

Mental Health in Young People – Script Bullet Points for Video Presentation.

Introduction

- Mental health is an important part of young children's overall development.
- It includes emotional security, relationships, confidence, emotional expression and coping with experiences.
- Young children may communicate feelings through behavior and play rather than words.
- Early childhood involves rapid physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development.
- Positive relationships and environments can provide protective factors for future well-being.
- WHO, UNICEF and World Bank (2018) identify health, nutrition, safety, responsive caregiving and early learning as interconnected.
- This is reflected in the Nurturing Care Framework.
- Welsh Government (2022) also recognizes physical, mental, emotional and social well-being as interconnected within the Curriculum for Wales.
- This presentation will explore significance, influences, theory, Welsh policy and practical approaches.

Why Mental Health Matters:-

- Mental health can influence learning, behaviour, communication, relationships, and emotional regulation.
- Anxiety may appear as withdrawal, distress, avoidance, or difficulty separating from caregivers.
- Emotional difficulties do not automatically indicate mental illness.
- Practitioners should observe, listen and respond rather than diagnose.
- WHO (2024) highlights the importance of early intervention across the life course.
- Early intervention can prevent difficulties from becoming more significant.
- Mental health promotion should support all children, not only those experiencing difficulties.

Health, Well-being and Lifestyle:-

- Mental health is closely connected to physical health, well-being and lifestyle.
- Sleep can affect mood, concentration, and emotional regulation.
- Physical activity supports physical development, confidence, and social interaction.
- Nutrition supports growth, energy and brain development.
- Positive relationships provide emotional security.
- Curriculum for Wales, Welsh Government (2022), promotes a holistic approach.
- Mental health can therefore be supported through everyday experiences.
- Examples include outdoor play, shared meals, stories, creative activities, and social interaction.

Theorists:-

Bowlby – Attachment Theory

- Bowlby (1969) highlighted the importance of early relationships.

- Secure attachments can provide children with a secure base.
- Children can feel confident exploring when they know support is available.
- Consistent practitioners can provide reassurance within early years settings.
- Key-person approaches can support security and continuity.
- Ainsworth et al. (1978) highlighted the importance of sensitive caregiving.
- Attachment theory should not be used to blame parents or predict a child's future.

Bronfenbrenner – Ecological Systems Theory

- Bronfenbrenner (1979) viewed development as influenced by children's environments.
- The microsystem includes family and early years settings.
- The mesosystem includes relationships between these environments.
- Partnership with families can therefore support children's mental health.
- Wider influences include housing, income, relationships and community resources.
- Mental health should be understood within the child's wider context.

Maslow – Hierarchy of Needs

- Maslow (1943) identified five levels of human need.
- Physiological needs include food, water, warmth and rest.
- Safety involves physical and emotional security.
- Love and belonging are supported through relationships.
- Esteem develops through encouragement, achievement and independence.
- Self-actualisation can relate to exploration, creativity and reaching potential.
- Children may struggle to learn when basic needs are unmet.
- The hierarchy is useful as a framework but should not be viewed as a rigid sequence.

Vygotsky – Sociocultural Theory

- Vygotsky (1978) emphasised learning through social interaction.
- Adults and peers can support children's development.
- The Zone of Proximal Development highlights the value of appropriate support.
- Practitioners can help children understand and communicate emotions.
- Emotional language can support self-regulation and problem-solving.
- Relationships therefore support both learning and mental health.

Welsh Legislation and Frameworks

Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014

- Places well-being at the center of care and support.
- Recognizes physical and mental health and emotional well-being.
- Promotes prevention and early intervention.
- Supports partnership working and children's participation.
- Encourages practitioners to consider the child's wider circumstances.

Framework

- The Welsh Government framework for mental health and well-being.
- Supports babies, children, young people, and families.

- Promotes services and environments that are nurturing, empowering, safe, and trusted.
- Supports early intervention and prevention.
- Reinforces the importance of relationships and whole-system support.

Curriculum for Wales

- Health and Well-being is one of the six Areas of Learning and Experience.
- Includes physical health and development.
- Includes mental health and emotional and social well-being.
- Promotes a holistic understanding of health.
- Mental health can be developed through everyday play, relationships, and learning.

Application – What Can Practitioners Do?

Relationships

- Develop consistent, trusting relationships.
- Use key-person approaches.
- Respond sensitively to children's needs.
- Make children feel listened to and valued.

Emotional Literacy

- Help children identify and name emotions.
- Model appropriate emotional language.
- Use stories, puppets and role play.
- Help children connect feelings with experiences.
- Encourage children to communicate rather than expressing emotions only through behaviour.

Environment and Play

- Provide predictable routines.
- Use visual timetables where appropriate.
- Give warnings before transitions.
- Provide quiet spaces for emotional regulation.
- Provide outdoor play and movement opportunities.
- Give children appropriate choices to develop independence.

Working With Families

- Parents and carers provide important information about children's experiences.
- Share observations sensitively.
- Avoid judgement or assumptions.
- Consider changes within the child's home environment.
- Work with health, education and other professionals when necessary.

Example From Practice

- A three-year-old becomes increasingly withdrawn.
- The child previously joined activities and played with peers.

- They now avoid groups and become distressed during transitions.
- Practitioner observes behaviour rather than immediately diagnosing a problem.
- Identify possible triggers and changes in circumstances.
- Key person provides additional reassurance.
- Introduce predictable routines and visual prompts.
- Use stories and role play to explore separation and emotions.
- Communicate sensitively with the family.
- Seek additional professional support if concerns continue.

Research Evidence

- NICE (2012) provides guidance on social and emotional well-being in the early years.
- Recommends positive relationships between children and practitioners.
- Highlights continuity of care and responding to individual needs.
- Evidence supports early years approaches that develop social and emotional skills.
- Possible benefits include improved social competence and self-regulation.
- Not every intervention will work for every child.
- Practice should therefore be evidence-informed and individualized.
- WHO (2020) recommends responsive caregiving and early learning alongside health and nutrition.
- This supports an integrated approach to children's development.

Conclusion

- Mental health is fundamental to children's overall development.
- It is connected to physical health, well-being, lifestyle, relationships, and learning.
- Young children may communicate emotional difficulties through behavior and play.
- Practitioners should observe, listen, and respond sensitively.
- Bowlby, Ainsworth, Bronfenbrenner, Maslow and Vygotsky provide complementary perspectives.
- Welsh legislation and frameworks reinforce prevention and holistic well-being.
- Effective practice includes secure relationships, emotional literacy, play, predictable routines, and family partnerships.
- Early intervention can provide important protective support.
- The key message is that mental health promotion is part of everyday early years practice, not a single activity or lesson.

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