

# Raising Resilient Children: Approaches from Positive Psychology

*FIONA FORMAN  
B.ED., M.SC. APPLIED POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY*

*SCOIL MOCHUA, CELBRIDGE*

*OCTOBER 6TH, 2021*



# Welcome and thank-you!

Welcome and thanks so much to Catherine and Paula for this opportunity!

Delighted to work with Scoil Mochua again!

Resilience is one of the greatest gifts you can give your child!

With the added stresses and challenges of Covid 19, it is more important than ever.

Good news – these stresses and challenges can actually build their resilience!

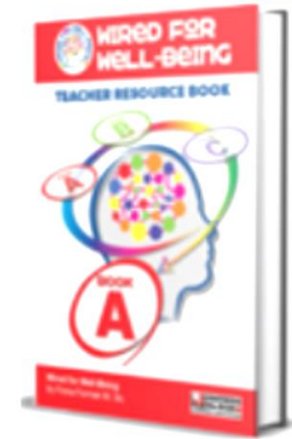


# House Keeping!

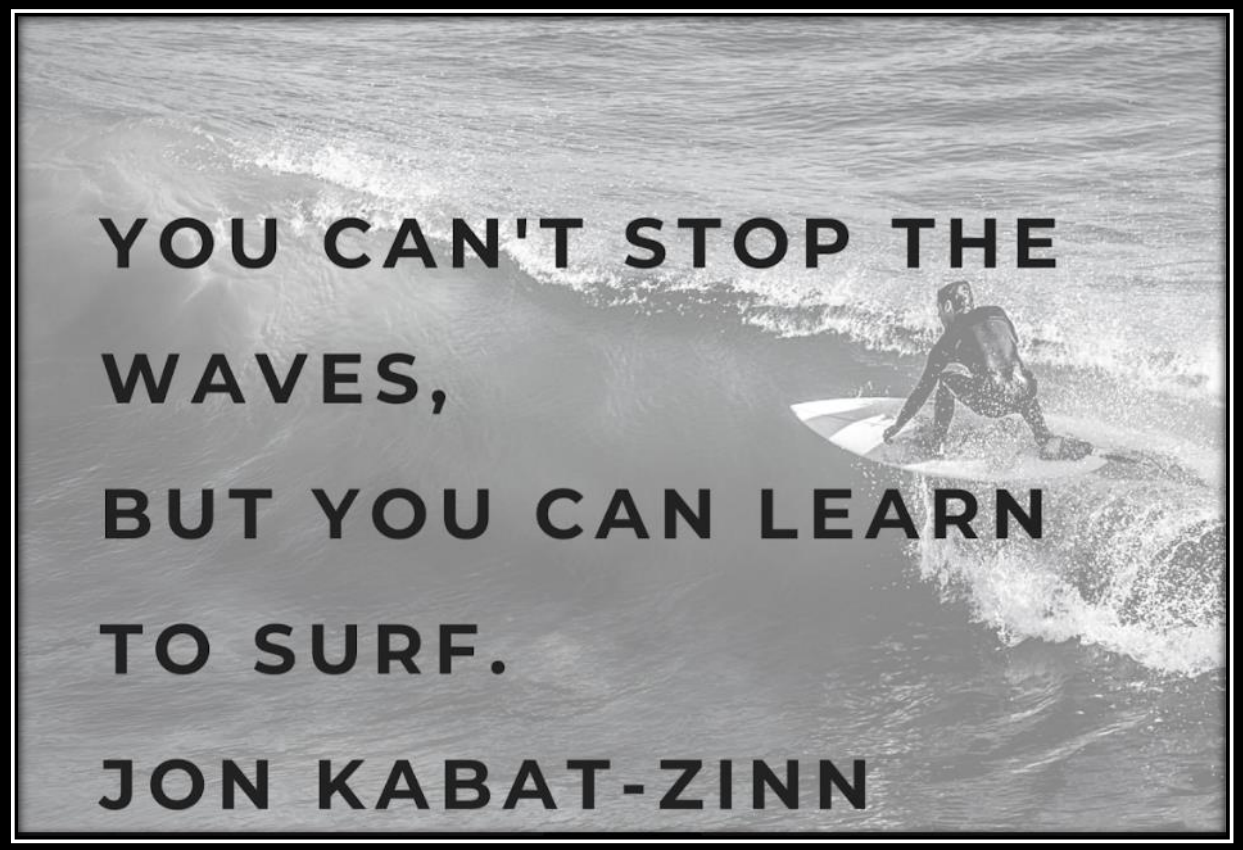
- ▶ If you would like to ask any questions or have any comments please feel free to use the chat function at the end of the presentation
- ▶ I will email the presentation to Catherine



