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Health, Well-being, and Lifestyle

Concept

Health and well-being are ongoing processes that depend on social support, coping skills, and available resources, which help build resilience (Bonanno, 2004). Poor lifestyle choices can harm children's health and affect their development and well-being (Kumar et al., 2019). This illustrates how lifestyle has a direct impact on overall health outcomes. Social and environmental factors like community resources and economic conditions also influence both physical and mental health (Adams et al., 2020).

Introduction:

This poster defines health, well-being, and lifestyle, highlighting their importance in early childhood. A holistic health view is crucial due to increasing chronic illnesses and health inequalities, as lifestyle habits link to many early diseases (WHO, 2020). The poster will discuss theories and how practitioners can support children's development. It will emphasise that positive relationships are foundational for overall development, fostering emotional regulation and learning readiness (Williams et al., 2024). Supportive early environments build resilience and better lifelong health outcomes (Rodriguez et al., 2023). Early experiences have lasting impacts; while adverse experiences increase adult health risks, positive ones offer protection (Felitti et al., 1998), stressing investment in health promotion throughout life.

Health

Health used to mean simply not being sick (Engel, 1977). Now, the World Health Organization defines health as complete physical, mental, and social well-being (World Health Organization, 2019). According to George Engel (1977), an individual's health is fundamentally shaped by the dynamic interaction among biological processes, psychological states, and social involvements. For example, stress can cause inflammation, while good social support can protect us from various health problems (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Recent research in positive psychology emphasizes the importance of happiness and life satisfaction for health (Seligman, 2011). Different cultures also contribute valuable ideas about health. For example, the Japanese concept of Ikigai focuses on having a life purpose (García & Miralles, 2017), while African Ubuntu Philosophy emphasizes community well-being (Metz, 2021). Today's healthcare takes a broader approach. Healthcare providers focus on preventing illness, working with communities, and teaching patients how physical, mental, and social health connect. They also consider environmental issues like climate change that affect health (WHO, 2022). Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (1986) helps us understand how health behaviours change by showing the strong connection between personal beliefs, surroundings, and actions. A main part of this theory is self-efficacy, which is simply how much you believe you can do something (Bandura, 1997). Studies consistently prove that strong self-efficacy leads to better health habits like exercising more, eating healthier, and successfully quitting smoking (Luszczynska, Scholz and Schwarzer, 2005). Research shows that good early relationships significantly reduce healthcare costs and improve education and social outcomes throughout life (Heckman, 2013). This evidence supports making relationship quality a central focus of public health programs. Relationships are essential for good health, and healthcare should focus on improving social connections and relationship quality (Sharki, 2023). Strong family relationships and friendships lead to better physical and mental health (Powell et al., 2023). The Harvard Study of Adult Development found that good relationships are the best predictor of happiness and physical health, resulting in less heart disease, stronger immune systems, and better stress management (Waldinger & Schulz, 2023). Good relationships help people in many ways. Social support helps individuals cope with emotions, reduce stress, and get practical help when needed (Cohen & Wills, 2023). Strong connections also promote personal growth, give life meaning, and encourage healthy habits (Umberson & Montez, 2010). On the other hand, loneliness and isolation cause harmful stress in the body, increasing stress hormones, and inflammation, and weakening the immune system (Scrip. Org, 2017). These physical effects show how important human connections are for survival and well-being. Bowlby's attachment theory explains that secure attachment is necessary for healthy development. Brain research shows that early experiences actually change brain structure, affecting how people handle stress, manage emotions, and form relationships throughout life (Shonkoff et al., 2023). Secure attachment, built through consistent and caring relationships, creates the foundation for both mental and physical health (Duschinsky, 2020). This shapes how people see themselves and others for their entire lives. Secure attachment helps the brain develop properly, leading to better emotional control and stress management (Wadhwa, McCoy and Bongar, 2023). This results in stronger immune systems, better sleep, and less illness from childhood through adulthood (Morales et al., 2023). Parents who understand their own attachment experiences are more likely to create secure relationships with their children, offering hope for breaking negative patterns (Ferreira et al., 2023). Good health across all areas of life directly improves how satisfied we are and how well we achieve our goals. For children, optimal health is the basic building block for all their growth and development (the National Institute for Children Health Quality, 2023). When children have strong physical and mental well-being, they can better engage with their surroundings and develop crucial skills for lifelong success (Hinojosa and Hinojosa, 2042).

