

Understanding Health and Wellbeing: A Holistic Approach supporting healthy lifestyles

Exploring theories, curriculum links and factors influencing health and wellbeing

What is Health?

World Health organisation defines Health as 'Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity'. (World Health Organization, 2024, Constitution).

Wellbeing

The World Health Organisations highlights that 'Well-being encompasses quality of life and the ability of people and societies to contribute to the world with a sense of meaning and purpose.' (World Health Organization, 2024) this enables individual's quality of life,by ensuring they feel safe, valued, connected and able to thrive. Childrens wellbeing cannot be understood by looking at one area alone. To meet a child's wellbeing we must look at the holistically at the whole child.

Lifestyle

The Oxford English dictionary defines Lifestyle as 'A style or way of living (associated with an individual person, a society, etc.); esp. the characteristic manner in which a person lives (or chooses to live) his or her life. (Oxford English Dictionary, 2024). Lifestyle is the pattern in which a person chooses to live their lives. This includes their everyday choices and behaviours that influence health this includes

- Diet and nutrition
- Physical activity
- Sleep
- Relationships

This image displays the benefits of a health lifestyle

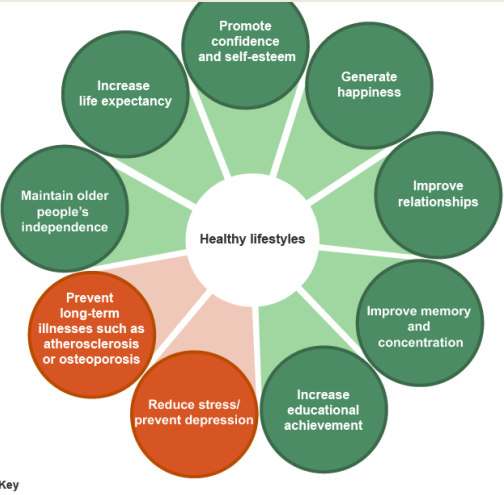
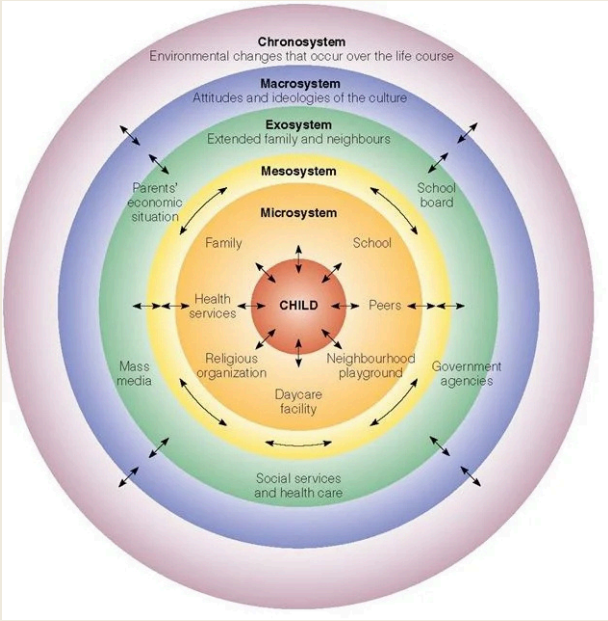


Image of healthy lifestyles (BBC Bitesize, 2024).1

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory diagram (Simply Psychology, 2024)



Urie Bronfenbrenner

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems theory (1979) highlights children's health and wellbeing are shaped by the different environments and relationships that surround them. He suggests that development is influenced by interactions between children, their families, school, community and wider society. His theory suggests that wellbeing is not only affected by individual choices but also by the support, opportunities and experiences a child is exposed to within their environment. Bronfenbrenner argued that "the prediction is that the child's experience in a day care or preschool environment will have substantial impact on the kinds of structures" (Bronfenbrenner, 1981, p.204). This suggests that the environments children are exposed to from a young age have an impact on their development and learning.

Abraham Maslow

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1934) suggests that children's wellbeing and development is influenced by their ability to have their basic needs met. It highlights that basic needs must be supported before children can fully engage in learning and reach their full potential. Maslow's Hierarchy of needs identifies that basic needs such as food, sleep and safety provide the foundations for children to feel secure and able to learn. When these needs are supported, children can develop positive relationships, confidence and self-esteem enabling them to reach their full potential.

Both Maslow's Hierachy of Needs and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System's highlight the importance of considering the whole child when supporting their health and wellbeing. Maslow shows that children need their basic needs such as safety, emotional security and a sense of belonging to be met in order to achieve their full potential. Bronfenbrenner then extended this idea by explaining that these needed are influenced by the environments around the child including family, school and wider community. These theorist combined demonstrates that children's wellbeing is shaped by their individual needs and the support they receive from the people and systems around them.

