



Dear Parents/ Carers,

Next week is **Children's Mental health Week** and this year the theme is **Express Yourself.**

Expressing yourself is about finding ways to share feelings, thoughts, or ideas, through creativity. It is about finding a way to show who you are, and how you see the world, that can help you feel good about yourself. As parents carers and educators, we all play an important role in your child's mental health.

When children are able to find creative ways to share their feelings, thoughts or ideas it can help them feel good about themselves and who they are. Children can do this through art, music, writing and poetry, dance and drama, photography and film, and doing activities that they enjoy. It's really important to remember that being able to express yourself is not about being the best at something or putting on a performance for others. It is about finding a way to show who you are, and how you see the world, that can help you feel good about yourself. Given that the past year will have left many of us feeling out of control and helpless, supporting children and young people to express themselves is arguably more important than ever. It is also important that you as parents and us as educators, are kind to ourselves and accept that we are doing the very best we can to keep your children safe and happy.

We have planned many exciting activities for the children under the theme of expressing themselves next week through art, song, discussion, role play and writing. The week will culminate by celebrating self-expression with a mufty day where the children can dress in their favourite colours in a way that expresses their personality or culture. Mrs Fernandes would really love for you to email a picture in your 'express yourself' mufti outfit, on [head@st-josephs-jun.croydon.sch.uk](mailto:head@st-josephs-jun.croydon.sch.uk)

The activities have been designed for both the children who are home learners and the children of key workers who are in school. But there is no reason why the fun should end there! Here are some ideas if you would like to continue this at home: build on existing interests or passions -think about what has helped them get through the past year. If they

have a love of dancing/ baking/ drawing/ fashion, encourage your child by noticing their unique interests and praising their efforts.

Trying new things can be a great way to find a new creative outlet. There are lots of online tutorials and video demos that you and your child could be inspired by or you might try out something new together. Some children may not think of themselves as being creative. Try to focus on the importance of the process and the way it can make them feel, rather than the end result. Try not to judge their efforts and remember to give encouragement for trying rather than for doing something well.

Listening carefully can help children feel more comfortable and confident when expressing themselves. Try to minimise distractions and give your child your full attention when you're spending time together, being aware of your own body language and eye contact. You might want to try summarising what they've shared and acknowledging their feelings.

Children are expressing themselves all the time but not necessarily with words. 'Listen' to everything they are trying to tell you with their behaviour, or with their play and creativity or with their silence. It's all self-expression.

Remember – you don't need a lot of expensive equipment to get creative at home. Recyclable materials or older items you no longer have a use for can provide amazing inspiration, and of course there's no limit to your imagination! I have attached some mindfulness activities to this letter which you can enjoy with your child which hopefully will give you a chance to have some fun together and share precious time together.

Finally, let your child know that if they are worried about something, they should always talk to an adult they trust. It could be you, someone in your family, a teacher or someone else in their school. If you're worried about your child's mental health you can talk to your GP or Mrs Fernandes and Mrs Gallagher at school. The Anna Freud National Centre for Parents and Families also has very useful information <https://www.annafreud.org/parents-and-carers/> hope you all have a great week expressing yourselves!

*Mrs Langford-Jackson*

*Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Lead*