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Health, Lifestyle and Wellbeing

As poverty in the UK rises (Halliday, 2024), so does the question of children's health, lifestyle and wellbeing and how these statistics affect their future (Butler, 2024). This poster will dissect the leading factors that impact a child's mental and physical wellbeing, along with factors that affect their lifestyle and health. Using theorists such as Bronfenbrenner, Dahlgreen and Whitehead and experts including World Health Organisation and Sir Michael Marmot, this poster will share insight on what defines health, lifestyle and wellbeing and how certain topics can have a positive and negative affect. The Marmot Review, conducted by Professor Sir Michael Marmot and his team, has recently stated that children who grow up in a poorer area become less healthy in their adult years and have a shorter life span than those brought up in a richer community (Marmot *et al.*, 2020). While Dumuid *et al.* (2017) mentions that all lifestyle habits can have adverse effects on the quality of life of the individual (Dumuid *et al.*, 2017). Diet, routine, physical activity and avoiding unhealthy habits can contribute to a greater lifestyle and wellbeing both physically and mentally (Thomas *et al.*, 2020). Being aware of these factors can help a practitioner to advocate for those who may not have the ideal upbringing, and having the knowledge to intervene early to allow each child the opportunity for the best quality of life (Lioret *et al.*, 2020).

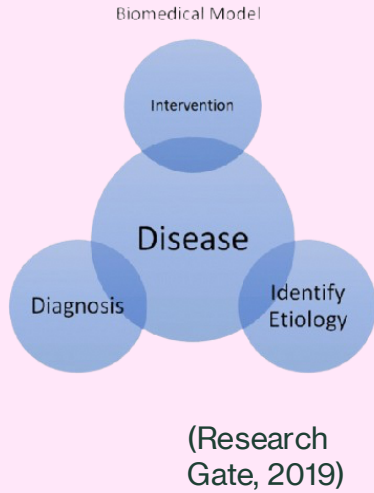
Research suggests that when it comes to the concepts of health, lifestyle and wellbeing, they are closely interconnected and influence one another (Cheung, 2018). Recognising that poor lifestyle in childhood can lead to negative physical health, resulting in poor mental wellbeing (Underdown, A., 2007). Understanding that children do not get a say when it comes to environmental factors and upbringing, and the importance of raising awareness of healthy habits such as diet and physical activity in order to help the child achieve the best quality of life is part of the role as a practitioner (Yu and Zou, 2023). Health is not just an outcome of individual choices, but instead it is determined by a range of influences (Public Health England, 2017).



(Vecteezy,
no date)

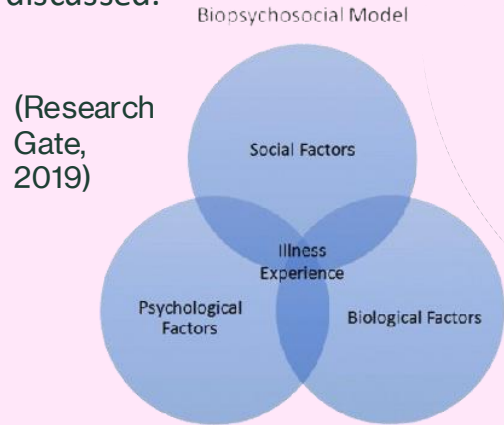
Health

As the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2022a) once stated; health is multidimensional, and good health is a combination of physical, mental and social wellbeing, not only the absence of disease or infirmity (WHO, 22a). At times, health has been considered unrealistic, and the idea of health itself has been criticised in the past (Welsh Government, 2022). What is perfect health? How to achieve perfect health? Is a common topic, and is constantly being evaluated. By looking at academic models such as the biomedical model and the biopsychological model, it is easy to see how different health can be viewed. The biomedical method views health as the absence of disease, and it focuses on factors such as genetics, pathogens and bodily systems (Elliot, 2024). It provides the reader with insight on acute illnesses, injury and trauma and medical conditions that have clear physical causes. But with this, there are obvious limitations. It does not account for mental health, or social environments or lifestyles, and it can often be less effective (Farre and Rapley, 2017). Meanwhile, the biopsychological model is more adaptive and relatable. It recognises health as holistic and multidimensional, which strengthens the World Health Organisations statement (WHO, 2022a). The use of biological, psychological and social factors is important, especially when discussing mental health conditions, chronic illnesses, health inequalities and child development and wellbeing (Bradshaw, 2016).