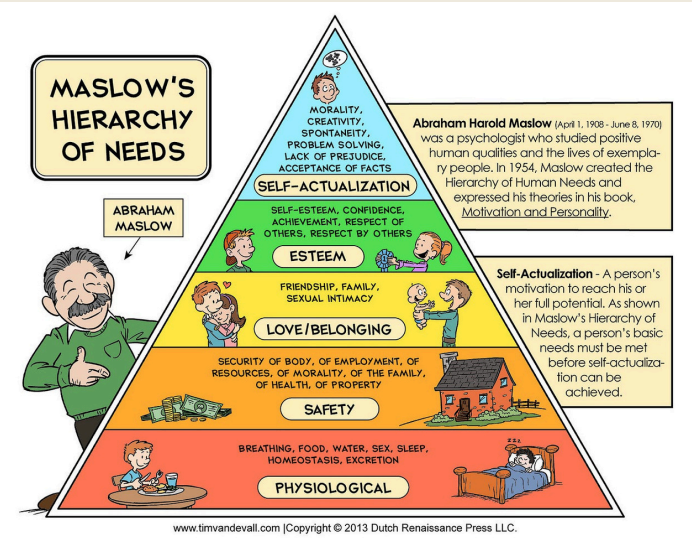


Image of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Mehra, 2023)



Image of a safe and supportive learning environment (Action for Healthy Kids, 2024).

Curriculum Connections

The new curriculum has a strong focus to support children’s Holistic Development with the Four Purposes providing a foundation for supporting children to develop as confident, healthy and capable individuals

- Physical development by promoting healthy lifestyles, movement, nutrition and physical skills
- Mental health and emotional well being by developing confidence, resiliences and emotional awareness
- Social development by encouraging positive relationships communication and belonging
- Personal safety by developing awareness of risk, safeguarding and healthy choices
- Life skills by supporting and promoting independence,

Health and Wellbeing in practice

Supporting childrens health and wellbeing in practice involves creating a safe enviroment that promotes emotional and social development. Play is an important part of this, providing children with opportunities to explore, develop confidence, build relationships and support thier overall wellbeing. Play Wales highlights that play is essential for children’s development. The document states play is so critically important to all children in the development of their physical, social, mental, emotional and creative skills that society should seek every opportunity to support it and create an environment that fosters it. (Play Wales, 2023, Play Policy Implementation Plan)

Health and Wellbeing in practice is a key principle of the Early Years Framework, as it emphasises on the imprtance of supporting children’s physical, emotional and social development from a young age. “Our ambition is for Wales to be the best place for children to grow up and our vision is to create a Wales of the future which is a fairer society, where every person, regardless of circumstance, is able to make the most of their abilities and contribute positively to the community that they live in.” (Welsh Government, 2019)

The Early years framework aim to achieve this by ensuring that in early years settings, practitioners promote wellbeing by providing a safe and nurturing environment, encouraging healthy lifestyles, supporting emotional regulation and building positive relationships. As it is recognised that children learn and thrive when they are exposed to a holistic approach to learning through consistent, high quality care and inclusive practice.



Image of children playing (Edmonton Public Library, 2023).

Influencing factors on Health and Wellbeing

Children’s health and wellbeing are shaped by a range of social, environmental and lifestyle factors. These factors can influence children’s opportunities, experiences and overall development, highlighting the importance of looking at the whole child within their wider context

- Home environment offering a child safety, stability, relationships and emotional support
- Income provides children with access to opportunities, houses, food and support
- Diet and nutrition can have a major impact on physical health, growth and energy levels
- Exercise supports health, development and wellbeing
- Relationships and support networks contribute to security, confidence and resilience
- Sleep has a massive impact on mood, concentration and learning

These influencing factors can be understood through Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory which as highlighted earlier children’s health and wellbeing are influenced by their relationships and environments at home, school and within wider society.

Article 24: The right to health (UNCRC) recognises that every child has the right to the best possible standard of health and access to health care. ‘Every child has the right to the best possible health. Governments must provide good quality health care, clean water, nutritious food, and a clean environment and education on health and well-being so that children can stay healthy’ (UNCRC UK, 2019)

Image of negative lifestyle choices (BBC Bitesize, 2024).



This image from the BBC displays to us the implications that an unhealthy lifestyle can have on an individual health and wellbeing. both in the oresent and in the long term

Affects of COVID-19 on Children’s Health and Wellbeing.

Recent research as shown the impact COVIS-19 has had on children’s health and wellbeing, social development and learning opportunities. “New data from Foundation Phase baseline assessments show how children have developed before entering school, with the latest data reporting on the academic year 2021 to 2022 following the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic.” (Welsh Government 2022) This highlights the impact that the pandemic had on children’s development by limiting their exposer to social interactions, limiting play opportunities and disrupted routines during lockdowns. From this assessment we are able to see where children development was at when they started school after the pandemic gaining us a valuable insight into how COVID-19 impacted a whole generation at the start of their educational journey.

Holistic Approach

A holistic approach recognises that children’s health and wellbeing are interconnected and influenced by a range of factors. It moves on from focusing on one area of development and now considers the whole child looking at their relationships, experiences, emotions and individual needs. When supporting a child’s holistic wellbeing the environment should reflect a space where a child feels safe, valued and able to develop at their own pace.

Holistic development is looking at a child’s physical, emotional, cognitive and social development and recognising they are all interconnected. An example of this is if a child is experiencing poor sleep may have difficulties with concentration, emotions and relationships this shows us how different aspects of health and wellbeing are connected.



Curriculum for Wales 2022 diagram (Kinderly, 2022).

This model highlights that the child remains at the centre of learning and development. It demonstrates the interconnected nature of health and wellbeing, where the four purposes work together to support children’s physical, emotional, social and cognitive growth.

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