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Academic Poster – Health, Wellbeing and Lifestyles

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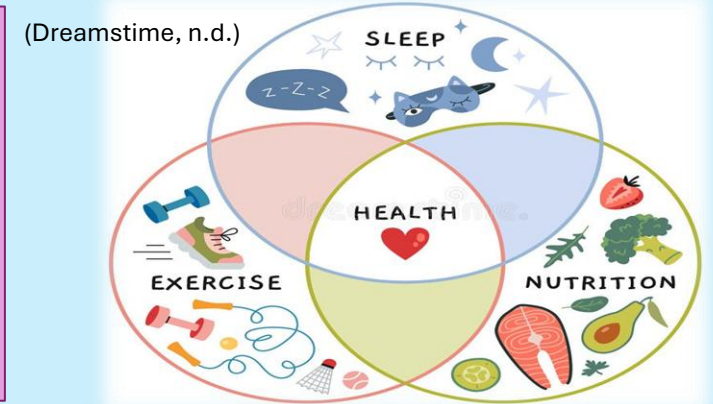
Health, Wellbeing and Lifestyles

Introduction

This poster focuses on the important aspects of health, wellbeing and lifestyles, and their impact on the holistic development of children. This poster will also focus on the practitioner's role in supporting children's wellbeing and development. Children's emotional, physical, social, and cognitive development are greatly affected through positive health and wellbeing (World Health Organisation, 2023). Children's health and holistic development can be affected by lifestyle factors such as exercise, sleep and nutrition, which can also affect their future wellbeing and holistic development (Department for Education, 2025). Early years practitioners play a significant role in supporting the child's positive wellbeing through promoting healthy lifestyles, providing a nurturing environment and identifying factors such as emotional needs and home environments which influence the child's wellbeing (Lindon and Brodie, 2016).

Health

Children's overall growth and development can be heavily affected by their health. The World Health Organization specifies that "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." (World Health Organisation, 1948, p. 1). This highlights that health includes social and emotional wellbeing, not only physical factors. Maintaining good health during early childhood is essential as it contributes to children's overall development, behaviour and their ability to positively engage with others. Positive health can promote positive relationships and effective learning opportunities (Underdown, 2007).



A range of factors can impact children's health and development, including emotional wellbeing, exercise, nutrition, hygiene and sleep. A nutritious diet contributes to children's healthy physical development, energy levels and cognitive development, while regular exercise supports coordination, bone health and muscle strength (Meggitt, 2012). Participating in physical activities can also support emotional wellbeing and self-esteem. Lynch (2024) suggests that physical education and regular exercise can benefit children's holistic health, wellbeing and academic progress. Sufficient sleep also plays an important role in supporting children's behaviour, concentration and emotional wellbeing (Meggitt, 2012). Guidance from the National Health Service states that developing healthy routines during childhood can positively contribute to future health and wellbeing (NHS, 2024). This links closely with Maslow's hierarchy of needs which emphasises that children's development and wellbeing are dependent on fulfilling basic psychological needs such as food, sleep and security, these must be met before positive development and emotional wellbeing can occur (Pichère and Cadiat, 2016).

Children's health is a holistic concept, as wellbeing can be influenced by physical factors, environmental factors, and emotional and social influences. A range of factors including access to healthcare, family situations, living conditions and income can all effect children's health and development (Bradshaw, 2016). According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, a child's development is affected by the environments and relationships in their lives including society, family and education (Bronfenbrenner, 1996). Children raised in safe, supportive and nurturing environments are more likely to experience positive holistic health outcomes while adverse experiences such as challenging home situations and poverty may negatively impact children's overall development (Bradshaw, 2016). Overall, health should be viewed holistically, as it significantly impacts children's overall wellbeing and future development.

Wellbeing

Wellbeing plays an important role in children's holistic development and encompasses emotional, mental, social and physical aspects (Roberts, 2010). Children who experience positive wellbeing are more likely to have the ability to develop positive relationships with others. Positive wellbeing also contributes to resilience, confidence and positive behaviour (Burton and Levermore, 2020). Similarly, the World Health Organization (1948) states that wellbeing is strongly associated with quality of life and overall health. According to Roberts (2010) children experiencing positive wellbeing are more likely to experience feeling of support, safety and belonging.

