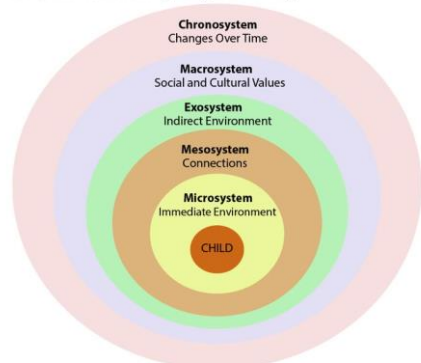


Well-being, Health and Lifestyle

Introduction

As stated by Sir Micheal Marmot (2010), the foundations for virtually every aspect of human development, physical, emotional and intellectual are laid in early childhood. This poster will explore the concepts of health, well-being and lifestyles and how important these are in early childhood. This poster will also discuss different theories that are linked to the early years practice to gain an understanding of the different variety of factors that influence health, well-being and lifestyle. The role of the early year's practitioner will also be explored, amongst a safe and stimulating environment, quality relationships and attachment and other factors that impact a healthy lifestyle and well-being in early childhood.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory



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Health

The World Health Organisation (2024) defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political beliefs, economic or social condition. Musgrave (2017a) also defines health in a holistic way by suggesting health and well-being can be described as the achievement and maintenance of physical fitness and mental stability. Health being the result of a combination of physical, social, emotional and intellectual factors. Holistic health is an approach to wellness that considers multiple dimensions of a person's life. Maslow considers this when he created his theory, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. He brings together various human needs, but in a hierarchy of importance, once one need is fulfilled, another appears almost immediately. His theory covers multiple areas of personal needs, understanding that health is not just simply physiological, but also personal development and well-being (Pichère, 2015). General socio-economic, cultural and environmental conditions can be determinants of health including, education/work, living conditions, water and sanitation, health care services etc. the Dahlgren and Whitehead model of the main determinants of population health encourages people to think beyond the health sector/services and broadens horizons. The model maps various influences on health ranging from age and sex to broader factors like unemployment and living conditions, to emphasise that health is impacted by a complex of personal, social and environmental factors. Today, the Dahlgren and Whitehead model is the world's most widely used model of its kind (Dahlgren and Whitehead 2021). Factors like living in a deprived area and parents' employment/financial status can contribute to a child's mental and physical health and can determine how they think, feel and behave. Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasises the importance of a positive relationship in overcoming the potential damage that is caused by a gloomy and ineffective environment. A very constructive environment may not be sufficient to foster emotionally positive development without a warm and caring relationship. When a parent is affected by these factors their mental health is likely to be affected too, therefore also affecting their child's mental health. Good health for young children builds the foundation for the healthy development of many interconnected biological systems that children need to grow and thrive well into adulthood (Harvard University, no date). In early childhood, having positive relationships with others can in a positive way support health and development. These strong bonds built between the child and their parent/carer are what allows the child to feel safe and secure (Welsh Government, 2021). Bowlby developed this theory known as the attachment theory. In his theory, Bowlby suggests that the strongest bond is between the child and the mother which helps children feel a sense of security, the quality of these relationships shapes attachment styles, secure or insecure and is a critical role in early childhood development. However, Bowlby also suggests that these attachments can also be formed by multiple care givers including teachers and childcare practitioners. Bowlby believed that if these attachments are not formed from as little as the newborn stage, then it can negatively affect the emotional health and wellbeing of the child as they progress through childhood into adolescence and adulthood (Holmes, 2014).

Well-being

According to Statham and Chase (2010) the concept of well-being is multi-dimensional, encompassing physical, social and emotional well-being and focusing on children's immediate as well as their future lives. Whereas Musgrave (2017) describes well-being as a state of being, comfortable, happy or healthy. Diener and Suh (1997) believed that subjective well-being consists of three interrelated components: life satisfaction, pleasant affect and unpleasant affect. Affect refers to pleasant and unpleasant moods and emotions, whereas life satisfaction refers to a cognitive sense. In simple terms, this means how happy or satisfied a person is with their life and well-being is made up of three parts. Positive feelings – joy or excitement, negative feelings – sadness or anger and how satisfied a person is (Dodge et al, 2012, p. 223). Early work from Ryff (1989) identified aspects that constitute wellbeing. These are, positive relationships with others, environmental mastery, purpose in life, potential, self acceptance and the ability to fulfil goals.