Well-being

Well-being is a multi-dimensional concept that includes physical, emotional, social, and psychological health working together. Hapus,2024 defines it as optimal functioning across life domains, while Richardson et al. (2021) emphasize that all areas must be balanced - for example, a child with poor sleep may struggle both academically and socially. (Maddux,2017) notes that well-being is subjective and varies between individuals. Well-being encompasses multiple interconnected dimensions that determine children's developmental success. (Bordani and Ziskova,2015) identify physical, emotional, social, and cognitive components as equally important - for example, a chronically ill child may struggle academically and socially. Children with balanced well-being show superior problem-solving and adaptability. (Brandt et al.,2022) emphasize that social connections are fundamental, with isolated children showing increased depression and anxiety. Golombok,2006 discovered children receiving comprehensive support across all dimensions show significantly better long-term outcomes, while(Frydenberg, Deans and Liang,2021) report that early development of coping skills maintains higher well-being throughout life. Well-being represents a dynamic state that changes based on circumstances and environment. Eriksen et al.,20211) describe it as the capacity to thrive despite challenges, such as a child adapting well to family relocation by forming new friendships(. Atkinson et al.,2019) found that well-being is culturally influenced, with communities prioritizing different aspects like academics versus social harmony. (Jones, McGarrah and Kahn,2019) emphasize well-being develops through positive experiences and supportive relationships, children's well-being significantly impacts future success including career and relationship quality.



(Template.net, 2025)

Lifestyle

A person's lifestyle is shaped by factors like their home environment, diet, finances, social connections, community involvement, and the quality of care and services they use (Henderson & Park, 2018). For children, lifestyle choices are significant for their immediate and long-term health, covering diet, exercise, sleep, and hygiene (Roberts & Martinez, 2019). In the early years of education, lifestyle is seen as a broad view of health and well-being beyond just physical care. Children form habits for lifelong health, nutrition, activity, and emotional regulation (Pate et al., 2004). Educators recognize that physical, mental, social, and environmental factors are linked and affect a child's overall development (World Health Organization, 2018). This holistic view acknowledges that family, culture, socioeconomic status, and early education quality influence children's lifestyle choices (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, Kumar et al., 2020). Studies show that early intervention in these areas greatly impacts children's health, academic success, and social-emotional development throughout life (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Conversely, unhealthy childhood lifestyles increase the risks of physical and mental health issues, such as chronic diseases, stress, and anxiety, negatively affecting mood and motivation (Rodriguez & Chen, 2021; Smith & Johnson, 2020; Thompson et al., 2018). However, promoting positive behaviours and offering supportive interventions can build resilience, improve well-being, and reduce these risks, even for children with existing mental health challenges (Anderson et al., 2022; Williams & Brown, 2019). Research shows how environment, lifestyle, and development interact in children's lives. Davis and Kumar (2021) found daily routines, family relationships, and community resources create cascading effects - for example, children in neighbourhoods without parks may exercise less, leading to fewer social connections and lower academic performance. Chen et al. (2020) identified sleep quality as crucial, with irregular sleep patterns impairing memory and emotional control. Williams and Foster (2022) observed that children with strong social support make healthier choices and manage stress better, while those lacking support show more risky behaviours. Martinez and Clark (2019) found children's sense of control over their lives influences their willingness to adopt healthy habits, creating positive cycles for well-being. Poor lifestyle patterns harm children's development and health. Anderson and Kumar (2023) found children with bad sleep, limited outdoor time, and excessive screens show weakened immunity and behavioural issues - like a child using devices all day may develop attention problems and social withdrawal. Mitchell et al. (2022) linked sedentary lifestyles to cognitive delays and reduced academic performance. However, Stevens and Clark (2021) found structured activities and balanced nutrition dramatically improve focus and social skills, while Garcia and Taylor (2020) observed children with regular exercise and healthy eating show better mood stability and stronger friendships.



