

# Health education and health promotion among preschool children

Ewelina Kurowicka

The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Poland

Corresponding author:

kurowickaewelina@gmail.com

## Abstract

The most important period for shaping health behavior is human childhood. An important task of parents and kindergarten teachers is to develop healthy eating habits and to encourage sports activities. During the daily educational and didactic classes, teachers implement health education in kindergarten. Cooperation with the local community and organization of meetings with health care representatives are also important. The purpose of this article is to show the essence of health education in kindergarten, with its goals and tasks. The text presents the role of the teacher as a health educator among preschool children.

**Key word:** health, health education, health promotion, kindergarten

## Introduction

Pre-school education is the first and fundamental period for the development and further education of a child. His entire educational future depends on how his development will take

place in the first years of his life. The assumptions presented in the pre-school education core curriculum point to the need for optimal and comprehensive child development. The child should develop in all areas of his personality - both in the physical, mental, social and emotional sphere. The preschool's priority is also to improve the health of the pupils.

Barbara Woynarowska emphasizes that pre-school education plays an important role in reducing social inequalities and related inequities in health. The implementation of health education in kindergarten is facilitated by various factors regarding mutual cooperation of teachers with parents, as well as the conditions and organization of preschool education. The kindergarten can be called a habitat for implementing health education. Kindergarten educators undertake a number of activities promoting health attitudes among children. Effective achievement of set goals is possible thanks to the partnership and cooperation of parents and kindergarten. Maintaining good relations with parents fosters the coherence of educational and didactic interactions. Health behaviors practiced in kindergarten should be developed and continued in the family home.

In the 21st century, there are many threats to properly implementing educational challenges among the youngest children. The dynamic pace of everyday life, lack of time and rush are not conducive to the integral development and education of children. Children increasingly have access to a computer with internet access and spend time in front of a glass screen. Parents as the first educators of their children should take care of their proper development. This is related to, among others, spending free time together. Preschoolers have a great need for exercise, which can be met by having fun at home or outdoors. Parents are the first educators of children in shaping attitudes towards health. In a properly functioning family, the child is given appropriate patterns to promote a healthy lifestyle. The process of health education and acquiring hygienic and health knowledge is continued in kindergarten and then at school. In the context of these threats, an extremely important task of the kindergarten is the effective and systematic implementation of health education from the first stage of child's education.

### **Health as a basic concept in health education**

The word "health" is a concept often used in everyday life. Everyone has a different understanding of the term. This concept is interpreted differently in the literature and may apply to the individual but also to the community. Health is one of the basic concepts of health education. Over the years, various concepts of health and its protection have arisen. They undergo evolution primarily as a result of the development of science and the extension of approaches to surrounding reality. The feeling of health or its loss in the physical, mental,

spiritual and social dimensions is considered in the aspect of the subjective assessment of each person. The Polish Language Dictionary gives a general definition of health, according to which it is "a state of a living organism in which all functions are carried out correctly". This is a condition that means good body function. The concept of "health" can refer to an individual, but also is health: public, international, environmental, population, global, social. The well-known and often used definition of health formulated by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1948, according to which health is a state of complete physical, mental, social and spiritual well-being, and not just a lack of illness or disability.

here are different approaches to defining health in the literature on the subject:

- a) Health as a person's ability to: function properly and fulfill social roles, adapt in a changing environment, meet their needs and reduce tensions, comprehensive development;
- b) Health as a person's physical and mental potential, which enables self-realization and development of various skills;
- c) Health as a balance and harmony of the individual's physical, social and psychological abilities, disposition to maintain a balance between the individual's body and the requirements of the environment,
- d) Health as a good quality of life: self-realization, well-being, sense of happiness and contentment<sup>1</sup>.

The following factors determining health can be distinguished:

- 1) Cooperation between countries in the field of environmental protection and exchange of mutual experiences in the field of prevention and health education;
- 2) Social and technical infrastructure and health care;
- 3) Awareness of each person about the dependence of his state of health on the style and environment of life, as well as activities (work, leisure, play, learning)<sup>2</sup>.

In the context of this article, attention should be paid first and foremost to the third factor. The state of human health awareness is particularly important in leading a healthy lifestyle and reducing the risk of disease. This implies the timeliness and need for health education from the earliest years of human life. Through the so-called health promotion can be understood not only in the prevention of diseases, but above all "creating opportunities through which people, other social groups or the local community will want to take action to maintain or improve health"<sup>3</sup>. Health promotion is associated with leading a healthy lifestyle. Health promotion is a process

---

<sup>1</sup> B. Woynarowska (red.), Edukacja zdrowotna, PWN, Warszawa 2017, s. 17.

