



The Positivity Patch



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All About the 'The Positivity Patch'.

I have created the idea of the positivity patch. A concept and product I feel will be very beneficial to the early years sector. The positivity patch aims to help and support children with their emotional and mental wellbeing, throughout their time at school. Giving them key skills and being a tool that constantly reminds them how strong, brave and loved they are, regardless of how they may feel about themselves or what they are going through. An idea that helps practitioners to be equip to encourage healthy wellbeing and be vigilant to negative changes in children's behaviour.

The positivity patch consists of 6 soft toy fruits and vegetables each having a positive nickname, whom all hold a positive note of affirmation. Where they sit in a soft toy vegetable role play patch. I have chosen this concept as I feel it will be an exciting and fun way for children to express their emotions in a safe place with supporting and nurturing adults assisting them.

Sitting in the positivity patch there is:

The Positive Potato – 'I am positive just like the positive potato! I am grateful and I can see all the good that is in me'

The Strong Strawberry – 'I am strong just like the strong strawberry! I can do anything I set my mind to, I can face all my worries'.

The Brave Beetroot – 'I am brave just like the brave beetroot! I can overcome my fears however big or small'.

The Resilient Radish – 'I am resilient just like the resilient radish! I am capable and confident, I can get through anything'.

The Loved Lettuce – 'I am loved just like the loved lettuce! I am worthy, I am special and I deserve to be loved'.

The Confident Carrot – 'I am confident just like the confident carrot! I believe in myself and I show courage'.

Training for the 'Positivity Patch'.

Alongside the concept of the Positivity Patch I have created a one day training course. This course will be undertaken by myself once a month in local communities within early years settings. The course is open to any early year's practitioners who would like to receive and understand how to utilise the Positivity Patch as a resource for enhancing children's wellbeing as well as for parents and carers, giving them an opportunity to build their skills in supporting their own children.

The training session will include:

- An overview of the positivity patch and how it can be used in different settings & in different circumstances.
- A fun and interactive hands on role play aspect where participants can test out how the positivity patch can be used for both children in groups and individually.
- A section on children's counselling with an opportunity to enquire new skills that can be used in practice.
- Ending with a quiz that pulls together everything learnt so that after completion a certificate can be authorised.
- To end, each individual will receive a positivity patch to take away to utilise independently.

The cost of one place on the training course will be £30. It will be open for early years settings to enrol their practitioners with the promise that it will create a more knowledgeable and skilful workforce. The £30 will include the new qualification in aspects of children's counselling for practitioners as well as the physical Positivity Patch toy to take and be introduced into settings. The profit from the courses will be placed back into the sector in funding counselling sessions for children that need it and offering financial support to local children's charities. The social gain from this idea is the driving force as I feel it can ongoingly develop children's wellbeing, leading to them thriving as they grow into adulthood.

Key links to Early Years.

As early years practitioners it is easy for us to assume that children are coping just from what they portray on the outside which can sometimes be incorrect. Some children can be closed and struggle with opening up emotionally which can be a barrier to care. I think within the early years sector it is time to open our eyes to every aspect of wellbeing of all those in our care. Not all children receive the love and support they need from their primary carers in their home environment and for some children school and education becomes that safe place for them to open up.

The positivity patch links to early years in many different ways, not just supporting and encouraging children in emotional and communicational aspects of their development but also enhancing the knowledge and skillset of practitioners. In result arguing that children will become more self aware, emotionally open and confident gaining good life skills for the future and it helps to build a thriving and well informed early years workforce.

Furthermore the positivity patch links well with the new Welsh Curriculum where the Welsh Government argue that the introduction of the new curriculum for Wales has been designed to support young people develop the different skills they need to make the most out of life. Where Aim 4 'Healthy and Confident'. Seeks to enable children and young people to have both a healthy mind and body. Where they feel good about themselves and what they believe in.

The positivity patch is a soft toy fruit and vegetable patch that is an effective tool to be used by practitioners in assisting with children's overall development. The tool is a good way of encouraging children to open up and think positively about themselves, developing confidence in many areas of their life.

Helping practitioners to actively support those who have their 'worry wellies' on to visit the positivity patch to talk about how they are feeling is important for children to therefore come away knowing they are loved, strong and valued. It may take children more than one visit to come away feeling they are any of these positive things so it is important for practitioners to check in regularly with children, giving them time and a safe space where they are able to talk and where practitioners more importantly listen.

Benefits & Barriers.

With all new concepts and ideas entering the early years it is important to look at not only the strengths of the new idea but also the challenges and potential barriers that can arise.

I feel it is argued that the concept of the Positivity Patch will not only have key benefits initially but strengths that will continue to run in the early years sector for years to come. Helping children develop emotionally as well as encouraging them to use communication effectively are some of the reasons why I want to introduce the Positivity Patch into early education.