When trying to understand the concept of health, it is notable to recognise all health influences. Such as biological, lifestyle, social and environmental factors. Dahlgren and Whitehead (1991) explain how health is commonly influenced by multiple factors, and not just individual choices (Dahlgreen and Whitehead, 2021). The theory also emphasises the role of social determinants of health, and how family, friends and social support systems affect wellbeing (Dahlgreen and Whitehead, 2021). Health inequalities arise from unequal access to resources and support, and to improve this requires action across multiple levels and multiple sectors (Maholmes, 2014). The World Health Organisation (2019) summarised that the health sector can support and implement nurturing care in collaboration with other sectors (WHO, 2019). By adapting a multi sector approach, the quality of care for the child increases and in turn the child survives and thrives (WHO, 2019). This allows the care to be more holistic rather than isolated, allowing progress on each individual health factor as previously discussed.

Similar theorists such as Bronfenbrenner and Bowlby claim that health and development are shaped by many interacting systems. Bronfenbrenner has named these 'mesosystems' (Killam and Degges-White, 2017). The mesosystem highlights the connections between settings, home and school relationships for example, and how they can influence health outcomes, solidifying the point that health is influenced and complex, not just physical (Killam and Degges-White, 2017). Bowlby's theory emphasises the early emotional bonds, and how crucial these relationships are for healthy development (Fletcher and Gallichan, 2016, p. 13). The influences a child can have in early relationships can impact a child's ability to cope with stress, which can impact both mental and physical health (Fletcher and Gallichan, 2016, p. 13).



Wellbeing

The overall quality of life does not only rely on health, but also wellbeing. Wellbeing is the emotional, physical and social aspects of health, and how important it is to ensure children have a good wellbeing (Musgrave, 2017). The World Health Organisation focus on the feel and function of wellbeing, and how things children experience impact their mind (WHO, no date). There are multiple dimensions to wellbeing including emotional, psychological, social and physical factors (Ashdown and Bernard, 2012). All of these dimensions are interconnected and are important when considering the wellbeing of a child. Each factor influences each other, and if one is negative its effect could impact other factors, resulting in poor mental wellbeing (Ashdown and Bernard, 2012).

Childhood wellbeing is not only shaped by these factors, but relationships, environment and experiences do play a big part (Zacher and Rudolph, 2021). By harbouring secure attachments and positive interactions with others can support emotional security and self-esteem. By not promoting this, a child's poor wellbeing can affect their learning, engagement, behaviour, emotional regulation and social development (Topp, 2015).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs demonstrates the importance of basic needs, such as safety and belonging, and how they must be met before wellbeing can develop (Carducci, 2020, p.80). In turn, Bowlby's attachment theory solidifies the importance of secure relationships and how they can promote emotional wellbeing and resilience (Fletcher and Gallichan, 2016, p. 13). Both theorists complement each other when attempting to understand the complexities of wellbeing, and how vital it is for a child to feel valued (Killam and Degges-White, 2017).

Vitters (2016) focuses on meaning, purpose and personal growth, and how achieving this can fulfil a child's potential (Vitters, 2016). He calls this 'Eudaimonic' wellbeing, and emphasises that wellbeing is functioning well, and not just feeling good. Amongst other theories of wellbeing, Huta (2016) focuses on pleasure, enjoyment and happiness through 'Hedonic' wellbeing (Huta, 2016). This is achieved through positive feelings, that could be linked to activities which are done for enjoyment or relaxation. Feeling good in the present moment can have positive contributions towards wellbeing, and the Welsh Government (2022) supports this by defining wellbeing as physical fitness and mental stability (Welsh Government, 2022).

Emotional wellbeing - abilities to understand, express and manage emotions.

Psychological wellbeing – confidence, self-esteem, resilience and feeling a sense of purpose.

Social wellbeing – feeling connected to others, supported and eventually the ability to form positive relationships.

Physical wellbeing – sleep, nutrition, energy levels and physical activity.

(Sonnentag, 2015).



(Ubuy, no date)

To understand a child's wellbeing holistically, understanding socioeconomic status is crucial (Halliday, 2024). Poverty and instability in a child's life can negatively impact emotional and social wellbeing, and it is important for practitioners to create supportive and inclusive environments to reduce these inequalities, and uplift children (Maholmes, 2014). Educational settings play an important part in promoting wellbeing, allowing children to thrive academically, socially and emotionally are the foundations to a happy and healthy wellbeing (Wilson, 2024).