# Personal Introduction



# Opening Quote



**YOU CAN'T STOP THE  
WAVES,  
BUT YOU CAN LEARN  
TO SURF.**

**JON KABAT-ZINN**



*Self-care is  
not selfish.*

*You cannot  
pour from an  
empty cup.*

*Eleanor Brown*

Parenting is a challenging job at the best of times!

You are facing unprecedented challenges  
yourself at present –

- working from home,
- months of home schooling,
- dealing with loss & grief –
- dealing with uncertainty and the ‘new normal’

Takes a lot of our psychological resources – self-care is vital!

Now is not the time to try to be a perfect or amazing parent! If your children feel safe and loved, you’re doing a great job!

Use the suggestions for yourself as a starting point!  
Aim – to reassure you – take one or two ideas onboard

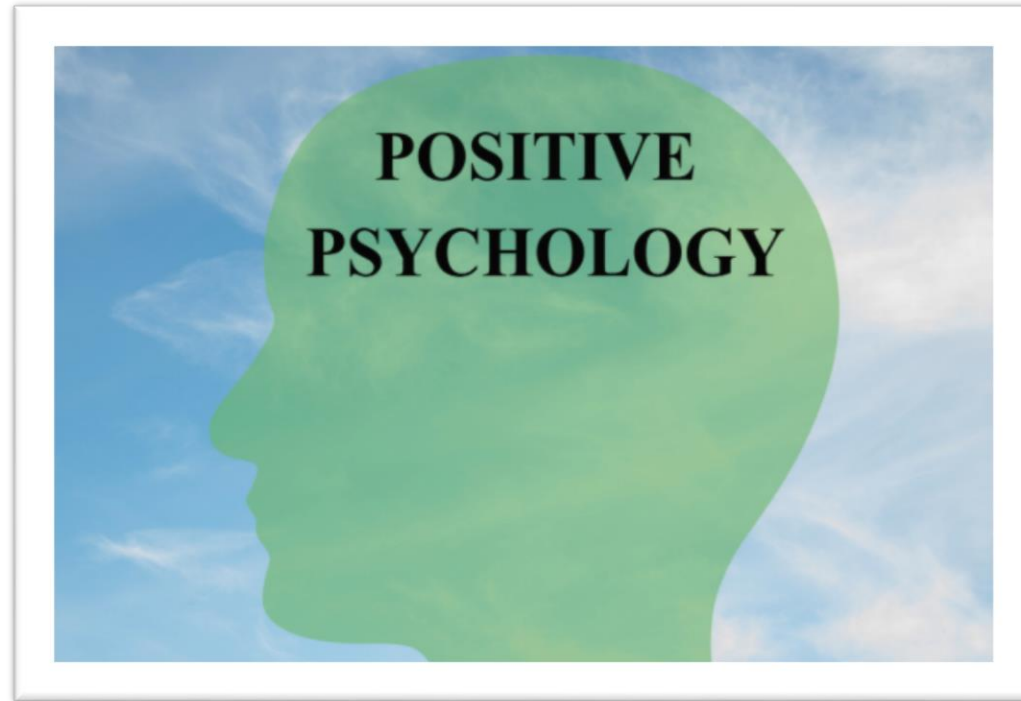
# Session Overview

Overview of Positive Psychology

Current challenges facing our children

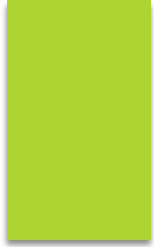
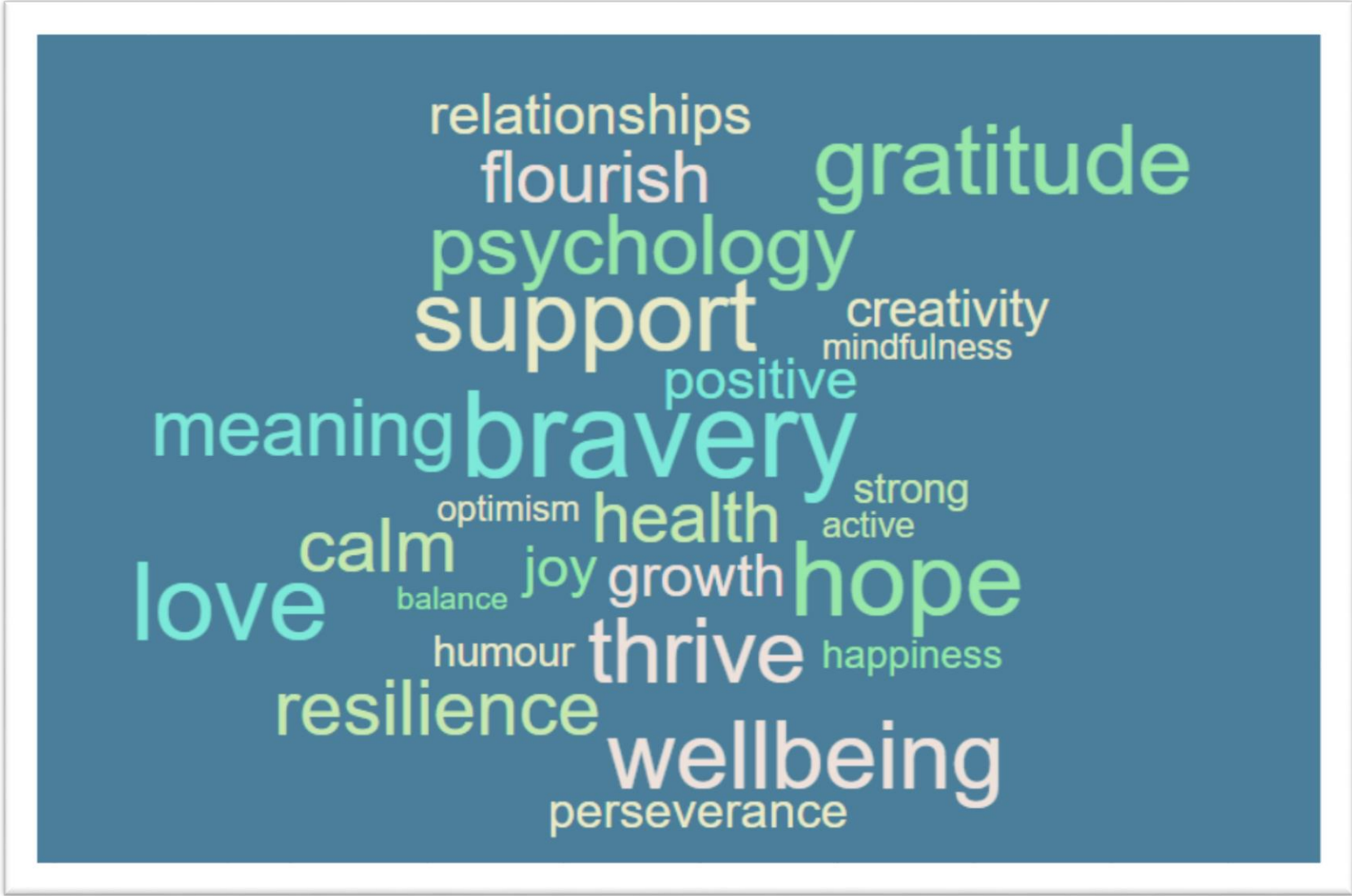
Resilience – what & why?