Children being able to regulate their emotions and feelings can lead to positive steps in the right direction for children's development. Having key practitioners who are nurturing, caring, and knowledgeable will help children to open up and develop these emotional skills. Which in return links strongly to academic sides of curriculum.

On the other hand, some challenges may arise with this, costing being one of them. For the Positivity Patch to be effective there needs to be early years setting and practitioners willing to undertake the training which is at a cost. With settings struggling with budget cuts making money available to go towards this type of training may not be first on the list, this can create a barrier to children having access to this positive tool. However, publicising and promoting the Positivity Patch through social media and educational sights may lead to practitioners individually funding this training for themselves. As they may see the importance of this exactly like I did which can then from word of mouth encourage others to join.

Another barrier may be producing enough Positivity Patch toys for all children to have access. A practitioner from one setting attending the training course will return with one Positivity Patch toy to use in their practice which unless others attend the course, may not be enough to support all children that need it within that setting. This is a challenge that needs to be addressed with a positive outcome in mind.

My Expertise

I have worked as a early years practitioner since I was 16 years old and have worked with a range of different aged children from 6 months to 10 years.

I have grown an understanding of how children develop and everything that makes them so individual and unique. With this knowledge and continuing to develop my skills sets I have come to creating this concept called the Positivity Patch. Which I feel from my experiences in early years and my own personal circumstances together has given me a strong foundation to build something unique, innovative, and rewarding. Developing the early years sector into a positive, safe space for all children no matter what differences to flourish is all part of a positive future, ensuring that children are assisted to be in touch with their emotions and understand that it is okay not to be okay sometimes is all part of promoted good mental health.

‘Giving children the opportunity to develop their emotions, empathy and social skills is one of the best ways to prepare them for life ahead’. – **Kathy Perez Ed.D.**



Part 2 - Research

The aspect of early years development my concept focuses on is the emotional and social wellbeing of children as well as having a key emphasis on children's mental health. The importance of seeing every child as individual and practitioners taking a holistic approach to understanding children's wellbeing is paramount to children succeeding in all aspects of life. Children need to develop a positive sense of themselves and those around them with a positive disposition to learn therefore their emotional wellbeing plays a large part in helping them know themselves and what they are capable of. Pacey (no date). Children's wellbeing can be argued to refer to feelings of ease, the absence of emotional tensions, spontaneity and crucial to secure mental health, Laevers (2005). Mental health can be regarded as an individual's cognitive, behavioural, and emotional wellbeing and is something that we all have including children and young people, Mind (2020).

Stated by the NSPCC (2024) mental health is just as important to a child's safety and wellbeing as their physical health and can impact their everyday lives, how they cope with relationship, educational attainment, and physical wellbeing. Each areas of wellbeing and development clearly interlink for example a child who is struggling with their mental health may also struggle to maintain their physical health, feelings of low self esteem and stress may lead to a child not taking care of their physical appearance as a result. A report carried out by the NSPCC between 2022 and 2023 showed that over half a million of ChildLine counselling sessions were related to poor mental and emotional health. To add to this a survey undertaken by Mind founded that more than one in five young people who had experienced trauma in their early years felt that their problems were not serious enough to reach out for mental health support.

Supporting this the Good Childhood Report 2022 stated that children's happiness continued to decline alongside the statistic that children and young people suffering with mental health problems has increased by 50% over the last few years which is argued to be a very concerning finding. A UK parliament research briefing report written by Bunn & Lewis (2021) states in research that the effects of the COVID 19 pandemic on children's mental health was influential, finding factors that favour an increase in the vulnerability of poor mental health within the early years. with evidence from NHS data that show the rates of referrals to children's mental health services are now at record highs.

Despite this, the government have devised interventions and tactics in improving resources, expanding support services and implementing effective interventions. Together for Mental Health a strategy created by the Welsh Government, published in 2012 with 3 yearly delivery plans that look to improve the mental wellbeing of Wales. Providing significant funding of £7.1 million allocated to health boards to support the mind over matter recommendations as well as the CAMHS improvement programs.

Supporting children with poor mental health can be challenging and it can be hard for many adults to recognise when a child needs support and what correct interventions should be made, when for some children speaking out can be a hard barrier to face. Public Health Wales (2020) founded that more than a quarter of young people in Wales do not feel they have mental health support in school, this is a worrisome statistic and emphasises the need for change and adaptations to practice. The Positivity Patch which I have created is to be promoted in early years settings as an active way of improving the mental health support and services we provide within the early years, helping children speak out.