Lifestyle



(Public Health
Wales, 2022)

Educational settings help support healthy lifestyles by encouraging physical activity, promoting healthy diets, establishing a consistent routine and providing health education. Designed to Smile is a programme that runs in Wales throughout primary schools, their main goal is to ensure all children have healthy teeth (NHS Wales, no date). They work with families and young children of ages 0-7, and they encourage good oral hygiene by giving advice to families, providing equipment, encouraging dentists visits and how to access them and daily tooth-brushing twice yearly in school (NHS Wales, no date). Early intervention and support helps to reduce future health inequalities (Jakobovich *et al.*, 2023). Supporting healthy lifestyles for children requires collaboration between families, education, health and policy, and advocating for this will contribute positively to a child's development.

What defines lifestyle? The NHS (no date) share that lifestyle is a combination of behaviours, habits and daily choices (NHS, no date). These also include diet, physical activity and sleep. But, according to Dalal *et al.* (2022) lifestyle choices are also influenced and shaped by social, cultural and environmental factors, especially throughout early childhood (Dalal *et al.*, 2022). As the world moves into a modern way of life, screentime is another factor to be considered (Oswald *et al.*, 2020). Minimal physical activity, low energy expenditure and long periods of sitting or lying down are now becoming key themes in society's routines today, and it is important to remember how they can also affect children (Leblanc *et al.*, 2012). Ensuring children do not become used to sedentary behaviours is the first step in ensuring a healthy and balanced lifestyle (Leblanc *et al.*, 2012). Healthy habits are often established in early life, and tend to stick with children forever (Jakobovich *et al.*, 2023). As a child develops they rely on the ones around them, and become dependent on them. By demonstrating healthy lifestyle choices, and supporting a child will help the child to establish a positive outlook on lifestyle (Sieck, 2014). Early experiences influence long-term health outcomes and behaviour patterns, and for children who grow up in poorer areas it may be harder for them to understand the importance of a solid lifestyle (Bagordo *et al.*, 2017). For children who grow up with poor socioeconomic status, family routines and role modelling may not be ideal, and in turn are demonstrating an unhealthy balance to children (Wapner and Willoughby, 2015). The lack of access to healthy lifestyles deprive children of a good start in life, and as they grow older they may face more barriers (Bagordo *et al.*, 2017).

Not only are socioeconomical factors important when considering a healthy lifestyle, but also the child's everyday environment. For example, a nursery or school setting. Professionals play a key role when helping a child develop, and by having supportive and educational environments will help the child to understand more about healthy and unhealthy habits (Wein, 2021). Especially if there is a lack of education at home. Dahlgreen and Whiteheads theory states that lifestyle is influenced by social and economic conditions, and the importance of having a good social relationship (Dahlgreen and Whitehead, 2021). As previously stated, children look up to others for guidance and support. Behaviours and lifestyle choices are shaped by family and community according to Bronfenbrenner, reiterating the importance of a good support system in early childhood (Elliot and Davis, 2020).

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Script

Routines and structure is an aspect of health, lifestyle and wellbeing that is sometimes forgotten about. Practitioners and caregivers may not see the importance of routines or structure in a child's life, but in reality they help form long lasting habits (Selman and Dilworth-Bart, 2023). This presentation will argue that consistent routines and structure are essential to a child's health, wellbeing and lifestyle by exploring psychological theories, physical and emotional outcomes and the role of caregivers and practitioners.

Routine consists of predictable daily patterns. For example; meals, play and sleep. While structure focuses on clear expectations, boundaries and consistent care and support (Hughes-Scholes and Gavidia-Payne, 2016). Both of these combined help provide predictability to a child, helping them feel safe and supported within their environment (Peters, 2025).

Routine can effect a child's sleep, nutrition, emotional regulation, behaviour and lifestyle habits (Britto *et al.*, 2017). Creating a regular bedtime routine can improve sleep, mealtimes can promote healthier eating and predictable days can lessen anxiety (Britto *et al.*, 2017). Understanding and learning how routines play such an important part in a child's early development can provide a practitioner with new knowledge to ensure that the health, lifestyle and wellbeing of a child is cared for and prioritised (Daelmans *et al.*, 2017).

Maslow's hierarchy of needs touches on basic needs that fulfil a person's life, and how by achieving these the possibility to reach full-potential is a reality. This is also relevant when discussing children and the importance of routines. Maslow lists sleep, nutrition, safety and emotional care as basic needs in his theory, routine and structure help meet all of these needs, which in turn allows the child to feel secure, focused, confident and healthy (Carducci, 2020).

