

Health, Well-being and Lifestyles



(Pinterest, n.d.)

Introduction

This poster will outline and define the concepts of health, wellbeing and lifestyle and discuss their importance in supporting young children's overall development. It will also explore a range of relevant theories and models and examine how they can be applied effectively within early years settings to promote positive outcomes for children.

Health, wellbeing and lifestyle are multidimensional concepts that are closely connected, with each influencing the others. Early childhood is an important period for health, wellbeing and development. Early childhood is an important period for health, wellbeing and development. Experiences during these early years can influence children's learning, relationships and later outcomes, including their health, social behaviour, educational attainment and employment (Tickell, 2011). Supporting children's health and wellbeing from an early age can therefore help establish positive foundations for their development and future wellbeing.

Marmot et al. (2020) emphasise the importance of giving every child the best start in life and demonstrate how social and economic inequalities can influence children's health, development and future outcomes. This highlights the importance of ensuring that children receive appropriate care, guidance and support during the early years.

Ecological and sociocultural theories provide valuable insight into how children's health, wellbeing and lifestyles can be influenced by their relationships, experiences and wider environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Vygotsky, 1978).

Understanding these theories enables early years practitioners to recognise the many factors that influence children's development and to provide appropriate support. This poster therefore explores these theoretical perspectives and demonstrates how they can be applied in early years practice to promote children's holistic development, health and wellbeing.

Health

Health is a holistic concept that includes physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing. These aspects of health are closely connected and together influence a child's overall development and quality of life. Wellbeing involves feeling safe, secure, valued and able to develop positive relationships with others. Musgrave (2017) states that children's wellbeing is shaped by their daily experiences, the quality of the relationships they form and the support they receive from the adults around them. Research consistently shows that health and wellbeing during the early years have a lasting influence on later life. Children who experience poverty or adverse childhood experiences, such as abuse, neglect or family dysfunction, may be at greater risk of later harmful behaviours, physical illness and poorer life outcomes (Cheung, 2018).

The World Health Organization (1948) defines health as encompassing physical, mental and social wellbeing, rather than simply the absence of disease or illness. It also recognises the highest attainable standard of health as a fundamental right for all people, without discrimination (World Health Organization, 1948). Similarly, Marmot et al. (2020) emphasise that giving every child the best start in life is essential to reducing health inequalities. Early childhood circumstances can influence children's health, development and educational outcomes, with inequalities experienced during childhood potentially contributing to disadvantages across the life course.

Mental health is an essential part of overall wellbeing and can influence how children understand and manage their emotions, respond to challenges and develop relationships with others. Musgrave (2017) highlights the importance of supporting children's emotional health and wellbeing, including the development of confidence, resilience and positive relationships. Consistent emotional support and responsive relationships can contribute to children's emotional security and positive development (Musgrave, 2017).

Supportive environments are also important for promoting children's health and development. Responsive relationships with caregivers can support healthy development, help children manage stress and regulate their emotions and behaviour, and contribute to the development of resilience (Center on the Developing Child, 2021). Similarly, the World Health Organization (2024) emphasises that children need good health, adequate nutrition, safe and supportive environments, opportunities for learning and responsive relationships to support their health, development and wellbeing.

The importance of positive relationships can be further understood through Bowlby's Attachment Theory. Holmes (2014) explains that Bowlby's theory emphasises the importance of the emotional bond's children develop with caregivers who provide consistent comfort, protection and security. Secure attachment relationships can help children develop a sense of safety and confidence, supporting their emotional wellbeing and their ability to manage stress and everyday challenges. Positive and responsive relationships can therefore provide an important foundation for children's emotional wellbeing and healthy development (Holmes, 2014).

Wellbeing

Wellbeing relates to an individual's quality of life and ability to cope with everyday challenges. Dodge et al. (2012) describe wellbeing as a balance between the challenges individuals face and the resources available to manage them. Similarly, the World Health Organization (2024) views wellbeing as a positive state that includes quality of life and the ability to have meaning and purpose. Supporting children's physical, emotional, social and psychological needs is therefore important for their overall wellbeing. Public Health Network Cymru (2025, p. 2) states that "Good mental health and emotional wellbeing of babies, children, and young people is crucial for their development, happiness, and success in life."

Wellbeing can mean different things to different people. Ryff, Boylan and Kirsch (2021) describe two main types of wellbeing. Hedonic wellbeing relates to happiness, enjoyment and positive feelings, while eudaimonic wellbeing focuses on personal growth, having a sense of purpose and achieving potential. For children, these types of wellbeing may be supported through play, positive relationships, learning and a sense of achievement.

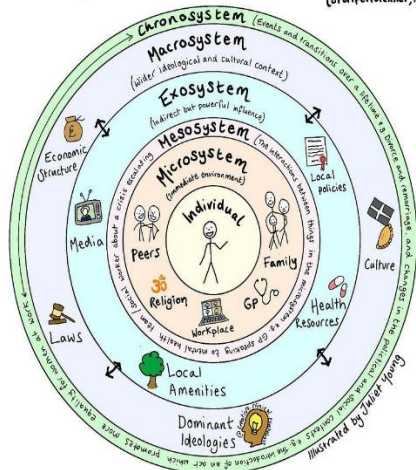
Emotional wellbeing relates to children's ability to experience positive emotions, develop confidence and cope with everyday challenges. Musgrave (2017) highlights the importance of children's emotional and social development as part of their overall health and wellbeing. Ryff's (2014) model also helps explain psychological wellbeing through six areas: self-acceptance, autonomy, personal growth, purpose in life, environmental mastery and positive relationships. However, children's experiences can also affect their wellbeing. Adverse experiences during childhood can have a negative impact on children's mental health and emotional wellbeing (Howard, Burton and Levermore, 2020).