5 Resilience Skills – focus on 2



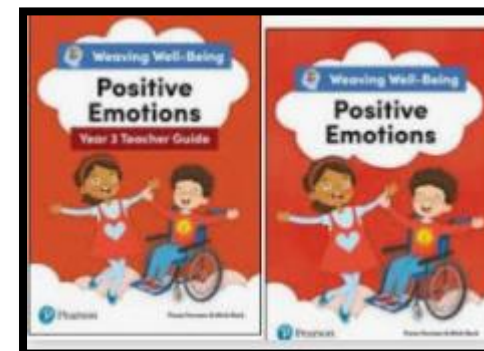
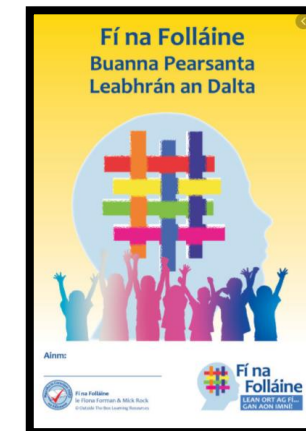
***The Science of Well-Being & Resilience***





# Weaving Well-Being

- 2<sup>nd</sup> Class – Character Strengths
- 3<sup>rd</sup> class – Positive Emotions
- 4<sup>th</sup> class – Tools of Resilience
- 5<sup>th</sup> class – Positive Relationships
- 6<sup>th</sup> – Empowering Beliefs



## FRAMEWORK OF THE WELCOME TO WELL-BEING PROGRAMME

Welcome to Well-Being: Meet Mo and Ko!	Welcome to Well-Being: Good to be me with Mo and Ko!	Welcome to Well-Being: Feeling good with Mo and Ko!
<b>Lesson 1:</b> It's good to be me	<b>Lesson 1:</b> I can be my best self	<b>Lesson 1:</b> We all belong
<b>Lesson 2:</b> All feelings are OK	<b>Lesson 2:</b> I can name my feelings	<b>Lesson 2:</b> We can name our feelings
<b>Lesson 3:</b> I'm ready for my big feelings	<b>Lesson 3:</b> I can name more feelings	<b>Lesson 3:</b> We can express our feelings
<b>Lesson 4:</b> Spread happiness	<b>Lesson 4:</b> I can tame my feelings	<b>Lesson 4:</b> We can feel our energy
<b>Lesson 5:</b> It's cool to be calm	<b>Lesson 5:</b> Sprinkle kindness	<b>Lesson 5:</b> We can change our energy
<b>Lesson 6:</b> It's OK to feel sad	<b>Lesson 6:</b> I'm ready to relax	<b>Lesson 6:</b> We can do hard things
<b>Lesson 7:</b> I'm proud of myself	<b>Lesson 7:</b> It's OK to feel worried	<b>Lesson 7:</b> We are good enough
<b>Lesson 8:</b> It's OK to feel angry	<b>Lesson 8:</b> Today I'm thankful	<b>Lesson 8:</b> We care and share
<b>Lesson 9:</b> I can be brave	<b>Lesson 9:</b> My friends have feelings too	<b>Lesson 9:</b> We can solve our problems
<b>Lesson 10:</b> It's good to be me	<b>Lesson 10:</b> It's good to be us	<b>Lesson 10:</b> It's good to be us



### WELCOME TO WELL-BEING - BOOK B: GOOD TO BE ME WITH MO AND KO! Parent/Guardian/Carer Pull-Out

This short 4-page leaflet is designed to give parents an introduction to the *Welcome to Well-Being* programme and to help them to support their children as they complete their pupil book *Good to be me with Mo and Ko!*

*Welcome to Well-Being* is a 3-level programme that aims to promote positive mental health, resilience and flourishing in children. It is based on concepts from Positive Psychology and emotional regulation. The programme has been designed in accordance with the Social, Personal & Health Education (SPHE) curriculum from the Department of Education. In each lesson, Mo and Ko (2 little aliens from the Planet Zo) introduce children to an idea or skill to help them to feel good and also give them a challenge to encourage them to use the skill over the course of the week. Please note that Mo and Ko are gender-neutral, so the pronoun 'they' is used to refer to them.