<sup>2</sup> E. i. J. Frątczak, Edukacja zdrowotna dzieci przedszkolnych, Turpress, Toruń 1996, s. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Z. Krawczyńska, Promocja zdrowia, „Lider” 1993, nr 4, s. 3.

that enables people to increase their impact on their health and to improve and maintain it. In contrast, a healthy lifestyle includes "behaviors, attitudes and the general philosophy of human life depending on his personal beliefs, values, skills, environment, social and cultural norms, and the general economic, political and organizational structure of society"<sup>4</sup>. A person leading a healthy lifestyle is characterized by physical activity, maintaining good relationships between people, life without addictions, as well as compliance with the principles of proper nutrition. A healthy lifestyle is a chance for proper development in childhood and extension of active, independent life in old age<sup>5</sup>.

It is a set of daily behaviors conducive to improving human health. It is important to shape health behaviors in children from an early age. Health behaviors are developed under the influence of many factors and personal patterns (both at home, in kindergarten, school, peer group, media, local community).

Table 1. Stages of health education according to M. Demel.

Name of the stage	Description
Early childhood	This stage covers the period of early childhood. At this stage, treatments related to hygiene and care science prevail. The child acquires health habits.
Intermediate stage	It occurs in the pre-school and early school period. The child's activity regarding taking care of his own health is increasing.
Selfeducation	This stage includes adolescence and puberty. Man becomes an active co-creator of his health.
Inverted heteroeducation (pedagogical inversion)	Human enters the role of educator of other people (siblings, friends, children, parents).

Source: study based on M. Demel, *Pedagogika zdrowia*, WSiP, Warszawa 1980, p. 173.

With regard to various health issues, different parts of the different stages may coexist in a child. There are no clear boundaries between these stages and they are not always in that order.

<sup>4</sup> B. Woynarowska, *Popularny słownik wychowania prorodzinnego i seksualnego*, Agencja Promo-Lider, Warszawa 1996, s. 307.

<sup>5</sup> B. Woynarowska, A. Wojciechowska, *Aktywność fizyczna dzieci i młodzieży*, Kwalifikacja lekarska do wychowania fizycznego w szkole, Instytut Matki i Dziecka, Warszawa 1993, s. 5.

## **Objectives and tasks of health education in kindergarten**

Health education is not only teaching young people ways to overcome diseases, but also encouraging them to care for and strengthen their and others' health.

Correctly understood health education includes:

- a) holistic approach to health,
- b) factors properly and improperly affecting health,
- c) developing attitudes, skills, beliefs and health habits in various situations,
- d) creating conditions conducive to health and multiplying its potential in the kindergarten,
- e) striving to organize the knowledge about health that the child acquires from various sources of information<sup>6</sup>.

The term 'health promotion' is often used next to the term 'health education'. Health promotion is an activity that enables people to increase control over health issues and leads to its improvement<sup>7</sup>.

The main goal of health education for young children is to create conditions that ensure the development of skills for health promotion. The objectives of health education include:

- Care for children's health and physical fitness,
- Encouraging active participation in games and sports activities.

In the course of daily activities and activities, it is important to teach preschoolers to make the right health choices. The specific goals of pre-school health education are associated with awakening the child's interest in their own development and health, as well as improving the ability to distinguish between factors that positively and negatively affect health. The task of the kindergarten is to care for the development, physical fitness and health of the pupils, as well as to encourage them to engage in sports activities.

The principles of health education of preschool children concern:

- a) Coordination of social forces in the kindergarten and its social environment;
- b) Free selection of the contents of health education, but related to the needs of children and the local social environment, in particular parents and children;
- c) Direct connection of the health education process with the local natural environment;
- d) Emotional attitude to the content of health education (by using literary texts or songs as a source of information);
- e) Ensuring that children have the need for mental and technical security;

---

<sup>6</sup>K. Żuchelkowska, Edukacja zdrowotna w przedszkolu, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego, Bydgoszcz 2013, s. 38-39.