Supporting children's emotional wellbeing is an important part of their overall health and development. Positive and responsive relationships with caregivers and other significant adults play an important role in children's healthy development (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004). The Center on the Developing Child (2021) also explains that supportive relationships and positive early experiences can help children build resilience and manage stress. Marmot et al. (2020) emphasise the importance of giving every child the best start in life, as early experiences and inequalities can affect health, wellbeing, education and future opportunities.

Meeting children's needs from an early age is important for their wellbeing. Maslow's (1943) theory suggests that basic needs, such as food, safety and security, need to be met before individuals can focus on higher-level needs, including belonging, self-esteem and personal growth. Similarly, Dowling (2014) highlights that consistently meeting children's physical and emotional needs can support the development of confidence, positive self-esteem and a secure sense of identity. Meeting these needs can therefore provide an important foundation for children's healthy development and overall wellbeing.

Ecological Systems Theory

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979)



Lifestyle

Lifestyle refers to the behaviours, habits and choices that shape how people live. Naidoo and Wills (2016) suggest that factors such as diet, physical activity, relationships and everyday habits can influence health and wellbeing. However, children's lifestyles are also shaped by the circumstances in which they grow up. Public Health Wales (2023) highlights that health and wellbeing are influenced by wider social, economic and environmental factors, including family circumstances, housing, education, employment and access to resources.

A child's lifestyle can be influenced by their home environment, relationships, culture and community. Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests that children's development is shaped by interactions within their family, educational settings and wider social environment. These different influences can help shape children's experiences, behaviours and overall development.

Maintaining a healthy lifestyle can support children's physical, emotional and social wellbeing. Musgrave (2017) highlights the importance of healthy habits in supporting children's overall health and development. Regular physical activity is particularly important, as it supports physical fitness, bone and muscle development and mental wellbeing in children (WHO, 2024).

Sleep is another important part of a healthy lifestyle. Getting enough sleep supports children's growth and physical health, as well as their concentration, memory and mood (Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, 2025). Having a regular bedtime routine can also help children settle and develop healthy sleep habits. Good hygiene practices are equally important, as they can help reduce illness and infection and support overall health (Naidoo and Wills, 2016).

While healthy habits are important, children's health and wellbeing are also influenced by circumstances that may be outside their control. Marmot et al. (2020) highlight that children's early circumstances and wider social environment can influence their health and future outcomes. Bradshaw (2016) also highlights that children's wellbeing is influenced by different areas of their lives, including their health, relationships, education and living environment. Promoting healthy habits alongside positive and supportive environments can therefore contribute to children's development and long-term wellbeing.

Young children's lifestyles are largely influenced by the adults who care for them and the environments in which they grow. Public Health Wales (2023) highlights that children's health and wellbeing are shaped by wider factors, including family circumstances, income, education and access to healthy environments. Early years practitioners therefore have an important role in supporting healthy lifestyles through balanced nutrition, physical activity and positive daily routines. The Welsh Government (2022) also highlights the importance of providing learning and experiences that support children's physical health, mental health, and emotional and social wellbeing. Practitioners should work in partnership with parents, carers and other professionals to ensure children receive appropriate support. The NSPCC (2024) highlights the importance of recognising and responding to concerns and working with other agencies to safeguard and support children and families.

Providing opportunities for outdoor play, exploration and creative experiences can also support children's wellbeing. Musgrave (2017) highlights that play supports children's emotional and social development and can help them process feelings, reduce anxiety and improve overall wellbeing. Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises children's right to rest, leisure and play (UNICEF, 2021, Article 31). The Curriculum for Wales also recognises the importance of supporting children's health and wellbeing as an integral part of their learning and development (Welsh Government, 2022).

The Curriculum for Wales places health and wellbeing at the centre of children's learning and development, with the aim of supporting them to become healthy, confident individuals who are ready to learn (Welsh Government, 2022). Practitioners should also recognise when children may be affected by adverse childhood experiences and provide appropriate support. Boullier and Blair (2018) highlight the importance of recognising adversity early and building social support and links with community services to help reduce its potential impact and promote resilience. This reinforces the importance of providing timely support that responds to the needs of children and families. Wilson (2025) also emphasises the importance of developing positive partnerships between practitioners and parents, as effective relationships and communication can help practitioners work collaboratively with families to support children's learning, development and wellbeing.

Conclusion

Overall, the evidence presented throughout this poster demonstrates that health, wellbeing and lifestyle are closely interconnected, with each influencing the others. It highlights the need to support young children in developing healthy lifestyles while providing positive experiences and secure, nurturing relationships that promote their physical, emotional, social and cognitive development. The discussion also shows that early years practitioners play a vital role in promoting children's health and wellbeing by creating safe, inclusive and supportive environments, working in partnership with families, recognising individual needs and encouraging healthy habits from an early age.

The theories and models explored reinforce the value of adopting a holistic approach that considers all aspects of a child's development while recognising the influence of family, community and the wider environment. Welsh Government guidance also provides a valuable framework for promoting health and wellbeing within early years practice and supporting children to reach their full potential.

Finally, understandings of health and wellbeing can evolve and may differ across cultures, communities and stages of life. This requires practitioners to remain responsive and reflective in their practice while recognising and responding to the diverse needs of every child.

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