#### Positive Psychology

Positive Psychology is the science of well-being, thriving and resilience (Seligman, 2011). It is underpinned by concepts including positive relationships, self-worth, self-compassion, character strengths such as kindness, bravery, humour and fairness and positive emotions such as gratitude, love, joy, hope and pride. It uses evidence-based activities to help us to grow, reach our potential and flourish in life. It makes sense to introduce these concepts and skills to children from as early an age as possible.

#### Emotional Regulation

Emotional Regulation is the process of consciously managing your own emotions, for personal growth, fulfilment and goal satisfaction (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Emotional regulation skills are important in building resilience. By giving children tools and strategies to cope with their strong emotions, we can also build their self-confidence and give them a sense of inner strength.

Emotional regulation is a process with 4 distinct parts as follows:

1. Understanding and labelling emotions
2. Accepting and expressing all emotions
3. Up-regulating positive emotions such as love, pride, joy, gratitude, humour and calm
4. Down-regulating negative emotions such as anger, sadness and worry

#### Supporting your Child

You can support your child's well-being and emotional regulation by normalising all feelings and emotions and reinforcing the message that 'all feelings are OK'. Empathise with and comfort your child when they are experiencing a difficult emotion and encourage them to express how they are feeling. Some children internalise the idea from an early age, that certain feelings such as anger or frustration, are not acceptable and then try to suppress these emotions. This can then lead to emotional outbursts or feelings of shame or regret at expressing them. Try not to over-protect your child from normal feelings of disappointment, frustration or sadness – it is through experiencing these feelings, with your love and support, that they learn to cope with them. By reinforcing and modelling positive ways of accepting and processing all feelings, children can know that it is OK to have these feelings and that there are helpful ways to cope with them.

To gain most benefit from the programme, encourage your child as much as possible and support them as they try the weekly challenges. The rest of this guide provides some ideas for doing this.



### WELCOME TO WELL-BEING - BOOK B: GOOD TO BE ME WITH MO AND KO! Parent/Guardian/Carer Pull-Out

In each lesson, Mo and Ko (2 little aliens from the planet Zo) introduce children to an idea to help them feel good and also give them a challenge to try to use the idea over the course of the week. Images of all of the challenges can be found on the inside cover of the Pupil Book.

#### Homework:

Each lesson has a homework activity which involves reading a short poem about the lesson with your child, discussing the challenge and trying it out at home over the course of the week. There is also another activity to reinforce the concept. This is a Parental/Guardian/Carer comment box at the end of each homework page for you to sign and comment on if you wish.

#### Self-assessment traffic lights

This is an optional activity to try with your child if they would like to. On each homework page there is a small set of traffic lights. Each week, discuss with your child how they feel they did with the challenge. If they feel it went well, they can circle the green light, if it went OK they circle the orange and if they didn't do it or it didn't go well they can circle the red.



#### Lesson 1: I can be my best self

Children are introduced to the characters of Mo and Ko as two little aliens from the planet Zo who know a lot about children and want to help children to feel good about themselves. They are introduced to the idea of their best selves and given positive characteristics to describe themselves based on the Character Strengths of Positive Psychology, including kind, funny, brave, friendly, loving, energetic and thankful.

**Support your child:** Read the poem *Hello Mo, hello Ko* with your child this week and talk about your child's positive characteristics. Praise them for showing these positive characteristics and let them know how proud you are of them. Mo and Ko's challenge to the children is for them to be their best selves everyday by showing these characteristics, so try to support them with this as much as possible, by noticing, reinforcing and praising.

#### Lesson 2: I can name my feelings

Your child learns that all feelings are OK, and names as many as they can, including happy, sad, angry, calm, frustrated and jealous. They learn it's not OK to hurt others because of our feelings.

**Support your child:** Read the poem *All Feelings are OK* with your child this week and talk about how they are feeling. Remind them that all feelings are OK. Mo and Ko's challenge this week is for the children to use their words to name how they are feeling, and to remember that all feelings are OK.

## Lesson 4: I can tame my feelings

### 3

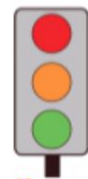
### Homework

Practise saying the poem 'If my feelings' with your family this week.

