

EXPRESS YOURSELF

#ChildrensMentalHealthWeek



www.childrensmentalhealthweek.org.uk

DEAR PARENTS AND CARERS,

1-7 February 2021 is Children's Mental Health Week. The week is run by children's mental health charity Place2Be to focus on the importance of children and young people's mental health. This year's theme is **EXPRESS YOURSELF**.

WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

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.



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Here are a few simple ways you can encourage your child to express themselves.

1. Could you build on existing interests or passions? Think about what has helped them get through the past year. A love of dancing? Baking? Drawing? Fashion? Encourage your child by noticing their unique interests and praising their efforts.
2. 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... could you try out something new together? Or perhaps ask someone you know to share their creative hobbies and give them a go.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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!

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 someone at your child's school.

You can also find a list of organisations that provide support and advice on our website: place2be.org.uk/help