

Health, Well-being and Lifestyles

Introduction

This poster will explore and define the concepts of health, well-being and lifestyles and why these are important within the early years. In addition, different models and theories will be discussed and linked to early years practice. The role of the practitioner within early years practice will also be discussed with different ideas on how they can support the health, well-being and lifestyles of young children in order to aid their holistic development. The poster will also explore the interconnections between all three concepts with positive relationships being the key theme running through this poster. According to Berlinski and Norbert (2015) having good relationships with others is the foundation for positive well-being for young children. Musgraves (2017) suggests they will feel safe and secure and ready to learn.

Concepts

According to research conducted by Cheung (2018) there are direct links between health, well-being and lifestyle as they are all interconnected and all affect each other. If a child has a poor lifestyle, this in turn can have a negative effect on their health which can then effect their development and well-being (Cheung, 2018). Wilkinson and Marmot (2003) believe there are many health determinants that can lead to health implications and impact on one's mental health and well-being.

Health

Health according to the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2022) is not merely the absence of disease or chronic illness, but a state of complete mental, social and physical well-being. Whereas Welsh Government (2022) define health as having sound body and mind. Bradshaw (2016) states that mental health includes someone's emotional, psychological and social well-being which effects how they think, feel and behave. Social well-being could mean where a child lives, their parents job if they have one, circumstances, environment or their parent's financial status. These are all contributing factors to a Child's mental health and can determine how they feel (Maholmes, 2014).

If a child lives in a deprived area and their parents struggle financially then it is likely they will be experiencing stress and worry which will impact on their mental health greatly, this can also have a negative effect on their physical health (Maholmes, 2014). Having good health is important as it is the foundation for living a happy and productive life (Currie and Rossin-Slater, 2014).

Howard, Burton and Levermore (2020) believe that looking after one's holistic health enables them to experience a better quality of life and achieve their personal goals. For young children good health is the foundation for all growth and development (Harvard University, 2022). Davis, Costigan and Schubert (2017) agree and state that the foundations for future health and well-being are laid in early childhood and before birth, and what young children experience early on can have an impact on them in later life. According to Marmot *et al.* (2012) when it comes to young children's health and well-being, if one gets it right early on then this will have lifelong effects and shape them as they get older. Providing a child with good emotional support early on reduces the chance of slow growth and development and the risk of poor physical health, cognitive and emotional functioning in adult life (Musgrave, 2017). It is important for young children to have good health early on as research from WHO (2022) suggests that children must be nurtured and cared for in order to develop correctly and have the best chance in life.

According to Welsh Government (2021) having good relationships with others is of great importance when it comes to children's health. Children need to experience good relationships and form strong bonds with their parents or carers in order to feel safe and secure (Holmes, 2014). This is known as attachment theory which is a theory developed by Bowlby. Bowlby suggested that the strongest bond is usually formed between mother and baby, however, strong bonds can also be formed with multiple care givers including practitioners in a setting (Holmes, 2014). According to Goldberg, Muir and Kerr (2013) Bowlby believed that if a strong attachment is not formed within the babies very early years, then this can have a negative effect on the child's development and lead to different emotional problems later on in life and therefore effect their well-being. It is important to understand this as children who experience good relationships tend to cope better with change and become more resilient as they develop (Musgrave, 2017).

Well-Being

Musgrave (2017) describes well-being as a state of being comfortable, happy or healthy. Ashdown and Bernard (2012) agree and state that well-being is multi-dimensional, which encompasses several aspects of personal health such as, physical, emotional, spiritual, social and intellectual. In order to be considered well, it is important for none of these areas to be neglected. Welsh Government (2022) describe well-being as the achievement and maintenance of physical fitness and mental stability. Having good emotional well-being could look like being happy and confident without the feelings of anxiety or depression (Topp *et al.* 2015). Sonnentag (2015) states that psychological well-being means the individual has the ability to be autonomous, problem solve, manage their emotions, experience empathy and be resilient. Whereas, social well-being means maintaining good relationships with others, and not necessarily experiencing behavioural problems, such as being disruptive or violent for example (Bradshaw, 2016). According to Musgrave (2017) well-being is subjective, meaning it cannot be measured and will mean different things to different people.