A lot of responses demonstrated by a child can be understood through developmental psychology, such as Maslow. Theory helps explain why things work the way they do, and how certain models support emotional and physical development (Killam and Degges-White, 2017). Bowlby's attachment theory demonstrates how children need consistency, and responsive care while they develop (Fletcher and Gallichan, 2016).

Secure attachment develops when care is responsive and predictable, and children often form emotional bonds with caregivers. Predictable routines help children to feel safe and secure, leading to better emotional regulation and lower anxiety (Fletcher and Gallichan, 2016). Furthermore, children are constantly learning to control emotions and behaviour, especially in new environments like nursery or school. Having a solid consistent routine can help predictability, managing transitions and reduce emotional overload (Selman and Dilworth-Bart, 2023). Children tend to self-regulate their emotions, and it is important for a practitioner to recognise this and be supportive, so that their wellbeing is cared for (Montroy *et al.*, 2016). These theories contribute towards the health, wellbeing and lifestyle elements of a child's life.

Beyond emotional security, predictable routines contribute towards a child's physical development and wellbeing. Daily routines can help shape sleep, diet and physical activity. These factors are essential for healthy growth and development in the early years (Arlinghaus and Johnston, 2018).

Young children need more sleep than adults, so by creating a good sleep routine supports growth, the immune system and brain development (Essa and Burnham, 2019). A consistent bedtime routine improves sleep quality, resulting in fully focused and present children in the classroom (Mindell and Williamson, 2018). Not providing a good bedtime routine can impact a child's energy levels, concentration, behaviour and risks to obesity. Sleeping controls two hormones, leptin and ghrelin, which communicate with the brain about hunger levels (Klok *et al.*, 2007). When children do not get enough sleep, their leptin and ghrelin hormones increase. This means children will start to feel hungrier, and are less able to eat full meals. Sleep also regulates insulin and blood sugar, and prevents the child from feeling fatigued and stressed (Breakthrough T1D, 2024). So by ensuring children get enough sleep is vital when considering their health.

Along with this, a child's diet should not be neglected either. Regular mealtimes support appetite, metabolism and digestion (McGee, 2018). This can encourage balanced eating, which in turn will reduce grazing throughout the day or overeating. A healthy balanced diet will also support emotional regulation around food (McGee, 2018). Inconsistent eating can lead to poor nutrition, energy crashes and unhealthy habits which can have long term impacts (Callejas *et al.*, 2021). When a child's blood sugar drops from a lack of food, it causes them to feel anxious, shaky and overwhelmed. Their concentration drops, and emotions can become harder to manage resulting in tantrums and behavioural changes (Breakthrough T1D, 2024). By integrating a healthy eating routine, the practitioner or care giver is supporting the child's emotional wellbeing and helping them create lifelong health habits.

Children need the opportunity to run around, move and play. Having structured days in practice allow for outdoor play, active learning and reduced screentime. Children tend to play best when they feel comfortable and safe, and by harbouring a predictable environment allows the child to know what's coming next, and the brain is free to explore and imagine (Lynch, 2019). Without a stable routine, play can sometimes be impacted by low hunger and energy levels. With a combination of play and routine, together they reduce stress, support emotional regulation and promote healthy development and habits (Irvin, 2017).

Bandura believed that children learn best when observing and copying from people around them, especially parents and caregivers. By displaying healthy routines such as a good sleep routine, diet and being active, a child will learn through caregivers and start implementing these as they develop (Macblain, 2021). This shows that routine is not something a child is given, but something that is learnt. Bandura supports a structured family and nursery routine help children build lifelong healthy habits (Rumjaun and Narod, 2025).

As Maslow mentions, fulfilling basic needs creates confidence and self-worth – along with emotional stability (Carducci, 2020). Achieving this helps children to feel safe, calm, confident and emotionally regulated.

Routine keeps the child in the know, and helps them to understand what is happening. By explaining the routine, or what the next task it reduces anxiety, increases confidence and results in fewer stress responses (Montroy *et al.*, 2016). This relates back to Bowlby's attachment theory, and how creating a safe and reliable bond can help a child feel more emotionally aware and attentive during tasks (Fletcher and Gallichan, 2016).

Children need help regulating emotions, as previously mentioned they tend to rely on adults to model how this is done. Emotions can be very overwhelming, especially during transitions or settling in to a new environment. By providing a predictable environment and adult support and communication regulation can become easier (Earlby, 2020).

