

The Signs of Well-being

(Adapted from Laevers, 1997)

Openness and receptivity

A child is receptive to his environment. His expression is alert, open and direct. He allows himself to be 'touched' by the stimuli presented to him. He is aware of the people around him and does not try to avoid them. He can accept both verbal and non-verbal attention from others, for example, a cuddle, a compliment, a word of comfort, an encouragement, a spontaneous offer of help. He listens and often responds to suggestions made by others. The child does not cut himself off from new situations or people, but shows a willingness to explore them.

Flexibility

Children, whose well-being is high, readily adapt to their environment. This flexibility is especially noticeable in situations which are different or new to the children. They may be only briefly confused or upset. They can easily accept new situations and therefore experience them to the full. Children react flexibly to problems or frustrations. They do not dwell on them. They show a willingness to consider various alternatives or to make compromises.

Self-confidence and self-esteem

A child radiates a good deal of self-confidence. She is able to express herself and to let herself be seen or heard. She also shows a fair amount of self-esteem. When faced with new challenges, she will tackle them head on. She will try out new activities risking the possibility of failure. When well-being is high, a child can overcome failure quite quickly. A child, whose well-being is high, does not dwell on failures or associate them with her own worth. She will look for challenges at her level, neither too difficult nor too easy for her. She can admit that there are things she cannot do yet, without feeling inadequate.

Being able to defend oneself, assertiveness

Children who are assertive will not be walked over. They will stand up for themselves, for their own wishes, needs and desires. They are strong enough to ask for the things they need, such as help, comfort or care. If they want something, they will ask for it in an appropriate manner. If something is said or done which the child experiences as an injustice she will object. Children, whose well-being is high, will act assertively and will not merely respond to the orders or suggestions of others, if these injunctions interfere with their own needs.

Vitality

A child whose well-being is high radiates vitality and zest for life. The vitality expresses itself in the child's facial expression and in her composure. The children's eyes are often glistening. They are rarely hunched up with shoulders drooping. They tend to hold themselves up straight and to move quickly and energetically.

Relaxation and inner peace

Relaxation shows in composure and movements. Facial expressions are natural and do not twitch. Most movements are flexible and smooth. A child whose well-being is high usually keeps up a 'normal' speech tempo and vocal volume. You can almost 'feel' the 'inner peace' of children, who are relaxed. They do not bottle up tensions or jump when touched. They are often able to relax quickly after an exciting and active game. They are relaxed and active at the same time.

Enjoyment without restraints

Children who are in their element are enjoying themselves. They are happy and take pleasure in what they are doing and experiencing. The enjoyment is genuine. They are enjoying the right things in the right way (not, for example, hurting others). Some children express their enjoyment by beaming, singing spontaneously, smiling or humming quietly.

Being in touch with oneself

Children seem to know for themselves what they need, wish, feel and think. They do not turn away from these things but work through them. When children are at peace with themselves, they feel united with other people, animals and nature. They do not hide their needs, wishes, feelings or thoughts.



The Well-being Scale

Well-being Scale	A Description of the Level
1	Well-being is very low. None of the signs of well-being are shown. No interest is shown in interacting with others or in playing. Eyes are dull. Little energy is shown. A child might look withdrawn and becomes anxious quite easily.
2	About half of the time, signs of emotional discomfort might be displayed. There is a lack of trust. A child may be watchful or cling to one person. A child whose well-being is low cannot sustain enjoyment, worries about what other children have and may enjoy hurting others.
3	Expresses their feelings most of the time. Occasionally, a child may get anxious, seek reassurance or seem uncertain. They may show distress at transition times, for example, moving into group time from free play time.
4	Generally able to communicate and express their feelings. A child whose well-being is high feels comfortable enough to ask for what they want and to choose what they want to do confidently. They rarely show signs of discomfort.
5	An extremely high level of well-being and behaves like “a fish in water”. The nursery is “their place” and they radiate vitality, relaxation and inner peace.

(Adapted from Laevers 1997 p36-37 and AcE Project, 2001)

