

Cover sheet

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Assignment title and number: Well-being,
care and healthy living. ECEY5009

AI Cover sheet

Section 1: Poster- 1898 words

Reference list

AI Acknowledgement

I acknowledge the use of Grammarly (<https://www.grammarly.com/>) on 15 June 2025 to check my work using the prompts:

1. Check the text for readability, grammar, and syntax.

I confirm that I have not presented any AI generated text as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes and other resources I used before, and after the use of AI tools which I may be asked to provide as evidence.

I acknowledge the use of Google Scholar (<https://www.google scholar.com/>) continuously throughout the module using prompts:

1. Find articles about well-being, health, or lifestyle in the early years.

HEALTH, WELL-BEING & LIFESTYLE IN THE EARLY YEARS

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INTRODUCTION:

A child's early years are a critical period of their life; it is this period that lays the foundational blocks of their health, well-being and positive lifestyle behaviours. It is during this formative stage that experiences, interactions and environments play a pivotal role in shaping the child's long-term emotional, physical and cognitive development, and while the concepts of health, well-being and lifestyle are often discussed separately, they are deeply interconnected and influenced by a combination of a child's individual circumstances and those of broader social influence and detriments (Ahmed, 2025).

In terms of early childhood, these differing elements are particularly important as children are highly responsive to their surroundings and the care in which they receive. Meaning, the early years settings and the practitioners that work within them are in a position to ensure they make a positive lasting impact (Education Development Trust, 2024).

This poster will explore how the concepts of health, well-being and lifestyle influence a child's early development. It will also delve deeper into the role of early years practitioners and what they can do to promote positive outcomes for children and their families, especially those at a disadvantage. When examining these intertwined aspects, a clearer understanding can be seen of how quality care, support and early intervention can help promote a child's health, well-being and lifestyle.

HEALTH:

The definition of health can be a challenging concept to articulate, as its interpretation varies significantly between individuals and across diverse contexts. However, Sir Michael Marmot (2010) defined health in his 2010 review, titled 'Fair Society, Healthy Lives,' as people are shaped by the conditions in which they are born, grow, live, work and age. This is further supported by the Dahlgren and Whitehead model of health determinants (2021), first introduced in 1991, which has become a widely known framework that outlines the multifaceted influences that there are on an individual's health. It explains how our health is built of multiple layers, with our individual factors at the centre and societal conditions on the periphery.

This model is particularly good at providing a holistic view of health determinants and how health is influenced by a complex play of not just individual factors but also social factors. However, it does not account for more contemporary issues that could have a negative impact on health, such as the introduction of digital devices (Jahnel *et al.*, 2022).

However, the model has also been influential in numerous policies that address social determinants of health, helping promote health equity. For instance, the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 mandates the consideration of the long-term impacts of the multifaceted components of health during the decision-making process. This Act embodies the principles of the Dahlgren and Whitehead (2021) Model by promoting a holistic approach to health.

In terms of early years, health is crucial. It lays the foundations for lifelong physical, emotional and cognitive development. The First 1000 Days Programme (n.d.) is an excellent example of this. It emphasises the need for favourable conditions for babies in the first 1000 days of life, such as safe homes and support for parents, thus helping break generational cycles and making headway for the new generations to thrive. This closely correlates to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979). Bronfenbrenner's theory emphasises the impact of a multilayered environment on children, from their immediate surroundings, such as family and childcare, known as microsystems, to their macrosystems, which are understood to be the broader societal influences, such as cultural norms and policy. Like the First 1000 Days approach, it reflects the importance of healthcare, housing, parental support and community support to best influence the early childhood years and support appropriate development in children and in turn, promote resilience and equity (Moore *et al.*, 2017).

However, early years practitioners can also play a pivotal role in ensuring that children's physical, emotional and cognitive developmental needs are met, especially during those first 1000 days. Providing positive daily interactions and embedding encouraging routines can help promote healthy eating, physical activity, proper hygiene and emotional regulation and help support the holistic approach needed for children to have the best start in life (Melhuish *et al.*, 2019; Education Policy Institute, 2020).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory Model

