

What is Well-being?

When observing children's well-being the factors you need to look out for include:

- **Enjoyment** – having fun, taking pleasure in interacting with others and in activities. The children look happy, smile or laugh easily, engage spontaneously in chatting or even singing.
- **Relaxing & inner peace** – children give a relaxed impression. They do not feel threatened in any way. Their facial expression is open, there is no sign of tension or restlessness, and their muscles are relaxed.
- **Vitality** - This can often be read from children's faces: the look is lively and expressive. They radiate. Their posture also gives a lot away: not shrunk or with hanging shoulders but upright, not afraid to take the space they are entitled to.
- **Openness** – children have an open attitude towards the world around. Whatever comes in they are ready to experience it. They are also accessible and approachable to others. They are happy with the attention they receive: a hug, a compliment, a word of comfort, encouragement or help.
- **Self confidence** – can occur when one feels strong. Self assurance, self confidence, a sense of self value make one less anxious or stressed. This can be noticed in a posture expressing a certain pride, literally feeling “big”. Positive self-image is the foundation of resilience. Children then do not allow others to walk all over them, they are assertive.
- **Being in touch with oneself** – when a child does not suppress feelings but remains in touch with his/her emotions, it is enjoyable and they will also recover more easily from difficult experiences.

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WHY WELL-BEING IS IMPORTANT

Well-being indicates that one is doing well emotionally, is feeling comfortable with oneself as a person. A low level of well-being signals that a child does not succeed in fulfilling his/her basic needs.

THE BASIC NEEDS

1. physical needs (need to eat, drink, move, sleep, etc.);
2. the need for affection, warmth and tenderness (being hugged, physical contact, receiving and giving love and warmth);
3. the need for safety, clarity and continuity (need for a more or less predictable environment, need to know where you stand, what is allowed and what is not allowed and being able to count on others);
4. the need for recognition and affirmation (feeling accepted and appreciated by others, meaning something to others, being part of a group and belong);
5. the need to experience oneself as capable (feeling that you can do something yourself, master something, experience how to push the limits of your capabilities, experience success);
6. the need for meaning and (moral) values (feeling a “good” person and feeling connected with others and the world).

Of course, not every form of discomfort is automatically a problem. Frustrations are inevitable. But a low level of well-being in the long-term often causes psychological problems. A child loses contact with him/herself and with his/her feelings. The child can behave extremely listless, anxious or aggressive or seems to take a step back in his/her development. Because the foundation of a personality is laid during the first stages of life one cannot pay enough attention to signals indicating a low level of well-being. Also in older children these signals tell us that their social-emotional development is threatened. In short, well-being is about the ‘quality of life’. It refers to an optimal relation between the child and its environment.

TAKING ACTION

Improving the level of well-being is not equal to spoiling children and simply giving them everything they want. Children play an active role in getting to real satisfaction in life. Adults can help children by nurturing their self-confidence, by helping them to express what they feel, by learning them to deal with other children, by letting them experience success, by developing their talents and entrepreneurship, etc. Well-being generates energy and ensures that the child remains in touch with him/herself and gains inner strength. That is why we should invest in well-being for the present child and the future adult.

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What is Involvement?

When observing children's involvement the factors you need to look out for include:

- **Motivation** – children will really enjoy an activity and are truly interested and driven to engage in it. Children cannot achieve a high level of involvement if they do things only because others ask them or force them to do it. Their motivation must come from within.
- **Intense mental activity** – involvement means that the children will be completely open to experiences. Bodily sensations and movements, colours and sounds, smells and tastes will have a certain range and depth that is not there otherwise. When involvement is low the sensations are not really lived through and remain superficial.
- **Satisfaction** – Children spontaneously take initiatives to get into this particular state. Play is the place where this satisfaction can be found. If involvement is lacking, children will become bored and get a feeling of emptiness and frustration.
- **Exploratory drive** – If children are involved they have the urge to discover or explore, the urge to experience the world, to use their senses, to get a grip on reality. Initially, this “getting a grip” should be taken literally: touching and grabbing everything that comes within range. Gradually “grasping” means “understanding” and gets less concrete.
- **At the limits of your capabilities** – Involvement is only possible when children are challenged by an activity, when it is not too easy and not too difficult. Children with a high level of involvement operate at the very limits of their capabilities. They fully address their skills; they give their best themselves – whether they are babies or adults, children who are delayed in their development or highly gifted children.

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WHY INVOLVEMENT IS IMPORTANT

Involvement is something very special. When you observe it in children you are amazed. You sense intuitively that you cannot disturb their play. When children are involved, we know that they address their capabilities and that they are 'developing':

They learn at a deeper level, they become more competent. If involvement is lacking, there is reason for concern. Chances are that their development will stagnate. That is why we should do everything we can in order to create an environment in which children can engage in a wide variety of activities.

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Before you begin an observation of a child it is important that you familiarise yourself with the signals for well-being and involvement on pages A36 & A38 as well as the scales for well-being and for involvement on pages A44 & A45. Make sure you have a clear understanding of each signal as these will form the basis of each observation. This will enable you to build up an accurate portrait to be used in future planning.



