

Self-study notes

Unit No. 4 Health & Wellbeing

Unit objectives

- To become aware of the health needs of looked after children and care leavers.
- To understand the factors that can impinge upon the health of looked after children.
- To explore the impact of health difficulties on the learning of looked after children.
- To explore resources and strategies to improve and support the health of looked after children.

Outline of Unit

- Introductory activity exploring the impact of health on learning
- Guidance on health assessment of looked after children.
- Looked after children's mental health (Video Clip)
- Exploring strategies to improve and support the health of looked after children.

Introduction

Welcome to the unit on the health and wellbeing of looked after children. This short unit is designed to remind you of the importance of health in determining outcomes for looked after children. The main focus is the impact of poor health on children's capacity to engage with educational and developmental opportunities, but the relationship between child health and long-term outcomes is wider than this, and should be borne in mind.

The unit looks at the impact of health issues, but also identifies ways of promoting and improving the health of looked after children. This unit complements the material in the units on attachment, trauma and resilience.

Activities

Introductory exercise

Look at the hand out "Components of health".

Drawing on your personal experiences and relationships identify what factors to do with health affect our capacity to learn and interact with others (be that socially or through physical activities). Consider how health issues can influence our lives in a positive way, and how they can have adverse effects? Save your answers for later.

Read the guidance document Guidance on Health Assessment for Looked After Children and Young People in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2014), or parts which are relevant to your work. How does this guidance impact your work? How is the guidance reflected in local arrangements?

Video Clip

Helen Minnis talking about the mental health difficulties experienced by looked after children.

Exercise

Return to your answers from the first activity. What health factors did you identify as important in affecting our capacity to learn? Think about what you have just learned about looked after children's health and reflect on how these might affect children's capacity to learn. Try and identify examples of positive strategies that exist to support the well being of looked after children in educational settings and to address health needs sensitively. These might include the use of nurture groups, availability of counsellors within the school, sensitively managed health education, targeted schemes to engage children in positive creative, play and sporting activities, etc.

If you cannot think of anything yourself ask colleagues from education, social work and health if they know of any examples. Is there anything in your role that you can do to address these issues? The Healthy Care briefings from the NCB may be helpful in this activity. They are also an excellent resource to keep and use in the future.

Key Messages

- Looked after children often have complex and unmet emotional, mental and physical health needs.
- Educational outcomes can be strongly influenced by a child's health and wellbeing.
- Instability of care and school placement adversely affects children's

health.

- Disrupted schooling and school exclusion can lead to a social exclusion which places children and young people at risk of behaviours which may be detrimental to their health and wellbeing.
- Looked after children are more likely to smoke, drink and take drugs than their peers.
- Looked after children are more likely to engage in early and unprotected sex than their peers, and are significantly more likely to become parents as teenagers.
- The majority of looked after children will have mental health difficulties that need to be managed sensitively.
- Social, recreational and sport activities need to be considered as part of a holistic approach to supporting and improving the health of looked after children.

School can boost looked after children's health through raising self-confidence and self-esteem, improving participation in sports and providing access to health and sex education.