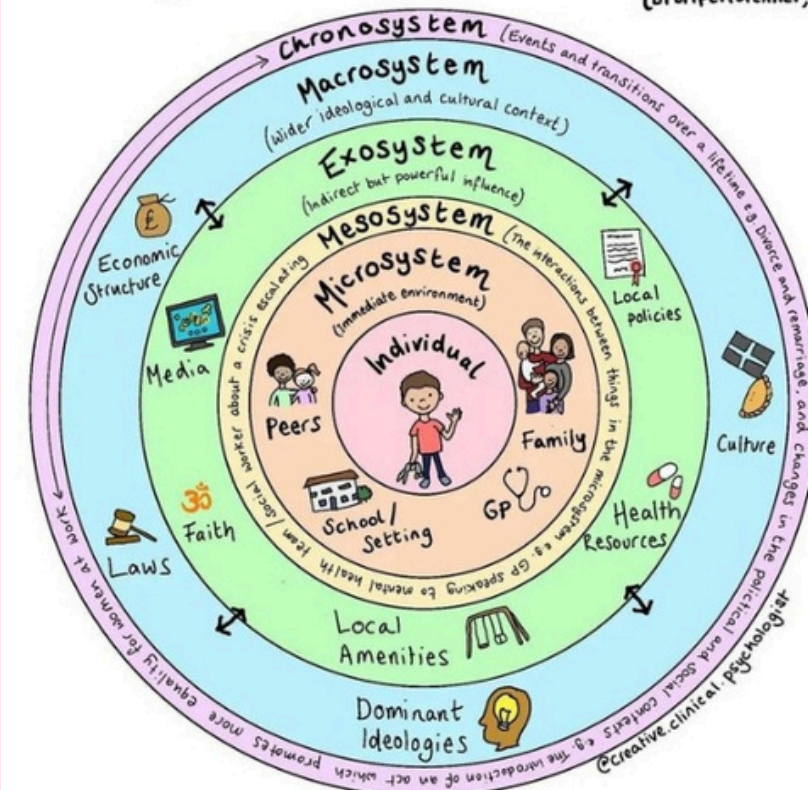


Figure 1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (Pinterest, n.d.).

WELL-BEING:

Well-being is another multifaceted concept, and in early childhood, it is especially crucial as this period lays the foundations for the child's development and health outcomes. It involves physical and mental health, education, material and emotional security, and relationships (Statham and Chase, 2010). When children have a strong sense of well-being, they also foster healthy brain development, resilience, and positive social interactions (Shonkoff *et al.*, 2012).

One qualitative study conducted between 2015 and 2024 reported that receiving praise, achieving goals and spending quality time with loved ones were all positive contributing factors to a child's well-being. On the other hand, they also reported that children felt a sense of unhappiness when they received limited peer interactions and felt their voices were ignored (Kellock, 2020). This aligns with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), which suggests that a child's basic physiological needs must be met before moving up the pyramid to self-actualisation. Nevertheless, it reinforces the idea that basic needs start with feelings of love and belonging, which are essential for a child to thrive (Maslow, 1943; Shonkoff *et al.*, 2012).

However, unlike Maslow's hierarchical model (1943), where it is seen as a more linear progression from physiological needs to self-actualisation, the ABC Model (Roberts, 2010), which stands for Agency, Belonging and Connectedness, recognises that these needs can operate simultaneously and together. For example, in an early years setting, children thrive when they are empowered to make their own choices (agency), feel secure emotionally and accepted (belonging) and are positively connected with their families, culture and communities (connectedness). The ABC Model aligns closely with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), particularly with Article 12, which states that children have a right to be heard, and Article 29, which states that children have a right to the development of their talents and personalities.

Furthermore, Welsh policy frameworks such as the Curriculum for Wales and the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 (Welsh Government, 2015) embed these values by promoting inclusiveness (Welsh Government, 2021). Collectively, these rights and values affirm a child's right to holistic well-being.

However, in her study, How to Grow Up Happy: An Exploratory Study on the Meaning of Happiness from Children's Voices, Thoilliez (2011) suggests that not all children come from happy homes. Thus, they do not have holistic well-being. The study aimed to find out what makes a child happy. The findings highlighted that a child's overall happiness was closely linked to their relationships with friends and family. Suggesting that the better these relationships are, the happier a child can be. These findings by Thoilliez circle back to Maslow's hierarchy of needs and the ABC model, cementing the suggestion that love, belonging, and connectedness are more than necessary for a truly holistic sense of well-being.