Positive emotional wellbeing is an important aspect supporting child development as it can impact communication, confidence and the ability to manage emotions effectively. In addition to this, it can contribute to developing healthy social relationships and developing confidence and resilience. However negative emotional wellbeing can impact children's relationships with others, their learning outcomes and behaviours (Burton and Levermore, 2020). The National Health Service states the importance of supporting positive emotional development and mental wellbeing in children from early childhood to promote emotional growth and long-term development (NHS, 2024). Aligning with Maslow's hierarchy of needs which emphasises the importance of self-worth, belonging and feeling secure in encouraging children's emotional development and wellbeing (Pichère and Cadiat, 2016).

Children's emotional wellbeing can be influenced by the experiences and relationships that surround them. Children's emotional wellbeing and self-esteem can be supported by positive experiences, supportive relationships and strong emotional attachments (Bradshaw, 2016). John Bowlby's attachment theory emphasises the role of supportive relationships and secure attachments and that these can have a positive influence on children's development and emotional wellbeing. He proposed that secure attachments between children and their caregivers help children feel more confident, safe and secure and that these positive emotional attachments can contribute to resilience and self-esteem (Holmes, 2014).

This is supported by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory that suggests interactions within social environments, such as school and family, shape a child's development and wellbeing and that experiences and relationships within their surroundings can either have a positive or negative impact on their wellbeing (Rosa and Tudge, 2013). However, negative experiences such as isolation, stress, neglect and challenging relationships can influence children's social development and wellbeing.

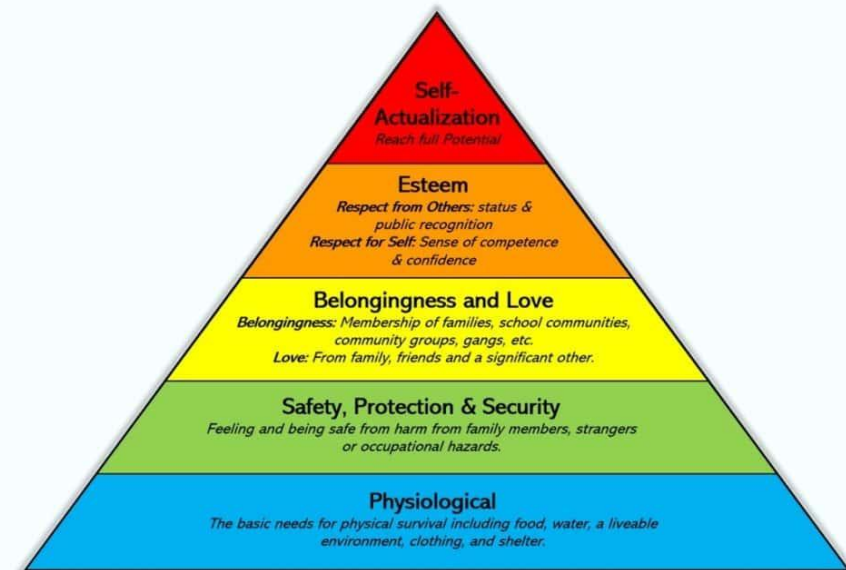
Furthermore, the Marmot Review stresses the importance of ensuring every child is given a positive start in life and that emotional support, supportive relationships and positive experiences can have a significant impact on a child's wellbeing and future outcomes (Marmot, 2010).

Lifestyles

Children's lifestyles consist of daily lifestyle choices, routines and behaviours that affect their health, wellbeing and holistic development. Lifestyle choices such as exercise, nutrition, hygiene, sleep, and screen time can contribute significantly to children's physical, social and emotional wellbeing. Healthy lifestyle choices formed during early childhood can positively contribute towards children's wellbeing and long-term development (Musgrave, 2017). In addition, the Welsh Government's Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience states the importance of encouraging children to maintain healthy habits, routines, positive wellbeing and emotional stability throughout life (Welsh Government, 2020).

Balanced nutrition is an important aspect that contributes positively to children's healthy physical growth, energy and development. Including essential nutrients in a balanced diet positively influences a child's behaviour, concentration, and overall development (Meggitt, 2012). However, inadequate nutrition may negatively affect children's emotional wellbeing, physical health and their ability to effectively engage in learning (Underdown, 2007). The National Health Service emphasises the importance of promoting children's health and development through balanced diets and healthy eating (NHS, 2023). This relates to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs which explains that children's physiological needs including nutrition are essential in supporting children's healthy wellbeing and development (Maslow, 1943).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs



(Drew, 2024)

Lynch (2024) explains that healthy sleep patterns and regular physical activity contribute significantly to children's holistic development and wellbeing. Regular exercise can positively affect children's emotional, social, and physical health while also supporting teamwork, social communication skills and promoting confidence. In addition, adequate sleep can positively influence children's behaviour, concentration and supports their ability to regulate their emotions. UNICEF (n.d.) emphasises the importance of healthy routines and positive childhood experiences having a significant impact on children's wellbeing and future development.

