

KAREN: Welcome back to The Student Hub Live Faculty of Well-Being, Education and Language Studies Freshers event. Gosh, there are so many of you in the chat today. It's so wonderful to meet you. It's so wonderful to see you meeting each other. And there's a lot going on in today's session.

We're now going to focus on children and young people's well-being. It's going to be a discussion. But please do keep chatting. Kieran in the chat, and we've got many other colleagues there hoping to answer your questions. And Kieran will relay questions we've got.

Kieran, the chat's moving so fast. Actually, I should remind people, there's a little pin button on the top right hand side of the screen that looks like one of those little map identity things in Google Maps. That's the only way I can describe it. I should really get a drawing of one and show people. But yeah, you can pin the chat and it can move a lot slower then. Or you can ignore the chat if you can't read and think at the same time. Or you could watch the catch up later.

Kieran, how's everyone doing at home?

KIERAN: Who else have we-- we've also got Alexander and Emily Float here on L161. And we've got a few other students as well here doing a subject close to my heart, which is, I think, one of the best, is sports students. So, fantastic.

KAREN: Now I've told you not to be biased here in the chat, Kieran. Yes, Kieran is one of our staff tutors at the Open University and is a keen advocate of sports. If anyone would like to talk to him about sports. I often talk to Kieran about triathlon. But he does also know other things about studying and teaching.

KIERAN: OK. I can't promise not to be biased. I'm sorry, Karen.

KAREN: Well it's great to see so many students. We've got hundreds of students here today. And it's absolutely wonderful that you've decided to join. There's something for everyone. So whatever you're studying, we hope that these conversations will give you something that you can think about and contribute to. So, yeah. Do hang out with us and stay here for the majority of the session. What you learn may well surprise you.

But let's take a look at children and young people's well-being. We wanted to start this because it's been a topic that, in lockdown, has been very close to so many people's hearts for very different reasons. And I'm joined by William Murcott and Karina Giaxoglou and Jackie Musgrave to talk about this.

Now, with many things, we always like to start with definitions. It's important to define our terms as academics. And as students, you're going to get very familiar with this idea that it's important to think about what we mean. So Jackie, I wonder if you could give us some idea about what we mean by this term well-being. Because I think it's a little bit more nebulous than it first seems.

JACKIE MUSGRAVE (Programme Lead for Early Childhood and Education Studies (Primary): Hi Karen. Lovely to see you again and have the opportunity to be here and say hello to our new students and returning students. So thank you.

Yeah, well-being. If you look it up in the diction-- if you looked in different dictionaries, there are different definitions. So there is a one accepted, generally confirmed definition. But, it's really to do with the quality of people's lives. And there are many factors that can influence well-being. One's financial position, educational welfare and well-being, and physical and mental health can impact upon well-being.

There are many studies have been carried out by organisations like UNICEF about children's well-being. And, if you look on the World Health Organisation website, they have their definition too. So as you said, Karen, it's a nebulous concept. And it can seem to be a little bit fluffy. But it's really to do with, if you like, level of happiness and our quality of life.

KAREN: That's a wonderful starter for 10. Thank you Jackie. Of course, the beauty of some of these discussions is that all of our colleagues approach these things from different lenses. So, Jackie, I guess, from your perspective, it's very much embedded in where you are, which is childhood studies. William, though. You're looking at things from a slightly more developmental lens, aren't you?

WILLIAM MURCOTT (Senior Lecturer in Applied Linguistics): Yeah. I think because my background being a mental health nurse and predominantly my clinical work has been around working with young people, I guess 12 to kind of 18, that those developmental trajectories that a young person goes through, we really have to pay attention to those. Because that can really affect how good your well-being can be, as well as other things that are going on with a young person.

So, it's quite important we look at what's going on with a young person and how they are in those developmental trajectories.

KAREN: Cause I think sometimes things can be very complex. There can become co-morbidities, different things happening. It can be difficult to, I guess, identify a cause in terms of something that may be hindering well-being. Things are so much more complex in this day and age, aren't they?

WILLIAM MURCOTT: Yeah. They certainly are. And sometimes, we need to pay attention to whether it's the things that are around a young person, say, if they are unwell in any particular way having an effect on somebody's development. Or it's the development themselves. Say, it's the period of their growth and adolescence that might be that affecting their health and well-being. So it's really nuanced. It's very hard to work out what's going on sometimes. So it's really important to have good relationships when we're working with young people to find out kind of what's been going on for them.

