



Health, Wellbeing & Lifestyles



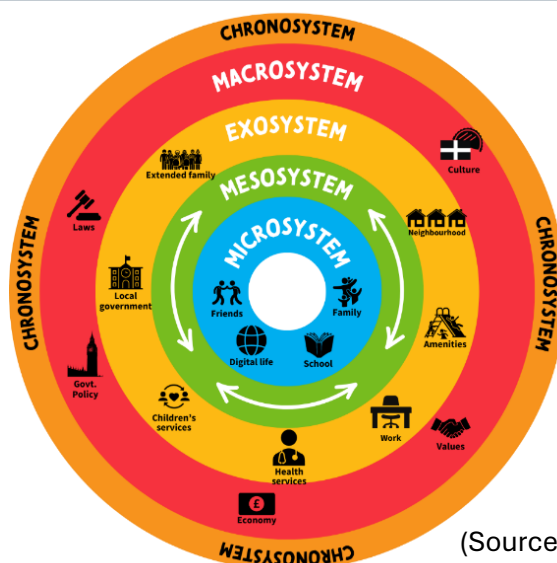
This poster will explore the key concepts of health, wellbeing, and lifestyles, and their importance in supporting children's growth and development. It will examine theoretical perspectives to demonstrate how health and wellbeing are influenced by a range of interconnected factors, including family, education, community, and wider societal influences. The poster also highlights relevant Welsh legislation, policies, and guidance which promote a holistic approach to health and wellbeing. Also, it considers how lifestyle choices and environmental factors impact physical, emotional, and social wellbeing, emphasising the role of early years practitioners, schools, families, and communities in supporting positive outcomes for children and young people.

Introduction

According to Rachel Bath, Consultant in Public Health at Public Health Wales and lead for Early Years, the latest findings from Child Measurement Programme demonstrate the significant influence that the earliest stages of childhood have on long-term health and wellbeing. She highlighted that healthy growth begins before birth and continues throughout infancy and the preschool years. Interventions during this period can have lasting benefits, helping children establish healthier lifestyles and improving their chances of achieving positive health outcomes later in life. (Public Health Wales, 2026)

Wellbeing

Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust (2025) states, wellbeing refers to our overall feelings and how connected we are to the people and world around us. It is associated with feeling happy, secure, and having a sense of purpose, and it plays an important role in our overall quality of life. Wellbeing is linked closely to health as poor wellbeing can be linked to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and self-harm (NICE, 2016) It may also affect our relationships with others, social interactions and influence how we view and engage with the world around us. Similarly, The Department of Health (2013) states, wellbeing refers to a person's overall experience of life and how their living conditions compare with the expectations and values of society. This definition highlights that wellbeing is influenced not only by individual feelings but also by wider social and environmental factors. Wellbeing can be understood through two main dimensions: Subjective wellbeing and Objective wellbeing. Subjective wellbeing focuses on how individuals personally feel about their lives. This includes areas such as life satisfaction, positive emotions, and whether they feel their life has meaning and purpose. In contrast, objective wellbeing focuses on essential human needs and rights, including factors such as physical health, education, safety, and access to adequate food. Objective wellbeing can be measured through personal reports, such as how healthy someone feels, or through factual indicators like life expectancy and mortality rates, while subjective wellbeing is typically measured through self-reported experiences and perceptions. These viewpoints demonstrate that wellbeing is a complex view, influenced by both personal experiences and wider social environments. Understanding both dimensions is important when promoting health and wellbeing, in particular, children and young people, as it highlights the need to look at both individual needs and wider environmental factors. Wellbeing can also be understood through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which suggests that children must have their basic physiological and emotional needs met before achieving positive wellbeing and development. These include food, sleep, safety, emotional security, belonging, and self-esteem. Within early years settings, practitioners support children's wellbeing by creating safe, nurturing environments where children feel valued and emotionally secure. This theory reinforces the importance of meeting children's holistic needs to support positive health and wellbeing outcomes.



