

# The Leuven Well-being and Involvement Scales<sup>1</sup>

This tool has been developed by a team based at the Research Centre for Experiential Education (Leuven University – Belgium) under the supervision of Dr. Ferre Laevers. The tool focuses on two central indicators of quality early years provision: children’s ‘well-being’ and ‘involvement’. Well-being refers to feeling at ease, being spontaneous and free of emotional tensions and is crucial to good ‘mental health’. Well-being is linked to self-confidence, a good degree of self-esteem and resilience. Involvement refers to being intensely engaged in activities and is considered to be a necessary condition for deep level learning and development.

## Measuring levels of well-being and involvement

Laevers has created a 5 point scale to measure both well-being and involvement. If there is a consistent low level of well-being and or involvement, it is likely a child’s development will be threatened. The higher the levels of well-being and involvement we can achieve for the child, the more we can add to the child’s development. When there are high levels of well-being and involvement, we know that deep level learning is taking place.

The evaluation process begins by assessing the levels of well-being and involvement using the scales outlined below. Practitioners should observe babies and children as a group or individually for approximately two minutes then give a score for wellbeing and involvement. Where children are observed to be operating at less than a score of 4 or 5, learning will be limited. However, it is useful to observe how well practitioners tune in to the children’s levels of well-being and involvement and respond to low levels sensitively. Even a low level of well being or involvement can become a learning opportunity which can result in higher levels.

The initial observation is the starting point for further analysis concentrating on children displaying lower levels of well-being and involvement. This analysis supports practitioners to reflect on the quality of the provision, including providing some clues about how to support individual children. Measuring children’s levels of wellbeing and involvement can also empower and energise practitioners, when their high-quality provision and interactions enables children to demonstrate higher levels of well-being and involvement more consistently.

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<sup>1</sup> *Well-being and Involvement in Care Settings. A Process-oriented Self-evaluation Instrument*, Ferre Laevers (Ed.) Research Centre for Experiential Education, Leuven University. ISBN: 978-90-77343-76-8)

## Ten action points

The Research Centre for Experiential Education (RCEE) formulated a list of 10 action points that enables practitioners to identify strategies for ensuring the learning environment (both physical and emotional) supports children's well-being and involvement:

1. Organise the physical learning environment in attractive and distinct corners or areas.
2. Review the resources within the areas and ensure there is a level of challenge for all children including the most able.
3. Introduce new and unconventional materials and experiences.
4. Observe and identify children's interests and offer experiences that respond to this interest.
5. Support activities by stimulating inputs.
6. Widen the possibilities for free initiative and support them with sound agreements.
7. Improve the quality of the relations amongst children and between children and teacher(s).
8. Introduce activities that help children to explore the world of behaviour, feelings and values.
9. Identify children with emotional problems and work out sustaining interventions.
10. Identify children with developmental needs and work out interventions that engender involvement.

In addition to the action points Professor Ferre Laevers (director of the RCEE) highlights the importance of the way in which adults interact with children. He believes that this is key to the achievement of well-being and involvement. Dr. Laevers describes it in the following terms:

“Stimulating interventions are open impulses that engender involvement, such as: suggesting activities to children, inviting children to communicate, asking thought-provoking questions and giving rich information. Sensitivity is evidenced in responses that witness empathic understanding of the child. Giving autonomy means: respecting the children's initiative, acknowledging their interests, giving them room for experimentation, letting them decide upon the way an activity is performed and letting them participate in the setting of rules”.

<b>The Leuven Scales for Well-being and Involvement</b>	
<b>Well-Being Level</b>	<b>Well-Being Signals</b>
1 Extremely low	The child clearly shows signs of discomfort such as crying or screaming. They may look dejected, sad, frightened or angry. The child does not respond to the environment, avoids contact and is withdrawn. The child may behave aggressively, hurting him/herself or others.
2 Low	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.
3 Moderate	The child has a neutral posture. Facial expression and posture show little or no emotion. There are no signs indicating sadness or pleasure, comfort or discomfort.
4 High	The child shows obvious signs of satisfaction (as listed under level 5). However, these signals are not constantly present with the same intensity
5 Extremely high	The child looks happy and cheerful, smiles, cries out with pleasure. They may be lively and full of energy. Actions can be spontaneous and expressive. The child may talk to him/herself, play with sounds, hum, sing. The child appears relaxed and does not show any signs of stress or tension. He /she is open and accessible to the environment. The child expresses self-confidence and self-assurance.
<b>Involvement Level</b>	<b>Involvement Signals</b>
1 Extremely low	Activity is simple, repetitive and passive. The child seems absent and displays no energy. They may stare into space or look around to see what others are doing.
2 Low	Frequently interrupted activity. The child will be engaged in the activity for some of the time they are observed, but there will be moments of non-activity when they will stare into space, or be distracted by what is going on around.
3 Moderate	Mainly continuous activity. The child is busy with the activity but at a fairly routine level and there are few signs of real involvement. They make some progress with what they are doing but don't show much energy and concentration and can be easily distracted.
4 High	Continuous activity with intense moments. The child' activity has intense moments and at all times they seem involved. They are not easily distracted.
5 Extremely high	The child shows continuous and intense activity revealing the greatest involvement. They are concentrated, creative, energetic and persistent



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	throughout nearly all the observed period.
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