

There are benefits for early years providers when they improve the quality of their setting above that laid out in the EYFS Statutory Framework (2024). It is important for early years providers to strive for improvements in a variety of ways. Two effective methods of quality improvement in the early years setting could include emotional well being scales, as well as continuous professional development.

Promoting quality above the minimum requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) yields significant benefits for children's development. Children are able to delve deeper into their knowledge of topics rather than just meeting the milestones laid out in the EYFS. If done correctly this creates a love for learning through various activities. Children who are given opportunities of high quality learning will build strong foundations to continue their learning throughout their lives, develop high self esteem and emotional resiliency to succeed later in life. (Brodie, 2015)

To promote quality in the early years it is important for settings to invest in well trained and knowledgeable practitioners who strive to understand children's needs for high quality learning environments and the educational, emotional and social benefits this provides for children. Practitioners who are trained and skilled will understand how environments that respond to children's needs and wants allow them to maximise their learning and development through the use of an interest already in the child's mind. Reflection is key to understand what has and hasn't worked well in the learning environment. Practitioners should be able to reflect on every learning opportunity whether they do this in depth or briefly. By exceeding the minimum requirements of the EYFS, early years settings can create a powerful and positive impact on children's lives, setting them up for a lifetime of learning and success. (CORC, n.d.)

Emotional Wellbeing Scales

Emotional wellbeing scales in early years education requires careful consideration of their purpose, design, and implementation. They allow early years settings to identify children who currently need emotional support and may be dealing with experiences or feelings that are emotionally difficult right now. This allows practitioners to provide early intervention and support, working with families in parent/carer partnerships will allow practitioners to understand the reasons behind a child's emotional distress and provide high quality support.

Emotional wellbeing scales allow practitioners to monitor the improvement of the child's wellbeing throughout time. Allowing early years settings to understand which techniques worked to improve a child's emotional wellbeing and which haven't. A benefit of this is that practitioners are then able to adapt their emotional wellbeing support techniques to the unique child, it is important to remember that scales are an aid and not a replacement for professional judgment and observations. (Hoare, n.d.)

Wellbeing scales should be age appropriate for young children. They should represent the language capabilities of the child, their self awareness and understanding of emotional wellbeing.

A quality early years setting will investigate cultural difference, recognising the variations in cultural emotional displays and emotional understanding. The assumption that all cultures express emotional wellbeing in the same way will greatly impact the wellbeing of children in the setting and negatively impact the practitioners understanding of the child's wellbeing. Many scales have limitations, these include as mentioned above, a lack of cultural awareness. One scale may not fit every single child in the setting, therefore a high quality setting may choose to have a collection of emotional wellbeing scales to choose from, possibly choosing a scale for the individual child and being open to adaptation at any point. There needs to be strategies in place to recognise when the scale does not fit the child and how to smoothly transition from one scale to another without disrupting the emotional wellbeing of the child. (Twinkl, n.d.)

Another issue that may become apparent is how the scale is interpreted. Does the scale meet adult emotional wellbeing standards or is it viewed as a child would view it. This can have significant impact on the reading and understanding of the child's wellbeing. Adults must be aware of personal biases and their own triggers. Regarding this, scales should not be used as a reasoning for isolation, exclusion or labelling. Children should be allowed to express their emotions and be taught how to do this in a healthy way. The emotional wellbeing scales are to be used as tools to support early years settings in understanding their children's wellbeing and support them correctly. As mentioned above, they are just one of many tools and should not be used to replace professional judgment and observations. (Freud, n.d.)

Training should be provided for all of the above. Providing practitioners with confidence and full understanding of how to use the emotional wellbeing scales. Parents should also be involved in the assessment, implementation and understanding of emotional wellbeing scales. Sometimes emotional wellbeing scales can be very focused on the decline of emotional wellbeing, rather than looking at the resilience present or positive emotional wellbeing traits that could be nurtured and built upon to give children a higher emotional wellbeing status. Looking at negatives could inhibit the child's progress rather than increase it. (Brodie, 2015)

Emotional wellbeing is complex and not a straight forward process of understanding. This means that we can often never get a complete picture of a child's emotional wellbeing, working with what we do know and building on positive traits could support this critical point. We must work with families and other services in partnership to assure we are understanding a more whole picture of children's wellbeing. There is room for misunderstanding and keeping a consistent schedule for reflection and evaluation of the child's wellbeing is important. The biggest improvements settings should make to be able to provide high quality care is through nurturing and supporting an emotionally wellbeing focused setting, implementing equality, support, freedom of expression and a culture of joyfulness in the entire early years setting environment.