If a child is not aware of when they will eat, sleep or who will care for them their brain continues to stay in a state of alert. This can trigger the hypothalamic pituitary adrenal axis, also known as HPA, which releases cortisol to keep the body ready for any threat (Katsu and Baker, 2021). Constant release of cortisol can lead to anxiety, irritability, emotional outbursts and difficulty concentrating. Having consistent routines sends a message to the child's nervous system that the environment is safe and stable, which in turn allows the cortisol levels to drop and the body eventually relaxes (Hall and Lindorff, 2017). Low cortisol levels supports emotional regulation, better sleep, stronger immune function and improved concentration.

Constant levels of high cortisol in early childhood can be linked to anxiety disorders and weakened immune systems (Katsu and Baker, 2021). So routine is not only something that helps a child stay calm, but it protects their developing brain and body, keeping them safe and healthy.

Research conducted in the UK within children has shown that consistency, predictability and daily routines is linked to healthier cortisol patterns (Hall and Lindorff, 2017). It has also been shown to reduce stress levels during transitioning, which is important to acknowledge during a child's early years (Kitsaras *et al.*, 2018).

Once a child understands and recognises that the environment has no risks, they are more likely to follow rules, concentrate and engage in daily life. Routine can influence behaviour and lifestyle habits. A child who acknowledges a routine, will then start to take part in the routine naturally (Britto *et al.*, 2017).

B.F. Skinner is a behaviour theorist, and he explains that behaviour is shaped through repetition. He believes that behaviours which are often repeated and rewarded become habits, and that behaviours which are not reinforced will disappear (Vargas, 2015). In the context of routine, when children follow the same daily patterns such as; eating meals, brushing their teeth, going to bed and getting dressed they become automatic behaviours (Selman and Dilworth-Bart, 2023). Resulting in the routine become habit. Skinner's theory supports the idea that routine is one of the main methods of children developing positive lifestyle behaviours.

Children also tend to imitate adults and their habits. Children who watch adults eat healthy, sleep regularly and have balanced days will adopt these behaviours. Bandura believed children learn the best through modelling and watching, and by caregivers and practitioners modelling a good healthy lifestyle the child will also do the same (RRuggeri *et al.*, 2023).

Routines help shape those lifelong lifestyle habits, eventually contributing towards the child's wellbeing and health. This can lead to solid emotional wellbeing, healthy habits and independence (Rumjaun and Narod, 2025). If routine is missing from a child's day to day, especially in children with socioeconomic factors, then they lose the opportunity to live a healthy life where their days are balanced and their wellbeing is supported (MacBlain, 2021). Educational environments such as nursery and school should enforce the importance of healthy habits, and create a balanced routine that reflects this resulting in natural rule and routine following that is enjoyable and educational (DaSilva, 2023).

All aspects of routine do have negatives. Having an inconsistent and chaotic environment can impact a child's health, wellbeing and lifestyle. If there is a lack of routine, there will be a rise of emotional stress, which in turn increases anxiety and cortisol levels (Hall and Lindorff, 2017). A child will start feeling unsafe and unaware, although there is no physical danger. This can lead to a child being more reserved and shy, and hesitant to enter the practice. A child may start to demonstrate challenging behaviour, reduced focus and difficulties following instructions as a way of saying they are stressed and unsafe (Mehrabian, 2017). It is then a caregivers job to ensure that children feel supported, and regulated, especially when displaying signs of emotional distress.

Socioeconomic factors can also impact routine. Some low-income families may not have the opportunity to have structure in the home due to living conditions (Bagordo *et al.*, 2017). This could be from a lack of food, clean water or adequate sleeping space, which alters a child's routine (Chaudry and Wimer, 2016). Families may not have the support, or are unaware of the importance in stability and routine.

Home-Start Cymru (no date) is a support charity based across Wales that work to support families with young children. They aim to improve wellbeing in children and family stability (Home-Start Cymru, no date). They assist parents with challenges such as isolation, stress and mental health difficulties, all factors that affect a child's stability. Supporting parents and making them aware of charities like Home-Start Cymru can help them with their parenting confidence, and ensure children are growing up in safe and stable environments (Home-Start Cymru, no date).

The evidence presented highlights the importance of structure and routine, especially in the context of health, wellbeing and lifestyle. By exploring theorists and research studies, the information provided is a reflection of understanding and acknowledging the highs and lows of stability in a child's life.

It is clear that consistent routines support children's physical health by ensuring adequate sleeping time and meal times. In terms of wellbeing, routine helps children to regulate their emotions and feel secure in their environment. Additionally, structure can influence behaviour and lifestyle through forming lifelong healthy habits.

Ultimately, routine provides a foundation for lifelong habits and stability. Practices that honour this contribute towards the child's health, wellbeing and lifestyle.

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