Furthermore, early years practitioners can help support a child's well-being by ensuring they create a nurturing and supportive environment that helps with their emotional regulation and resilience. Additionally, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) places a profound emphasis on the importance of high-quality care in early education settings, helping aid children to foster these skills (NICE, 2023). However, high-quality care is subjective, and there is not a defined explanation of what this looks like. Birth to Five Matters (n.d.) describes high-quality care as a setting that aims to continuously improve with the incorporation of continued professional development.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs pyramid

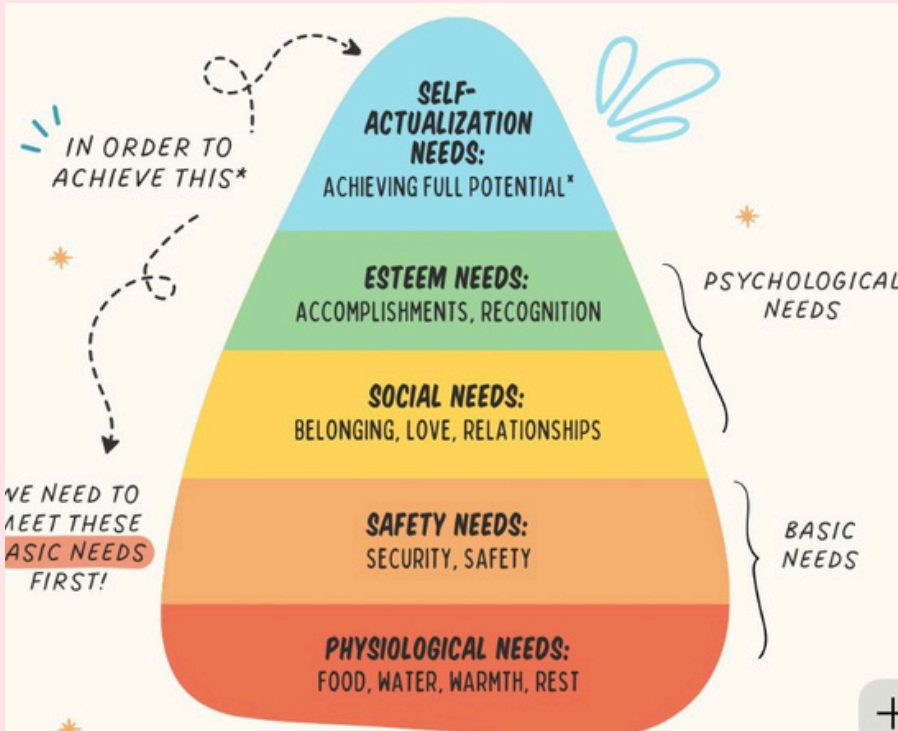


Figure 2: Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Pinterest, n.d.).

LIFESTYLE:

Lifestyle can be defined by a person's pattern of behaviours, which are based on choices made from the options available to them; these options are often influenced by a person's socio-economic circumstances (The National Health Service (NHS) Wales, n.d.; Muwfaq, 2023; World Health Organisation, 2019).

In early childhood, aspects such as physical activity, nutrition, emotional well-being, social interactions, and sleep are also important for a child to live a healthy lifestyle (Thomas and Lewis, 2016). However, a child's lifestyle is not isolated to just these factors but instead can be shaped by a handful of interwoven elements. These include their family income, housing situation, their parents' education quality, and access to healthcare and early education services (OCED, 2025).

According to Estyn (2024), children who come from more disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to encounter barriers to healthy appropriate food, safe environments and quality early years education. Consequently, this results in their developmental outcomes and emotional well-being being compromised. A review of parental behaviours' effects on a child's lifestyle (Maia *et al.*, 2025) supports this. The review suggests that their parents' behaviours and routines dramatically influence a child's lifestyle. They concluded clear associations between a child's mental health, sleep, daily behaviours and body mass index (BMI) against areas such as their parents' diet, emotional well-being and sleep.

Although it is poverty that has the most significant impact on children's lifestyles, a report by The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2025) found that in 2022/2023, 14.3 million people lived in poverty within the United Kingdom (UK), of which 4.3 million were children. This is further supported by The Equality and Human Rights Commissioners' (2024) tracker on "Adequate standards of living: Poverty and Social Security" that shines light on ongoing concerns within the UK, particularly the prevalence of single-parent families relying on food banks. Both the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and The Equality and Human Rights Commissioners have recommended the UK government implement changes to tackle the issue of persistent child poverty.

