

Health, Well-being and Lifestyles

Introduction

This poster will examine and define the terms lifestyle, health, and well-being and explain their significance in the early years. furthermore, this poster will also talk about various models and theories and how they relate to early childhood practice. The role of the practitioner in early childhood practice will also be covered, along with several suggestions for how they might promote young children's health, wellbeing, and lifestyles while encouraging their overall development. Additionally, the poster will examine how all three ideas relate to one another, with the main topic being positive relationships. Johnson, J (2010) states that children who have safe, loving and positive relationships grow up to be resilient and self-sufficient. Positive well-being for young children is based on having positive relationships with others, state Berlinski and Norbert (2015).

Concepts

According to Warburton and Bredin, (2017) lifestyle choices affect health and well-being on an individual basis as well as in mutually beneficial ways. A healthy lifestyle improves both mental and physical health, which raises general wellbeing. Lifestyle, well-being, and health are closely linked. A proactive approach to health through healthy lifestyle choices results in increased mental and physical well-being. The necessity of public health actions that support all-encompassing healthy living is highlighted by this relationship. (Ruiz, F.J., Suárez-Falcón, J.C. and García-Beltrán, D.M, 2022).



Dreamstime, (N.D)

Health

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), (2024) health is more than just the absence of illness or disability; it is a state of total physical, mental, and social well-being. WHO, (2024) also adds that one of every child's fundamental right, regardless of their race, religion, political beliefs, economic status, or social standing, is to have the best possible standard of health. Musgrave, (2017) explains that the attainment and preservation of mental stability and physical fitness can be characterised as health and well-being. Health is influenced by a variety of interrelated factors, one major factor being mental health. According to Bradshaw (2016), mental health encompasses an individual's emotional, psychological, and social well-being, all of which have an impact on their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. A child's social well-being may be influenced by their living situation, their parents' employment status, their environment, their circumstances, or their parents' financial situation. Each of these elements influences a child's mental health and can ascertain their feelings (Maholmes, 2014). Maurer, (2017) states that based on research, most mental illnesses start in childhood or adolescence. Recent studies in early childhood development, neurobiology, and mental health reinforce the argument for prevention and early intervention. Although the exact causes of mental disorders in children and adolescents are unknown, research indicates that several factors, including biology, spiritual well-being, psychological trauma, heredity, and environmental stress, may be at play. Individualised, customised, and integrative approaches are required because there are numerous factors that contribute to the mental health and disorders of children and adolescents. Children's overall development, academic performance, and long-term well-being are all significantly impacted by their health. A child's physical and cognitive development is largely influenced by their access to healthcare services, regular physical activity, and adequate nutrition. Because physical activity improves brain function and lessens depressive symptoms, research shows children who participate in regular physical activity perform better academically and have better attention and memory (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 2024). Nurturing care, which encompasses safety, nutrition, and good health, is crucial for the best possible development of children and has long-term advantages, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2025). Consequently, maintaining children's health is essential for their immediate development as well as for their prospects and standard of living. The idea of nurturing environments links to Bowlby's theory of attachments. Bowlby's attachment theory emphasises how early caregiving relationships have a significant impact on a child's development. According to his theory, children have a natural tendency to develop attachments to their carers, which provide a safe foundation for social and cognitive development as well as world exploration (Bowlby, J. 1982). The "Rainbow Model," developed by Dahlgren and Whitehead in 1991, provides a thorough framework for comprehending the complex determinants of health. The model places the individual at the centre and shows layers of influence that radiate outward, including social and community networks, living and working conditions, individual lifestyle factors, and larger socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental contexts.

Wellbeing

Statham and Chase (2010) state that the idea of well-being is multifaceted, focussing on children's present and future lives and including physical, emotional, and social well-being. Bradshaw, J. (2016) explains that a person's own evaluations and feelings regarding their life can be interpreted as their level of well-being. Similarly, MIND, (2023) states that wellbeing could be used it to discuss how people are feeling, how well people are handling day-to-day situations, or what currently feels feasible. The ability to control emotions, preserve fulfilling relationships, and discover meaning and purpose in life are all components of emotional well-being, which is a complex idea. It is acknowledged as an essential element of general health and life satisfaction (Haidt, J. 2015). While, Ryff, C (2016) explains the concept of psychological well-being is complex and includes many facets of a person's emotional and mental health. It emphasises the existence of positive psychological functioning and experiences rather than just the absence of mental illness.

Ryff’s six-factor model is one of the most widely recognized frameworks for understanding psychological wellbeing. The six factors include Self-Acceptance, Personal Growth, Purpose in Life, Environmental Mastery, Autonomy and Positive Relations with Others. These dimensions collectively contribute to an individual's overall sense of psychological well-being. Goffman, E. (1959) states that the quality and depth of children's relationships, their sense of community, and their capacity to make significant contributions to society are all considered aspects of social well-being. It includes how children interact with others, the help they give and receive, and their involvement in group activities. This aspect of well-being affects both mental and physical states, making it essential to general health. According to Maslow's theory, people achieve well-being when they move through each stage and eventually reach self-actualization. A thorough approach to well-being that considers psychological, social, emotional, and physical aspects is reflected in this progression. For example, meeting safety and physiological needs lays the groundwork for developing deep connections and accomplishing individual objectives (pichere, P. 2015). Robert’s (2010) ABC Triangle of Well-being is a conceptual model. It is powerful framework for understanding and improving mental health and overall well-being. The "ABC" in the triangle stands for three key components.