One form of well-being is eudaimonic well-being, which Vitters (2016) states it refers to quality of life derived from the development of a person's best potentials, and the time they give to others.

In simple terms, it refers to the happiness someone experiences from helping others (Vitters, 2016). Another form of well-being is hedonic, which refers to pleasure or happiness gained from doing something they like or something for themselves (Huta, 2016). According to Disabato *et al.* (2016) hedonic well-being is achieved through enjoyment and pleasure, whilst eudaimonic well-being is achieved through experiences of meaning and purpose. When both types of happiness are achieved, they contribute to one's overall well-being in different ways (Huta, 2016).

Zacher and Rudolph (2021) believe that children's emotional well-being is just as important as their physical health as good mental health helps them to develop the resilience to cope with anything life may throw at them and become well-rounded, healthy adults. Bradshaw (2016) agrees and states that well-being is important in ensuring a child feels at ease and comfortable in their life and environment, and being spontaneous and free of emotional tensions. According to the National Health Service (NHS) (2021) children who experience a greater sense of well-being tend to have higher self-esteem and increased physical benefits such as, improved brain health and concentration.

According to Marmot *et al.* (2012) in order to ensure a child's well-being then it is important that they are being nurtured and having their needs met from birth as this will have an impact on the child's development. Theorist Maslow developed the Hierarchy of Needs, a theory depicting the needs of an individual. The basic needs on the bottom for instance, change of nappy, being fed and watered and comforted must be met in order for the needs at the top to be fulfilled (McLeod, 2018).

Dowling (2014) states that it is vital for a babies needs to be met in order for them to grow into healthy and happy individuals who feel nurtured and have high self-esteem which is important for their development.



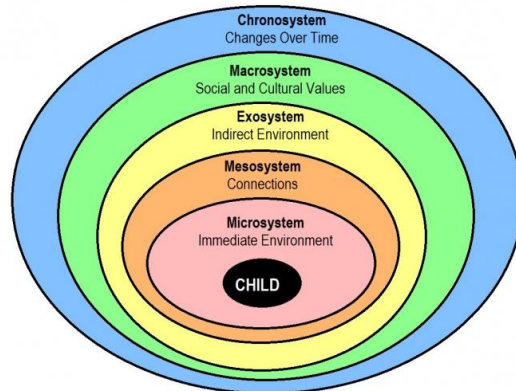
(Source: Simply Psychology, 2022)

Lifestyle

According to Bagordo *et al.* (2017) lifestyle can be described as the typical way of life for an individual, group or culture. There are many factors that can determine the type of lifestyle a person will live such as, their home environment, diet and nutrition, income, relationships, community, parenting ability and their engagement with services (Welsh Government, 2021). For many people the type of lifestyle they live will describe who they are and who they will become (LeBlanc *et al.*, 2012). In addition, Welsh Government (2021) suggests that a person's lifestyle is usually based on their culture, work and preferences.

According to Sieck (2014) the type of lifestyle a child lives is extremely important as this can directly effect their health and well-being. Living a healthy lifestyle will contribute to a child's overall well-being (Marques *et al.* 2019). Musgrave (2017) agrees and believes that living a healthy lifestyle means making healthy choices regarding what food and drink they consume, doing some form of exercise, this will not only help to keep fit but is also beneficial for a child's mental health, and help to strengthen their bones and muscles which is important for their health. Having a good sleeping pattern is also vital in living a healthy lifestyle as this can help improve on a child's brain performance, health and overall mood (Wein, 2021). According to Bagordo *et al.* (2017) having good personal hygiene and also ensuring that the home is hygienic is important in reducing risk of illness or infection and also to promote a better quality of life, even more so in houses where young children are living.

According to research by Elliott and Davis (2020) the type of environment a child grow's up in will have an impact on how they develop. They explored Bronfenbrenner's ecological system which is a theory that views child development as a complex system of relationships affected by several levels of the surrounding environment, from immediate family and school settings to broader cultural values, laws and customs. When children live in an environment that is safe with parents or carers that they have good relationships with and are being cared for and nurtured then this will impact positively on their health and well-being (Marmot *et al.* 2012). Bradshaw (2016) agrees and suggest that this will ensure the child feels secure, loved and motivated to learn and develop.



