



MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING NEWSLETTER Number 1 – Autumn 2

We hope you enjoy reading our second Mental Health and Wellbeing Newsletter. Our aim is to empower you with valuable insights, practical tips, and resources to navigate the various facets of your child's emotional well-being. As we approach the busy Christmas period, we hope you and your families find some of the information below helpful.

A MINDFUL MOMENT

Teddy Bear Belly Breathing

A mindful practice to help children learn focusing skills, calm down and figure out that paying attention to their bodies helps them to relax. Deep belly-breathing signals the nervous system to relax, which then lowers stress and reduces the heart rate and blood pressure.

- Ask your child to lie comfortably and place their hands on their belly (or hold a soft toy on top of their belly)
- As you count to three, ask your child to inhale deeply through their nose. Tell them to fill their belly with air. It should get bigger and bigger and they may see their soft toy rise up.
- Ask your child to exhale to a slow count of four. Tell them they might see their toy fall as they feel their belly shrinking.
- Do five rounds of belly-breathing and when ready, ask your child how it felt. Do they feel different now? How did it feel to release their breath?



Chill and Chat

On October, we launched our Chill and Chat Club on a Friday lunchtime. The 'club' is open to all children and is a safe, calm place where they can talk through any worries or problems with either Mrs Andrews or Miss Sohal. Children are invited to drop by Ash, at any point during their lunch hour, where they will be warmly welcomed and listened to. It has been popular with all year groups and a positive way for school to support children in managing their mental health.

The Sandbox

<https://sandbox.mindler.co.uk/>

The Sandbox is an NHS-funded service to support children and young people in Hertfordshire with their mental health and well-being. In addition to providing NHS-funded support, The Sandbox is a central place for resources about common mental health issues, with information on how to access additional support or emergency services.



Anna Freud is a world-leading mental health charity for children and families. They work in collaboration with children and young people, their families and communities and mental health professionals to transform children and families mental health. Their website provides advice and guidance for parents and carers to help them support a child or young person experiencing poor mental health or wellbeing. Attached to the bottom of this newsletter is their leaflet on how to talk about mental health with your young child. <https://www.annafreud.org/resources/family-wellbeing/resources-for-families/>

'The Most Wonderful Time of the Year',

is what we constantly hear at Christmas, but in reality the festive period can be a really difficult time for some families who are experiencing, loss, separation or financial difficulty. Just because it's Christmas, it doesn't mean caring for your mental health has to be put on hold. You're allowed to take breaks, and do things that perhaps don't involve the whole family. Mental health and physical health are equally important. At the bottom of this newsletter we've attached an A-Z of a more relaxed Christmas. The following websites might also be useful <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/tips-for-everyday-living/christmas-and-mental-health/christmas-coping-tips/> <https://parentsonline.co.uk> <https://nopanic.org.uk/mental-health-at-christmas/> <https://www.familylives.org.uk/advice/your-family/holidays/surviving-christmas>



The A to Z of a more Relaxed Christmas.

The pressure on parents to have 'a Perfect Christmas' can be enormous. Social media plays a huge part in this: people posting pictures of how their homes are decorated; huge piles of presents; trips out to see Santa or other Christmas activities; and the recent addition to the pressure, the pesky Elf on the Shelf!

Children are subjected to targeted adverts, in the run up to Christmas, showing the latest 'must have' toys, phones, games etc. and they might expect everything they ask, not realising the costs, especially younger children.

Below is an A-Z of how to try and have a more relaxed Christmas for all of the family.
(adapted from *Staincliffe Junior School, Yorks*)



ASK for help. Don't try to do everything yourself, get other members of the family to pitch in

BOUNDARIES! It is an exciting time, especially for little ones, and it's easy to let things slip. Children can try to push against the usual boundaries, but this can then make it difficult for them to regulate their behaviour which can lead to upset for all.

CUDDLES and a cuppa. When you feel pressured and busy, it's easy to forget the calming effect of a cuddle from someone you love can have.

DECIDE what is important for yourself and your family.

ELF on the Shelf. This is a recent addition for some families but the actual stress to thinking of a different 'naughty' thing for the elf to do can be one pressure be too much. While the children might enjoy it, is it necessary?

FAMILY and friends. Often Christmas is a time to spend with family or friends that you might not see often. This can be a pleasure or a stress. If meeting with someone is bad for your mental well-being, then maybe you don't!