#### If my feelings

If my feelings  
are wild and strong,  
I can tame them  
before too long.

If I name them  
and breathe so slow,  
I'll feel calmer  
and let them go.



Circle the  
traffic light  
colour that  
shows how you  
did this week.

Show how you did Mo and Ko's  
challenge this week.

Parental Signature/Comment

# Current Challenges

**Reflect: What challenges have your children been facing?**

- ▶ Dealing with fear and uncertainty, worry about the future
- ▶ A lot of new routines & structures to get used to
- ▶ Heightened intensity of emotions
- ▶ Getting used to online learning again
- ▶ Settling back into school
- ▶ May be struggling academically – 'catch up' narrative damaging
- ▶ Feelings of anger & anxiety
- ▶ Dealing with grief and loss
- ▶ May be regressing – this is a normal reaction – seeking safety, comfort reassurance and nurture

**We can't fix everything for our children!**

**Don't underestimate the power of listening and nurturing, your time and attention – comforting, encouraging, supporting...**

“

Listen.  
People start to heal the  
moment they feel heard.

CHERYL RICHARDSON

“

The more often a child experiences nurturing in times of distress, the more easily they grow to nurture themselves and others in times of distress.

LELIA SCHOTT

# Current Challenges

Unfortunately, statistics show that our children were already struggling in terms of their well-being & resilience

**Worrying statistics:**

**By age 13 years, 1 in 3 young people in Ireland is likely to have experienced some type of mental disorder.**

**By the age of 24 years, that rate will have increased to over 1 in 2.**



*Cannon, Coughlan, Clarke, Harley, & Kelleher, 2013*

# Why?

**No general consensus**

**A number of factors and recent changes to children's lives – any thoughts?**

**Technology, social media, no downtime – sleep impacted**

**Genetic predisposition**

**Adverse life circumstances**

**Trauma**



# Current Challenges

## Self-esteem movement:

- ▶ **Linked to decreased resilience in children, as the emphasis on avoidance of negative feelings such as disappointment, means that children don't learn how to cope with them in a safe way.**
- ▶ **Authentic self-esteem is not 'bestowed' on children, it is built through experience and dealing with challenges**

*Seligman, 2007; Storr, 2017*

[https://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-sack-md/children-self-esteem\\_b\\_1822809.htm](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-sack-md/children-self-esteem_b_1822809.htm)

# Current Challenges

- ▶ Encouraging news!
- ▶ Promoting children's well-being & resilience in order to enhance their emotional and social competence is an important measure in the prevention of such disorders
- ▶ Giving children a sense of belief in their own ability to cope with challenges is a key factor

*O' Connell, Boat & Warner, 2009*



**BEHIND EVERY YOUNG CHILD WHO  
BELIEVES IN THEMSELVES  
IS A PARENT WHO BELIEVED FIRST.**

**MATTHEW JACOBSON**



“

The parent-child  
connection is the most  
powerful mental health  
intervention known to  
mankind.

BESSEL VAN DER VOLK

# Resilience – What, Why & How?

- ▶ What comes to mind when you think of the word 'resilience?'
- ▶ Your belief in your ability to cope with, and adapt to, difficult and challenging events
- ▶ A process which evolves over time and can involve different steps or stages
- ▶ Not about being tough or immune to strong emotions such as sadness, grief or disappointment – working through them, expressing them & processing them in a healthy way
- ▶ Activated and nurtured at times of stress and challenge
- ▶ Opportunity for Post-Traumatic Growth



*Tait, 2008*

**‘Don’t just go  
through it, grow  
through it.’**

“No Mud  
No Lotus”



Thich Nhat Hanh

# Resilience – Why?

Resilience predicts a wide range of successful outcomes. These include

- ▶ lowered risk of anxiety and depression
- ▶ greater academic achievement
- ▶ improved psychological well-being and
- ▶ better relationships

