

Script

INTRODUCTION

This presentation will discuss mental health in young children, why it is important, what research and professional guidance tell us, and how early years practitioners can support children's emotional wellbeing. The World Health Organisation, 2025 states that around one in seven adolescents experience a mental health condition, and without appropriate support these difficulties can have a negative impact on their education, future employment opportunities, and relationships.

Mental health is about a person's thoughts, feelings and behaviour and how they manage everyday life. Everyone has mental health, including babies, children and young people, and it can change over time depending on experiences and support. When we talk about mental health issues, we are referring to difficulties that affect a person's emotional or psychological wellbeing. These can range from mild difficulties such as anxiety or low mood to more serious conditions, and they may not always be formally diagnosed by a medical professional. Mental health is a key part of overall wellbeing and influences how people cope, relate to others and function in daily life. (NSPCC, 2024).

Mental health should be talked about freely with children because it helps them understand their emotions and feelings from an early age. Open conversations can teach children that it is normal to experience different emotions and that asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness. When mental health is discussed openly and regularly, children are more likely to feel supported, build healthy coping skills, and develop confidence in expressing themselves. This also helps reduce stigma around mental health as they grow older, making it easier for them to seek help when needed. (NHS, 2021).

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT

Mental health is an essential part of a child's overall wellbeing and development. It affects how children understand and express their emotions, build relationships with others, and cope with everyday experiences, including changes in routine or new environments. Good mental health provides a strong foundation for learning, social development, and emotional growth.

The early years are particularly important because brain development happens rapidly during this time and early experiences can have long-term effects. When children experience positive mental health, they are more likely to feel secure, develop self-confidence, and adapt to new situations and challenges such as starting nursery or school. (Mental Health Foundation, 2021).

However, poor mental health can have a significant impact on a child's development. It may affect their ability to manage emotions, concentrate, interact with others, and engage in learning activities. Children experiencing mental health difficulties may struggle with behaviour, friendships, and achieving developmental milestones. If these difficulties are not recognised and supported early, they can continue to affect wellbeing later in life and even into adulthood. (Robert, Shlack et al., 2021).

WHO TELLS US

Our understanding of children's mental health comes from a range of organisations, government policies, and research studies. These sources provide guidance and information to help practitioners support children's emotional wellbeing and mental health in consistent and evidence-based ways.

In Wales, the Welsh Government promotes the importance of emotional and mental wellbeing through its policies and guidance for children and young people. The Curriculum for Wales and the Early Childhood Play, Learning and Care framework emphasise the importance of creating nurturing environments where children feel safe, supported, and valued. These frameworks recognise that positive wellbeing is closely linked to children's learning and development across all areas.

The Welsh Government aims to give all children aged 0 to 5 the best possible start in life by placing their wellbeing and development at the centre of early years play, learning and care in Wales. (Welsh Government, 2023).

NHS Wales also provides information and guidance on children's mental health. It highlights the importance of recognising concerns early and ensuring that children and families can access appropriate support when needed. They use services such as CAMHS, which help to assess and support children experiencing more serious mental health difficulties, improving emotional health and wellbeing over time. (NHS Wales, 2020).

Research has played a key role in helping us understand children's mental health. John Bowlby's Attachment Theory suggests that secure relationships with parents and caregivers are essential for children's emotional development. Mary Ainsworth's research supported this theory by showing that children who develop secure attachments are more likely to feel confident, emotionally resilient, and able to build positive relationships with others.

In addition, organisations such as YoungMinds and the NSPCC provide support, resources, and advice for families and professionals. Their work helps raise awareness of children's mental health and promotes strategies to support emotional wellbeing in everyday life. Together, these organisations, policies, and research studies provide valuable guidance for practitioners and highlight the importance of promoting positive mental health from an early age.

APPLICATION

Building positive relationships is one of the most important ways adults can support children's mental health and wellbeing. When children feel safe, supported, and listened to by the adults around them, they are more likely to feel confident and able to express their emotions.

Positive relationships can have a powerful impact on wellbeing by improving young people's confidence and helping them feel more able to face difficult challenges in everyday life, such as separation from parents or starting new routines.

Creating a stable and supportive environment is also important at home and in early years settings. This can include having clear routines, encouraging play, and making sure children feel included and valued. A consistent and calm environment helps children feel secure and reduces anxiety, especially during transitions such as starting nursery or moving rooms.

