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ECEY5009 2411206 2,013 words

Introduction

This poster will investigate and define the concepts of health, well-being and lifestyle, highlighting their importance in early childhood development. It will also explore various theories and models and how they apply to early years practice. Examples of how each concept effects children in their childhood through to adulthood has been discussed. Synthesis between all three concepts will be apparent throughout this poster.

Concepts

NHS England (2023) says that a person's mental, physical, emotional health and maintaining a healthy lifestyle all work together to support an individual's overall health and well-being. Cheung (2018) has examined the concepts being discussed in this poster and emphasizes direct links between health, well-being and lifestyle, acknowledging the connection between them and the influence they have on each other. Furthermore, it has been said that health and well-being are closely linked and that a person's health has a direct effect on their well-being (Department of Health, 2024; Musgrave, 2017). Vice versa, Howard and McInnes (2013) say that well-being has a direct effect on a person's health. This research demonstrates triangulation between the three concepts being discussed.

Health

As reported by the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2022) a good state of health is more complex than just the absence of illness and or disability, it relates to a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being. So that children can sustain good health, continue to grow and develop, it is essential that parents and caregivers commit to supporting their children from birth and continue to nurture them throughout their lives. Promoting good health in early childhood is fundamental because it has a knock-on effect of their health into adulthood (Cheung, 2018). Furthermore, it is necessary for adults to ensure the maintenance of their own health so that they can effectively care for and support their child(ren) (WHO, n.d). However, in recent years it has been recorded that parents are facing more stress now than ever before, meaning the health and well-being of children are also affected. When parents are feeling stressed or anxious, is it difficult to conceal those feelings and parents can become less patient leading to harsher discipline this can cause children to become unsettled, they face weakened attachments and start to withdraw or act out, this behaviour can then filter into their school life impacting their academic life and friendships (Children's Health, 2024). Among the most common stressors for parents is financial worries, the rising cost of living is affecting over 2 million families with young children, parents reporting that they must make difficult decisions regarding how they spend their money as they feel they do not have enough to cover even the most necessary bills (UNICEF, 2022). During the 2020 COVID 19 pandemic universal credit payments were increased for low-income families to tackle financial struggles. It was reported that because of this financial support the number of children living in poverty was decreasing, however as the payments were only a temporary change, this additional support has now been removed, and child poverty is on the rise once again (Action for Children, 2022). Factors such as the rising cost of living crisis has pushed parents into feelings of depression, statistically children are more likely to develop depression if they live with parents who suffer mentally (Mental Health Foundation, 2023). Additionally, financial hardship has an indirect consequence on physical health, as obtaining healthy food may not be affordable for low-income families, leading families to buy cheaper, high processed food that increases the risk of obesity (Musgrave and Payler, 2021; Young Minds, 2022). Lack of physical activity and unhealthy diets are the primary causes of weight gain (GOV.UK, 2022), resulting in low mood and lack of self-confidence (Balasundaram and Krishna, 2023). Not only does obesity have a psychological and physical effects on health, but it can also cause serious health conditions for example diabetes. Parents find it difficult to provide adequate care for their children when they are faced with a lot of life challenges all at once (NSPCC, 2024). Dahlsen and Whitehead (2021) created a model in 1991 (pictured below) that illustrates a range of inequalities that influence people's health, the model shows that health is not just affected by personal choices and but also by economic, social and environmental factor. In recent years, modern technology has been a great concern regarding children's health in early childhood (Holland, 2017; Muppalla, et al., 2023).

Health (continued)

World Health Organization (2019) recommends reduced use of screen time, especially for children under the age of five, this is because research has shown how excess screen time can lower opportunities for physical activity and interfere with quality of sleep that is associated with poorer mental health, WHO recognise and promote the benefits of playtime and suggest that parents and carers spend more time playing and engaging in non-screen time activities. UNICEF (2022) agree that playtime is paramount for living a happy and healthy life, it helps to build positive relationships, reduces feelings of stress and anxiety and promotes self-confidence all of which help to contribute to a healthier lifestyle. Walters and Rekers (2019) emphasised the benefits of playtime outside because it helps children to develop holistically. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) under article 24, all children have the right to the highest attainable standard of health and healthcare services.



Source: Dahlgren and Whitehead (2021)

Well-being

(Mainstone-Cotton (2017) says that the word wellbeing is commonly used but there is no clear definition on what it truly means. Musgrave (2017) agrees that defining wellbeing is difficult. She says that a person's well-being can be made up of several factors; if they feel happy, are physically and mentally healthy, have positive relationships, and if they are able to maintain a positive state of mind. Similarly, Hong, Ra and Jang (2014) say that well-being for young children is the feeling of happiness, and excitement especially when engaged in play, spending time with people they love and receiving comfort and support from well-known adults. From these examples it is clear to see that well-being is subjective, meaning it cannot be easily measured, and the concept of well-being is interpreted differently by each individual person (Musgrave, 2017). Marmot (2010) believes that the well-being of society should take priority over the economic growth of the country, thus showing the significance people's well-being plays in civilisation. When people attain strong health and well-being, they can live life to their fullest potential and as a result, naturally contribute to the growing economy. An example of this is also seen in Maslow's Hierarchy of needs model, the model shows how when the lower section of the model is achieved this includes well-being, then a person climbs up the model and eventually reaches the top achieving their full potential (Maslow, 1943).