Children's lifestyles may also be affected by factors such as their home, social environments and family routines. According to Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, children's holistic development and behaviour are shaped by the various relationships and environments they experience including family members, community and the wider society (Rosa and Tudge, 2013). Furthermore, research by Shonkoff and Garner (2012) suggests that environmental stress alongside adverse experiences during childhood can negatively affect children's long-term development and overall well-being and that establishing healthy habits in early childhood within nurturing environments are essential in supporting children's holistic development, overall well-being, future development and opportunities.

In addition to this screen time is becoming an increasingly prominent lifestyle factor for children. The use of technology can provide benefits such as communication and enhance learning. However excessive use of screen time can have a negative effect on children's physical activity, sleep patterns and social engagement (Stiglic and Viner, 2019).

Application to Early years practice

Early years practitioners have a key responsibility in positively contributing to children's health, wellbeing and lifestyles. Early years practitioners are responsible for providing children with safe, secure environments that are nurturing and inclusive for all children. In addition to this, early years practitioners have the responsibility to encourage healthy lifestyle habits and behaviours and promote emotional wellbeing to support children's holistic development (Musgrave, 2017). Early years practitioners can positively support children's future wellbeing and life opportunities by helping them to develop resilience and confidence through everyday positive experiences and interactions (Underdown, 2007).

The Curriculum for Wales Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience (AoLE) highlights the need to support children in developing positive relationships, healthy lifestyle choices and emotional wellbeing to benefit them throughout their lives (Welsh Government, 2020). Early years practitioners can support this by creating meaningful experiences, fostering positive relationships, encouraging healthy choices and supporting children's holistic wellbeing. This practice reflects Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory which suggests children's development is influenced by their environmental influences and social interactions (Rosa and Tudge, 2013). As a result, the support and experience available to children within the early years setting can positively contribute to children's overall health and wellbeing (Marmot, 2010).

Early years practitioners can support children's health and wellbeing through demonstrating their own positive actions and behaviours. By acting as positive role models, practitioners can encourage children to foster their own positive behaviours and attitudes towards a healthy lifestyle. Practitioners can support children through everyday routines and planned experiences to promote healthy choices, for example, encouraging outdoor physical activity, providing healthy food choices, and supporting communication and relationships through group activities or circle time. Therefore, encouragement and consistent support from practitioners can support children to develop the skills and confidence that contribute to long term positive health and wellbeing (Underdown, 2007).

Working in partnership with parents and carers is essential in supporting positive outcomes for children's wellbeing and development. According to Wilson (2025), strong partnerships between families and practitioners play an important role in supporting children's wellbeing and holistic development. Through effective communication, families and practitioners can promote healthy and consistent routines and positive behaviours in the educational setting and at home. Additionally, working collaboratively with a range of professionals can ensure children and families receive support, early identification and early intervention for children with additional learning needs. Children's health, overall development and wellbeing can be supported through collaboration of multi-agency professionals, such as social workers, educational psychologists, speech and language therapists and health visitors (Wilson, 2025).

This is supported by the Marmot Review, which highlights the importance of providing early intervention, access to essential services and nurturing relationships to help every child receive positive outcomes (Marmot, 2010).

Conclusion

In conclusion, health, wellbeing, and lifestyles are closely intertwined and play a significant role in children's overall development and wellbeing. Children's physical development is supported through positive health whereas positive wellbeing contributes to self-confidence, resilience, positive social relationships, and emotional security. Healthy lifestyle choices, including regular exercise, adequate sleep, balanced nutrition, and consistent positive routines all positively contribute to children's health, wellbeing and development.

Theories including Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory and Bowlby's Attachment theory recognise the importance of meeting children's individual needs, providing nurturing environments and developing secure attachments to promote children's positive development. Together, these theoretical perspectives recognise that children's development is affected by a range of factors including experiences, environments and relationships.

Early years practitioners support children's health, wellbeing and lifestyles by providing a safe, secure, inclusive, and nurturing educational environment. By supporting positive behaviour and wellbeing, encouraging healthy lifestyle choices and collaborating with parents, carers, and other professionals, practitioners support children to achieve positive developmental outcomes. Therefore, positive health, wellbeing and lifestyles are key contributors to children's holistic development and future opportunities.

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