

Healthy Living

Introduction to Children's Mental Health



“The term ‘Mental Health’ for babies and young children describes their social, emotional, and psychological well-being...

Each baby or child in your care will have different experiences with their mental health and this plays a key role in their overall wellbeing. It encompasses their ability to form secure attachments, regulate emotions, develop social skills and cope with stress or challenges. Many factors can influence a child's social and emotional development such as the quality of their relationship with their parents and carers, nutrition, and even their experiences in the womb”.

Help for Early Years Providers GOV.UK

Other factors may be:

- Environment
- Stress
- Family circumstances
- Attachment issues and inconsistent caregiving.
- Trauma such as abuse and neglect.
- Lack of access to mental health services
- Substance abuse (exposure or living in environments where substance abuse occurs).
- Traumatic events or loss
- Social isolation
- Parental mental health

- Transitions and change
- Unhealthy diet
- Prejudice, discrimination, and bullying
- Cultural and linguistic barriers

Early signs of mental health issues in young children can be displayed in many ways such as:

- Changes in behaviour such as increased aggression and irritability.
- Difficulty regulating emotions e.g. extreme mood swings or frequent crying and outbursts.
- Social withdrawal
- Regression
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Sleep disturbances
- Toileting problems
- Difficulty maintaining focus or concentrating.
- Excessive worrying
- Increased anxiety and fear
- Fatigue and low energy
- Restlessness or fidgeting
- Developmental delays
- Physical symptoms e.g. complaints of stomach aches and headaches etc.
- Self-harm

In recent years the impact of Covid-19 on children's mental health has been significant, this has exacerbated the need to address the widening gap for mental health support for our very youngest children.

Task 1

As a group, reflect on the changes and uncertainty children faced during and after the pandemic. Consider the factors below:

- Disruption of routine
- Limited social interaction
- Increased stress in families
- Loss of support services
- Increased screen time
- Reduced access to the outdoors

In your experience, how did the pandemic affect children's over all well-being? Consider any observed changes in behaviour and emotions. What interventions and strategies did you employ? These may include; innovative teaching methods, creating a safe and engaging environment and collaborating with families and other professionals to address individual needs – discuss with your team.

Task 2

Spend some time exploring and researching the information provided in the links below:

- [Mental health for early years children - Help for early years providers - GOV.UK \(education.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/education/govuk-early-years-mental-health)
- [Children's mental health charity, Kids Inspire: Who, what, why. Find out all about the charity. — Kids Inspire](https://www.kidsinspire.org/who-what-why)
- [Promoting mental health and wellbeing | NSPCC Learning](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/learning/promoting-mental-health-and-wellbeing)
- [Child mental health: recognising and responding to issues | NSPCC Learning](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/learning/child-mental-health-recognising-and-responding-to-issues)
- [Childline | Childline](https://www.childline.gov.uk)
- [Wellbeing for Early Years \(under 6\) | Trauma in young children | Dealing with anxiety in kids | RISE \(riseuk.org.uk\)](https://www.riseuk.org.uk/early-years-wellbeing)
- [Emotional Needs Of A Child | What Are They?, Babies, Toddlers \(cpdonline.co.uk\)](https://www.cpdonline.co.uk/emotional-needs-of-a-child)
- [Early Signs of Mental Health Issues in Children \(onegoal.co.uk\)](https://www.onegoal.co.uk/early-signs-of-mental-health-issues-in-children)
- [Sadness and worry | Great Ormond Street Charity \(gosh.org\)](https://www.gosh.org/sadness-and-worry)
- [Home - Sunrise Wellbeing](https://www.sunrisewellbeing.org/home)
- [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services \(CAMHS\) - Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust \(leicspart.nhs.uk\)](https://www.leicspart.nhs.uk/child-and-adolescent-mental-health-services)

Task 3

- Think about how you can incorporate the information and resources gained from these websites into your daily practice. Reflect on potential strategies, activities, and approaches that you can use to support children's mental health and well-being in your setting.
- Consider how you could use the information to signpost and engage families in developing further understanding in supporting their child's mental health and wellbeing at home?

Task 4

- Nominate a staff member to be the 'Well-being Champion' who can lead on ensuring your setting is creating a supportive and nurturing environment that promotes the mental health and well-being of all children and staff.