

Student Name: Vicky Morris-Evans

Student Number: 2405866

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(ECEY5009)

Part 2: Script and presentation

AI Cover Sheet

I acknowledge my use of Canva to create the academic poster.

I also acknowledge the use of Copilot to help with finding specific research. I used the following prompts:

*Find me articles, research of journals that links health, well being and lifestyle to early years.

*Find me information on health, wellbeing and early years

*Find me information on lifestyle

These was used from the 1st of June 2025 - 25th of June 2025

I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

Link to recording:

[Meeting with Vicky Morris-Evans \(2405866\)-20250628_103218-Meeting Recording.mp4](#)

Evening everyone. Today, I will be discussing the topic Anxiety and linking it to early years and childhood. A crucial topic that affects children's development, health and overall well-being. We will explore its definition, the impact it can have, supporting data, and interventions that have been put in place to help children manage anxiety effectively.

Firstly, what is anxiety?

According to Mind (2021), anxiety is a feeling of unease, tension or fear, often triggered by concerns about future events or potential outcomes. It is a natural reaction to perceived threats and can manifest through thoughts, emotions and physical sensations. Cleveland Clinic (2023) state anxiety and fear are a normal part of childhood; fear is a natural reaction to danger or threat.

NHS (2023) claims anxiety can manifest in children as separation anxiety, social anxiety, phobias and generalized anxiety disorder. Young children may struggle to express their emotions verbally, leading to physical symptoms such as, stomach aches, sleep disturbances and irritability. Cleveland clinic (2023) explains anxiety in children is

classified as a disorder when persistent fears or worries disrupt their daily life for more than six months. Identifying anxiety can be challenging, as children may show signs of irritability or physical discomfort such as, complaining of feeling unwell. Recognizing symptoms early and providing appropriate support can be crucial in managing anxiety effectively.

Psychologist John Bowlby's Attachment Theory emphasizes the importance of secure relationships in early childhood and argues that children who experience inconsistent caregiving may develop anxiety due to a lack of emotional security.

Enright and Scharfe (2025) study reinforces Bowlby's Attachment Theory by demonstrating that attachment anxiety is closely linked to distress, which in turn affects emotional regulation. The research supports Bowlby's claim that the attachment system becomes activated in response to stress or perceived threats, highlighting the importance of secure relationships in fostering emotional stability. Findings indicate that attachment anxiety significantly impacts distress, fully mediating its effects on mindfulness, while attachment avoidance exhibits both direct and indirect effects. This suggests that children who experience inconsistent caregiving may struggle with heightened distress, reinforcing Bowlby's argument that emotional security in early relationships is crucial in mitigating anxiety and promoting well-being. The study highlights the importance of factoring in distress when looking at attachment and treatment outcomes, showing how secure attachment helps build emotional strength.

Types of anxiety

According to Willacy (2023), children can experience various types of anxiety, including *Generalized Anxiety Disorder*, which involves ongoing worry about everyday situations without a clear cause. *Separation anxiety* is common in very young children who become upset when apart from a parent, often reflecting healthy attachment and typically improving with age. Some children may also develop *specific fears or phobias*, experiencing intense anxiety toward objects or situations, which can trigger strong physical reactions. Additionally, *panic attacks* can occur suddenly and without warning, causing symptoms like rapid heartbeat, dizziness, and shortness of breath that usually pass after a short time.

Secondly, how does anxiety link to health, wellbeing and lifestyle in the early years?

Smith & Pollak (2020) believe that anxiety in early childhood can significantly impact a child's health, well-being and lifestyle, influencing their emotional and physical

development. Research suggests that early anxiety affects self-regulation, social interactions and stress responses, potentially leading to long-term mental health challenges. They continue to say these neurobiological changes significantly increase the risk of depression, anxiety and long-term physical health problems.

According to Crowley (2017, cited in NSPCC; Shonkoff *et al.*, 2014, cited in NSPCC, 2021), anxiety and early childhood stress can have significant effects on children's physical and cognitive development. It may weaken the immune system, making children more at risk to illness. Additionally, it can lead to difficulties with memory and learning, affecting their ability to process and retain new information. Children experiencing anxiety may also struggle to regulate their emotions, leading to mood instability. Furthermore, these challenges can slow information processing, making it harder for them to engage with tasks requiring focus and problem-solving. Addressing these issues early is essential for fostering healthy development.

Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory highlights the role of social interactions in cognitive and emotional development. Children with anxiety may struggle to engage in cooperative play, limiting their ability to develop problem-solving skills.

Mechelle *et al.* (2024) supports this by stating Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory highlights the importance of social interaction in cognitive and emotional development, suggesting that children learn best through guided experiences with more knowledgeable individuals. For children with anxiety, social withdrawal can hinder their ability to develop problem-solving skills and emotional regulation. They continue to say that The Zone of Proximal Development emphasizes the need for supportive guidance to help children overcome challenges, however anxious children may struggle to access this support due to limited social engagement. By fostering structured learning environments and encouraging peer interactions, caregivers and educators can help anxious children build confidence and resilience, reinforcing Vygotsky's belief that development is deeply rooted in social contexts.

Now I will move on to discuss the effects of anxiety on children

According to Anna Freud (n.d.) Children with Generalised Anxiety Disorder may struggle to recognize the severity of their anxiety, making it difficult for parents and carers to support them in addressing it. They often experience excessive worry about future events, loved ones or their own safety, leading to avoidance of school and social interactions. Physical symptoms such as stomach aches, headaches and muscle tension may accompany these concerns. Additionally, behavioural signs for example clinginess, sleep disturbances, irritability and difficulty concentrating can further impact their daily lives. Older children may lack confidence, engage in negative thinking and withdraw from social activities. Since these symptoms can overlap with other

health conditions, seeking medical advice from a GP is crucial to rule out other causes before a mental health diagnosis is made.

Pollard *et al.* (2023) state that childhood anxiety disorders have profound and lasting impacts across multiple domains of development. These disorders are associated with an increased risk of developing other mental health issues, such as depression, substance use and eating disorders, as well as self-harm. Additionally, children with anxiety disorders often experience poorer physical health and lower educational attainment, which can extend into adulthood. They continue to say the effects also influence family dynamics, with caregivers frequently missing work and providing informal care, leading to increased stress and financial strain. Childhood anxiety disorders lead to increased healthcare use and reduced productivity, with costs estimated to be 21 times higher than for children without these disorders. Early detection and intervention are crucial to reducing their widespread impact. (Pollard *et al.*, 2023).

It highlights that excessive anxiety can lead to significant distress and functional impairment, affecting emotional, cognitive, physiological and behavioural responses.

Vallance & Fernandez (2018) believe children with anxiety disorders often experience persistent worries, avoidance behaviours and heightened physiological responses, such as muscle tension. They discuss how genetic and environmental factors contribute to the development of anxiety disorders, with neuroimaging studies providing insights into their underlying mechanisms.

Additionally, their research suggests that childhood anxiety disorders, if left untreated, may increase the risk of depressive disorders in adulthood. Treatment approaches include cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) and pharmacological interventions, which have shown effectiveness in managing symptoms.

Next, I will be discussing the statistics and data surrounding the topic

According to The Children's Society (n.d.), the precise number of children struggling with anxiety and depression remains unclear, however available mental health statistics provide valuable insight into the issue.

NHS England (2020) state that since 2017 probable mental health disorders has risen. By 2020, one in six (16.0%) children aged 5 to 16 were identified as having a probable mental disorder, up from one in nine (10.8%) in 2017. This increase was observed in both boys and girls.

They continue to say among individuals aged 5 to 22 years with a probable mental disorder, 58.9% reported experiencing sleep difficulties.

Children aged 5 to 16 with a probable mental disorder were more than twice as likely to live in households struggling with payments (16.3%) compared to those without a disorder (6.4%).

According to Children in Wales (n.d.), mental health challenges among children and young people are widespread, with approximately one in eight having a diagnosable condition. These problems were already rising before the pandemic, yet governments across the UK continue to struggle in effectively addressing them.

Mind (2024) state that there was a 34% increase in the number of children and young people referred with anxiety in Wales between 2015/16 and 2022/23.

According to Mental Health Foundation (n.d.), almost one in ten children and young people aged 5 to 16 have a diagnosable mental health condition. However, the majority—about 70%—do not receive the early intervention they need to address these challenges effectively.

The statistics show a concerning rise in mental health issues among children and young people. NHS England (2020) say that between 2017 and 2020, the number of people likely to have mental health problems rose significantly—from about one in nine to one in six.

