

Health, Wellbeing and Lifestyles.

2.105 words

Introduction

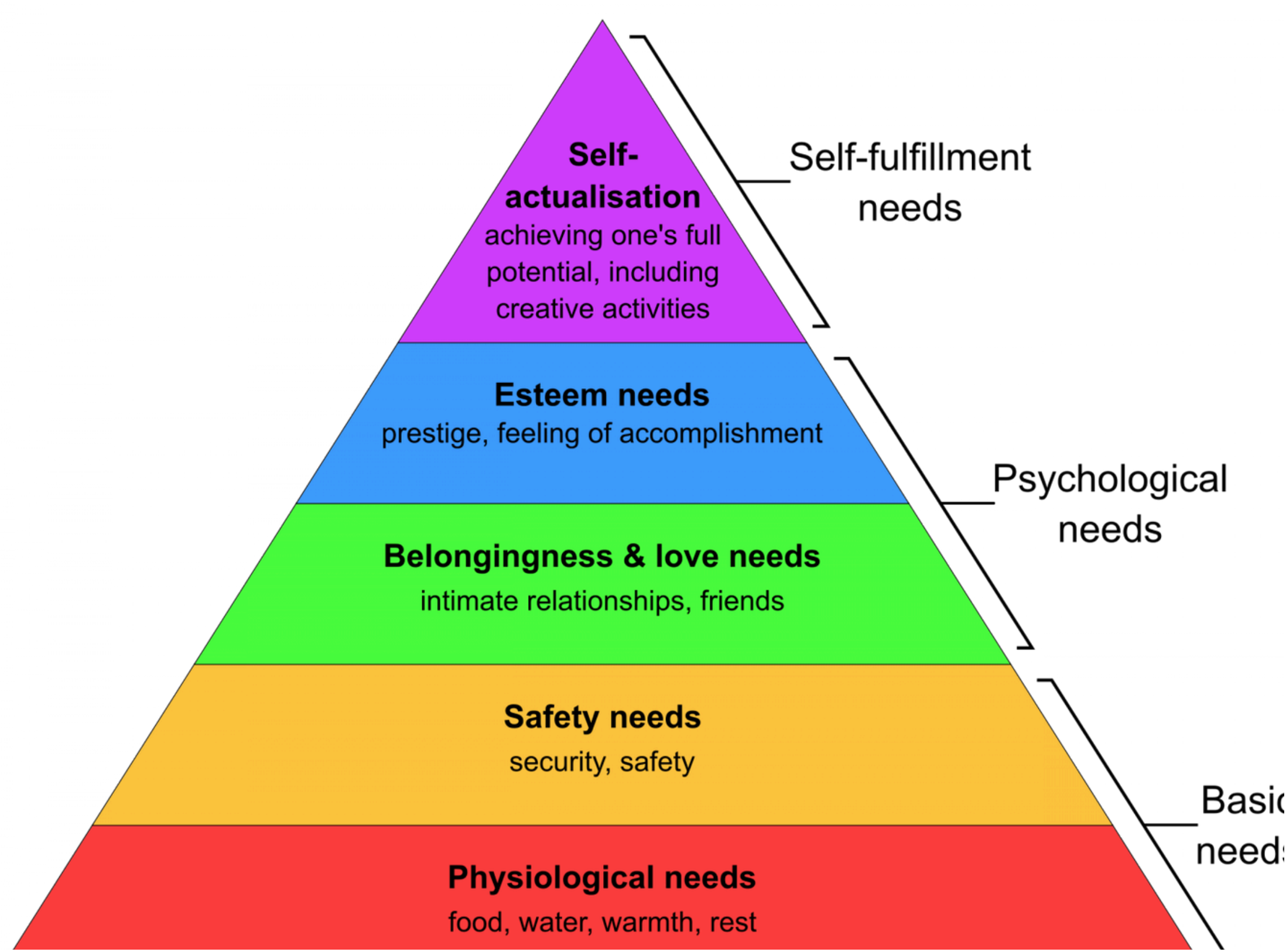
In the formative years of a child's life, the foundations of health, wellbeing and lifestyle choices are by integrating holistic approaches that prioritise nutrition, physical activity, and emotional resilience, early years practitioners can create a framework that empowers children to make informed lifestyle choices. From engaging in active play to encouraging a balanced diet, these practices not only enhance children's immediate wellbeing but also create habits that will positively impact their futures, shaping their physical, emotional, and social development. This poster explores the critical importance of healthy habits and environments for young children, emphasising nutrition, physical activity, emotional resilience, and safe spaces. Different theories and models will be discussed and linked to the early years practice with different ideas on how they can support children in the early years. According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), ecological systems theory says that an individual's development is influenced by a series of interconnected environmental systems, ranging from the immediate surroundings (family) to broad societal structures (cultures).