Furthermore it is crucial that anyone working in early years are trained and able to recognise signs and use appropriate action when required to make impacts on children's emotional and mental wellbeing. According to the Royal Society of Medicine (2022) schools and teachers who have not received adequate training in their field will inevitably buckle under the strain of providing mental health support to children and suggest that investment into promoting good mental health and responding to problems is a matter of urgency in the early years. According to Cowley (2021) children have a right to wellbeing and to grow equipped with a range of skills and effective tools that will enable them to navigate through their early years and support not only their emotional and mental wellbeing but their physical, social and economic wellbeing also.

Some early years settings have made a stand on this matter and have begun to introduce mindfulness classes to help children's mental fitness however this is seen to be treated as an experiment to see whether it can protect from mental illnesses that can severely affect children's growth into adult life. Brentyn (2022). With some disadvantages of being open about mental health in schools leading to over diagnosis, large costing implications as well as not having the resources available to equip practitioners correctly. All of these lead to serious barriers in practitioners being able to provide the best mental health support that they can. But what can be done to promote good mental health in schools? According to GOV.UK (2021) It is seen that if good mental health and wellbeing is practised in schools it can help children to develop, attend school, engage in learning more and fulfil their potential therefore school settings providing a safe, calm and supportive learning environment alongside early targeted support for those who need it can lead to more of a holistic and evidence based approach, which in return will give positive results in children's overall wellbeing.

As some research claims, some schools use the OFSTED's Pupil Premium funding that was introduced in 2011 to provide additional support with mental health. This includes teacher training where there are many schemes of this in England. Where some are run through the MHFA England and others through charities like Place2Be which run a free CPD certificated mental health champion programme which aims to enhance the understanding of children's mental health as well as introducing approaches that support positive wellbeing in schools. Moreover further support can be founded in school counselling however it is not mandatory in England at this present time. Argued by Girio – Herrera et al (2019) many children and young people with mental health problems do not receive treatment this may be due to many district schools employing social workers to assist those with mental health needs and due to funding cuts many schools are without this type of service which clearly highlights the vital need to transport evidence based interventions into early years settings imminently.

The need for early years settings to be a key environment for children and young people to express themselves involves practitioners holding this importance too and the NHS suggest that practitioners need to be there to listen, take what a child says seriously and build positive routines in order to build strong rapports and maintain healthy mental wellbeing. Maslow's hierarchy of needs links closely to the importance of positive interventions for children. Early years practitioners are part of ensuring that all children's needs are met and without the emotional and psychological concepts of love, belonging, self esteem and safety children will not achieve self actualisation and may struggle to cope and manage emotional struggles.

The concept and ideas surrounding the Positivity Patch can link to many aspects of curriculum and can integrated into everyday learning. According to the Welsh Gov (2020) the new curriculum has four new aims which argue that education is changing. One of the four areas includes Number 4: Healthy and Confident. This area is all about children looking after their physical and mental wellbeing which alongside includes their emotional development. This is where they will learn about not only healthy eating but how to make good decisions, deal with different influences and develop strong healthy relationships. Children's mental health and wellbeing being an important integrated aspect of curriculum shows its real significance in early years and with the use of new concepts like the Positive Patch, it can actively lead to enhancing children's development as a whole, making positive steps to promote a healthier and happier next generation.

Positively within Northern Ireland the department of health has published a mental health strategy for 2021 to 2031 and also includes actively improving child and adolescent mental health services. Alongside the Welsh government published a framework on embedding a whole school approach to mental health within schools and sets out to develop plans to identify and address any

weaknesses and look at how to evaluate whether measures put in place by schools meet the emotional and mental wellbeing and needs of children. Welsh Gov (2021).

The idea and concept of the positivity patch could be argued to become an integrated important aspect of early years practice, with its positive aims and eye-catching look, it is a resource I feel can be utilised from now and in years to come. Providing children with strategies and skills that they can use to develop positively. The Mental Health Foundation (2021) state that good mental health helps children and young people to develop the resilience to cope with whatever life may throw at them and helps them to grow into well rounded healthy adults as a result.

The effects of good mental and emotional wellbeing can link with all other areas of development and those who are optimistic, resilient and have somewhat control over their lives and feel a strong sense of belonging are more likely to have good mental wellbeing compared to others. With certain risk factors making it more likely for them to experience mental health problems. Norman et al (2012) state that the traumatic impact of abuse and neglect can increase the likelihood of children developing a range of mental health issues both now and in later life which include anxiety, depression and PTSD. As claimed by GOV.UK (2023) over 14,000 schools across the UK have now claimed a grant to train a senior mental health lead within their settings, helping to develop their approach to mental health and wellbeing. Alongside this the use of the Positivity Patch can be utilised as a supportive resource imbedding positive wellbeing into the early years sector.

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