

What is Hygge?

Hygge (pronounced hue-guh) is a Danish concept that cannot be translated to one single word but encompasses a feeling of happiness, cosy contentment and well-being by enjoying the simple things in life. It feels unique to everyone. For example, taking the time to watch the dancing flame of a candle while sat sipping a hot mug of tea.

Meik Wiking author of *The Little Book of Hygge* believes that there are 10 principles that must be considered to live a hygge lifestyle. These are

- Atmosphere
- Presence
- Pleasure
- Equality
- Togetherness
- Gratitude
- Harmony
- Truce
- Comfort
- Shelter

(Principles taken from Wiking, M (2016) *The Little Book of Hygge*)

Incorporating Hygge in the Early Years

Many of the hygge principles could be applied to the way we teach too.

I realised that the way we organise our learning environments is important to creating a calm setting. Cosy areas to sit and read in, the interiors were all clutter free and decorated in neutral décor and furnished with warm textures. Lighting involved swapping to lamps and fairy lights in jars to give off a warm and inviting glow. Rather than the harsh tones from the over head lighting.

The Scandinavians appreciate the importance of nature and that it offers us something wonderful and unique that we cannot experience inside. There is a richness and a diversity to what we can experience in nature as we go through the flow of the seasonal year and working outside can allow every area of our early years curriculum to be met.

We know from extensive research that being in nature is good for our mental health and wellbeing by raising serotonin levels in the brain, improving

happiness levels as well as allowing children to take risks and build resilience which all contributes to a healthy way of living.

We can make sure as early educators that throughout our week there is a balance of adult led sessions held between the inside and outdoor environment to show that learning can happen anywhere.

Hygge is not just about making changes to the environment but about becoming more present. As educators we can make changes to our daily routine and slow everything down. Tweaking our planning to make it more responsive and child led by improving engagement and involvement during play.

Four Ways to bring Hygge into your Early Years setting in 2022



1. Re-balance you

Discovering what hygge feels like for you will be different to how a colleague experiences it. The individual things that light us up in life make us who we are.

Start off by thinking about your personal definition of Hygge:

- Make a hygge scrapbook or vision board of what hygge looks, smells, tastes and feels like to you by gathering a collection of images or quotes that you resonate with. These can then be shared with colleagues and you could develop a collective one for your team.
- Remember that Danes don't live just for the happiness of a next holiday or the weekend but actually live for simple and joyful moments each day. Make a list of everything you enjoy doing then a separate list of what you do each day. Now add something that you love to your daily list.
- Try a piece of creative writing about what your own version of a hygge day looks like.



2. Create a sense of arrival

Imagine stepping inside your friends' warm cosy home after a long walk in the cold. You begin to thaw out as you notice the lit fire, smell homemade soup coming from the kitchen and your friend greets you with excitement and love. They take your coat and show you to a comfy seat where they offer you a mug of warm tea. In Scandinavia there is a focus on creating spaces where people feel comfortable and welcome. This is called creating a "sense of arrival" and it's the special feeling someone experiences during the first few seconds or so after arriving in your home, setting or environment. This is critical, as it sets a tone and leaves those visiting you reassured and excited while also creating a great first impression. This is how we want your children to feel about coming to work with you each day. We also want the children's family to feel that their children are safe, comfortable and somewhere they will enjoy learning.

Leave your setting and walk down the street. Now I want you to approach the entrance to your setting and make a mental note of how it makes you feel. What is the first thing you see? Use these prompts below to help you.

- Does the area look tidy and welcoming around the door?
- Is it safe here?
- Are the signs up to date around the grounds?
- Is it clear where to go?
- Does the doorbell/intercom work?
- Are you greeted by a friendly member of staff?
- Does the member of staff know who you are?
- Does the member of staff give a clear instruction on what you need to do first?
- Is there an area to sit and wait in if you're new here or waiting for a meeting?
- Is it clear in the entranceway how young children learn here and the ethos?
- Do the equipment and environment look clean and well looked after?
- Is there a cosy little space that children can retreat to if they become overwhelmed?



3. Slow Teaching

The way we organise our day has a big part to play in how successful child-led learning happens. When we limit the amount of time children have to freely play by breaking up this time: planning in assemblies, interventions or group sessions, the children never fully get into the learning flow. Imagine that you're working hard on an important task, it could be report writing, and you have many distractions; your phone flashes up with a notification, a member of your team asks you a question or you get asked to speak to a parent. Breaking off from your work makes it difficult to get back into it. In fact every time we get distracted and broken off from a task it affects our productivity. Work through the following activities with your team to identify any opportunities where you could slow down your practice:

- Take a copy of your own weekly timetable and take a look at how much time your children get in the environment without getting broken off to do other tasks or activities. Is there any way you can maximise this time? What activities/group timings are not developmentally appropriate for your children or having little impact on their learning?
- Working with your team discuss the parts of the day that have the least calmness. Are there patterns to the time of day you or the children find the hardest? What can you change about the routines here to help them run smoother?



4. Embrace Nature

When it comes to babies and toddlers many educators that I work with find it challenging to plan for opportunities for babies and toddlers to work outside in nature. Below are some ideas for around the year but it's important we don't just save all our outdoor play for the sunny and warmer weather. In Scandinavia babies and toddlers go outside in almost all weather as they believe children need to grow up knowing how to cope with extreme weather conditions. Life

can't just stop because of the snow or the ice...otherwise nothing would ever happen!

The important route to making outdoor learning work for all is by wearing the appropriate clothing and footwear. Waterproof suits and layers are always good.

- Barefoot learning:
- Baby carriers
- Walks
- Picnic blankets and waterproof sheets
- Bring nature inside
- Have snack time outside
- Water play
- Nature treasure baskets
- Fallen branches
- The rain