KAREN: Yeah. Very much looking at the whole person. And what their experience is like phenomenologically.

WILLIAM MURCOTT: And I think there's been a lot of changes in the last few years, especially how we look at a young person, especially looking at how young people use social media, internet, and how they talk and converse as groups within themselves.

KAREN: Yeah. Yeah. No. Technology has certainly shifted a lot of things, for example. And also, I guess, the extent to which we can operate interventions and reach people through some of those media itself. It's very two edged sword, isn't it?

WILLIAM MURCOTT: Yeah. And sometimes, I think we've been guilty not understanding say, how a young person might want to kind of tell their story or show us in different ways how they might be thinking and feeling.

KAREN: Yeah. Yeah. Karina, you're interested more in the sense of the role of language in well-being.

KARINA GIAXOGLU: Yes. As Jackie and Will have already shown, well-being is complex. It's multidimensional. And that's why we have an interdisciplinary panel to show that there are different aspects to well-being.

So for example, the Oxford English Dictionary defines well-being as the state of being comfortable, healthy or happy. But what happy means differs not only across different people, but also for one person across their lifespan. In applied linguistics, we are interested in the role of language in well-being. Which is mainly concerned with the elements of the social well-being, emotional well-being, and intellectual well-being.

So the way we communicate what our needs are, what our emotions are, are of paramount importance, especially for children and young adults who are trying to develop their, what we call their well-being literacies, something that they will have throughout their lives and be able to address changing needs and changing contexts.

So like when we talk about the role of language, we, of course, mean the role of communication.

KAREN: So what I'm hearing very much from you and everybody else is that there's not really a one size fits all approach to well-being. Things can be a lot more complex. There are different concerns that each of you have in terms of how you're addressing and interpreting well-being, and different interventions.

I wonder if we might sort of try and look at some of these theoretical ideas and apply them to our current situation, COVID. And think about the lived experience as well of well-being. I bet there are lots of comments in the chat. Sorry. My cat's just come in and so the dogs are off to chase the cat.

But, you know, we have been very concerned about how children's well-being has been affected by the restrictions. So I wondered Jackie if you have some comments to make around how this can translate into that setting?

JACKIE MUSGRAVE: Yeah, absolutely. The important thing, I think, to think about in relation to children's well-being is that although children have rights and we try to promote them certainly here at the Open University, to some extent, they have limited control over their lives. And, particularly at the moment, we're all living with restrictions.

But, it's also important to remember that there are lots of everyday resources available that we can make available to children that will improve their health and well-being. Getting them outdoors as much as possible. And I know that Autumn is upon us and Winter's around the corner. But getting them out dressed appropriately, no matter what the weather, and letting them run out and have that freedom that they can have in the time available will be really helpful.

Another everyday resource that's available to enable children to cope with this changing situation is simply listening to them. And you don't even have to ask them particularly in-depth questions. But, just being there in the moment with them and listening. And then try to answer in a way, as William was mentioning, in an age appropriate, developmentally appropriate way.

So, these things, I mean, it's so important, of course, that they do comply with hand washing and whatever restrictions there are in their nursery and in their preschool area. And it's probably going to be quite difficult for them to maintain social distancing. But, there's a very fine line between being too-- strict is perhaps not a good word.

But not over loading them with the words, as Karina was saying. Don't do this, don't do that. But actually look at what you can give them. And hopefully, the opportunity to be outdoors is good from their own endorphin releasing mechanisms that we all get when we're outdoors and engaging in physical activity.

And also, play is so important for children, particularly young children. And really giving them the opportunity to engage with what they enjoy playing with. And just, again, when we talk about listening, just being there. Keeping an ear to the ground. What are they articulating in their play? We've all seen young children with their small play, their dolls and so on. What are they saying? What are they pretending? What fantasy is going on?

Because they will be talking out loud about their concerns. And play's like therapy to young children. So, again, not interfering too much. But just making sure that they have those opportunities where they have freedom in that sort of space. Because in other areas of their lives, some of their freedom is being taken away. And of course, very young children will find it quite difficult to understand that.

So I guess, giving them the opportunities to be as free as they can. But of course, keeping them as safe as they can. And, you know, those things-- I'm a nurse at heart still. And the hand washing and the hygiene is so important. But actually, so is the opportunity to give them some freedom and play opportunities will really help their well-being, and improve their mental health overall.

