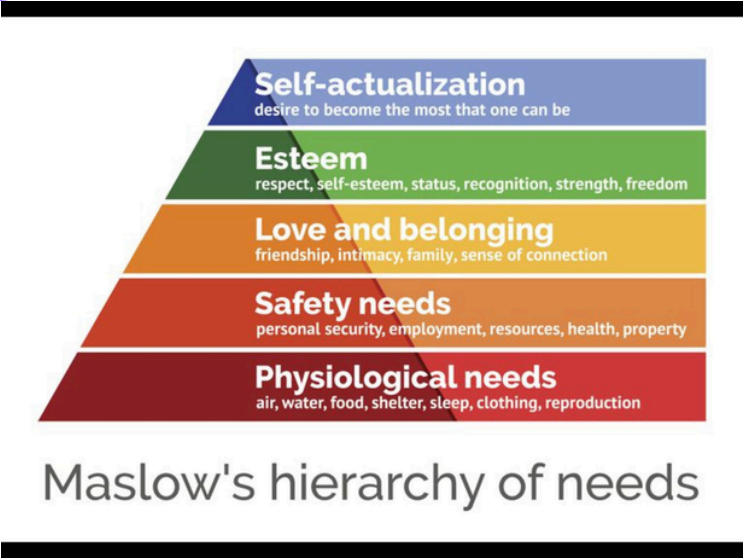
Health, Well-being, and Lifestyles

Introduction

This poster will investigate the concepts of health, well-being, and lifestyles and why these are important within the early years sector by exploring the different theories and models that support these concepts. This poster will also highlight the role of the early years practitioner and guide how to promote their practice to support young children effectively. Bradshaw, (2016) states that children are our future, children are tomorrow’s workforce, parents, and citizens’ investment in children’s health. Well-being and lifestyle are fundamental foundations that will help shape the future of the country.

Well-being

Well-being is defined by Berlinski & Schudy, (2015) as being healthy, happy, or prosperous. Musgrave, (2017) also defines well-being as happy, healthy, and comfortable. However, Jarden & Roache, (2023) state that “wellbeing can be understood on how people feel and how they function both on a personal and social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole.” A person's quality of life is commonly regarded as their level of wellbeing when they achieve both their personal/social goals, for instance, maintaining a good home, career, and relationships, as well as life satisfaction. It is important to support children in developing a good level of well-being. Who, (2024) states that children need opportunities to develop independence and self-regulation as well as good health to survive and thrive. To illustrate this point, UNICEF, (2022) states that children are the world’s most precious resource, and investing in their well-being will provide positive outcomes. To promote health and well-being, it is essential to support parents, families, and communities. In England, the Department for Education (DFE) published guidance for teachers within schools on addressing a child’s well-being needs (NSPCC, 2021). The UK government has also established an initiative called Plan for Change, which aims to enhance support for children and young people concerning their mental health and well-being. However, it is not just England that is focusing on well-being. Wales is the only country in the world to establish legislation that requires government agencies to improve social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being in Wales. for example, the Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG Act) (2015) forms a society that enables people to fulfil their potential no matter what their background or circumstances (including their socio-economic background). A society where individuals' physical and mental health is at the forefront (Tickell, 2011). This is where well-being and health, and lifestyles are all interconnected, and each one has an impact on the other. If you do not have the basic needs highlighted in Maslow’s hierarchy, then this will create a detriment to your lifestyle, which in turn will have a negative impact on your health and well-being. The WHO (2024, quoted in GOV. UK, 2014) states that “wellbeing exists in two dimensions, subjective and objective. It comprises an individual’s experience of their life as well as a comparison of life circumstances with social norms and values” examples of this include education, health, work, relationships and security.



(Fig 1 simply psychology, 2022)



(Fig 2: Researchgate.net, 2019)

Health

Early childhood is the period in which the foundations are laid for all aspects of human development, including emotional, intellectual, and physical. Marmot, (2013) states that it is essential to provide every child with the best start in life to enable a reduction in health inequalities. The World Health Organisation , (WHO) (2024) states that in 2016, at least 250 million children were unable to reach their full physical or psychological potential. According to WHO, (2024), one definition of health is a positive term that emphasizes a person’s social and personal resources. Musgrave (2017) also states that it is a positive concept emphasizing the need for social and personal resources, in addition to physical capabilities. However, the Welsh Government (2022) defines health as having a sound body and mind. The state of children’s health is determined by several factors social, environmental, and economic factors (Pearce *et al.*, 2019). For instance, socioeconomic factors such as poverty, where a child is living in an environment that is unable to supply the basic needs, such as food and water. This form of deprivation can lead to stress and worry, which can have an impact on a child’s mental health. This is where the need for Maslow’s hierarchy (theory illustrates an individual's needs) is compelling, as it introduces the basic needs that a human requires. Niemela & Kim, (2023) state that if the lower level of deficiency of needs is not met, then the higher levels of needs would be impaired. Maslow’s hierarchy is not the only model that is widely used in health care. The Rainbow model by Dahlgren and Whitehead is another model that is used. This model encourages people to think beyond just health and look to wider deterrents within society that can cause these health outcomes (Marmot, 2013). Almost everything has an impact on our health, so it is important to support healthy habits and good health during the first few years of life. The most important times to influence healthy outcomes are before birth and during the first 1000 days of life. The Welsh Government, (2022) suggests the need to maintain a holistic approach in supporting health and well-being. Maintaining a whole-system approach will allow professionals, caregivers, and families to collaborate on health and well-being. The need to provide support to children from an early age is fundamental in shaping their progression in future life. Early childhood health has a direct economic impact on countries with inadequate early childhood health. causing adverse effects such as unemployment, educational failures, and poor productivity. Cheung, (2018) also agrees with maintaining a whole-system approach to help children who are in poverty and children with trauma, such as abuse or living in a dysfunctional family environment. however, according to WHO, (2024), which states that half the deaths of children are due to conditions that could be easily prevented if the child had access to health care and given the correct support in assisting them to have the quality of life they deserve. They also state that there is still a great deal of work to be done to improve the health outcomes for children.