Not least we must be aware of the emotional state for adults in the setting. Staff wellbeing scales are of equal importance and a tracking process should be made for adults in the setting. Staff wellbeing is part of creating a holistically safe environment and will give children an atmosphere where they are able to express their creativity which will support children's learning. Stress and anxiety can be felt through the setting if staff feel this way. Therefore avoiding this is a crucial step to child wellbeing. (Twinkl, n.d.)

Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

Continuous professional development is another technique to improve the quality of care in an early years setting. Allowing staff members the independence and creative freedom to be able to express their unique interests and talents in an age appropriate manner through offering a variety of continuous professional development gives children a variety of experiences and creates an inclusive environment. For example, children who are interested in cooking would more than likely benefit from a staff member trained in bakery in the early years, or nutrition for the early years. Specifically nutrition as a push for high quality early years settings as there is an evident unhealthy eating issue in the early years. (Denny, 2021)

Staff should feel supported, understood and that they are given every opportunity to improve their unique skill set and therefore thrive in the early years setting and career as a whole. Continuous professional development gives practitioners the chance to reflect on their own practice and continuously develop a love for early years even long into their careers. Encouraging them to move forward with their passions whilst also retaining the early years workforce. Establishing a supportive working environment for them. Giving them further skills to solve problems, adapt, change, learn and make professional judgments. The support offered by the setting gives practitioners a sense of solid rapport with their working environment. As well as their fellow colleagues. They may find shared interests with colleagues and bounce ideas off of each other. (Education development trust, n.d.)

An additional positive impact of continuous professional development in the early years workforce is the effective relationship improvement between staff and parents and carers. Giving staff fulfilment through their own passions and training as well as widening their skill set and keeping them up to date with relevant training in turn improves the partnerships. Parents and carers may feel more understood and have a better ability to relate due to the continuous professional development of staff. As deeper connections are made with the unique children in the setting, parents and carers feel more comfortable and at ease. Strengthening the quality of care provided by the setting. Through continuous professional development the early years setting shows staff that it understands the demands of the workforce and the way the early years sector touches on many different sectors. (Dubiel, 2019)

Continuous professional development is essential for anyone looking to become a leader in the early years sector. The skills learned will be invaluable and carried through their work daily. It is important for Continuous professional development to be offered without hesitation to the entire workforce, allowing those below leaders to gradually learn to become and develop into leaders. Continuous professional development can tackle issues leaders directly face such as dealing

with difficult conversations with staff, parents, carers. Managing a team, time management, administration needs, dealing with OFSTED, and much more. When the staff team is able to train and be led in this way, they are nurturing a culture of learning and development in their setting. An open minded-ness which is so often needed in the early years sector. Possibly most important, the impact on children's cognitive, emotional and core skills. Through creating this culture and high quality care in the setting, children are directly impacted and given better opportunities for learning and development themselves. Building stronger relationships with their practitioners. (The CPD Certification service, 2024)

It is important to consider implications of continuous professional development which may influence a decision when applied to each unique setting. For example, some continuous professional development can be costly. However there are many options available now which may offer introductory level continuous professional development even for free. Travel issues when continuous professional development is not online, and finding the time for staff to have off to be able to complete the courses. With a demanding sector with already few staff, this could cause a big issue for many settings. However there are lots of options which include at home study. Settings must be responsible for finding the correct training which offers the desired knowledge and skills, it can be tricky to navigate with such broad and diverse online courses. A reputable company should be chosen carefully and considered. Some settings find if staff are leaving the setting after they complete training, then their investment is wasted. Which can sometimes be the case, however it is a gradual and long process to raise the quality of care in a setting and a staff member leaving may be opening the door for a new and improved staff team. (Archer and Merrick, 2020)

In conclusion, continuous professional development is still essential in early years despite the negatives that can be considered. Planning, staff wellbeing and staff understanding is essential to improving the quality of the early years setting as a whole.

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