KAREN: Absolutely. I've noticed my daughter so much happier being at school. And it was quite hard to always try and encourage some of that play, in particular, when there are those restrictions and sense of fear around. It was almost difficult to be carefree with so much sense of threat, I found myself.

Will, I wonder what, from a sort of health and social care perspective, you'd mentioned before you had a lot of experience in mental health nursing. And I just wondered what sort of resources you felt were available to young people right now to help support their well-being at a time like this?

WILLIAM MURCOTT: I think to start, firstly, that the whole lockdown period across here what we know of COVID so far, in some ways, it highlights a lot of the inequality that's around. We know is just hugely linked to people's outcomes and their well-being. And there's been quite a few reports-- and I gratefully received about young people struggling where they live in areas of high deprivation and there's a lot of social inequality and social injustice.

And, that's kind of telling us that you're really struggling in those areas with their kind of overall well-being, not just their mental well-being. Because a lot of the things that they had to, say, remove themselves from difficult home living situations like school, and the clubs around that have been removed. So that kind of six month period out of the school has been probably hugely difficult for a lot of young people.

And we were just talking about that relief of kind of going back into school and having that ability to then kind of be yourself in a different environment's really important. I think that goes beyond just the younger end into the older end of kind of end of the spectrum. So it's those outlets haven't been there. And having that kind of that lockdown on the mobility, the ability of going and seeing people has really affected and those outlets that are available, such as online, kind of social media stuff have been very important to young people.

Yeah, you asked specifically about resources. And that has been especially difficult, I think, to put in place. Again, it's very short notice where the mental health support traditionally that was given to young people, say, through child and adolescent mental health services. That never stopped. It's always been there. But how it's actually going to be delivered it has changed.

So a lot of those face-to-face meetings are often so important. The quality of relationship then has to go through a telephone or through Skype. And again, that's reliance on technology and there can be difficulties with that. So I think there's been lots of struggles with how to put in place resources to help young people. A lot of it is shifted to online. And I think that's useful because a lot of people do engage with online resources.

KAREN: No, absolutely. I guess the challenge now is that these are such huge issues. And Fary said, you know, that the faculty is really involved in doing stuff. So it's not just about knowing things and teaching, et cetera. It's about helping the world to operate.

And so I guess the question is, what do we, as people in these positions of understanding, of having potential interventions available, what can we actually do, then, to support these children and young adults in our roles as parents and providers of education? And also, you know, health professionals. Jackie, what sorts of practical things can we do?

JACKIE MUSGRAVE: Well, you mentioned the place of schools in relation to children's well-being. And also, I would extend that to nurseries. But there are a lot of the routines that are embedded in school and nursery day to day activities are really helpful for children. For instance, circle time, giving children the opportunity to speak. I've talked at great length about the importance of play and outdoor activities.

And so really, a lot of what we do is really helpful. One thing I would really like to highlight is that the faculty is so committed to young children's mental health and well-being that they funded a course that I've been writing over the last couple of years. And that's almost ready to be launched. So I will advertise that when it is available.

And within that, we've really taken the view that it is about low cost, everyday approaches, access to books. And listening to Will, I think, in a way, it's almost easier with young children to have resources available than it is for maybe the younger adults, older children, younger adults. Because with young children, they're very used to having adults around them all of the time.

But of course, as older children and young adults are making that transition, it must have been quite tricky for them to-- maybe that's a real understatement-- for them to get away from adult company and supervision all of the time.

So, and I wouldn't like to comment on the resources necessarily for young people. But certainly for babies and young children, having confidence in what is around them to help them with their well-being. And trying to-- I mean, one of the difficulties, of course, will be allowing children to visit their friends out of school and out of nursery. Because, of course, it is so important for their social and their emotional development.

But, for anyone who's really interested, please do have a look at the courses online that the faculty have funded. Hopefully, there'll be something useful in there for everybody working with very young children.

KAREN: That's fantastic, Jackie. Thank you. Will, I wonder if you can tell us about the co-production. The Open University, I don't know if new students realise. But very often, at the end of programmes, you might see an OU logo. And we work in partnership with the BBC on many, many different forms of broadcasts and initiatives. And we work in an academic way to advise on some of the content that's being made.

But Will, there was a co-production made for Mental Health Awareness Week. Can you tell us about that?