A – Affect (How you feel)

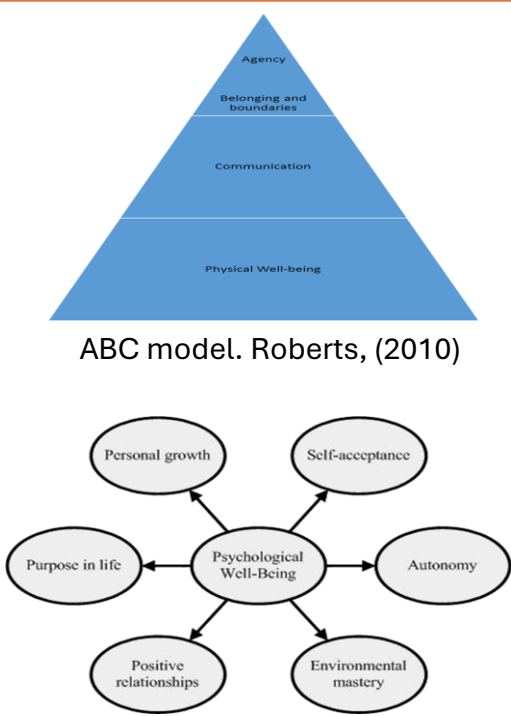
This refers to a child’s emotional state and mood. It includes positive emotions (like joy, contentment, and love) and negative emotions (like sadness, anxiety, and anger). Emotional well-being plays a critical role in how children perceive and respond to life events.

B – Behaviour (What you do)

This covers a child’s actions and habits, especially those that influence childrens mental health. Examples include exercise, social interaction, sleep, diet, and hobbies. Healthy behaviours promote well-being; unhelpful behaviours (like isolation or substance misuse) can contribute to poor mental health.

C – Cognition (How you think)

This includes children’s thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes. It’s about how the child interprets events, how optimistic or pessimistic they are, and how they talk to themselves internally. Negative thinking patterns (like catastrophizing or self-criticism) can fuel anxiety and depression, whereas positive, balanced thinking supports resilience.



Lifestyles

Early lifestyle choices have a significant and long-lasting effect on children's health and wellbeing. A child's physical, cognitive, and socioemotional development is influenced by a number of factors, including their diet, level of physical activity, sleep patterns, and emotional support. As stated in Supporting Children’s Health and Wellbeing, "a healthy lifestyle in early childhood lays the foundation for lifelong well-being and resilience" (Sheridan, Howard, and Aldridge, 2014). Children who regularly exercise and eat a balanced diet, for example, are more likely to grow up with strong bones, a healthy weight, and a positive body image, all of which are factors that affect general wellbeing (Mukherjee, 2018). Furthermore, the establishment of safe attachments which are essential for mental health and future social competence is supported by emotionally secure surroundings that encourage responsive caregiving and social interaction (Berk, 2013). Early childhood poor lifestyle choices such little sleep, little play, or excessive screen time have been connected to higher risks of obesity, behavioural issues, and delayed social skills (Public Health England, 2020). According to Harvard university, (2024) children who experience ACEs frequently grow up to adopt unhealthy coping strategies and behaviours. misuse, neglect, domestic violence or parental separation throughout childhood and are referred to as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Children's lives and health outcomes from their early years and far into adulthood are directly impacted by these experiences. By encouraging resilience, emotional control, and healthy lifestyle choices, early intervention and trauma-informed techniques in early childhood settings can lessen the effects of ACEs. (Anda, R.F., *et al.* (2006).A strong foundation for comprehending how various environmental layers affect a child's lifestyle, development, and general health and well-being—especially in the early years—is provided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, U. 2005). The idea that early childhood lifestyles are not merely individual decisions but are intricately entwined with a broader ecological framework that needs to be taken into account in health and well-being interventions is directly related to Bronfenbrenner's theory. (Sheridan, M., Howard, J., and Aldridge, J. 2014).

Ryffs model of psychological well being

Application to early years

In the early years, a child’s lifestyle, health, and well-being are crucial for their growth, school readiness, and long-term success. These factors support physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development. Government guidelines and the Welsh Curriculum (Curriculum for Wales 2022) prioritize well-being, encouraging children to develop healthy habits, positive relationships, and self-confidence through the Health and Well-Being Area of Learning and Experience. The Welsh Government’s *Healthy Child Wales Programme* and the UK’s Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework also emphasize the importance of nutrition, physical activity, mental health, and emotional development. Together, these frameworks highlight that fostering healthy lifestyles and emotional stability early on builds a strong foundation for lifelong resilience and well-being.

Conclusion

Health, well-being, and lifestyles are closely linked and essential for children’s development, especially in early childhood. Healthy habits like good nutrition, physical activity, sleep, and emotional support promote physical growth, cognitive skills, and social-emotional resilience. Well-being also includes emotional security, strong relationships, and a sense of belonging, which help children thrive. Early childhood lifestyles shape lifelong health, underscoring the vital role of families, educators, and policies in creating supportive environments. Together, these factors give children a strong foundation for lifelong health and well-being.

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