

Mental Health and Wellbeing in Young Children – Presentation Script

Good morning/afternoon everyone.

Today I will be discussing mental health and wellbeing in young children. Mental health is an important aspect of overall health and can have a significant impact on children's development, relationships, learning, and future outcomes.

Throughout this presentation, I will define mental health, explain why it is significant, discuss what research and key organisations tell us, and explore how practitioners can promote positive mental health in practice.

Slide 2.

What is Mental Health?

Mental health refers to our emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing. It affects how we think, feel, behave, and interact with others.

When discussing young children, mental health is not simply the absence of mental illness. Instead, it refers to a child's ability to express emotions, build relationships, develop confidence, and cope with everyday challenges.

Positive mental health provides the foundation for healthy development and supports children in reaching their full potential.

Why is Mental Health Significant?

Mental health is significant because it influences every aspect of a child's life.

Children with positive mental health are more likely to form healthy relationships, participate in learning, and develop resilience when faced with challenges.

In contrast, poor mental health can affect emotional development, behaviour, social interactions, and educational achievement.

Research also suggests that difficulties experienced during childhood can continue into adolescence and adulthood if appropriate support is not provided.

This demonstrates why mental health should be considered just as important as physical health.

Slide 3.

Impact on Health and Wellbeing

Mental health can affect physical, emotional, and social wellbeing.

Physically, children experiencing emotional difficulties may have sleep problems, reduced appetite, or lower participation in physical activity.

Emotionally, they may experience anxiety, stress, or low self-esteem.

Socially, they may struggle to make friends, communicate effectively, or participate confidently in group activities.

These impacts highlight the close relationship between mental health and overall wellbeing.

Slide 4.

Factors Affecting Children's Mental Health

There are many factors that can influence a child's mental health.

Protective factors include secure relationships with caregivers, positive friendships, supportive learning environments, and opportunities for play.

Risk factors can include poverty, family conflict, neglect, abuse, bullying, and adverse childhood experiences, often referred to as ACEs.

The quality of a child's early experiences plays a key role in shaping their emotional wellbeing and future mental health outcomes.

Who Tells Us?

Several organisations provide guidance and evidence regarding children's mental health.

The World Health Organization recognises mental health as a fundamental component of overall health.

UNICEF highlights the importance of supporting emotional wellbeing from early childhood.

The NHS and the Department of Health in Northern Ireland emphasise early intervention and prevention strategies to support children and families.

These organisations use research, statistics, and policy guidance to inform practice and improve outcomes for children.

Slide 5.

Research Evidence

Research provides convincing evidence regarding the importance of early mental health support.

John Bowlby's attachment theory suggests that secure relationships with caregivers help children develop confidence, emotional security, and resilience.

Felitti and colleagues' Adverse Childhood Experiences study demonstrated that negative childhood experiences can have long-term consequences for both mental and physical health.

Ann Masten's work on resilience highlights that supportive relationships and positive environments can help children overcome adversity.

Together, these studies show that early experiences can have lifelong effects.

What Can We Do About It?

There are many ways to promote positive mental health in young children.

Practitioners can create safe, nurturing, and inclusive environments where children feel valued and supported.

Developing emotional literacy is particularly important. This involves helping children recognise, understand, and express their emotions.

Providing opportunities for play, encouraging positive relationships, and working closely with families can also support children's wellbeing.

Early identification and intervention are key in preventing difficulties from becoming more serious.

Slide 6.

Example from Practice

In early years settings, practitioners can use a range of strategies to support mental health.

For example, many settings introduce emotional check-ins at the beginning of the day, allowing children to identify how they are feeling.

Practitioners may also use storytelling, role play, and emotion cards to help children discuss feelings and develop emotional awareness.

Some nurseries create calm spaces where children can go when they feel overwhelmed and need time to regulate their emotions.

These approaches help children feel safe, supported, and understood.

Research-Based Interventions

Research supports several approaches that promote positive mental health.

Social and emotional learning programmes help children develop communication skills, empathy, and emotional regulation.

Attachment-informed practice focuses on creating strong, trusting relationships between children and caregivers.

Nurture approaches and family-centred interventions have also been shown to improve wellbeing and resilience.

Evidence consistently shows that children achieve better outcomes when support is provided both at home and within educational settings.

Slide 7.

Role of the Early Years Practitioner

Early years practitioners have a key role in supporting children's mental health.

They are often among the first professionals to identify concerns and can work closely with families and other agencies to provide support.

Practitioners can model positive behaviour, encourage emotional expression, and create environments that promote wellbeing.

By building strong relationships with children and families, practitioners can make a significant difference to children's emotional development and overall wellbeing.

Conclusion

To conclude, mental health is a vital aspect of children's health and wellbeing.

Positive mental health supports learning, relationships, resilience, and healthy development.

Research and guidance from organisations such as the WHO, UNICEF, NHS, and the Department of Health highlight the importance of early intervention and prevention.

By working together, families, practitioners, and communities can help children develop the skills and support they need to thrive.

Thank you for listening. Are there any questions?