

Health, Well-being and Lifestyles

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AI Statement

I acknowledge the use of Copilot on 10 June 2026 to support me with my assignment.

I used the prompts:

“can you help me structure my paragraph, so it flows better”

“can you help me find a Welsh government source that demonstrates how practitioners support health in a setting”

“what theorists are best to use here?”

“can you help me with academic sources or theorists that will help me with a contrasting view”

“can you read my work and check the structure?”

what do you suggest I move sections to ensure it flows better?”

Health, Well-being and Lifestyles

Introduction

Health, well-being and lifestyle are central to children's development and are recognised across Welsh policy and practice as essential foundations for positive lifelong outcomes. This poster explores how these three interconnected concepts influence children's physical, emotional and social development, drawing on guidance from UNICEF, NSPCC and the Welsh Government. The discussion is supported by key theoretical perspectives, including Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and the Cycle of Change model. Firstly, the poster examines the concept of health and its importance in early childhood. Secondly, it considers well-being as a multidimensional construct shaped by relationships, rights and daily experiences. Thirdly, it explores lifestyle factors that contribute to healthy development, including routines, environments and practitioner support. The poster concludes by highlighting the importance of holistic, rights-based practice that helps children thrive.

Concept

UNICEF (2026) highlights that children's health and wellbeing are shaped by physical, emotional, and social factors, showing the need for a holistic approach (UNICEF, 2026). NSPCC Learning (2026) explains that children's wellbeing is strongly influenced by their daily routines, relationships, and environments, demonstrating how lifestyle behaviors directly affect both health and emotional development (NSPCC Learning, 2026). The Department for Education (2025) also notes that physical health and mental wellbeing are closely linked and supported through healthy habits such as sleep, nutrition, and physical activity (DfE, 2025). Maslow's hierarchy of needs suggests that children's basic physiological and emotional needs must be met through consistent care and routines before they can fully thrive (Maslow, 1943). Together, these perspectives show that health, wellbeing, and lifestyle are interconnected influences that shape children's development.



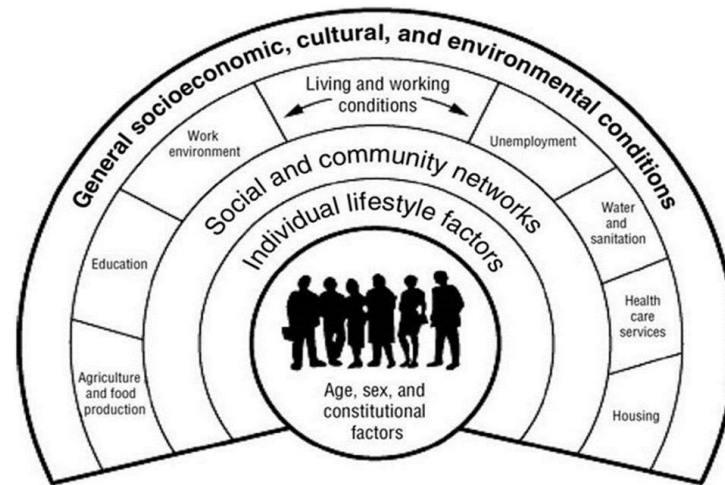
The UNCRC underpins children's rights to health, wellbeing, and development forming the foundation for educational and care frameworks (UNICEF, n.d).

Health

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (World Health Organization, 1948). This holistic definition recognises that children’s health is shaped by their emotional security, relationships and wider environment. Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child reinforces this by stating that every child has the right to the highest attainable standard of health, nutritious food, clean water and a safe environment (United Nations, 1989). Within Wales, the Curriculum for Wales identifies Health and Well-being as one of its four core purposes, emphasising that children must feel safe, supported and emotionally secure in order to learn effectively (Welsh Government, 2022).

Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs helps explain why health is foundational in early childhood, as children’s basic physiological and safety needs such as nutrition, rest and consistent care must be met before they can develop a sense of belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). At the same time, Dahlgren and Whitehead’s rainbow model highlights how factors such as housing, income, family relationships and community support shape children’s physical and mental wellbeing (Dahlgren and Whitehead, 2021). Maslow shows how children’s basic needs affect their health, while Dahlgren and Whitehead show how family, housing and income also play a role. This means practitioners play a crucial role in creating nurturing, inclusive environments that promote physical health, emotional security and positive relationships, ensuring that children have the best possible foundation for wellbeing and healthy lifestyles. Building on this, the medical and social models of health offer two contrasting ways of understanding health needs. The medical model of health focuses on illness, symptoms and biological causes, viewing a person as healthy when no disease or medical condition is present.

This model is useful for diagnosing and treating physical problems, but it does not consider the emotional, social or environmental influences that shape children’s development (Care Learning, 2024). In contrast, the social model of health recognises that health is affected by wider determinants such as housing, income, family relationships, community support and access to services (Care Learning, 2024). This aligns closely with Dahlgren and Whitehead’s model, which highlights how children’s wellbeing is shaped by the conditions in which they live and grow (Dahlgren and Whitehead, 2021). The social model also reflects the World Health Organization’s view that health includes physical, mental and social wellbeing rather than simply the absence of illness (World Health Organization, 1948). Together, these perspectives show that supporting children’s health requires both meeting their basic needs and addressing the wider social factors that influence their daily lives.



The Dahlgren and Whitehead Model of Health Determinants (Dahlgren and Whitehead, 2021).

Well-Being

The Mental Health Foundation (2015) says that well-being refers to a person feeling comfortable, healthy and content. Although happiness is part of well-being, the concept is more than moment-to-moment happiness. It also includes how satisfied people feel with their life overall, their sense of purpose, and the degree of control. The New Economics Foundation describes well-being as how people feel and function both personally and socially, as well as how they judge their life (Mental Health Foundation, 2015).

Children’s well-being is also supported through their rights to safety, participation and emotional security. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to express their views, be listened to, and be protected from harm, all of which contribute to their emotional and social well-being (United Nations, 1989). Within Wales, the Curriculum for Wales identifies well-being as a core element of learning, emphasising that children must feel safe, valued and supported to develop confidence, resilience and positive relationships (Welsh Government, 2022).

Theorists help explain why well-being is central to early childhood development. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs emphasises that children need emotional security, sense of belonging and positive relationships before they can develop confidence and self-esteem, making these needs essential for their overall well-being (Maslow, 1943). Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory highlights that children’s well-being is shaped by the relationships and environments including family, school and wider community influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, as cited in Bradbury and Swailes, 2022). The Marmot Review (2010) reinforces this by showing that inequalities in housing, income and access to services can significantly affect children’s emotional well-being, demonstrating that supportive and equitable environments are crucial for positive development (Marmot, 2010).

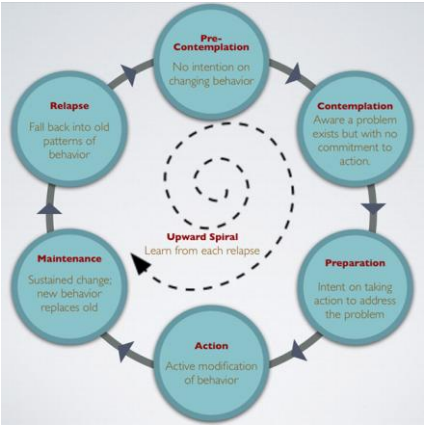
Research also provides insight into how children themselves understand well-being. Hong and Ra’s study on young children’s perceptions of happiness found that children link well-being to play, friendships, feeling cared for and having opportunities to make choices, showing that emotional well-being is strongly shaped by their daily experiences and relationships (Hong and Ra, 2015). Guidance from the Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Trust similarly highlights that young children’s emotional well-being is supported through secure attachments, consistent routines and opportunities to express their feelings safely. These findings emphasise that well-being is not only influenced by wider social factors but also by the quality of children’s interactions and the support they receive in their immediate environments (Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust, n.d.) Together, these perspectives show that children’s well-being is shaped by a combination of their rights, relationships, daily experiences and the wider social conditions around them. Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust highlights that practitioners play a crucial role in promoting emotional well-being by providing secure attachments, consistent routines and safe opportunities for children to express their feelings (Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust, n.d.).

