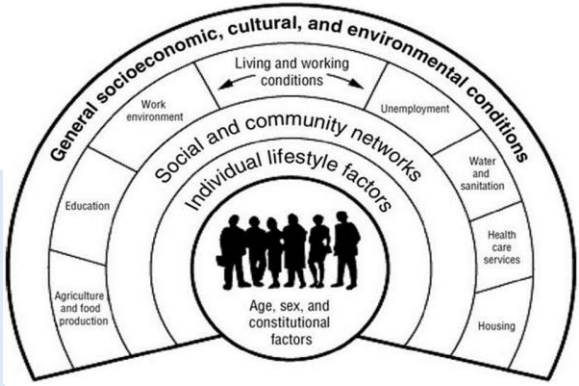
Health, Well-being and Lifestyle

Introduction

This poster will contain information about Health, Well-being and Lifestyle. It will include factors of them all and show how they are interconnected factors that influence a child's development. Different theories and methods will be explained and discussed along with the role of the practitioner within Early Years practice and the importance of positive relationships and encouraging good habits and lifestyles. Berlinski and Norbert (2015) support this by stating ensuring good relationships are formed with children and their families/carers builds the foundation for an individual's positive wellbeing. Center on the Developing Child (2016) states during a child's early years physical growth, cognitive development and emotional wellbeing are highly sensitive to environmental factors including nutrition, physical activity and nurturing relationships. During the first 1000 days of a child's life from conception to their second birthday are critical for lifelong health, development and well-being. During these days rapid brain development and physical growth occur along with the foundations for cognitive, emotional and social skills are established. The first 1000 days are recognised as the best opportunity to create a healthier future.



Source: Dahlgren and Whitehead (1991)

Health

Health is a state of complete mental, social and physical well-being. Improving the health of children is of upmost importance, the statistics of children under 5 years dying has halved from 2000 to 2017. However, to further improve the health outcomes work and support is to be continued and strengthened through organisations and practices. Over half of child deaths are due to conditions that could have been prevented with support and help (WHO, 2022).

The medical model of health, focuses on diagnosing and treating illness. It plays a significant role in early years by emphasising the prevention, identification and management of diseases and developmental conditions. However, it has been critiqued for its limited focus (WHO, 1984). The New curriculum for funded non maintained settings (2022) states practitioners forming emotionally secure relationships with the children and their families/carers allows the children to feel safe and loved. By modelling positive behaviours encourages the children to start communicating their feelings and helps with regulating their emotions. Brodie (2014) supports this by stating a stron relationship between a key person and child is vital for that child to settle and feel comfortable in their surroundings allowing for them to reach their true potential. However, Bowbly (2012) argues a child can only form secure relationships with the primary caregiver.

Action for Children (2025) states that poverty in the UK has risen since Covid-19, this putting strains on many families around communities. A parent/carers mental health can be highly impacted by the stress of money related issues and poverty which can impact a way they parent and the environment a child lives in. It can also have an impact with their relationships with others excluding themselves or getting into argumentative relationships with others with the children witnessing this. This can cause negative impact to a child's life leading to a negative upbringing and impacting their future. Therefore, it is important for practitioners and settings to ensure close bonds and relationships with the children and their families/carers to ensure a safe, nuturing home life is a part of that child's background. Creating a close bond to a child can help them feel loved and respected allowing them to thrive academically while supporting their self-esteem and confidence for later in life. (Brodie, 2014).

Well-Being

Well-being in the early years is the foundation of a child's overall development. A strong sense of well-being allows children to explore, learn and form secure relationships which are crucial for positive outcomes later in life. Statham and chase (2010) state that the concept of well-being is multi-dimensional and focuses on a child's immediate as well as their future. Early years practitioner (EYP's) play a vital role in supporting children's well-being by creating safe, nurturing environments. EYP's model positive interactions, support emotional regulation and foster a sense of belonging these aspects contribute to improved social outcomes. Well-being is not just a matter of health but a critical determinant of a child's future success and happiness (Centre of the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2024). According to UNICEF() children are at their happiest when spending time with loved ones, that including family, friends, pets, and people they have close relationships with. Maslows Hierachy of Needs states children and babies require their basic needs to be met by their caeregivers, the first need to in Maslows chart that needs ot be met is a child's physiological needs these include water, air, food, shelter, sleep, clothing and reproduction. These need to be met before moving up the ladder of needs. (Mcleod, 2018) Dowling (2014) supports this by stating it is imporant a babys needs are met to ensure they can grow up happy and healthy giving them the best chance for a future with high self-esteem and the feeling of being loved and nutured by their caregivers and others around them. Zadar and Rudolph (2021) believe that well-being is just as important as physical health, their reasoning for this is because having a good mental health helps build resilience giving them the life skills to deal with challenges throughout life with positivity and gratefulness. Children who have better well-being seem to have better self-esteem and confidence this improves their social skills and transitions.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Source; Simply Psychology, 2025.