Adults can also help children understand and talk about their emotions. This can be done through everyday conversations, storytelling, books about feelings, role play, and circle time activities. These approaches help children recognise different emotions and learn how to express them in a healthy and appropriate way.

Working in partnerships is key because when practitioners and parents or carers work together and share information, they can better understand a child's needs and provide consistent support. This can also help to identify concerns early and ensure children receive the right support at the right time. Estyn, 2024 states that working in partnership is essential in supporting a child's development and wellbeing.

Research shows that early support can make a real difference to children's wellbeing and development. By noticing difficulties early and responding in a supportive way, adults can help children build confidence, resilience, and positive coping skills that will

benefit them as they grow. For example, practitioners might use emotion cards daily, support children to name feelings, or use stories that explore emotions.

Early experiences are very important. The mental health of babies and young children is important both now and for their future health and development. A range of services play a role in supporting young children's mental health, along with community resources that help give children the best possible start in life. (UNICEF, 2023).

CONCLUSION

To finish, mental health is an important part of children's overall wellbeing and affects how they grow, learn, and interact with others. When children have good mental health, they are more confident, able to form positive relationships, and better at managing their emotions.

If children struggle with their mental health, it can affect behaviour, learning, and social development. The early years are especially important because early experiences can shape long-term wellbeing.

This is why early support, positive relationships, and safe environments are essential. In Wales, policies and curriculum guidance, along with research from key organisations, show the importance of supporting children's mental health from an early age.

Overall, when parents, carers, and practitioners work together, they can help children build resilience, understand their emotions, and develop positive wellbeing that supports them throughout life.

Reference list

BBC Children in Need (n.d.). *Building a Positive Relationship*. [online] BBC Children in Need. Available at: <https://www.bbcchildreninneed.co.uk/changing-lives/mental-health/building-a-positive-relationship/> [Accessed 3 Jun. 2026].

Estyn (2024). *The impact of working in partnership to support children's development and well-being*. - Estyn. [online] Estyn. Available at: <https://estyn.gov.wales/improvement-resources/the-impact-of-working-in-partnership-to-support-childrens-development-and-well-being/> [Accessed 3 Jun. 2026].

Mental Health Foundation (2021). *Children and Young People*. [online] Mental Health Foundation. Available at: <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/a-z-topics/children-and-young-people> [Accessed 3 Jun. 2026].

NHS Choices (2021). *Talking to your child about feelings*. [online] NHS. Available at: <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/children-and-young-adults/advice-for-parents/talk-to-children-about-feelings/> [Accessed 3 Jun. 2026].

NHS Wales (2020). *Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)*. [online] NHS Wales Performance and Improvement. Available at: <https://performanceandimprovement.nhs.wales/functions/strategic-programme-for-mental-health/child-and-adolescent-mental-health-services-camhs/> [Accessed 3 Jun. 2026].

NSPCC (2021). *About the NSPCC*. [online] NSPCC. Available at: <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/about-us/> [Accessed 3 Jun. 2026].

NSPCC (2024). *Child mental health: recognising and responding to issues*. [online] NSPCC Learning. Available at: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/child-health-development/child-mental-health> [Accessed 3 Jun. 2026].

Schlack, R., Peerenboom, N., Neuperdt, L., Junker, S. and Beyer, A.-K. (2021). The effects of mental health problems in childhood and adolescence in young adults: Results of the KiGGS cohort. *Journal of Health Monitoring*, [online] 6(4), pp.3–19. doi:<https://doi.org/10.25646/8863>.

UNICEF (2023). *A TOOLKIT TO SUPPORT LOCAL ACTION IN THE UK UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH IN INFANCY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD*. [online] Available at: <https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/UnderstandingAndSupportingMentalHealthInInfancyAndEarlyChildhood-1.pdf> [Accessed 3 Jun. 2026].

Welsh Government (2023). *Early childhood play, learning and care in Wales - Hwb*. [online] hwb.gov.wales. Available at: <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/early-childhood-play-learning-and-care-in-wales/> [Accessed 3 Jun. 2026].

World (2025). *Children and young people's mental health: the case for action*. [online] Who.int. Available at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/commentaries/detail/children-and-young-people-s-mental-health--the-case-for-action> [Accessed 1 Jun. 2026].

YoungMinds (2022). *YoungMinds - children and young people's mental health charity*. [online] YoungMinds. Available at: <https://www.youngminds.org.uk> [Accessed 3 Jun. 2026].