Lifestyle

Barnardo’s (n.d) explains that maintaining a healthy lifestyle involves developing a healthy relationship with food and drink for both children and adults. They highlight that fostering positive behaviours in childhood supports children to make constructive lifestyle choices as they grow, showing that lifestyle is shaped by the routines and environments children experience each day (Bardardo’s, n.d). In Wales, national guidance encourages early years settings to help children build healthy lifestyle habits from a young age. The Healthy and Sustainable Pre-School Scheme (HSPSS) supports settings to promote things like active play, healthy eating, good hygiene, safety and a positive environment where children feel happy and confident. The scheme also highlights the importance of strong relationships, opportunities to play, and creating a setting that works closely with families and the community (Hywel Dda University Health Board, n.d).

The HSPSS also encourages a whole-setting approach, where staff, routines and the physical environment all work together to promote healthy choices. This includes providing opportunities for outdoor play, supporting emotional well-being and working in partnership with families to ensure consistent messages about lifestyle are shared between home and the setting (Hywel Dda University Health Board, n.d.). Alongside this, the All Wales Weight Management Pathway focuses on early support for families to encourage healthy routines around food and activity (Welsh Government, 2021). Together, these frameworks show and support the UNCRC Article 24, which states that children have the right to the highest attainable standard of health, and highlight the role early years settings play in helping children develop positive lifestyle habits (UNCRC, 1989). The Cycle of Change model by Prochaska and DiClemente (1983) explains that people move through different stages when modifying behaviour, including pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance. The model highlights that change is gradual and that relapse can occur, but each relapse forms part of an “upward spiral” where individuals learn and strengthen their ability to make healthier choices (Swindon Safeguarding Partnership, 2018). This helps practitioners understand that families may need support at different points when developing routines around food, activity or daily habits. Research shows that children’s lifestyle habits are strongly influenced by their home environment. Schmeer and Yoon (2016) found that factors such as a noisy, chaotic and unstable home environment can affect children’s health and development (Schmeer and Yoon, 2016). This highlights that lifestyle behaviours are shaped by daily experiences within the home. Practitioners play an important role in supporting children’s lifestyle habits by modelling healthy routines and creating positive environments. Through everyday practice, they promote active play, healthy eating and consistent routines, which supports the Curriculum for Wales aim of helping children become healthy, confident individuals (Welsh Government, 2022). This links to the Curriculum for Wales, which emphasises helping children become healthy, confident individuals who understand how their choices affect their bodies and well-being (Welsh Government, 2022).

Guidance on holistic development also highlights that children’s physical health supports their ability to learn and regulate emotions (School of Academics, n.d.). Safeguarding guidance further stresses that promoting well-being and healthy routines is essential for keeping children safe and supporting their overall development (NHS Wales, 2022).



The Cycle of Change (Swindon Safeguarding Partnership, 2018).

Conclusion

Overall, this poster shows that children’s health, well-being and lifestyle are closely connected and shaped by their relationships, environments and daily experiences. Guidance from organisations such as UNICEF, NSPCC and the Welsh Government highlights that children need safe, nurturing and consistent environments to develop physically, emotionally and socially. Theories including Maslow, Bronfenbrenner and the Cycle of Change help explain how children’s needs, family circumstances and readiness for change influence their development and routines. Research also shows that children’s well-being and lifestyle habits are strongly affected by the quality of their home environment and the support they receive from trusted adults. Practitioners therefore play a vital role in promoting healthy habits, emotional security and positive routines through modelling, partnership with families and whole-setting approaches such as the HSPSS. Together, these emphasise the importance of holistic practice that supports every child to thrive.

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