Concepts

According to the research conducted by (Erikson, 1950), his psychosocial development theory offers critical insights into how identity and social relationships shape a child's overall development. Erikson emphasised the importance of navigating specific developmental crises at various stages of life, which can affect a child's emotional and social wellbeing. Early years practitioners can effectively contribute to the holistic health of young children, laying the groundwork for their future wellbeing. Integrating these concepts into practice can lead to positive long-term outcomes, fostering resilient and healthy individuals. Infants learn to trust when their needs are consistently met by responsive, sensitive caregivers. This stage lays the foundation for a child's sense of safety and security in the world (Erikson, 1950).

Health

There are several ways to explain what health is, according to (The World Health Organisation (1946), health as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". This Definition of health also implies with the (The Health Foundation, 2025), who state that "Health is not just the physical wellbeing of an individual but also the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being. Therefore bringing about the total wellbeing of their community." These are all contributing factors of a child's health and surroundings at an early age as child development refers to the physical, cognitive, emotional, and social growth that occurs throughout a child's life. Children's mental health, their cognitive, behavioural and social wellbeing, is affected by this development, as well as other factors like trauma and abuse (NSPCC Learning, 2024). According to (Welsh Government, 2021) the first two years of a child's life are the most crucial, and nutrition and physical health play a big part by introducing a healthy diet and encouraging physical activity from a young age to help reduce the risks of childhood obesity and tooth decay. According to The Healthy Child Wales Programme there is consistent evidence to suggest that an investment in early years significantly improves health, social and educational development and long term outcomes (Black Report 1980, Acheson 1998, Marmot, 2010) and failure to address harmful behaviour in the early years can have a dramatic impact on the child and society (Welsh Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study, 2015). The HCWP aims to provide a structured national program for children and their families to achieve these outcomes and support them in addressing potentially harmful behaviours. Child poverty is also a significant challenge to delivering improved health outcomes in Wales and this cohort of children are the most likely to have unstable home situations and move between health boards. By developing and delivering services with a core set of all Wales universal contacts, health boards will minimise the possibility of these children and families missing out on the positive impacts of receiving the benefits of an early intervention and public health program (Healthy child Wales programme, 2024). A key aspect of the Healthy Child Wales Programme is its partnership with working with local authorities, communities, education, and the third sector. As an authority, they believe that with the Healthy Child Wales Programme, health boards in Wales will provide a solid platform to deliver the improvements for children in the early years which will help with the most important part of their lives while growing up. This is known as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs psychological framework, proposed by Abraham Maslow in 1943. It suggests that human needs can be arranged in a hierarchy, often depicted as a pyramid with five levels. According to Maslow, individuals are motivated to fulfill these needs in a specific order, starting from the most basic needs up to higher-level needs. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs remains a foundational theory in psychology and motivation. It provides a useful framework for understanding human behaviour and motivation, highlighting how individuals strive to fulfil varying levels of needs throughout their lives. By recognising the importance of these needs, practitioners in the early years can utilise multiple disciplines that promote growth and well-being more effectively.



(Source, Simply Pschology 2022)

