

HOW CREATIVITY CAN SUPPORT CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

Julia Clements, Principal Educational Psychologist at Place2Be, shares some advice on how creativity and self-expression can help support your child's mental health.

The events of the past year may have left some of us feeling like we don't have control over our lives and our emotions. To help support our mental health, we all need to find healthy and enjoyable ways to express our thoughts, feeling and ideas.



Place2Be started **Children's Mental Health Week** in 2015 to shine a light on the importance of young people's mental health, a message that has never been more relevant. This year, we are looking at the many ways we express ourselves, and the benefits this can bring for our emotional wellbeing.

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.

Here are some ideas and examples of ways you could encourage your child to think about how they express themselves:

What can you do at home?

- **Does your child have any existing interests or passions you could build upon?** Think about what has helped them get through the winter months. Do they love dancing? Baking? Fashion? Try to encourage your child by noticing their unique interests – something they love doing in their spare time could be turned into an activity for a lockdown evening or weekend.
- **Trying new things can be a great way to find a creative outlet.** There are lots of online tutorials and video demos that you and your child can be inspired by and could try out together. Or perhaps ask someone you know to share their creative hobbies and give them a go.
- **Some children may not think of themselves as being 'creative' in the traditional sense.** Instead, try to focus on the importance of the process and the way creating something makes them feel. Remember to give them encouragement for trying, rather than for doing something well.
- **You don't need a lot of fancy equipment to get creative at home.** Recyclable materials that you no longer have a use for can provide amazing inspiration, and of course there is no limit to what you and your child's imagination can come up with.
- **Listening carefully can help children to feel more comfortable and confident when expressing themselves.** Try to minimise distraction 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 even with their silence. They are all forms of self-expression.

Place2Be's Art Room is a programme that uses art to support children and young people's wellbeing and mental health. For Children's Mental Health Week this year, the team have come up with some simple games you and your child can play at home to get the creative juices flowing.

Draw Your Feelings and **The Squiggle Game** can both be found on the **Children's Mental Health Week website**, along with a host of other resources and activities you can do at home to help your children explore how they express themselves.

*If you or your child are struggling, it's important to talk to someone. If this can't be face-to-face, here are some contact details for a range of **organisations who can provide immediate support**.*

Children's Mental Health Week 2021 is supported by the players of the People's Postcode Lottery and the Beaverbrook Foundation. Find out more at childrensmentalhealthweek.org.uk.

Working together to keep our children safe and happy

Halina Rooney

Deputy Head of Inclusion/SENCo