(Source: University of Aberdeen, 2013)

Marques *et al.* (2019) suggests that if a child does not live a healthy lifestyle then this could have negative effects on their health and well-being. They could be at higher risk of disease or serious illness, their mental health may also be at risk due to stress or worry. In addition, it can take a toll on a child's overall mood and motivation, resulting in decreased well-being (Phiri *et al.* 2014). Coles, Cheyne and Daniel (2015) believe it is important for a person to try and develop good habits and a positive way of thinking, which is not always easy if they already suffer with mental health. Being encouraged to stay motivated can have positive effects on a child's well-being and will give a sense of achievement (Musgrave, 2017).

Application to Early Years Practice

According to Rodriguez *et al.* (2013) a person's lifestyle choices directly effects their health and well-being, however, for young children they do not necessarily have the ability to make their own lifestyle choices, it is down to the parent or carer to make the right choices in the best interest of the child. Welsh Government (2012) stresses the importance the role the practitioner plays in encouraging healthy lifestyles for young children. The school or setting can provide guidance on what should be included in the child's packed lunch, encouraging healthy foods such as, fruits and vegetables and not allowing any chocolate or sweets in school (Welsh Government, 2016).

According to Barnardo's (2022) it is important for practitioners to make parents aware of the type of support that is available to them and the child should they require it, this means asking the right questions in a sensitive way should they suspect there could potentially be an issue they need support with. Barnardo's (2022) suggest taking a multi-agency approach is the best way to support children and their families and ensure appropriate action is taken when required. This would mean working in partnership with parents and carers, other practitioners, or social services for example, to encourage positive outcomes for the children and their families to ensure positive well-being (Cheminais, 2013).

According to Musgrave (2017) ways in which practitioners could improve on a child's well-being would be to provide opportunities for them to play outdoors and let them explore and be creative in a safe environment and allow them to take risks without fear of consequence in accordance with article 31 of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which states that all children have the right to leisure and rest and engage freely in play (UNICEF, 2021). Maholmes (2014) suggests engaging in mindfulness activities with children such as taking a walk outside or doing some colouring. Research by Bradshaw (2016) states this can help children learn to calm their body and mind and creates a relaxed, positive environment which can benefit communication, behaviour and emotion regulation which are useful skills to develop early on. It is important to understand this in order to support a child's holistic development and ensuring positive well-being (Maholmes, 2014). Considering a child's holistic development is of great importance as this will encourage positive well-being by ensuring that every area is covered, and the child feels secure (Maholmes, 2014). Welsh Government (2021) agrees and states that adults can enable and aid children's development by creating enabling experiences for them and encourage them to engage their imagination and be free to explore, which is an important part of learning in the early years.

According to Welsh Government (2019) the new curriculum for Wales helps settings support the health and well-being of young children, with the purpose of encouraging healthy, confident individuals who are ambitious and capable learners.

Boullier and Blair (2018) suggests practitioners should take an equitable approach when it comes to children and offer support based upon their individual needs. Practitioners can be the supportive adult for children who may suffer from adverse childhood experiences which could be any form of neglect or abuse (Boullier and Blair, 2018). Being able to recognise this is which may look like the child not wanting to engage in activity or appearing shut off or lashing out or anything that is out of character for the child may indicate poor well-being. This is important in order to provide the right support to the child and their family and ensure they receive help in order to prevent any lasting effects which can be caused through experiencing trauma early on in life (Kalmakis and Chandler, 2015).

Conclusion

Based upon strong evidence within this poster it is evident that health, well-being and lifestyles are interconnected and all strongly effect one another. As discussed, it is of great importance that young children experience a healthy lifestyle, with emphasis on experiencing positive and nurturing relationships in order for them to develop and grow healthily. It is also evident that the practitioner plays a crucial role in encouraging positive well-being for young children and ways in which this can be achieved and the benefits in doing so. Through models and theories discussed, it is evident that it is important to take a holistic approach when it comes to children's development in order to better support them and ensure positive well-being with guidance from Welsh government on how to promote health and well-being within early years practice. Furthermore, it is important to remember that the ideas of health and well-being will change overtime and vary between different life stages and cultures.



(Source: Pinterest, 2018)

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