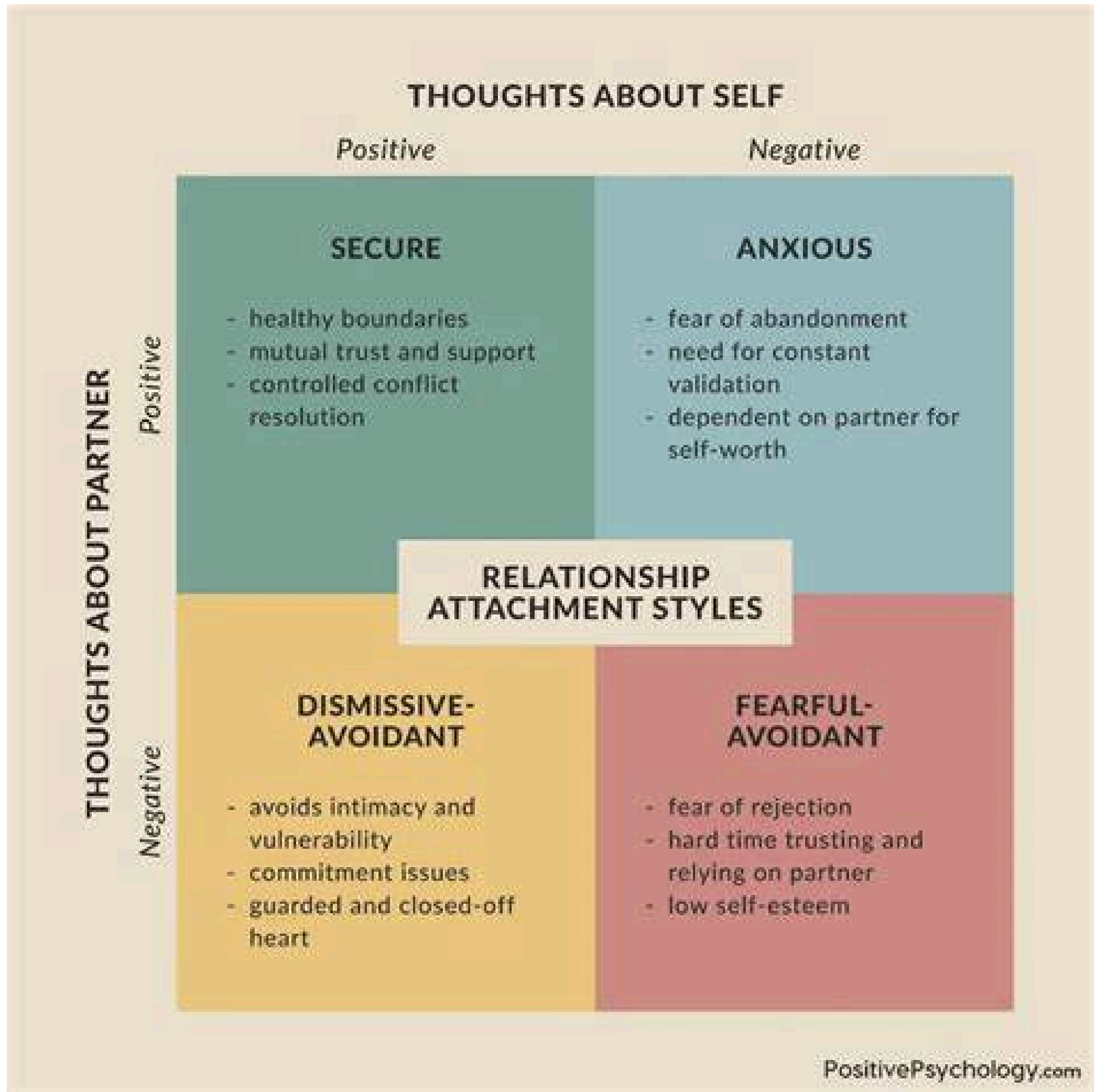
Well-Being

The Mental Health Foundation (2015) described well-being as the “state of being comfortable, healthy, and happy. However, they suggest that it is important to realise that well-being is a much broader concept than moment-to-moment happiness. While it does include happiness, it also includes other things, such as how satisfied people are with their life as a whole, their sense of purpose, and how in control they feel. From a psychological standpoint, this also refers back to the Mental Health Foundation definition that well-being can include aspects such as how people experience the quality of their lives and includes both emotional reactions and cognitive judgements and positive functioning, including autonomy, personal growth, purpose in life, and positive relationships (Ryff, C.D. (1989). Improving the well-being of young children is fundamental for early years practitioners. This includes fostering physical, emotional, social, and cognitive well-being. By creating a safe and nurturing environment, children can then thrive in safe, welcoming, and supportive environments. Practitioners can improve by ensuring that settings are physically safe and emotionally secure (Browne, K, (2006). Also, by improving emotional literacy and social skills, practitioners can teach emotional literacy, helping children understand and express their feelings while also recognising the emotions of others. Role-play, storytelling, and group activities can facilitate this (Denham, S. A., & Weissberg, R. P. (2004).