WILLIAM MURCOTT: Yeah. I was lucky to be involved with this brilliant co-production, which focused on a lot of kind of online resources, whilst lockdown was at its strictest back then. Specifically aimed at kind of young people, young adults. Just kind of short pieces. A lot of it was about reassurance about the importance of talking and looking after yourself during kind of a very difficult and unusual period.

I think that's really important to get people who are able to talk to young people and listen to. And so we had people like Naomi Shimada, who's a model and social media influencer. And she talked brilliantly about how to look after yourself online, and the pressures and stresses that you might have with social media. And kind of how to navigate some of that, especially when that can be such an overwhelming part of somebody's life when they can't go outside.

KAREN: No, absolutely. Absolutely. And also, this might link with I know what some of Karina's concerns are about communication. It can be challenging, I guess, for especially young children, to articulate something that is foreign in that sense of not having been in a situation like this before. And communication, and I guess communication through play in a variety of different ways, can be particularly challenging when it is so unfamiliar. Karina, can you tell us about how communication is implicated?

KARINA GIAXOGLU: Yes. I think it's always surprising to look at how children actually deal with crises. Very often, we are very worried about them, and rightly so. But we sometimes forget that they have amazing resilience and great imagination. So, if we engage, when we engage young children, and young adults, in reading aloud stories or even co-creating stories about what's happening around us, then we realise that actually they might inspire us. And they end up supporting us, rather than us supporting them.

What's interesting about children-- young children-- and the way they understand the world through stories, is that they tend to emphasise a lot at the present moment. And that has its strengths and weaknesses. So for example, if they are very excited about something, the desire is something, they have it, then everything's great. They are very happy and they fully enjoy the moment. So they live in the moment, which is a key principle, a key tip for well-being for adults.

However, if something is not working for them. So if they feel confined or if they want to see their friends, for example. And they can't see an end to that, the emphasis on the present becomes really a true distress. So we need to help them through stories and through other types of activities, play, and so on, to realise to develop a different way of looking at what's happening, to look at the future and to look beyond that moment that might be a bit difficult.

But definitely, literature, picture books, are excellent ways for helping children develop their well-being literacy and deal with crises. We know that a lot of COVID related stories-- COVID-19 stories-- were written to explain to children what is happening and what they can do to contribute, to help.

And also, of course, in this situation, the classic character, or the hero, becomes really, really important. So we have seen our key workers-- doctors and nurses and teachers-- presented to us and to the children as heroes with whom children can identify. And they can feel that, you know, empowered in that they're not just passively, you know, living through something. But actually, they are supporting the key workers-- might be their parents-- and they actually imagine that maybe that's something they might want to do when they grow up.

So that's another way of developing their emotional vocabularies. But also their kind of their imagination, their looking ahead to the future and seeing themselves in it.

KAREN: Absolutely. So it's sort of harking back, I guess, to what Jackie was talking about, about play and the way that we can use narratives, either be they imagined in that position through role playing, or through reading about other narratives and thinking about other alternatives can be very useful in terms of helping shaping expectations, aspirations, and even what is potential and acceptable.

KARINA GIAXOGLU: Yes. That's exactly-- and it's an excellent way for rehearsing emotions from a safe space, from a safe place. That's why we don't need to wait for crisis, you know, to tell the children stories about difficult emotions, like grief, even like death. Children are much more open and much more flexible and they adapt quite, I think, easier than adults.

And here, I'll tell you my favourite example of a little girl who, when she found herself with her family all the time during the lockdown, and everyone was cooking, they were exchanging gifts. So she thought, oh, well, it's Christmas. It's Christmas every day. So there are some things that we don't even think about that, about the way children can imagine the world around them.

KAREN: Absolutely. Which is why, going back to Will's point, it's so important to understand the individual meaning and experience for each person. Karina, Jackie and Will, that's all we've got time for. I'd love to talk further. And I know students will as well. I'm hoping you can pop into the chat also to talk with all of the hundreds of people who are here

today. So please do do that. But thank you so much for a really wonderful start to today's programme.

We've also got links on our Student Hub Live websites too-- lots of resources as well. So you can open a different tab. I know that there are links going on in the chat. You might like to save a little takeaway goody bag of some things that you might like to look at later.

But Kieran, I'll come to you at the start of the next session to check in. But for now, we're going to have a quick video break. We're going to look at Manga and children's literature. And then I'll be back to talk about digital professionalism. So I'll see you in just a minute.

[Text on screen: [studenthublive.open.ac.uk](https://studenthublive.open.ac.uk)]