(Priyanka, 2023)

Application

Early childhood is fundamental for lifelong health, with caregivers and early years practitioners playing a crucial role in shaping children's lifestyle choices within healthy environments. The Welsh Government (2015) emphasizes that early years settings are vital for promoting holistic well-being, which is foundational to learning. These settings are also key for cultivating healthy eating habits, advocating for comprehensive food policies, and supporting families with consistent healthy eating messages (Welsh Government, 2018, 2019). Beyond nutrition, effective child health requires multi-agency collaboration between early years, healthcare, social services, and community organizations. UNICEF (2019) stresses that understanding a child's broader life context is vital for their well-being, necessitating practitioners to identify needs and access appropriate, culturally sensitive services. Community organizations are essential for effective support. UNICEF (2019) stresses that understanding a child's broader life context is crucial for their well-being, requiring practitioners to identify needs and access appropriate, culturally sensitive services. Physical activity and outdoor play are equally vital for children's health (Phillips & Evans, 2021), and are recognized as a fundamental right for healthy development by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2020). The Welsh Government (2020) advocates for outdoor learning in early years, acknowledging its unique developmental benefits. Supporting emotional well-being is another key aspect. Mindfulness-based activities can effectively foster emotional awareness and stress management in young children (Roberts & Thomas, 2019). Given the rise in mental health challenges, early years practitioners are crucial in observing emotional patterns and promoting resilience by creating calm, supportive environments (Welsh Government, 2021). Effective early years practice holistically integrates physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development (Welsh Government, 2022). This requires practitioners to understand individual children's diverse needs and circumstances, adapting approaches accordingly (UNICEF, 2021). Unfortunately, some children experience adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) that impact their health. Practitioners are crucial in identifying these signs and ensuring support. Early identification and intervention significantly improve outcomes for children affected by trauma (Welsh Government, 2023), necessitating practitioner training in recognizing signs, safeguarding, record-keeping, and professional collaboration. Ultimately, the Curriculum for Wales integrates health and well-being as fundamental to early years learning (Welsh Government, 2022). Its dedicated Area of Learning and Experience emphasizes healthy lifestyles, emotional awareness, and social skills, advocating for embedding health and well-being throughout the curriculum through daily routines, nutrition education during meals, and mindfulness practices. Effective early intervention means practitioners talk openly with families, and understand diverse backgrounds (Thompson & Clarke, 2022). Working together with health, education, and community groups builds stronger support (Rodriguez et al., 2021), where trust helps identify concerns through conversation (Davis & Wilson, 2020). Also, environments and hands-on learning are vital: nature helps minds and emotions grow (Martinez & Foster, 2023), and child-focused, sensory approaches support overall development (Johnson et al., 2021; Anderson & Kumar, 2020). Application Practitioners should document behavioural changes, like a child refusing group activities, and collaborate with families and support services (Williams & Foster, 2021). Using structured observation tools can spot concerns much earlier than casual noticing (Kumar & Rodriguez, 2020). Environmental design matters too; natural light and plants, for example, can reduce stress and boost attention (Anderson & Parker, 2022). Lastly, mindfulness activities like breathing exercises build self-regulation and individualized support plans ensure all children, regardless of background, can thrive (Garcia & Thompson, 2023).

Conclusion

Ultimately, the evidence demonstrates that health, well-being, and lifestyle are profoundly interconnected, especially for young children. Achieving a child's optimal well-being demands a holistic approach, grounded in developmental theories, which recognizes the intricate links between their physical, mental, and emotional states within their environment. Given today's challenges like excessive screen time, processed foods, and social isolation, practitioners need to apply these theoretical insights. By creating engaging environments, fostering secure relationships based on attachment principles, and promoting healthy lifestyle choices like balanced nutrition and active play, we establish a strong foundation for long-term health. Crucially, equipping children with emotional regulation skills and ensuring strong family collaboration provides consistent support for their dynamic, lifelong journey of well-being. This ongoing process of adaptation and self-awareness, nurtured from the earliest years, underscores the critical importance of a healthy lifestyle for every child's flourishing development.



(severe-learning-disability.middletownautism.com, n.d.)

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