

PARENT/CARER NEWSLETTER

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Welcome to the Third Edition of the Parent and Carer Newsletter!

The goal of this newsletter is to share updates about the Mental Health Support Team (MHST) and to provide helpful tips for looking after mental health and well-being. The MHST is here to support children and young people in schools, offering resources, guidance, and structured programs for mental health care.

NEW SCHOOLS IN OUR PROVISION

NEW

We're excited to announce that our services have expanded to include schools in the South West and South East areas of the city! This means more children and young people can access mental health support through their schools. Our team members visit schools regularly to deliver workshops, assemblies, and talks, aiming to make mental health support a part of everyday school life.

WHAT THE MHST OFFERS

If your child or young person is experiencing mild to moderate mental health challenges, such as low mood or anxiety, the MHST may be able to help. In cases where a child needs support, school staff might speak with you about completing a referral to our team. You also have the option to self-refer if you feel that your child could benefit from our services.

Our support is based on Low Intensity Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) principles, which can be highly effective for managing mild to moderate issues. Depending on age and specific needs, support may be provided in group settings or one-on-one with children, young people, or parents. Sessions are conducted at school during school hours, making it easier for children to access support without disrupting their routine.

As an NHS service, the MHST is dedicated to using evidence-based approaches tailored specifically to children and young people. Our staff members are fully trained to address the mental health needs of young individuals, providing a safe and supportive space for children to develop tools for managing their mental well-being.



WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT OUR NEWSLETTER?

We would love to hear your thoughts on our newsletter, we have completed three of these now and want to make sure they are hitting the mark! Scan the QR code to the right and fill out our short feedback form!

Mental Health Support Team
(MHST) Newsletter Feedback
Survey



LOOKING FORWARD...

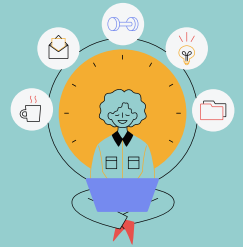
We look forward to connecting with as many of our new schools as possible in the coming months. Through these visits, we aim to build strong partnerships with schools, families, and communities to support the mental well-being of children and young people.

Thank you for being part of this journey with us. If you have any questions about the support we offer, or if you would like to explore how MHST services might benefit your child, please don't hesitate to reach out!

TEN WAYS TO LOOK AFTER MENTAL HEALTH IN WINTER

KEEP A ROUTINE

Maintaining a steady routine, especially with sleep, is essential for mental well-being. Waking up and going to bed at the same time every day can improve sleep quality, which is directly linked to mental health. Having a structured day can bring a sense of stability during a season that often feels unpredictable.



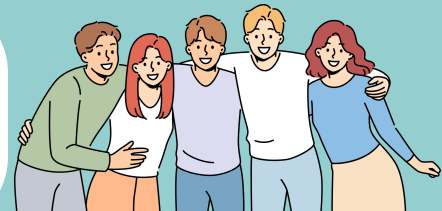
GET OUTSIDE



The saying "there is no bad weather, only bad clothing" is especially relevant in winter. Getting outside, even for a short time, can improve mood, boost energy, and release endorphins. In areas like Milton Keynes, there are many natural spaces to explore, from lakes to woodlands. Activities like Geocaching or orienteering can make these outings engaging for older children, while the Parks Trust often has family-friendly events that make it easier to embrace the outdoors together.

STAY CONNECTED

Winter often limits opportunities for socializing, especially for young people who may see less of their friends due to weather conditions. Finding creative ways to stay connected, like hosting a game night or meeting friends for an outdoor activity, can make a big difference in mood. Social connections can elevate self-esteem, provide a sense of belonging, and help people feel supported and valued.



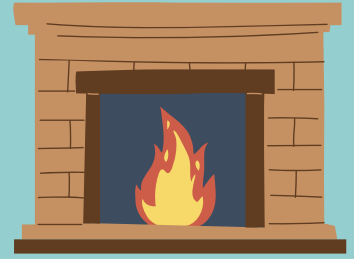
START A HOBBY



Hobbies are a great way to break up the monotony of winter and boost mental health. They don't have to be costly or complicated. Visit your local library, explore the MK Music Centre, or sign up for an art class at the MK Art Centre or MK Gallery. For hands-on fun at home, consider joining a Play Association for access to inexpensive craft supplies or a scrap store.

EMBRACE HYGGE

Hygge (pronounced “hoo-gah”) is the Danish concept of finding comfort and cosiness. Winter provides a perfect opportunity to embrace this idea. Try creating a warm, inviting space with blankets, soft lighting, and a few cosy activities like reading or board games. This sense of cosiness can make the extra time spent indoors feel like a treat rather than a chore.