According to Statham and Chase (2010) children thrive when they feel safe, supported and healthy, a good well-being also allows for the development of confidence and resilience and encourages them to express their emotions in a positive way. Children who experience a greater sense of well-being are likely to become healthy adults. It not only positively effects mental health but also has a great impact on physiological health too. Improved concentration in school and provides a positive focus. Early childhood health and well-being are interlinked; Maslow created his theory based on the needs of an individual. Basic, physiological needs must be met before the other needs can be considered as the human body cannot optimally function if needs are not satisfied. Once this level of needs is fulfilled, it motivates behaviour to begin fulfilling other needs. It is vital for children's needs to be met so that they can grow and develop and have a high self esteem and well-being. However, for young children, the need for positive and loving relationships can sometimes override the need for safety and security, this can often be seen in children who have experienced some form of abuse. Once a child begins to feel a sense of security in relationships and develops a level of trust with a caregiver, their mental and physical health is impacted positively (McLeod, 2018).

Lifestyle

According to ESTYN (2017) the promotion of healthy living is a key objective of the Welsh government as healthy living contributes to a healthy well-being. Factors that contribute to a healthy lifestyle include, a balanced diet and physical exercise, good emotional and mental well-being, safety, hygiene and environment related issues. Other factors including relationships, parenting, engagement with services and income can also determine the type of lifestyle a person lives. Sieck (2014) explains that lack of activity destroys the good condition of every human being and the type of lifestyle a child lives is important as this can directly affect their health and well-being. A child's lifestyle shapes their health and well-being, so it is important to understand and support positive lifestyle through multi agency working to strengthen the child's outcomes. Multi agency working involves practitioners from different professions working in an integrated way on a shared task (Payler and Georgeson 2013). According to Gasper (2009) multiagency working provides opportunities for needs to be met collectively as well as individually so that the needs of the whole family can be addressed in a unified way which supports a healthy lifestyle, therefore supporting positive health and well-being.

Good personal hygiene, a good sleeping pattern and the cleanliness of the home environment are vital for a healthy lifestyle, decreasing the risk of illness, improving mental health and well-being and positively effecting they way a child's brain preforms (Wein, 2021). An unhealthy lifestyle in children can also negatively affect their health and well-being. Nutrition plays a vital role in growth and development, without proper nutrition children are at risk of impaired growth and higher risk of illness and infections or childhood obesity. Early childhood is the time for rapid brain development, an unhealthy lifestyle can lead to poor memory and can affect the ability to build cognitive skills meaning the child may not hit certain developmental milestones (Patil, no date).

Application to early years practice

Welsh Government (2021) explain how important the role of a practitioner is when supporting children through their development. Being an enabling adult means creating emotionally safe environments where children can express and regulate their emotions and behaviours in positive ways. They support children to cope with uncertainty and change, preparing them to manage transitions and changes in their daily routines. As a practitioner, it is also vital that stronger connections are made between the child's home and wider community. This strengthens their sense of belonging, builds trusting relationships, creates a sense of identity and promotes a positive well-being for all involved. Bronfenbrenner's theory has significant implications for early years practice, by applying insights from the ecological systems and bioecological model, early years professionals can create optimal conditions for children's learning and development (Early Years TV, no date). The influence of the local community is a powerful determinant of health. Children living in deprived areas or in poverty are more likely to experiences health problems and have poor emotional development and mental health, therefore working in partnerships with other professionals allows for expertise and professional values to be shared that enhance the outcomes for the children.

Article 31 of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child (UNICEF, no date). Providing opportunities for children to play in safe, creative environments where they can take risks without the fear of consequences will improve wellbeing and encourage independence (Musgrave, 2017b). Supporting a child's holistic development is important as it ensures every area is covered. Creating enabling experiences in safe yet stimulating environments supports holistic development and the well-being of the child (Maholmes, 2014). Just like attachment, adverse childhood experiences (ACES), which can be any form of abuse or harm, can have an impact on a child's future holistic development. promoting stable and nurturing environments and relationships and using emotional regulation strategies can help to support the needs pf children who have unpredictable behaviour and those who struggle to understand how to deal with their emotions and feelings (Forbes, 2023). The new curriculum helps settings support the heath and well-being of young children holistically. It encourages healthy and ambitious individuals who are capable learners (Welsh Government, 2021). This is important as it guides practitioners as they provide the correct support for children and their families and supports their growth and development.

Conclusion

As discussed, deeply important that children experience a healthy lifestyle with positive relationships that support their well-being, in an environment that is enabling and supports their growth and development. Within this poster health, well-being and lifestyles are all interconnected and influence each other. Through the theories discussed within the poster it is evident that promoting a holistic approach allows practitioners to support every child's individual needs to encourage them to grow and develop healthily. Furthermore, it has been made clear that health and well-being strategies vary between different cultures and stages of life and there is often new research taking place to ensure we have the best, most up to date information.

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