In response, the Welsh Government (2024) provided families and individuals facing food poverty with £1.7 million in funding. The funding aimed to provide emergency food aid through local groups, in the hope of addressing immediate food insecurity. Moreover, children who are not living a healthy lifestyle due to poverty and adverse parental behaviours are often experiencing greater challenges in terms of school readiness (Department for Education, 2022). Therefore, it is vital that early years practitioners support children in developing healthy habits. They can help do this by promoting regular physical activity, by incorporating it into their daily time schedules and by ensuring nutritious meals and snacks are available in their settings, along with modelling positive behaviours themselves (Hesketh *et al.*, 2021).

Furthermore, the offerings of parenting workshops or support groups, along with signposting of relevant services such as social workers and health visitors, can also help empower parents with the knowledge and skills needed to better improve their children's lifestyles, in turn improving their well-being and health (Grindal *et al.*, 2016; Gonzalez-Gomez, 2025).

Graph illustrating the rates of children in absolute poverty from the Institute for Fiscal Studies

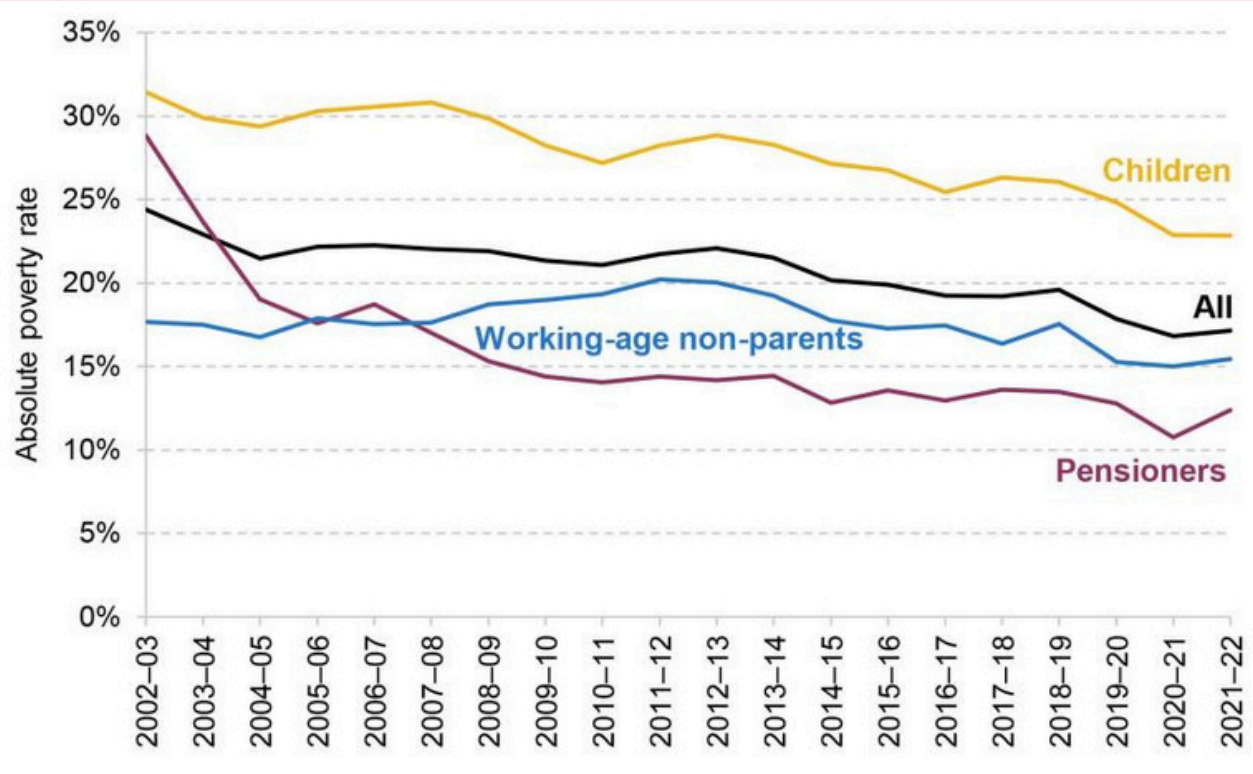


Figure 3: Absolute poverty graph (Chaudhuri *et al.*, 2023).

CONCLUSION:

To conclude, the content presented within this poster demonstrates just how deeply interconnected a child's life is in those early developmental stages. It is shaped by a complex interplay of personal, familial and societal factors, and the theories, policies and models mentioned help provide a valuable framework for understanding the broader context in which children develop.

By promoting healthy equity, emotional well-being, and healthy lifestyle habits right from the start, practitioners and policymakers can ensure that every child and their family have the best support and start in life.

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