Lifestyles

Lifestyle is defined as an individual's way of life depending on several factors, such as diet, nutrition, home, and relationships. NHS. Wales, (n.d) states that people's lifestyles are determined by many factors, including social, economic, and physical environment, along with mental health. The Welsh government aims to eradicate unhealthy lifestyles by providing support and education to help individuals change their lifestyles. By 2030, the aim is for Wales to have an environment and society in which healthy choices are the easy choice. One factor that contributes to a lifestyle and is a determinant of an unhealthy lifestyle is poverty or neglect. Musgrave, (2017) says that parents who struggle financially and are unable to provide fresh food are supporting unhealthy outcomes for their child; without sufficient support, this cycle will continue with future generations. This is where the dynamic needs to change. The Welsh Government, (2024) wants to increase the life expectancy of adults, especially between the least and the most deprived areas, by 15% by 2050. This is just one of the pledges they have made to improve the lifestyle of individuals within Wales. To further the need for healthy outcomes, the Welsh Government has also introduced Universal Primary Free School Meals, which are now available to all primary schools within Wales. This pledge is in reaction to the growing strain that the cost of living is placing on families, as well as child poverty, and making sure no child goes to school hungry. Free school lunches also have advantages, such as encouraging a healthy diet, social interactions, and a better understanding of nutrition and health options. These initiatives are all centered around changing the dynamics of how we address health, well-being, and lifestyles by providing a deeper understanding. However, it must be noted that the UK Government does not provide free school meals for children, and they are still means-tested. They do, however, state that data collected in 2023 on healthy lifestyles show that 8 out of 10 (86.5%) adults have made changes to their lifestyles to help tackle environmental issues and future health outcomes. This is a positive move and shows that the more initiatives that local authorities and governments to provide support and encouragement for people to expand their knowledge on health and lifestyles will have a significant impact on how individuals see the benefits of these changes, not just for the individual but also for their families.

Application to Early Years Practice

Application to Early years practice, as previously highlighted, the importance of health, well-being, and lifestyles within our society is the foundation of living a healthy and happy life. Musgrave, (2017) states that it is vital that these foundations are formed from an early age. Early intervention is most effective when resources are focused on children, as these are the individuals who will benefit the most. Cheung, (2018) also agrees with the importance of early intervention but highlights the importance of physical health in early childhood. For instance, low birth weight may have lasting effects on a child's development. These factors and other detriments, such as low-income families, looked-after children, and a dysfunctional home environment, are all concerns that practitioners within early years settings need to be aware of. Everyone has a responsibility to ensure our children's health from professionals within a variety of positions and organizations in health, education, and charities. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Children (UNCRC) states that all children have the right to an education that lays a foundation for the rest of their lives (UNICEF, 2022). The Welsh Government, (2024) has created a new curriculum for Wales, which supports early years settings to create environments for children from 0 to 5 years of age to provide accessible, high-quality play. Providing a holistic approach that recognises the importance of the physical, emotional, and psychological well-being of children.

By providing the child with self-directed play, the practitioners within the early years setting are enhancing the child's cognitive development, along with aiding in both physical and social development. This is where a whole approach is required from parents, caregivers, and practitioners to ensure that every child has the best start in life. Sims, (2013) says it is important that a child's early years' experience is supported in the best way possible.



Fig. 1. The health hexagon model.

Conclusion

This poster highlights the importance of health, well-being, and lifestyle have with one another and how they are all interconnected. Young children are the future, and without the firm foundations of a healthy lifestyle, there is an increase in unhealthy outcomes such as obesity, diabetes, and mental health difficulties. This poster recognises the need for healthy outcomes from an early age by supporting a child's physical growth, emotional, and cognitive development, along with encouraging children to make healthy food choices. Maintaining the need for physical activities and the need to express their emotions positively helps children to build resilience and to gain lifelong habits that support overall well-being. Children who are healthy and emotionally secure are better able to focus, engage in learning, and form positive relationships with their peers and adults. In summary, early intervention in health, wellbeing, and healthy lifestyle choices is critical for families, society, and individual children. It lays the groundwork for a better, more resilient future for everybody if everyone raises healthy, content children from birth.