<sup>7</sup> <https://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/promocja-zdrowia;3962694.html> (dostęp: 15.06.2019)

- f) Diagnosing the needs of children and parents;
- g) Reverse education, which consists in ensuring that children fulfill certain educational tasks towards others (conversations with parents on a topic related to, for example, environmental pollution);
- h) Applying a multitude of forms, methods and didactic means;
- i) Linking messages to children's practical skills;
- j) Expression and impression of messages and personal patterns as well as the natural environment;
- k) Continuity and comprehensiveness of impacts on children;
- l) Teacher's openness to the needs of children;
- m) Maintaining anonymity towards personal information expressed by children<sup>8</sup>.

The pre-school education core curriculum contains a lot of content related to health education of the youngest. In the light of the current core curriculum for pre-school education, a child prepared to attend school, among others:

- "reports physiological needs, independently performs basic hygiene activities;
- communicates the need for movement, rest, etc .;
- performs basic exercises shaping the habit of maintaining proper body posture;
- demonstrates body fitness and coordination to a degree that allows you to start systematic learning of complex activities, such as reading and writing.
- recognizes and names basic emotions, tries to deal with their experiencing"<sup>9</sup>.

When planning activities with children, it is important to consider the needs and abilities of children. Teachers use every situation that arises to achieve their goals.

### **The role of the teacher conducting health education**

Many Polish kindergarten institutions are associated with the creation of a health promoting kindergarten. In everyday pedagogical practice, he uses the concept and strategy of creating schools to promote health. It is worth considering that we evaluate education in kindergarten. These competencies of the teacher used to create patterns of healthy behavior and establishing cooperation with parents of children<sup>10</sup>.

---

<sup>8</sup> E. i . J. Frątczak, Edukacja zdrowotna dzieci przedszkolnych, Turpress, Toruń 1996, s. 21-22.

<sup>9</sup> Podstawa programowa wychowania przedszkolnego dla przedszkoli, oddziałów przedszkolnych w szkołach podstawowych oraz innych form wychowania przedszkolnego, Załącznik 1. do rozporządzenia Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 14 lutego 2017 r. (poz. 356).

<sup>10</sup> B. Woynarowska, (red.), Edukacja zdrowotna, PWN, Warszawa 2017, .s. 219.

Działania pedagogiczne nauczyciela w przedszkolu powinny być zorientowane na wdrażanie dzieci do utrzymywania higieny osobistej i czystości w swoim otoczeniu. Ważne jest, aby nauczyciel wprowadzał wychowanków w różne sytuacje edukacyjne sprzyjające rozwijaniu czynności samoobsługowych i nawyków higieniczno-zdrowotnych.

The teacher's pedagogical activities in kindergarten should be oriented on implementing children to maintain personal hygiene and cleanliness in their surroundings. It is important for the teacher to introduce pupils to various educational situations conducive to developing self-service activities and hygienic and health habits.

The climate of educational and didactic classes depends to a large extent on the teacher conducting them. A teacher who is a health educator should have appropriate competences defined as: "specific human characteristics, expressed in demonstrating at the level of skills set by the standards the skills of adequate behavior, awareness of the need and consequences of such behavior and assuming responsibility for one's own conduct. Competences can therefore be defined as knowledge, acquired experience and skills, appropriate personality traits, as well as internal motivations, attitudes and behaviors enabling good implementation of the assumptions and goals of health education"<sup>11</sup>. These competences largely contribute to improving the effectiveness of health education and thus to promoting health in pre-school settings. The educator knows the needs of children best, which is why he should motivate them to care for their own health, support these activities and evaluate the process and results of health education. The task of a preschool education teacher is to convince with his attitude that health is a value for man and a resource for society. The condition for the effectiveness of the undertaken actions is continuous teacher education not only as part of pedagogical studies.

It should be noted that the effective operation of educators as guides for children in education in making decisions about their authority. In terms of pedagogical authority, one can call "the educational influence of a person on access or groups of people, resulting from such personality traits of teachers that contribute to his universal recognition, respect of the community and successes in teaching and educational work"<sup>12</sup>.

---

<sup>11</sup> K. Żuchelkowska, Edukacja zdrowotna w przedszkolu, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego, Bydgoszcz 2013, s. 69-71.

<sup>12</sup> B. Pitula, Wieloaspektowe pojmowanie roli zawodowej nauczyciela, Wydawnictwo Śląskiej Wyższej Szkoły Zarządzania im. gen. Jerzego Ziętka, Katowice 2008, s. 25.