GRATITUDE! Sometimes we are so busy thinking about what we want in life, we forget about what we have.

HYDRATE! Make sure you drink enough water, so that your brain and body can function properly.

INDULGE! Christmas is a time for eating and drinking - remember to eat healthier when you can.

JOBS! Delegate some of the tasks to other family members. Don't feel you have to do everything yourself.

KNOW what you are doing and when. Planning your time can reduce the worry of missing something important and is very useful for children who might struggle with the change of routine.

LISTEN to your body. Getting enough rest and down time will keep your energy levels up

MOVE! Getting out in the fresh air can help clear your head, give you thinking time and help you to relax.

NO! Feel able to say no to others who are adding to your pressures. You don't have to go anywhere or meet anyone if this will cause you upset or extra stress.

ORGANISATION! Make lists, reminders on your phone, post it notes stuck around the house, which can all help you to stay on top of things. Knowing what, where and when can make you feel more in control.

PLAY! Children get new toys and games and want to be able to play with them. Allowing them time to play with their toys and not having to be going out all the time is important.

QUIET TIME. Having the time to relax with your feet up occasionally.

ROUTINES. It can be easy to get out of your family routines over the holiday time. Children can struggle with this, so trying to keep some routines such as bath time and bedtime can help them.

SIMPLE. Don't make things harder than they need to be. Don't feel that you can't buy ready prepared food or use paper plates. If this cuts down the stress, then that is perfect.

TRADITIONS! We all have things that we do over the holiday because that is what we have always done. It might be something small like getting a new decoration for the tree or watching a certain film, but other things can cause more pressure. Maybe start a new tradition, one that does not cost money, doesn't cause stress and everyone will enjoy.

UNPLUG. Take time away from social media, if this is a source of stress.

VALUE. What is it about the holidays that you value the most? Some like the hustle and bustle while others enjoy a quieter time.

WORK. Switch off from work- no phone calls, no emails.

(e)**X**PECTATIONS. Be realistic with what you expect from yourself, others, and the holiday. Trying to be perfect can put huge pressure on yourself.

YOU COME FIRST. Remember if you don't take care of your own well-being then you won't be able to help others.

ZZZ. Remember to get enough sleep!

An introduction from our Patron, HRH The Duchess of Cambridge



As parents, we all want our children to have the best possible start in life. Encouraging children to understand and be open about their feelings can give them the skills to cope with the ups and downs that life will throw at them as they grow up.

It's important that our children understand that emotions are normal, and that they have the confidence to ask for help if they are struggling.

This is why I am proud to support the *You're never too young to talk mental health* campaign by the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families, which is being rolled out across primary schools this autumn.

The campaign's resources are excellent tools to support parents. They demonstrate how we can help children express their feelings, respond appropriately, and prevent small problems from snowballing into bigger ones.



What is mental health?



We all have mental health. Mental health is about our feelings, our thinking, our emotions and our moods. Looking after our mental health is important.



We all have small feelings every day: These sometimes feel strong and overwhelming, whether happy or sad, but they go away before too long.



Sometimes we experience big feelings: These feel strong and overwhelming for a long time. They stop us doing what we want to in our lives.



1 Make conversations about mental health a normal part of life: Anywhere is a good place to talk; in the car, walking the dog or cooking together. Model everyday talk about feelings such as by talking about a TV character's feelings.



2 Give your full attention: We all know it's horrible to be half listened to. Keep eye contact, focus on the child and ignore distractions.

3 Check your body language: Try to keep it open and relaxed and make sure you come down to the child's level.

4 Take it seriously: Don't downplay what the child is saying or tell them they're "just being silly". Resist the urge to reassure them that everything is fine.

5 Ask open questions: Such as "How did your day go today?" This will help to extend the conversation.



6 Calmly stay with the feelings that arise: It can be our automatic reaction to steer away from difficult emotions.

7

Offer empathy rather than solutions: Show that you accept what they are telling you but don't try to solve the problem.

8

Remember we are all different: Respect and value the child's feelings, even though they may be different to yours.

9

Look for clues about feelings: Listen to the child's words, tone of voice and body language.

10

Some ways to start a conversation about feelings might be:

"How are you feeling at the moment?"

"You don't seem your usual self. Do you want to talk about it?"

"Do you fancy a chat?"

"I'm happy to listen if you need a chat."