PRACTICE MINDFULNESS



Being inside together more often can sometimes lead to tension. Mindfulness helps you respond thoughtfully rather than reacting immediately, which can ease interactions at home. Practicing mindfulness as a family can help everyone feel more grounded and connected. You could try simple breathing exercises, guided meditations, or mindful listening practices, especially during moments of stress.

FIND WAYS TO BE ACTIVE

Physical activity is crucial for mental health, even in winter. Indoor options like yoga videos, dance sessions in the living room, or active video games can make exercise fun and accessible. Engaging in movement releases endorphins, improves mood, and can reduce stress, helping to maintain mental wellness.



COOK HEALTHY MEALS



It's easy to reach for comfort foods during the winter months, but a balanced diet can have a profound impact on mental health. Cooking hearty stews or soups filled with nutrient-rich vegetables is one way to provide comforting and nourishing meals. Try blending or chopping up veggies to add more nutrients that everyone can enjoy.

LOOK AFTER PHYSICAL HEALTH

Physical health and mental well-being are closely connected. Encourage habits like hand washing and dressing warmly to prevent common winter illnesses. Taking care of your body means you're better prepared to enjoy seasonal activities without interruption, helping you maintain mental resilience.



ASK FOR HELP



If you or your child is struggling, remember that it's okay to ask for help. Talking with a friend, taking a break, or reaching out to someone in your support network can ease mental strain. For more persistent struggles, seeking advice from a GP or mental health professional can provide guidance and resources to help.

Making these practices a part of your winter routine can transform the season into a time of warmth, connection, and self-care. Whether it's embracing the outdoors, finding new indoor activities, or reaching out for support, each small step helps in creating a winter filled with mental wellness and resilience.

HOW TO START PRACTICING MINDFULNESS AS A FAMILY: A GUIDE TO CONNECTING, GROWING, AND BEING PRESENT TOGETHER

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WHAT IS MINDFULNESS?

Mindfulness is the practice of paying attention to the present moment without judgment. It involves focusing on the "here and now" instead of worrying about the past or future. This focus can be applied to thoughts, emotions, physical sensations, and surroundings. Practicing mindfulness as a family helps everyone feel more connected, relaxed, and aware of each other's feelings.

Begin with small, simple steps to ease everyone into the practice:

- **One-Minute Breathing Exercise:** Set a timer for one minute and have everyone close their eyes, focus on their breathing, and try to stay present with each inhale and exhale. A short exercise like this makes mindfulness accessible and easy to understand.
- **Mindful Listening:** Sit quietly as a family and listen to the sounds around you. Take turns sharing what you heard, from birds chirping to cars passing by. This teaches kids to pay attention to their environment and boosts their listening skills.

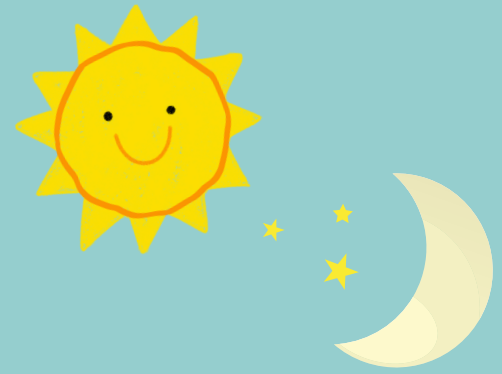


CREATE A FAMILY MINDFULNESS ROUTINE

Setting aside specific times for mindfulness practice helps create a habit. Start with a few minutes a day, perhaps during a transitional time like after school or before bedtime. For example:

- **Mindful Mornings:** Start the day with a few deep breaths and set an intention, like being kind, patient, or grateful.
- **Evening Reflection:** At dinner or before bed, take a moment for everyone to share something they're grateful for or one thing they noticed about their day.

By establishing a routine, you make mindfulness a regular, dependable part of family life.



PRACTICE MINDFUL BREATHING TOGETHER



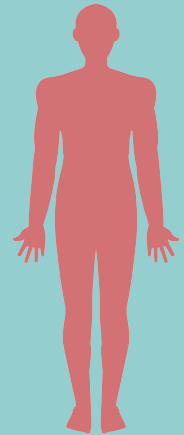
Mindful breathing is one of the simplest yet most powerful mindfulness practices. Breathing exercises help reduce anxiety, improve focus, and provide a calming effect for everyone in the family. Try these easy breathing exercises together:

- **Balloon Breathing:** Ask each family member to imagine they're filling a balloon with each breath in, expanding their belly as much as they can. Then, as they exhale, they "release" the air. This is a fun way for kids to understand deep breathing.
- **Hot Chocolate Breathing** - see our fun worksheet later on in the newsletter!

