



Blog Post

Mental Health Awareness Week

This blog post uses the annual news-peg of Mental Health Awareness Week as an opportunity to discuss children's mental health, an issue about which the UK public is largely uninformed.

The post begins with an appeal to the tested Value Social Responsibility, orienting the reader to the information that follows by reinforcing a sense of collective obligation for children's well-being. It then expands the understanding of healthy development to include mental health. The application of the Explanatory Metaphor Levelness uses the analogy of a table on an uneven floor to build understanding of the ways genes interact with environments to influence and shape children's mental health. Solutions are introduced next in the description of one organisation's solutions—in the form of specific programmes and services—to address children's mental health needs. Using the Explanatory Metaphor Brain Architecture, the post puts the organisation's work into context and makes its relevance clear by showing how its efforts contribute to building solid developmental foundations in young children. The post ends with a final appeal to the Value Social Responsibility.

Mental Health Awareness Week, organised by the Mental Health Foundation and held the week of May 11-17, provides us with an excellent opportunity to think about the mental health of children and what we can do as a society to make sure that all children in the UK have an opportunity to thrive. We spend a lot of time as adults, parents, carers, and community members thinking about what children need to develop well: supportive adult relationships, good nutrition, a safe home, a strong education. But we think less often about children's mental health, and yet that's just as critical to their development as these other, more tangible factors. We need to meet our obligation to tend to this aspect of their development, too.

One important way we can do this is by ensuring that all children have access to the programmes and services that support their mental health. Stable mental health allows a child to function in many different ways, similar to how a table needs to be level for it to function. And, just as tables cannot level themselves, children need support to establish stable, steady mental health. Without the aid of supports like positive environments and relationships—or if a child faces abuse or neglect—their development is “wobbly,” like a table on an uneven floor.

The Stitch in Time initiative promotes programmes and services such as child care centres and family support groups that are designed to provide children with the support they need for level mental health. And, we are committed to making sure that children have access to the services they need as early as possible because we know that what a child experiences when he or she is young (even before birth!) affects their brain development. This is because a brain is built much like a house: it is an ongoing construction project, and the foundation laid at the beginning of construction is important for the overall stability of the house. A strong foundation built in early childhood increases the likelihood of positive future outcomes, and a shaky foundation increases the odds of future troubles. When we dedicate resources to young children and the programmes that support them, we can identify problems early on and provide appropriate interventions, helping children build the stable foundations that help them succeed throughout life.

This Mental Health Awareness week, we are asking you to join the Stitch in Time initiative. Contact your election candidates about the necessity of investing in early support and intervention for children, and use social media to discuss #stitchintime. Spread the word: We are all responsible for helping every child build a stable foundation for brain development and attain steady, level mental health.