Lifestyles

A child's early years are crucial for shaping lifelong habits. A healthy lifestyle in early childhood includes many factors, such as balanced nutrition, physical activity and development, community, relationships, home environment, adequate sleep and engagement with services. Having a good sleep routine helps improve brain development and lowers stress improving mood and focus. (Welsh Government 2021). Cambridge dictionary (2023) supports this by stating lifestyle is described by an individual's life choices, their interest's and the way they live. How they choose to make decisions and go about their daily routines. Nutrition in Wales plays a vital role in shaping young children's lifestyles, through the Welsh Government's Healthy and Sustainable Pre-School Scheme it promotes settings to promote balanced diets, oral health, community involvement, emotional well-being and physical activity (Public Health Wales, Nutrition Skills for Life, 2025). According to Benelam et al. (2015) The UK's Eatwell plate is a visual representation of the types and proportions of foods needed for a healthy balanced diet. The department of health states it can be gradually applied from 2 years old and applied in full when the child reaches 5 years old. However, there is no current food-based models for ages 1-3 years. By embedding the eat well plate principles into snack and meal provision in settings this will promote healthy habits that will hopefully last a lifetime. It will promote hydration, reduce sugar intake, reduce saturated fats while involving children with food preparation and giving them knowledge about the foods they are consuming every day.The hopes for the Eatwell poster are to aim as a quick reference guide that can be used daily showing the four main food groups visually in the suggested proportions per the child's age. Including five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, five portions of starchy foods, three portions of dairy rich food or two portions of non-dairy protein high foods (three for vegetarian-based diets for children).Toddlers should be physically active for at least 180 minutes a day; this is 3 hours spread out throughout each day. This can include light strenuous activities such as standing up, moving around, as well as move active activities such as running, riding a bike, playing in activities.

According to Bargoda et al. (2017) having good hygiene and ensuring the environment and home is clean and tidy also promotes a better quality of life and helps reduce the risk of illnesses and germs spreading to and from everyone. This is even more important where there are young children living as they crawl around and put things in their mouth.

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Application to Early Years Practice

Promoting health, wellbeing and a positive lifestyle is fundamental in early years practice. The Curriculum for Wales (2022) supports this as they place health and well-being as one of its six core areas of learning and experience, recognising that children's physical, emotional and social development are deeply interconnected. The Welsh Government (2019) states that the new curriculum for Wales helps practitioners and nursery/school settings to support the health and well-being of the children in their care, the purpose of the new curriculum in Wales is encouraging healthy, confident individuals who can be ambitious and capable learners. It equips the children with the support to navigate physical, mental, emotional and social challenges. Ultimately, early years practitioners play a crucial role in fostering environments that build healthy, confident individuals by forming strong bonds with the children and their families and supporting them in the best way for them. A holistic approach as outlined in the Well-being of future Generations Act (2015) ensures practitioners consider long term impacts while using preventative strategies when supporting the children's development. A holistic approach ensures the children are seen as a whole, recognising that health, learning and emotional development are all interconnected. Following the holistic approach supports in tailoring for individual needs, respects cultural diversity and fosters resilience and positive self-identity (UNICEF, 2019). A child's physical, emotional and social well-being influences their ability to learn, develop and focus. Bradshaw (2016) states engaging children in mindfulness activities helps them learn strategies to calm their body and mind, while creating a peaceful and relaxing environment that encourages increased communication and concentration. Emotional regulation is a tool all children will benefit from early on and future life.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is evident to see that Health, Well-being and lifestyle are play a crucial role in supporting a child's development and in shaping their future to maximise each child's true potential. Early intervention and supporting environments contribute to positive health behaviours and resilience that can last a lifetime. Understanding the foundational concepts equips professionals with the right tools to support holistic child development. By encouraging healthy habits from early years and positive emotional well-being can influence children's future outcomes. Through models and theories discussed it is apparant that taking a holistic approach is important when It comes to children's development to support them in the best way suited and to ensure their health and well-being are being supported whilst intilling positive behaviours and lifestyles.

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