TRY A FAMILY BODY SCAN

A body scan is a mindfulness technique where you bring attention to different parts of the body, noticing any sensations without judgment. Practicing a body scan helps everyone become more in tune with their physical sensations and promotes relaxation.

- **Guided Body Scan for Kids:** Start from the toes and move up to the head, asking your kids to notice how each body part feels. For example, "Notice how your feet feel against the floor" or "Are your shoulders relaxed or tense?"
- **Parents as Guides:** You can narrate the body scan for younger kids, or use an app to help guide the practice for everyone



PRACTICE MINDFUL EATING TOGETHER



Mindful eating is a fun way for families to practice mindfulness without it feeling like a "task." It involves eating slowly, savouring each bite, and paying attention to the textures, flavours, and aromas of the food.

- **The Raisin Exercise:** Give everyone a small item of food, like a raisin, and ask them to look at it, smell it, feel it, and finally taste it as if they've never eaten a raisin before. This is a classic exercise in mindfulness that encourages everyone to slow down and appreciate their food.
- **Savouring Family Meals:** Occasionally, have a "mindful meal" where you all focus on eating without distractions. Encourage everyone to notice the taste, textures, and sensations.

USE GUIDED MEDITATIONS AND APPS

For families who are just beginning their mindfulness journey, guided meditations can be incredibly helpful. There are plenty of mindfulness apps available with exercises designed specifically for families and kids. Some popular options include:

- Headspace (offers family and kids' meditations)
- Calm (offers short meditations suitable for all ages)
- Insight Timer (includes a wide selection of meditations for different age groups and needs)

Apps are convenient, and they can add variety to your mindfulness practices by guiding you through various exercises. Click on the logos to link through to their websites!



USE GUIDED MEDITATIONS AND APPS

Mindfulness and gratitude often go hand-in-hand. Practicing gratitude as a family helps everyone focus on positive aspects of their day and fosters a more optimistic mindset.

- **Gratitude Jar:** Place a jar in a central area of your home with slips of paper beside it. Encourage everyone to write down one thing they're grateful for each day and place it in the jar. Once a week or month, read them together as a family.
- **Daily Gratitude Practice:** Take a few minutes before bed to share one thing each person is grateful for that day. This helps everyone end the day on a positive note.



SPEND TIME IN NATURE

Being in nature naturally fosters mindfulness. Taking walks, hiking, or simply playing outside together offers an opportunity to connect with the environment and each other without distractions.

Try these mindful nature activities:

- **Nature Walks:** Encourage everyone to notice what they see, hear, and feel as they walk. Take turns pointing out things you observe, like a beautiful flower, a bird, or the feeling of the sun on your face.
- **Mindful Play:** Let kids explore freely, and encourage them to notice their surroundings, from leaves and rocks to the sensation of grass under their feet



MODEL MINDFULNESS AS PARENTS

Children learn a lot by observing their parents. If you demonstrate a calm, mindful approach to life, they're more likely to follow suit. Be present with them during these mindfulness activities, and even outside of practice time, try to stay mindful in your day-to-day life.

- **Responding vs. Reacting:** When stress or conflict arises, show your kids how to pause, take a breath, and respond calmly.
- **Expressing Emotions Mindfully:** Share when you're feeling stressed or happy, and describe how mindfulness helps you cope. This teaches them that mindfulness is a tool to manage their emotions.



Starting Your Mindfulness Journey Together

Practicing mindfulness as a family is a gradual process. Start with small, consistent activities, and make it enjoyable rather than a chore. Mindfulness can bring a sense of peace, gratitude, and joy into your household. Most importantly, it can help your family grow closer, more compassionate, and better equipped to handle life's ups and downs—together.

HOT CHOCOLATE BREATHING EXERCISE

A graphic with a warm, autumnal color palette of oranges, yellows, and pinks. It features stylized leaves and a large, glowing mug of hot chocolate at the bottom. The text is centered and reads:

Hot Chocolate
Breathing

Imagine you are picking up a big mug of hot chocolate

Imagine the warmth of the drink in your hands,
Now take a big smell of your hot chocolate.
Breathe out slowly enjoying the smell of your hot chocolate.

Take several big deep smells of your drink and slowly breathe out as though you are cooling your drink.