(Source: Headstart Kernow, 2026)

Lifestyle

According to the World Health Organization (cited in Kothe, E. 2013) lifestyle is a way of living which is based on patterns of behaviour. These patterns of behaviour are determined by the individual, social, and environmental factors. Lifestyle health behaviours are generally described as actions carried out every day, or nearly every day, as part of a person's routine. Children have little or no choice in their lifestyles as they are determined by their parents and the people around them. This view aligns with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (cited in Wingreen et al. 2003). It suggests that an individual's lifestyle is shaped by different layers of influence within their environment. At the microsystem level, family members and friends influence behaviours such as diet, physical activity, and sleep patterns. The mesosystem highlights how interactions between settings, such as home and school, can affect lifestyle choices. The exosystem includes wider influences such as parents' work schedules, local facilities, and access to healthy food, while the macrosystem reflects broader cultural values, social norms, and government policies that shape health behaviours. The idea demonstrates that lifestyle choices are influenced by a range of interconnected social and environmental factors. Although Bronfenbrenner's model recognises environmental influences, it does not fully explain how children actively shape their own experiences. Berlinski and Schady (2015, p.15) agree with Bronfenbrenner as they state, throughout a child's early years, parents and guardians make a wide range of conscious and unconscious choices that significantly affect their development and everyday experiences. They believe a lack of awareness regarding the connection between childhood experiences and life outcomes may result in parents making decisions that do not fully support their child's development (p.17) Lifestyle behaviours can have a significant impact on both health and wellbeing. Healthy lifestyle choices, such as a balanced diet, regular physical activity, sufficient sleep and positive social relationships, can support children's physical health, emotional wellbeing and cognitive development (U.S Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, 2026) In contrast, unhealthy lifestyle behaviours may increase the risk of poor health outcomes and negatively affect children's wellbeing. Poor eating habits can increase the likelihood of obesity and cardiovascular disease, while physical inactivity is associated with musculoskeletal and mental health problems. Excessive screen use has been linked to vision difficulties, sleep disturbances, and behavioural issues. Also, insufficient sleep can negatively affect physical fitness and cognitive development.

Health

'Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being' (UNESCO, 2026), (WHO, 2026) The organisations also state that all individuals have the right to the highest possible standard of health, and governments are accountable for supporting public health. Although these definitions of health remain widely used within healthcare, recent research has questioned whether it fully reflects modern understandings of health and wellbeing. Research by Wahlström *et al* (2025) believes that this definition is accepted without critical analysis. The researchers found that the terms can be interpreted in different ways and may conflict with each other.

State - Health should not be viewed as a fixed state but as a scale that changes over time in line with a person's circumstance.

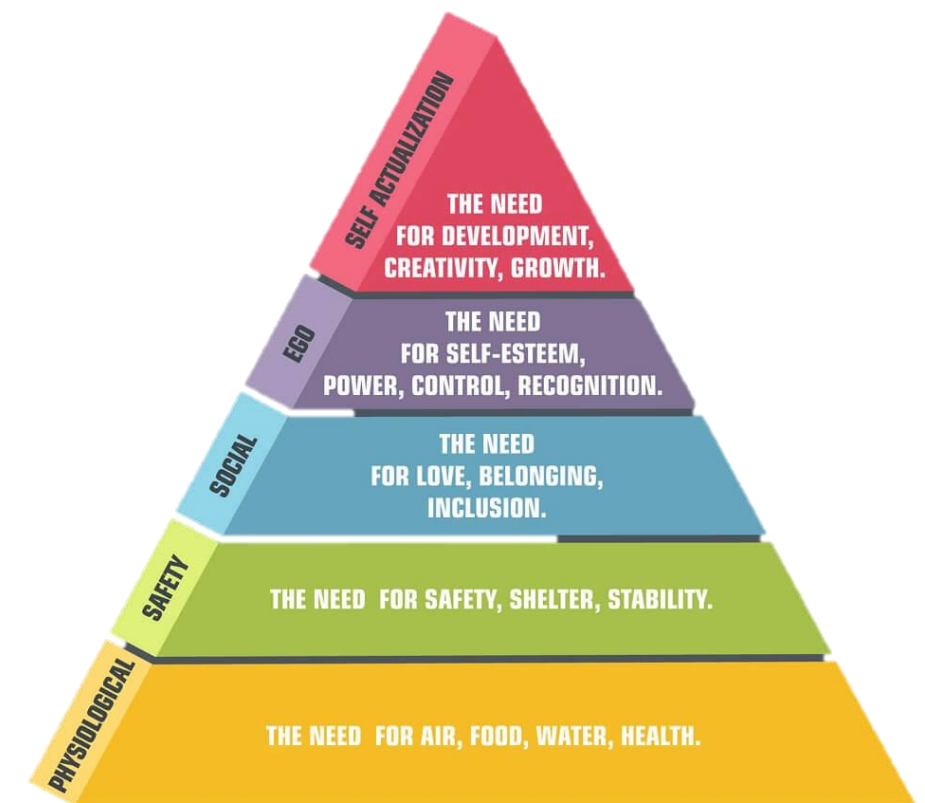
Complete - The word complete may imply that a person must achieve perfect wellbeing to be considered healthy. Everyone has a different perception on what good mental health means to them.

