

What children can do to support their own wellbeing and 4 ways you can help.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Awareness week 8-14th May

1. Connect

'If I was doing something with my friends and my family were going out I'd probably want to go with my parents because you want to have that time with them when you're young.'
Year 7 student

One of the hardest things to do as a parent is to slow down and the time to talk with and listen to our children, no matter what their age. Unfortunately, the solutions haven't really changed. Shared mealtimes, fewer hours in front of kids' TV and finding activities that the family can enjoy together, will all help to support your child's wellbeing. The same is true of making the time to spend with extended family.

But it's not just family that matters. We know from our work, that sometimes having a trusted adult, who perhaps isn't a relation, to talk to and spend time with, can really help children and young people when difficult times arise.

And of course, children's friendships are vital. Interestingly we found that seeing friends was much better for children than speaking to them either by phone or online. So, helping your children to see their friends outside of school, if possible, will make a real difference.

2. Be active and Creative!

'I always say after a session I come out and I feel a sense of achievement, like I've achieved something, done something new and mixed with different people.' Student, Year 8 (about his Karate class)

Using sports to help them to develop trusting relationship with safe adults is a great way to help with Wellbeing.

'I like designing stuff. I like sketching things, copying things - it just makes me feel good that I can draw stuff.' Student, Year 9

Children need a range of opportunities to be active, both in and outdoors. These can be as straightforward as walking, running, skipping, cycling or swimming, all of which are great at improving strength, balance, fitness and concentration.

Group sports are also good for enhancing self-confidence and co-operation and can help support new friendships outside of school.

Children are naturally imaginative and creative. They can take an object and discover a hundred different uses for it, invent an entire character and mimic accents or produce a masterpiece of modern art with just a pencil.

Sadly, as they get older, it's easy for children to lose these abilities. This is why it's vital that they're encouraged to continue with some form of creative activity. Magic shows, storytelling, collage making, poetry reading, drama, art, dance, design, playing an instrument or making music and visiting some of the wonderful museums and galleries in the UK that offer free entry, are all brilliant ways to get their creative juices flowing. Plus, there are lots of clubs and activities in the school and local area.

3. Learning

'It can make you feel like you're in a different world' Student, Year 10 (on reading)

The children we spoke with were really clear that learning outside of school was just as important to them as learning at school. It was the sense of achievement that they felt from gaining new knowledge or skills that most mattered.

That's why it's crucial that we try to keep as many learning avenues open for our children as possible. This could include simply passing on the skills we may have, such as cooking, carpentry, DIY, model making, sewing or photography.

The other way to encourage our children to learn is to model the attitudes towards learning that we'd like them to adopt. That's why one of the best ways to get your child to read for fun or be curious about life-long learning, is to make sure that they see you regularly doing it as well.

Ultimately, children are natural learners, we just need to try and make their world as large as possible, by filling it with new experiences, cultures and ideas.

For children, it's almost impossible to separate creativity from play. Happily, most children need little encouragement to do it because playing inside and out are essential to their emotional and physical development.

4. Take notice

'I like listening to music because when I'm feeling annoyed and upset with things it helps me to calm down'. Student, Year 8

The ability to live in the moment also turns out to be an important factor in their wellbeing. So, as parents it's important to nurture this quality rather than discourage it. It's not easy, especially when the clock's ticking, but it's good to keep in mind.

Finally, encouraging them to pay attention to their feelings and showing them how to process their emotions in a positive way is probably one of the most valuable lessons you can pass on to your children. We know that valuing their thoughts and ideas is one of the

best ways of helping them to make real changes in their lives. Regarding their ideas and letting them work through obstacles themselves, with our support can also build their resilience.

We shouldn't underestimate how differently children see and interact with the world around them. Rather than impose our own experiences, we can let them make their own and support them in their decision making.

This also means that their surroundings have a real impact on their wellbeing. So, while we'd all like to go on holiday more often, day trips to different types of places can help too. These could include the beach, farms, local forests, the coast, even different parts of town can all help them to 'spread out' and enjoy a more varied environment.