When you are ready imagine you are taking a sip!
Think about the flavour, the texture and the feeling of swallowing the drink and feeling it warming you

UPCOMING GROUPS

MK MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT TEAM

INCREDIBLE YEARS PARENTING GROUP

The Incredible Years approach is an evidence-based intervention, providing brief parent guided self-help for mild to moderate behavioural difficulties, for primary aged children. The program is designed to strengthen child well-being, promote social-emotional learning and academic competence, and prevent, reduce, and treat behavioural and emotional problems in young children through parenting.

It is recommended that the therapeutic skills are implemented through the parent(s) or guardian as they are often in a better position than therapists to put strategies in place and to create opportunities for new learning in their child's day-to-day life.

New Group starting

Wednesday 8th January 2025

13:00-14:30

Online Zoom

for 8 weeks

WHO IS THE GROUP FOR?

- Primary age parents who want to improve their parent-child interactions and want to learn a range of different skills linked with play, implementing boundaries, delivering praise, teaching children to problem solve, establishing routines and rules.
- They might observe:
 - their child displaying challenging behaviours which parents struggle to manage.
 - regular arguments with their child
 - 'meltdowns' which they struggle to manage

If you feel the group would be suitable for you, please speak to your child's teacher or school mental health lead who will complete a referral to the MHST

The MHST is an NHS service and a referral will result in a mental health episode of care being opened on your child's shared electronic records. Explicit parental consent will be sought by your school prior to this referral being made.

MK MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT TEAM

HELPING YOUR CHILD WITH FEARS AND WORRIES PARENT GROUP

This is a parent-led, guided self-help intervention which aims to provide parents with an increased understanding of anxiety and how it is maintained. It will encourage you to identify triggers, explore the role of anxious thoughts and how you can respond to them and support you with step-by-step practical strategies to help your child overcome specific fears or general worry.

WHY ARE WE NOT WORKING DIRECTLY WITH YOUR CHILD?

When you're the parent of an anxious child, of course you want to support and protect a child who is distressed and, as much as possible, avert their suffering. But in fact, when it comes to a child who is experiencing distressing anxiety, trying to shield them from things that trigger their fears can be counterproductive for the child.

Parents have a key role in supporting their child to challenge and overcome their anxiety. You will be able to provide consistent support and guidance to your child that direct therapy could not do. This is particularly important in primary age children.

Next Group starts:

Tuesday 7th January 2025

09:30-11:00

6 consecutive weeks

Virtual group via Zoom

WHO IS THE GROUP FOR?

- Parents of children (reception to Year 6) whose child is experiencing increased anxiety in one or more settings that is impacting daily life.
- You may experience your child.....
 - avoiding situations that make them feel worried?
 - having trouble getting to sleep because of fears or worries?
 - having difficulties in separating from a parent when they come into school?
 - experiencing physical symptoms of worry such as a tummy ache or feeling sick in certain situations?

If you feel the group would be suitable for you, please speak to your child's teacher or school mental health lead who will complete a referral to the MHST.

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MK MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT TEAM

REFRAME: BEHAVIOUR AS COMMUNICATION

This group introduces parents to a parenting approach that aims to promote family relationships and reduces parent-child conflicts. We use ideas of 'mentalising' which is the ability of the parent to understand the thoughts and feelings behind the behaviour of both themselves and their child.

Parents can expect to develop a better understanding of their child's emotions and behaviours, helping the child to feel both understood and of value. The approach also helps to de-escalate difficult situations and reduces behavioural and emotional outbursts.

The group will focus on the parent role in supporting child's emotional development and how they can support their child to increase their emotional literacy and learn co-regulating and self regulation strategies.

WHO IS THE GROUP FOR?

- Primary age parents who want to improve their parent-child interactions
- They might observe:
 - their child regularly experiencing emotional distress
 - regular arguments with their child
 - 'meltdowns' which they struggle to manage
 - behaviour that challenges
 - struggle to regulate their responses to their child
 - learn skills and strategies of emotional regulation and mindfulness

FEEDBACK FROM PARENTS.....

'Friendly, informative, thought-provoking'

'For me personally, learning new techniques that I'll be able to use to help my child, some of which I have already put to good use. Also, I have learnt a lot about how our reactions and general behaviour as a parent has a big impact on my child. This is probably the biggest element I have taken from the group and something I didn't think about too much before. I have been adapting my approach when my child has been misbehaving or upset and already seen improvements. I also found it useful to hear the experiences of other parents in the group and how they were very similar to ours.'



Next Group starts:

January 2025:
7 consecutive weeks
Virtual group

If you feel the group would be suitable for you, please speak to your child's teacher or school mental health lead who will complete a referral to the MHST.

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