Absence of disease or infirmity - This portrays health as an unachievable goal for individuals living with chronic conditions or disabilities. They may still experience a good quality of life and wellbeing.

Different models of health have been developed to explain how health is understood and promoted. The medical model (EBSCO, 2026) views health as the absence of disease or illness and focuses on diagnosing, treating and preventing physical conditions. Within this model, healthcare professionals play a central role in improving health outcomes. This model treats the human body similarly to a machine, with illnesses seen as a fault that needs to be diagnosed and fixed. Although the medical model provides a structured way of understanding and treating health conditions, it focuses mainly on biological conditions and often overlooks the social and psychological factors that influence wellbeing. In contrast, the social model of health (Yuill, et al. 2010) recognises that health is influenced by a wider range of social, economic and environmental factors, including housing, education, income, relationships and access to healthcare. As a result, the social model offers a more comprehensive understanding of health and wellbeing by considering the many factors that influence people's lives. In addition to the medical and social models, the Biopsychosocial Model Model (cited in Wade, et al. (2017) provides a more holistic understanding of health. This model recognises that biological factors, such as genetics and physical development, psychological factors including emotions, resilience, and mental wellbeing, and social factors, such as family relationships, education, and socioeconomic status all interact to influence health outcomes. This model is particularly relevant within early childhood as children's health and wellbeing are shaped through a combination of family experiences, social environments, and individual development.

Application to Early Years Practice

Early years settings are a key component of a child's ecological environment and play a vital role in promoting positive health behaviours and supporting lifelong health and wellbeing outcomes (Public Health Network, 2025). Within Wales, this is reflected in policies that promote partnership working between families, schools, communities, health services, and other agencies to support children's wellbeing and development (Headstart Kernow, 2026). The Curriculum for Wales (2020), Health and Well-being AoLE promotes physical activity and nutrition, emotional wellbeing and healthy relationships. These curriculum areas enable practitioners to promote positive health behaviours and emotional wellbeing from an early age. Within early years settings, practitioners apply these principles by working collaboratively with parents, and professionals in external agencies to identify and meet children's individual needs. Through these partnerships, professionals can share expertise and resources, provide consistent support, and promote positive outcomes for children and families. In settings, practitioners can promote children's social, emotional and mental wellbeing by developing strong partnerships with parents, involving them in decisions about their child's learning and wellbeing, and working alongside external agencies such as health visitors, educational psychologists and other support services. This corresponds with National Institution for Health and Care Excellence (2022) which recommend a whole-school approach to wellbeing, which includes collaboration with families and external organisations, alongside the provision of evidence-based learning opportunities that help children develop emotional awareness, resilience and positive relationships. The Welsh Government, (2024) states one way to promote children's health and wellbeing is by ensuring that early years settings provide a safe, healthy, and nurturing environment. This is reflected in the National Minimum Standards for Regulated Childcare (2023) which outline expectations for providers to support children's physical health, emotional wellbeing, nutrition, and opportunities for physical activity. In practice, settings can implement these standards by providing nutritious meals and healthy snacks, promoting active play through regular outdoor learning opportunities, and supporting emotional development through positive care and relationships. The introduction of Universal Primary Free School Meals (2024) further supports healthy eating by ensuring children have access to nutritious meals. Dr. Pamela Kapetanović Goluža UNICEF (2025) highlights the importance of establishing healthy habits in the early years for long-term benefits for children's health outcomes and wellbeing. Therefore, adhering to the National Minimum Standards helps create environments that enable children to develop positive lifestyle behaviours from an early age. NHS Wales (2022), supports this view, stating investment during early childhood can significantly enhance children's physical health, social wellbeing, educational progress, and overall life chances. Practitioners play a crucial role in creating environments that encourage positive lifestyle behaviours and support children's holistic development. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1990) reinforces children's right to achieve the highest attainable standard of health. Article 24 highlights the importance of healthcare, nutritious food, clean environments, and health education. In Wales, this supports policies that promote children's holistic health and wellbeing through partnership working between families, schools, and healthcare professionals.



(Source Calm Sage 2026)

Conclusion

Health, wellbeing, and lifestyle are interconnected concepts influenced by biological, psychological, social, and environmental factors. A holistic approach, supported by theory, legislation, curriculum guidance, and positive early intervention, is essential in promoting children's long-term health outcomes and wellbeing.

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