In Wales, one in eight children have a diagnosable condition, and Mind (2024) notes a sharp increase in anxiety referrals between 2015/16 and 2022/23. The Mental Health Foundation stresses that while around one in ten children aged 5 to 16 have a diagnosable condition, most do not receive adequate early intervention. Across the UK, experts point to a system that reacts to crises rather than prioritizing prevention, leaving many young people without the support they need.

What interventions, legislations, policies and support have been implemented to support early years anxiety?

Davis and Packer (n.d.) developed six-week interventions called Quiet, Shy and Anxious (QSA) Learners Programme, they say it successfully helped children become more confident in their interactions, both with peers and practitioners. Small group sessions created a calm, supportive space where children felt empowered to lead discussions, boosting their confidence and assertiveness in mainstream classrooms. They said that practitioners valued the opportunity to connect with quieter children and observed noticeable improvements in their self-esteem and engagement. The programme highlighted the importance of providing quiet children with dedicated spaces to reflect and communicate, ensuring their development is not hindered by their reserved nature.

Elsa support (n.d.) state that The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) intervention is a school-based programme designed to help children and young people develop emotional resilience and well-being. ELSAs are trained teaching assistants who provide structured support for issues like anxiety, self-esteem, social skills, emotional regulation and coping strategies. The intervention is not about fixing problems but rather helping children find their own solutions in a safe, nurturing environment. Sessions typically last six weeks, focusing on building emotional literacy through activities, discussions and reflection. ELSAs receive specialized training and supervision from educational psychologists to ensure effective support.

Both the QSA Learners Programme and ELSA Intervention are designed to support children dealing with anxiety and emotional challenges, however they differ in their approach. While QSA fosters connections between practitioners and quieter children, helping them integrate into mainstream classrooms. ELSA provides guided support and emotional literacy development, ensuring children learn to manage and express their emotions in a safe, structured environment.

According to Croke (2022), the Mind Over Matter report called for prioritizing mental health in Wales, shifting focus to prevention and early intervention, and improving collaboration between the key services health, education and social care. The report highlighted gaps in support for young people who do not meet specialist service criteria, prompting the Welsh Government to back 'Together for Children and Young People' an NHS-led initiative aiming to reshape mental health services. The Children's Commissioner for Wales (2022) *'No wrong door' report*, further emphasized the need for clearer more coordinated services to prevent families from falling through system gaps. Recent improvements include increased school-based counselling, a CAMHS in-reach programme, and curriculum reforms embedding mental health in education. The Welsh Government's Mental Health Delivery Plan continues to prioritize children's mental health, driven by scrutiny from policymakers and sustained campaigning from young people and advocacy groups.

Welsh Government (2019) state the Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act was introduced in 2015 to improve Wales's social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being. It requires the Welsh Government and 43 public bodies to adopt long-term thinking, community collaboration, and preventative approaches to create a better future. The Act establishes seven well-being goals: a prosperous, resilient, healthier and more equal Wales, along with cohesive communities, vibrant culture and language and global responsibility. National indicators are being developed to track progress, aligning with the Early Years Outcomes Framework to support children's well-being.

The UK government's mental health framework for babies, children, and young people, as outlined by the Department of Health & Social Care (2024), focuses on promoting well-being and preventing mental health issues from birth through adolescence. It emphasizes *early intervention, nurturing relationships, safe environments, and accessible support*. The plan aims to reduce risks like poverty and discrimination while boosting protective factors such as caregiving, social connections, and access to nature. A key element of the framework is cross-sector collaboration among healthcare, education, and policy services to build stronger, more unified mental health strategies

Let's conclude

Anxiety in early childhood is a complex and growing concern, with significant effects on children's emotional, cognitive and physical development. It can present in various forms such as, generalized anxiety, separation anxiety and specific phobias, often impacting a child's ability to learn, socialize and thrive. Bowlby's Attachment Theory and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, highlight the importance of secure relationships and social interactions in fostering emotional resilience. Alarmingly, recent statistics reveal a sharp rise in childhood mental health issues with NHS England reporting that the number of children with probable mental disorders rose from one in nine in 2017 to one in six by 2020, with many experiencing sleep difficulties and living in financially stressed households. Despite the growing need, many children still do not receive timely intervention. However, programmes such as the QSA Learners Programme, ELSA and national frameworks for example the Mental Health (Wales) Measure and the UK's early years mental health strategy offer essential steps toward early support. Addressing anxiety early through prevention, targeted intervention and strong caregiver relationships is crucial for promoting long-term well-being and healthy development.

Thank you for listening

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