

Early Years Educators ‘Your Well-being Matters’ too!

By: Dr. Jennifer Pope

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As summer approaches, consider the advice they give on the plane before take-off...’In an emergency, put your own life-jacket and mask on first before you attend to your children’. In our day to day work we are usually told to start with the child and be child-centred but when it comes to our health and well-being, we actually need to look to ourselves first. Children’s health and well-being is strongly related to the well-being of those around them, their parents, families, local communities and also those who work closely with them each day in early childhood settings. Your well-being matters to young children.

We need to ensure that we are positive role models when it comes to healthy behaviours and having positive outlooks on learning and life (one of the key aims within the *Aistear* theme of Well-being). We need to encourage healthy approaches to eating and nutrition, dental health, promote physical activity which goes beyond playing sports or ‘having a run around’ but encourages movement, dance, yoga, exercises, obstacle courses, traditional games such as hopscotch, skipping or ‘stuck in the mud’. Encouraging girls is particularly important as the stats tell us that even by age five, girls are much more likely to be overweight or obese compared to boys and this trend continues as they get older.

But being healthy is more than how we exercise or what we feed our bodies, it’s about how we exercise and feed our minds too. The evidence tells us that the relationships we have and how happy we feel have a direct impact on our health and well-being. We need to make sure

to be kind to ourselves, kind to each other and kind to children. However, the evidence also tells us that too much stress can have a negative effect on our bodies and our minds. We know that financial stress in families for example, can have a direct impact on parent's and young children's well-being. If you are working everyday with very young children and are under similar stress to make ends meet, this may also have an impact on young children's well-being over time.

Aistear tells us that 'in partnership with adults, children should be strong, psychologically and socially'. To build strength in young children, we need to feel strong ourselves. To be strong, how we feel is important, we need to feel respected, to feel that we matter, have a voice and have positive relationships with those around us.

How you feel is important, your well-being matters, it matters to you and it matters to the children you work with, their parents and to the well-being of our society now and into the future.

How as Early Years Educators are you looking after your health and well-being?

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