THE SCALE FOR WELL-BEING

LEVEL	WELL-BEING	SIGNALS
1	Extremely Low	<p>The child clearly shows signals of discomfort:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whines, sobs, cries, screams; • Looked dejected, sad or frightened, is in panic; • Is angry or furious; • Wiggles feet, throws objects, hurts others; • Sucks thumb, rubs its eyes; • Doesn't respond to the environment, avoids contact, withdraws; • Hurts him/herself: bangs head, throws him/herself on the floor.
2	Low	<p>The posture, facial expression and actions indicate that the child does not feel at ease. However, the signals are less explicit than under level 1 or the sense of discomfort is not expressed the whole time.</p>
3	Moderate	<p>The child has a neutral posture. Facial expression and posture show little or no emotion. There are no signals indicating sadness or pleasure, comfort or discomfort.</p>
4	High	<p>The child shows obvious signs of satisfaction (as listed under level 5). However, these signals are not constantly present with the same intensity.</p>
5	Extremely high	<p>During the observation episode, the child enjoys, in fact it feels great:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It looks happy and cheerful, smiles, beams, cries out of fun; • Is spontaneous, expressive and is really him/herself; • Talks to itself, plays with sounds, hums sings; • Is relaxed, does not show any signs of stress or tension; • Is open and accessible to the environment; • Is lively, full of energy, radiates; • Expresses self-confidence and self-assurance

THE SCALE FOR INVOLVEMENT

LEVEL	INVOLVEMENT	SIGNALS
1	Extremely Low	<p>The child hardly shows any activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No concentration : staring, daydreaming; • An absent, passive attitude; • No goal-orientated activity, aimless actions, not producing anything; • No signs of exploration and interest; • Not taking anything in, no mental activity.
2	Low	<p>The child shows some degree of activity but which is often interrupted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited concentration : looks away during the activity, fiddles, dreams; • Is easily distracted; • Action only leads to limited results.
3	Moderate	<p>The child is busy the whole time, but without real concentration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routine actions, attention is superficial; • Is not absorbed in the activity, activities are short lived; • Limited motivation, no real dedication, does not feel challenged; • The child does not gain deep-level experience; • Does not use his/her capabilities to full extent; • The activity does not address the child's imagination.
4	High	<p>There are clear signs of involvement, but these are not always present to their full extent:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The child is engaged in the activity without interruption; • Most of the time there is real concentration, but during some brief moments the attention is more superficial; • The child feels challenged, there is a certain degree of motivation; • The child's capabilities and its imagination to certain extent are addressed in the activity.
5	Extremely high	<p>During the episode of observation the child is continuously engaged in the activity and completely absorbed in it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is absolutely focused, concentrated without interruption; • Is highly motivated, feels strongly appealed by the activity, perseveres; • Even strong stimuli cannot distract him/her; • Is alert, has attention for details, shows precision; • Its mental activity and experience are intense; • The child constantly addresses all its capabilities: imagination and mental capacity are in top gear; • Obviously enjoys being engrossed in the activity

EXAMPLE OF A COMPLETED OBSERVATION RECORDING SHEET



Child's Name
Olivia
Age: 21/2



Personal, Social & Emotional Development

WELL-BEING
Enjoyment
Relaxing & inner peace
Vitality
Openness
Self-confidence
Being in touch with oneself

Date:	Observations
5/6/09	Became very distressed this morning when her mummy left
8/6/09	Playing in the house corner on her own - talking and singing to herself
9/6/09	Was distressed again this morning and cried for ½ hour
9/7/09	Is dancing with two other children - laughing and smiling, She is very keen show the others what dances moves she knows

INVOLVEMENT
Motivation
Intense mental activity
Satisfaction
Exploratory drive
At the limits of your capabilities

Language & Communication Development

Date: Observations

6/6/09	Talked about the butterflies she had seen in a book that her mummy read to her
7/6/09	Sang "Ba Ba Black sheep", Twinkle Twinkle Little Star & "Wheels on the Bus" - did all actions and clapped at the end

Physical Development

Date: Observations

9/6/09	Is playing with the playdough - very focused on what she is doing - her tongue is sticking out as she uses the rolling pin
1/7/09	Climbed to the top the slide today without help



Likes

- *All books about animals*
- *Trying new fruits at snack time*
- *Singing and dancing to any type of music*
- *Playing in the water*
- *To have tea parties*
- *Tidying up*
- *Going to the park*



Dislikes

- *Painting activities*
- *Getting hair brushed*
- *Taking turns*
- *Going home in the evening*
- *Sharing*

Questions/discussions with parents

Check to see if there may be any reason why Olivia gets distressed when left off

Ask if Olivia talks about the childminding setting when she is at home.

Estimation of levels of well-being & involvement

4

4

Plan of Action

- *Introduce musical instruments so Olivia can make her own music*
- *Introduce new materials for the playdough - add colours and textures*
- *Try to organise activities to distract Olivia when her mummy leaves her off and ease the settling-in*

Childminders's signature:

Parent's signature:

STEP 2 - Analysis of the observation