### **Forms of promoting pro-health attitudes among children**

In the kindergarten environment, for a child, it is "a set of educational and health situations, everything takes place in an organized scenery with full awareness of the pedagogical impact: things, people and organization of classes. The kindergarten is a model of order of cleanliness, aesthetics, good manners, and all this serves the interests of health, development and upbringing"<sup>13</sup>. Nauczyciele wraz z dziećmi realizują różne projekty edukacyjne związane z edukacją zdrowotną. Organizing culinary classes for children encourages them to independence, discover new flavors and teaches cooperation with peers. Children readily listen to literary works on health topics. It is worth encouraging children to comment on healthy eating.

Health education is not only passing on knowledge about what is beneficial or harmful to health, but above all improving habits that will help to effectively use the acquired knowledge. An interesting form of developing health and hygiene skills is organizing meetings with a nurse, doctor, or organizing trips to, for example, a dental office. Then the children gain knowledge in a practical way. It is important to put children to dress according to the weather. The form of health education is also the systematic implementation of children to use hygienic procedures, washing hands before meals and after leaving the toilet. Organizing competitions and encouraging children to take part in them is a good solution.

The content of health education in kindergarten should be entered through play. It shows various phenomena in a way that is accessible to children, develops imagination and motivates to act. The child should be able to play outdoors and participate in various forms of active recreation. Children with the help of a teacher can create a medical corner in the room or a fruit and vegetable shop. Undertaking such games promotes health attitudes among children.

### **Summary and final conclusions**

Summarizing, pre-school health education should support the process of shaping health behaviors and counteract behaviors that negatively affect health. In childhood and youth, physical activity, healthy eating, adequate duration and quality of sleep, as well as leisure time are very important. The correct implementation of health education in kindergarten "depends

---

<sup>13</sup>W. Wrona-Wolny, Przedszkole jako pierwsze środowisko instytucjonalne do realizacji edukacji zdrowotnej, w: Edukacja zdrowotna - przedszkole – szkoła, Barbara Wolny, Józef Liba, Edmund Juško, Wyd. KUL, Lublin 2016, s. 59.



on the health awareness of all education entities, including teachers, children and their parents, and not only on social change and focus on promoting a healthy lifestyle”<sup>14</sup>.

---

<sup>14</sup> K. Żuchelkowska, Edukacja zdrowotna w przedszkolu, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego, Bydgoszcz 2013, s. 150.

## References

1. Encyklopedia PWN, <https://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/promocja-zdrowia;3962694.html> (dostęp: 15.06.2019)
2. Frątczak E. i . J., Edukacja zdrowotna dzieci przedszkolnych, Turpress, Toruń 1996.
3. Krawczyńska Z., Promocja zdrowia, „Lider” 1993, nr 4.
4. Pituła B., Wieloaspektowe pojmowanie roli zawodowej nauczyciela, Wydawnictwo Śląskiej Wyższej Szkoły Zarządzania im. gen. Jerzego Ziętka, Katowice 2008.
5. Podstawa programowa wychowania przedszkolnego dla przedszkoli, oddziałów przedszkolnych w szkołach podstawowych oraz innych form wychowania przedszkolnego, Załącznik 1. do rozporządzenia Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 14 lutego 2017 r. (poz. 356).
6. Słownik Języka Polskiego, <https://sjp.pwn.pl/sjp/zdrowie;2545327.html> , (dostęp: 06.06.2019)
7. Woynarowska B., (red.), Edukacja zdrowotna, PWN, Warszawa 2017.
8. Woynarowska B., Popularny słownik wychowania prorodzinnego i seksualnego, Agencja Promo-Lider, Warszawa 1996.
9. Woynarowska B., Wojciechowska A., Aktywność fizyczna dzieci i młodzieży, Kwalifikacja lekarska do wychowania fizycznego w szkole, Instytut Matki i Dziecka, Warszawa 1993.
10. Wrona-Wolny W., Przedszkole jako pierwsze środowisko instytucjonalne do realizacji edukacji zdrowotnej, w: Edukacja zdrowotna - przedszkole – szkoła, Barbara Wolny, Józef Liba, Edmund Juśko, Wyd. KUL, Lublin 2016.
11. Żuchelkowska K., Edukacja zdrowotna w przedszkolu, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Kazimierza Wielkiego, Bydgoszcz 2013.