

Let's get cosy with Hygge

Part one

Reading stories by fairy lights, snuggling up in blankets and laughing with the children. These are all moments of "Hygge", a Scandinavian concept which is sweeping across the UK. But how can you bring this to your setting and how can it benefit the children you care for? We invite you to read our article in a cosy corner with a hot drink and find out...



By Kimberly Smith, Early Years Consultant, Trainer and Author

The UK is currently experiencing a severe shortage of qualified Early Years Educators, with many reluctant to go into the profession due to the demands on workload and long hours. Those already working in the sector are facing difficulties around demands on the job that are leaving a negative impact on wellbeing.

With this in mind it's no wonder the UK is often seen to stand at the lower end of the world chart for happiness. At the other end of the scale, the Scandinavian countries of Finland, Norway and Denmark are top of the happiness chart again in 2018. What factors make these countries so successful at achieving a high level of well-being?

What is Hygge?

Scandinavia ranks highly on all the main factors found to support happiness: caring, freedom, generosity, honesty, health, income and good governance. With long dark nights in winter, they have to have a mind-set of positivity. So, when it's cold and snowing outside they turn the situation around and light a fire, candles and get blankets. They take enjoyment from the warmth they experience while reading a book by the fire and watching the snow fall outside. This concept around **living for now** is known as "Hygge".

The concept of Hygge (pronounced hue-guh) doesn't have a direct translation into English but is about embracing the simple moments in life with joy and appreciation, whether it is a meal at home with good friends, playing board games or taking time to enjoy a woodland walk.

This isn't an approach that you have to buy into. The whole idea of this way of living is that you don't need anything new or to even spend any money. The precious moments in life are right there for you to discover.

For us to do our job well as educators we need to embrace aspects of this lifestyle into our own day - and a heightened level of well-being equips us to do our job well with the children.

Hygge in practice

Now how can Hygge be applied to our Early Years teaching? There are some simple steps that we can take in our teaching to create more of a Hygge inspired approach to life. These might include:

- Letting in natural light and avoiding harsh strip lighting by adding lamps, fairy lights and LED candles into provision
- Does the space and layout of your setting naturally flow? We don't want a reading corner to be in a cold draft
- Are adults speaking at a quiet level and not above the children? You can also use rugs on hard flooring to reduce noise
- Bring nature inside with plants to care for, flowers in vases and natural loose parts to explore and investigate. Even better, spend time in the outdoors
- Are areas organised, clutter-free and minimalist?
- Have you created a sense of calmness with the colours of the interiors? Whites, greys and neutrals are good for this
- Add warmth by creating a reading nook with blankets, fairy lights and a star projector
- Slow things down: your planning, your day and teachable moments.

To get you experiencing the warm fuzzy feeling of Hygge, why not try a woodland walk today? This will help you feel completely in the moment and present in your surroundings. As the children walk along they could collect sticks, stones, acorns that they see along the way. This not only offers a brilliant talking point but also becomes a beautiful reminder of the journey they took.



"The love shared between our nursery family has flourished"

NDNA members Best Childcare put Hygge at the centre of their ethos and have found it is key to creating comfort and security. Best Childcare shared with Nursery News how they have developed the concept into their pedagogy:

Embracing Hygge means recognising the importance of a small interaction and reaping the benefits from the big impact, and at Best Childcare we do just that. Emotional well-being of children has always been at the forefront of our practice as our practitioners provide a safe, secure and stimulating environment.

The abundance of smiles is unmissable, the laughter heard is infectious and the love shared between our nursery family has flourished. We integrate Hygge through a combined ethos of Forest School and the Reggio Emilia approach.

The environment

Our outdoor provision includes a 'Hygge Hut' (read more on page 16), whilst indoors a simple adaptation to cots and floor space allows children to choose their own area when seeking cosiness.

The children and Hygge

Our children have profited tremendously from these adaptations, providing them with unlimited opportunities to seek out happiness at every turn. Support with transitions reduces stress and anxiety for both parents and children, encouraging feelings of self-worth and confidence through reflection.

We have strengthened this with "Lagom". This is another Scandinavian concept, which means being fair and balanced, and it gives children a greater understanding of empathy and mindfulness in all they do. Overall our children are more comfortable and happier during their time at our setting, which translates through to the staff team.

Our practitioners

Our practitioners enthuse over Hygge! With its high emphasis on smaller groups, our unique key worker system allows for practitioners to share special moments in groups of two to four, where both individual and group ideas can stimulate deep conversations in a meaningful atmosphere.

We have also created "Fika Fridays" which allow staff to take time from their busy schedules to add an element of joy into their routines. We see from these interactions a team that are inspired and motivated to continue our outstanding journey.

Advice for other nurseries

Hygge is a unique concept that requires research and understanding to be fully embedded into a provision's ethos. It is not just an area, twinkling light or colour - it's a feeling which can be enhanced by the right resources. Our advice to other providers would be to research Hygge, meet with the staff team and decide how it can be embedded into your practice and tailored to meet the needs of the children. Once this has been established you need a creative, enthusiastic team who fully understand the concept and can drive it forward. The possibilities are endless if you let your imagination run wild and the feeling embrace you!



Member resources

- We will continue our exploration into Hygge in the early years in the next issue of Nursery News, with guest writers The Curiosity Approach and a case study from Little People Nurseries
- We have updated our face-to-face Leadership and Management training with information about Hygge and love-based leadership. The course is based on contemporary research from the University of Lapland in Finland and offers members a fresh approach to leadership, incorporating the emotional aspects of developing a strong team. Find out more about the training at www.ndna.org.uk/ training.
- You can also find more from Kimberly, including case studies of settings that have transformed their practice and access free Hygge content, at www.kseyconsultancy.co.uk - or read "Hygge in the Early Years" by Kimberly Smith.

Win a book

We are offering a reader the chance to win Kimberly's book, *Hygge in the Early Years!* Just post your stories, photos or videos of moments of Hygge in your setting on social media, making sure to tag @NDNAtalk on Twitter and National Day Nurseries Association on Facebook. You can also email us at marketing@ndna.org.uk. We will pick a winner on 1 December, so this could be a lovely Christmas present for your setting. You could also feature in the next issue of Nursery News.