(Source: Simply Psychology, 2025)

Well-being continued

The Marmot (2010) review draws attention to children's well-being, it recognises that children deserve the best start in life and should be entitled to equal opportunities to achieve the highest level of well-being possible. The government places responsibility on themselves to help scaffold these equal opportunities for children by offering interventions to improve and nurture well-being (Welsh Government, 2025; Marmot 2010). This is supported by the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 (Welsh Government, 2015). Other interventions implemented include, the Flying Start programme, which aims to offer high quality childcare for children aged 2 to 3 years, focusing on developing socialisation, building speech and language skills and overall well-being, there are additional services offered to help support the parents of the children attending flying start, such as programmes to enhance their parenting skills and develop parent and child relationships. Initially the programme was designed for children living in the more deprived areas of Wales, who might lack opportunity to get a head start in life in the hopes that the education will influence their future chances of success. There are plans to expand beyond target areas of deprivation, the new expansion will not discriminate and will eventually invite all children aged 2-3 regardless of their home address to take a place in flying start, this will allow all children to have equal opportunity to the best start (Welsh Government, 2024). Educators are an instrumental part of a child's well-being, by promoting and facilitating play, through play children experience feelings of pleasure and joy. Children not only acquire knowledge but also develop holistically and foster emotional well-being when playing (Gradovski, et al., 2020). Contrary to traditional curriculum which focuses on adult led focus tasks, the newer emergent curriculum is a child centred approach that allows educators to focus on the whole child, in an environment that builds independence, confidence and resilience (Stewart, 2024). Educators can gauge a child's well-being through observing, observations allow educators to study how children are feeling and encourages adults to facilitate emotional and physical well-being (Bruce, Louis, and McCall, 2015). However, influences from government and educators are restricted, as children are highly influenced by their parents and carers. Parents are responsible for creating a solid and secure foundation for children to grow, in a happy, loving environment with secure attachments, all of which contributes to their well-being (Risi, Pickard and Bird, 2021). However, parents are facing sustainability pressures in life such as financial stresses, these pressures can turn into feelings of anxiety which restrict parent's ability to support children with their own well-being (Stoddart, 2023). Studies have shown that a child's well-being has a direct effect on their experience of well-being in adulthood, this places emphasis on how adults supporting children's positive well-being can influence a happier and healthier life in future (Fane, et al., 2020; Cheung, 2018; Hong, Ra and Jang, 2014).



(Source: Public Health England 2016)



(Source: Guy-Evans, 2025)

Lifestyle

WHO (1999) defines lifestyle as the way in which a person lives their daily life. According to Solan (2024) what a person does daily can influence their health and well-being. Children's lifestyles are influenced from conception, and how a child is nurtured during the first 1,000 days of their life determines their future quality of health and success (Cusick and Georgieff, 2016). Furthermore, Public Health England (2018) highlights that both women and men need to be healthy prior to conception; their reproductive health can impact both themselves and their future child(ren), as unplanned pregnancies are less likely to be as healthy as planned pregnancies. Public Health Wales (2023) says that parents are a fundamental part of shaping the lives of children and that positive parenting can enhance their children's health and well-being. Public Health Wales (2023) believes that parents have a difficult job raising children and that with the support of family, friends and public health services, parents can obtain the skills and knowledge required to provide a safe, warm, educational, happy and healthy environment, free from disadvantage. Bronfenbrenner (1979) created a model called the Ecological system, which illustrates how the community surrounding a person can influence them, as see in the picture to the left. Additionally, WHO (1999) says that adults should present themselves as role model to children by choosing a more physically active lifestyle and adopting a more positive attitude to maintain mental health. They believe that people who pursue a healthier lifestyle are more likely to lower their chances of becoming seriously unwell, and acknowledge that while not all illnesses are preventable, people can make healthier life choices to help avoid unnecessary illness. However, some parents are not modelling positive lifestyles and find themselves battling with addiction and or generational trauma. The children of those parents are experiencing the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), ACEs refers to traumatic events that children go through, usually as a result of their parents' actions, that have long-term effects on their health and well-being (ACEs, 2023). One of the traumatic experiences includes parents who abuse substances. Parents and carers with substance abuse issues may lead chaotic and unpredictable lives, making it difficult for them be present and aware of meeting the needs of their child(ren), which can increase the likelihood of children experiencing neglect or harm (NSPCC, 2023). When parents misuse alcohol and or drugs, it can harm children by causing neglect, emotional stress and developmental delays. The UK government's guidelines say that services for adults and children should work together to give the right support and safeguard children from harm. By placing the child at the centre of attention, professionals such as practitioners and social services can collaborate to help parents recover from their addiction and help build a more stable life for their children (Public Health England, 2018).

Conclusion

In summary, health, well-being and lifestyles are all closely linked and vital for a child's growth and development. Children's health can be negatively affected by their upbringing, especially if their parents or carers are faced with hardship such as financial struggles. However, with the right support from professionals, families can be guided to make better choices that will improve their own lives and the lives of their children. Supporting children in their early years gives them a strong start in life and gives them the best chance of living a life free from inequalities. Using different models and theories, practitioners can adapt their practice to enhance the lives of children in their care.

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