

Children's mental health awareness week.

From 1-7 February 2021 schools, youth groups, organisations and individuals across the UK will take part in Children's Mental Health Week. This year's theme is **Express Yourself**.

Expressing yourself is about finding ways to share feelings, thoughts, or ideas, through creativity. This could be through art, music, writing and poetry, dance and drama, photography and film, and doing activities that make you feel good.

It's 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.

For Children's Mental Health Week 2021 we, at Aspire, will be encouraging children (and adults) to explore the different ways we can **express ourselves**, and the creative ways that we can share our feelings, our thoughts and our ideas.

Self-expression is about communicating your individuality

This can be through words, clothing and hairstyle, or through art forms such as writing, drawing, music and dance. Self-expression can help you to showcase your true self – your story, your thoughts, feelings and emotions. But this can also make us feel vulnerable, so you might want to take things one step at a time. We often get told by our family, friends, school, communities and through social media how we 'should' look, think, speak, and act. These constant messages about what we ought to do, and who we ought to be, can make it difficult to let go of expectations and express our true selves.

Self-expression helps us connect to our true self. Self-expression is a great way to relieve yourself of stress and free your mind. Self-expression can help you to reflect on your life, actions, decisions, relationships, beliefs, and thoughts — rather than keep them buried deep down.

I would really like to see some of you express yourself this week, in any way you like! I want you to send in any evidence of your self-expression, so that we can encourage and support each other.

Here is a list of ways in which you can express yourself:

1. Pick a quotation to express who you are.

Choose a quotation that resonates with you. This could have been said by a famous person, or selected from a song or book etc.

Here are some examples you could use:

Brenda Ueland: "Everybody is talented because everybody who is human has something to express."

Fay Weldon: "The desire for self-expression afflicts people when they feel there is something of themselves which is not getting through to the outside world."

Deeyah Khan: "Self-expression should not be a challenge that demands extraordinary talent but should be a right accessible to all."

Criss Jami: "Everyone has their own ways of expression. I believe we all have a lot to say, but finding ways to say it is more than half the battle."

Mahatma Gandhi: "I want freedom for the full expression of my personality."

Maya Angelou: "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you."

Put your quotation in the middle of a large piece of paper, use art and craft materials to express yourselves creatively around the text. Think about the following to help you: How does this quote make you feel? What does it make you think of? What colours or shapes reflect how you feel when you read this quote?

2. Make a photo montage or a short video expressing who you are.

You might want to make a short video or photo montage about yourself. This could include your current likes and dislikes, strengths, interests, dreams and passions. Alternatively, you may like to complete a 7-day photo challenge during Children's Mental Health Week, for instance taking one photo a day that captures expresses some aspect of yourself, either literally or in abstract form.

3. Write a daily journal

Keep a daily journal in which you write about whatever comes to mind. It can be helpful to carry around an ideas book with you. Jotting down your thoughts can also help you to problem-solve — mind maps are a great tool for this. Creating vision boards about your future dreams and aspirations can also help to motivate and inspire you.

4. Sing to express yourself

Singing that focusses on self-expression and being your authentic self.

Here are some songs you could try:

'If you want to sing out, sing out' by Cat Stevens: <https://bit.ly/3iesKBg>

'Express yourself' by Labrinth <https://bit.ly/3kSm8tS> 'Roar' by Katy Perry <https://bit.ly/349L2hZ>

'Brown skin girl' by Beyoncé <https://bit.ly/2GIOnlK>

5. Dance is a form of self-care.

Watch the following videos as inspiration for how dancing can be used as a way to de-stress, join together and express your identity:

Dancing Di' Stress Away by Study in Sweden <https://bit.ly/33cBHGO>

Dance as self-care by Anna Freud NCCF <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISxmYT4fbBQ>

You might want to make up your own dance and send in a video. Remember the focus is on having fun and expressing yourself — not on being the world's best dancer!

6. Talking about your feelings is so important

Choose a video clip and discuss why it is important to acknowledge to ourselves, and express to others, how we are feeling. Here are a few videos and podcasts you could look at:

Premiership football stars and Prince William discuss the importance of looking after your mental health: <https://bit.ly/33bFOD1> (Teacher note: please note the conversation touches on some serious issues including suicide)

Nadiya Hussain, the winner of The Great British Bake Off, talks about living with a panic disorder: <https://bit.ly/2S65lYa>

Little Mix star Jade Thirwall talks about how she's exploring her Arab heritage on the No Country for Young Women podcast: <https://bbc.in/2S7P4Si> (You may choose to play an extract for example 11:54-14:01, Teacher note: Contains strong language, adult humour and content of a sexual nature).

Good luck everyone and please remember to submit any evidence to Mrs Gregory.