



EXPRESS YOURSELF

This week is Children's Mental Health week you may hear people talking about it on news this week. The week is supported by HRH The Duchess of Cambridge and I posted her launch of the week on social media on Sunday.

I encourage you to have a read through this information and try some of the activities suggested to improve your wellbeing. You can use different ideas, mediums and art forms to encourage self-expression in your pupils. This is not about producing great art or performances. This is about helping you to connect with their true selves and to others. Mediums and art forms you may consider include: simple craft making, sculpture, junk modelling, mask making, murals, weaving, painting, photography, film, digital art, dance, drama, mime, poetry and literature, music, singing, gardening and cooking. But there are lots more to choose from.

What is self-expression, and why is it important?

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.

Self-expression helps us connect to each other – in good times and bad

By expressing ourselves thoughtfully, we can better communicate, collaborate and build a community with others. At times of crisis, people come together to express themselves individually, and as a group, through the arts.

Here are some examples:

- *Gareth Malone's online choir* — bringing self-isolating singers together during the Covid-19 lockdown.
- *Grayson's Art Club* — a series of online masterclasses to help unleash creativity during the Covid-19 lockdown.
- *BBC Lockdown Orchestra* - as part of a ten-day creative challenge, nearly 1,500 members of the public joined the newly formed BBC Lockdown Orchestra as part of a huge virtual performance.
- *Create 2030 Solidarity Art Shows* - The World Health Organisation, Create2030 and a group of international working artists collaborated on a project to showcase films, music, poetry and visual art about the COVID-19 pandemic.
- *Te Rito Toi* — using art to help children when they first return back to school in New Zealand following a traumatic or life-changing event.

Pick a quotation that means something to you

Choose a quotation about self-expression 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:

- 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."

Consider how 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?

Make a photo montage or short video that expresses WHO you are as a person

You could make a short video or photo montage about yourself. This could include your current likes and dislikes, strengths, interests, dreams and passions.

Or you could complete a 7-day photo challenge during **Children's Mental Health Week**, taking one photo a day that captures expresses some aspect of yourself, either literally or in abstract form.

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.

Make inside-outside boxes

Follow these simple instructions:

- decorate a box with images and words on the outside to represent the qualities you show to the world
- decorate the inside of the box with images and words that represent the inner qualities, interests and passions that are hidden to most people

Think about why we all do this and what stops us sharing all of ourselves with others.

Sing together

Sing songs that focus on self-expression and being your authentic self. You could do this with friends and family

Here are some songs you could try:

'If you want to sing out, sing out' by Cat Stevens:

'Express yourself' by Labrinth

'Roar' by Katy Perry

'Brown skin girl' by Beyoncé

Understand the importance of talking about your feelings

Pick a video to watch to help you consider 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 Hussian, the winner of The Great British Bake Off, talks about living with a panic disorder: <https://bit.ly/2S65IYq>

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>