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Good morning, My name is Kelly Copic and my student number is 2403985 and the module code is ECEY5009 wellbeing, care and healthy lifestyles.

This presentation will explore children's mental health, and it will look to define what mental health is and how it presents in children and the challenges children may face because of having a mental illness. This presentation will also explore the role of the practitioner and how they can support families and their children who suffer with mental health.

According to the World Health Organisation [hereafter WHO] (2022) mental health can be defined as a state of wellbeing and can affect how a person lives their lives. They suggest poor mental health has the ability to change how a person may make decisions, build relationships and shape the world they live in. Similarly, NSPCC (2024) state mental health encompasses a person's cognitive, behavioural and emotional wellbeing and point out that children's mental health needs to be recognised as being just as important as their physical health. This is underpinned by UNICEF (2019) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child article 24 that states children have the right to a good standard of health that includes mental health services.

According to the Children's Society (2025) a classroom of 30 children will have 5 children that are likely to suffer from a mental illness. Similarly, Action for Children (2025) and The National Institute of Health [hereafter NIS] (2020) state research shows that 1 in five children between the ages of 5 to 19 suffer with at least one mental illness, with Bradshaw (2016) stating that of these statistics boys are more likely to suffer with mental disorders than girls. Maurer (2017) states research shows that mental disorders begin during childhood and suggests this can happen when there is a change in the development of children's nervous systems and states the consequences of these changes can affect children mentally, emotionally and physically. The WHO (2022) agree and state that mental illness can affect children in early stages of development and suggest that at this stage parents have a huge influence on their children's outcomes. In the same vein, Howard (2020) states the importance of parental influence and suggests that children's mental health must be

a whole family approach. However, NIS (2020) points out that family can sometimes be a barrier for children and suggests that some parents can be embarrassed with the stigma of having a child with mental illness and not allow them to speak to anyone else because of the fear of being judged. Howard (2020) recognises some of the factors that contribute to children's mental health and states they can be biological or inherited from family, brain development, such as adverse childhood effects, also known as (ACEs) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), Autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and environmental experiences, such as how and where children live and those impacts. However, points out the importance of other close relationships surrounding the child such as teachers and friends and the impact they can have on children's mental health and wellbeing. This is supported by theorist Bronfenbrenner (1977) ecological model, the model shows how education, family and friends are interconnected in the microsystem and shows the importance and influence these relationships can have on children's holistic development. In the same vein, The National Health Service for Wales [hereafter NHS] (2024) state children who grow up in stressful environments often suffer ACE's and suggest those children will often have low self-esteem that may lead to depression or anxiety.

According to the Government office for science (2008) interventions to help promote mental development can change future outcomes for children and suggest educating parents about how their own behaviour can impact their children's mental health and state offering support will enable them to make better decisions having a positive impact on their children's lives. The NHS (2024) would support this and states the importance of interventions and how they can break the cycle of generational ACE's and mental health by offering support and advice for parents in the early years. In the same vein, Howard (2020) would agree that intervention in schools is vital to help children's mental development and suggests that the early years is a pivotal time for children and points out that mental health usually starts at this stage of life and if missed can have long lasting effects on the children's future lives. NIS (2020) would agree with this and states children who are left untreated will have higher levels of drug abuse, self-harm and suicidal behaviour. This is recognised and underpinned by the Welsh Government (2024) who understand the implications and importance of mental health in the early years of children's lives and states that one of the six areas of learning in schools is health and wellbeing and

points out that the curriculum is designed to help support children by educating them on the importance of wellbeing and mental health and supporting them to manage their emotions, develop healthy relationships and educate them on healthy lifestyles.

According to Children's Commissioner for Wales (2022) poverty and social inequality are factors that can influence mental health and suggest children who live in deprived communities will often face difficult issues such as not being able to access activities or hobbies and will often not have access to the right support. They report that as many as 27% of young children worry about family problems while at school. Maholmes (2014) states studies have found that children living in poverty are more likely to suffer with mental illness. However, points out that families can be mindful and promote hope and positivity for their children by using intervention teams in the area to help their children develop and improve their outcomes. The Welsh Government (2024) recognise this and aim to support families in Wales by offering Flying Start Programmes in disadvantaged areas that offer support to children and their families and support them to develop and increase positive behaviour and outcomes. This is underpinned by theorist Maslow (1943) whose hierarchy of needs suggests children need to have the most basic physiological and safety needs met to develop. His theory recognises the importance of having each need met to support the children's health and mental health.

Howard (2020) states practitioners in the early years spend a huge amount of time with the children and are well placed to be able to spot any worrying changes in behaviour. He suggests that even though practitioners are not trained in mental health they should still have skills that will enable them to see any children that may be suffering with a mental illness and be ready to help those children with the right interventions and people relevant. Solomon (2019) would agree and points out that multi agency working can be effective and suggests sharing information with other relevant professionals can help. According to the NSPCC (2024) some common warning signs that children show when they are suffering a mental illness can be sudden mood changes, unexplained weight loss, behavioural changes and children who become withdrawn and suggest practitioners need to know and understand these signs to intervene and offer help and support and involving outside agencies where appropriate. Outside agencies such as, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services [hereafter CAMHS] (2025) is a service run by the NHS that offers support

for young people suffering with mental illness. The service offers support for children and young people in England and Wales can help with different mental health conditions such as, depression or low mood, bipolar disorder, anxiety, autism or ADHD and many others. The service works closely with professionals such as nurses, therapists, psychiatrists and counsellors that all work collaboratively to help support young people through their crisis. However, Rethink Mental Illness (2024) state average wait times for the CAMHS service is around 108 days and points out that 6,300 children had been waiting for over 2 years to be seen and suggest waiting for long periods of time without treatment can result in detrimental long-term effects. The service offers therapy and medication to help treat disorders such as depression or low mood that is closely monitored by qualified professionals and support groups where young people can talk and share their experiences with others. However, Maurer (2017) suggests that research on the use of anti-depressants for children can be more difficult to find and suggests there is a lack of knowledge about the impact they have on children compared to the readily available information on the use in adults. Maurer (2017) talks about the limitations on taking such medication and suggest that some children can experience side effects such as suicidal feelings or thoughts.

According to The National Institute of Health [hereafter NIS] (2020) there are many barriers children face when suffering with mental health and suggest research shows that 96% of children suffering have a lack of understanding and knowledge about their illness and do not know how to access help and support. Another Barrier according to NIS (2020) is the stigma or embarrassment associated with mental health and states that research shows 92% of children may avoid talking about how they feel because they feel they may be judged differently, with 68% of those children feeling as though they could not trust anyone with their information and worry that it will not remain confidential. Children's Health (2024) would agree, however state educating children on mental health and sharing real life stories with the children can help break the sigma associated with the disorder and suggest being open, honest and answering the children's questions about mental health can help them understand.

To summarise, understanding and supporting children's mental health is important and must be a priority to help promote positive well-being in the early

years and future success for the children. Recognising the relevance of early intervention and communication between families and their children is important. Also, understanding close relationships and the impact they can have on children's development are all crucial to help support children's mental health.