Well-being is a multi-dimensional concept that encompasses various aspects of human health and happiness. It is typically categorised into several types, each representing a different aspect of overall quality of life. Additionally, the Authentic Happiness Theory, developed by psychologist Martin Seligman outlines 24 strengths that support engagement and contribute to an individual’s overall well-being. These include qualities such as creativity, curiosity, gratitude, and resilience, which can be cultivated and nurtured over time (Tom Kellot, 2024). According to the Welsh Government, 2024, each baby or child will have different experiences with their mental health. Many factors can influence their social and emotional development and wellbeing. This includes things like the quality of their relationship with their parents and carers, nutrition and their experiences in the womb. Children are not born with the ability to self-regulate, so the skills are shaped by their temperament and their experiences in the womb and in early childhood. These skills must be developed over time rather than straight away. The Welsh Government proceeded to suggest that parents/guardians play a huge role in the early years of the child's life, this is because children need to continually learn and develop their self-regulation skills throughout the early years foundation stage. To do this they need responsive, sensitive care from the adults around them. This is known as the attachment theory, which is a theory created by Bowlby. John Bowlby (1907–1990) was a psychoanalyst and believed that mental health and behavioural problems could be attributed to early childhood. Bowlby’s evolutionary theory of attachment suggests that children come into the world biologically pre-programmed to form attachments with others, because this will help them to survive (Saul Mcleod, 2024). This theory connects to how parents have a role in supporting children in the early years, According to Main and Solomon (1986, 1990) Bowlby believed that if a strong attachment is not formed between mother and baby, although strong bonds can be formed with multiple care givers including practitioners, in a setting this could affect the childs development while growing up.

Lifestyle

According to (Barnardos, 2024) lifestyles can often be overlooked by choices and physical health, which can have a massive effect on our mental health and emotional wellbeing. Whilst therapies and coping strategies are helpful they can be limited if our lifestyle habits are not particularly healthy. There are many factors that can determine the type of lifestyle a person will live, such as their home environment, diet and nutrition, income, relationships, community, parenting ability, and their engagement with services (Welsh Government, 2021). In addition to ensuring a healthy lifestyle, (The World Health Organisation (2010) recommends eating lots of fruits and vegetables, reducing fat, sugar, and salt intake, and exercising. Based on height and weight, people can check their body mass index (BMI) to see if they are overweight. (The World Health Organisation, 2010) provides a series of publications to promote and support healthy lifestyles with which early years practitioners can support children with the right training. According to (Gantry Kids, 2022) a healthy lifestyle is important for many reasons. It can help kids have more energy, maintain a healthy weight, avoid illnesses and feel good about themselves. This includes eating healthy foods, being physically active and getting enough sleep. Eating healthy foods includes eating plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains and limiting sugar and saturated fat. Physical activity means moving your body in ways that make your heart beat faster for at least 60 minutes a day. Getting enough sleep means getting at least 9 hours of sleep each night (Gantry Kids, 2022). Having a good sleeping pattern is also vital in living a healthy lifestyle, as this can improve on a childs brain performance, health and overall mood (Wein,2021). Research by (JSWEC, 2024)states that the environment in which a child grows up plays a pivotal role in their overall development. From physical surroundings to emotional and social contexts, every aspect of a child’s environment can significantly influence their cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development. According to (ABC Quality (2021), as a child grows and develops, his or her first human interactions are typically with family members and associated caregivers. These first contacts are vital for the development of a child’s socialization skills as well as teaching children how to have a better understanding of themselves and of people around them which then creates the child's lifestyle. Children learn by observing family members and carers, as these are also the main influencers that determine how a child will socialise and learn, contributing to their overall physical, social, and intellectual development. Having loving family and carers around helps a child build a solid foundation that will affect their future relationships, work, health and sense of self (ABC Quality, 2021).



(Source, Structual Learning, 2023)

Application to Early Years Practise

According to Welsh Government (2019) the new curriculum for Wales helps settings support the health and well being of young children, with the purpose of encouraging healthy, confident individuals who are ambitious and capable learners. According to research by Care Learning, 2024 By implementing strategies within early years practice, educators can foster a holistic approach to health and well-being in children. The incorporation of nutritional education, physical activity, emotional support, and hygiene practices lays the foundation for a healthy lifestyle that children will carry into adulthood.

In addition, Barnados (2022) suggests that it is important for practitioners to make parents aware of the type of support that is available to them and the child should they require it, meaning they can ask the right questions in a sensitive way should they suspect there could possibly be a issue they need support with. Barnados (2022) states that taking a multi agency approach would be the best way to support children and their families.

Conclusion

In the formative years of a child's life, laying the groundwork for health and well-being is essential. By fostering healthy eating habits, encouraging regular physical activity, promoting emotional intelligence, and instilling good hygiene practices, this can create a nurturing environment where children thrive. Early years practitioners, parents, and caregivers play a vital role in modelling and implementing these behaviours, ensuring that children develop a positive relationship with their health and well-being. Through collaborative efforts and engaging activities both in educational settings and at home can empower young children to embrace healthy lifestyles that will resonate throughout their lives.



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