*Reivich & Gillham, 2010*

# Nurturing Resilience – how?



**Support &  
connection**



**Teaching  
resilience skills**

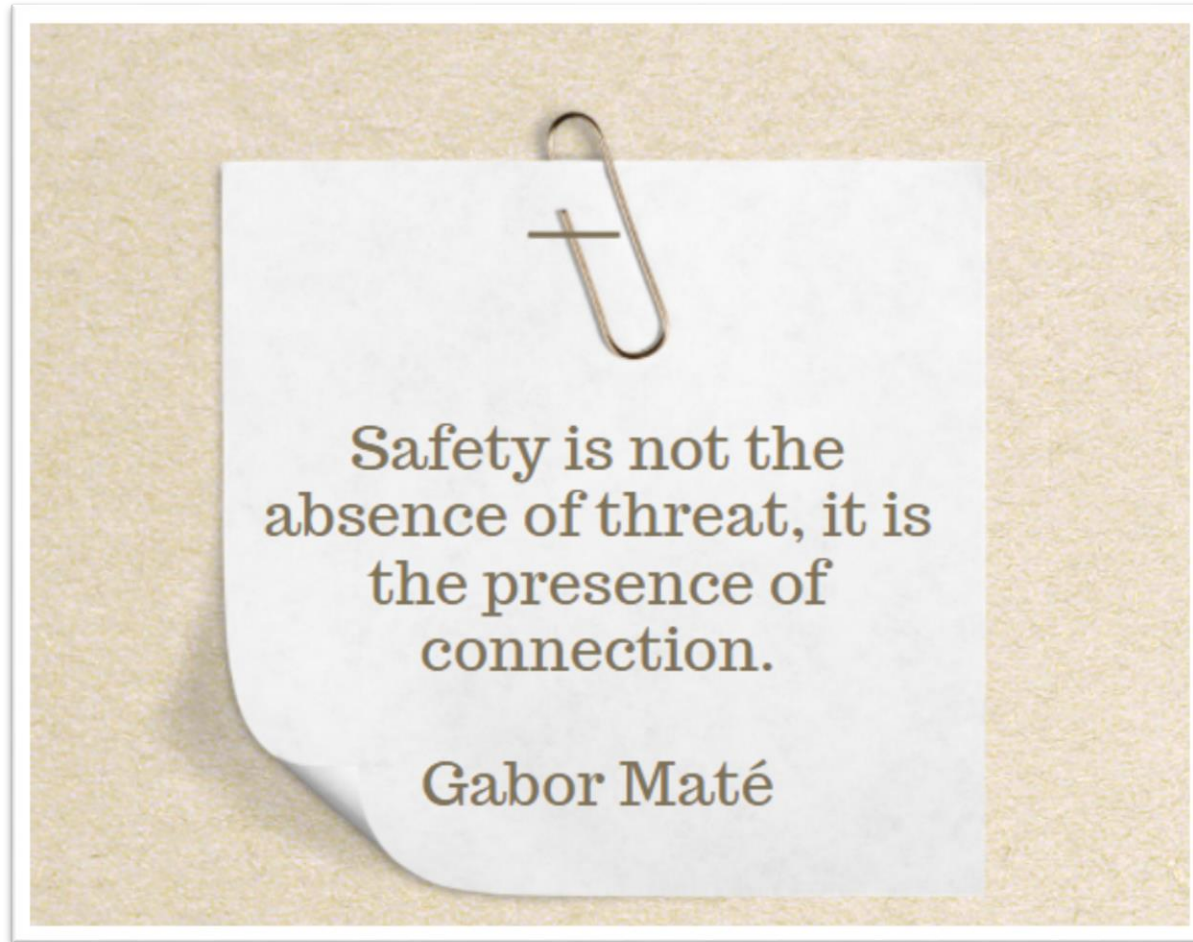
# Resilience

- ▶ **Good news!**
- ▶ **Research shows that we can develop children's resilience through 'ordinary rather than extraordinary processes'**
- ▶ **Resilience as 'ordinary magic'**
- ▶ **The No. 1 factor?**
- ▶ **A caring, nurturing relationship with a parent or caregiver.**
- ▶ **'One Good Adult'**

*'Ordinary Magic', Masten, 2001*







# Resilience

What is it that the 'one good adult' does that promotes resilience and well-being in the child?

4s of secure attachment:

▶ Seen

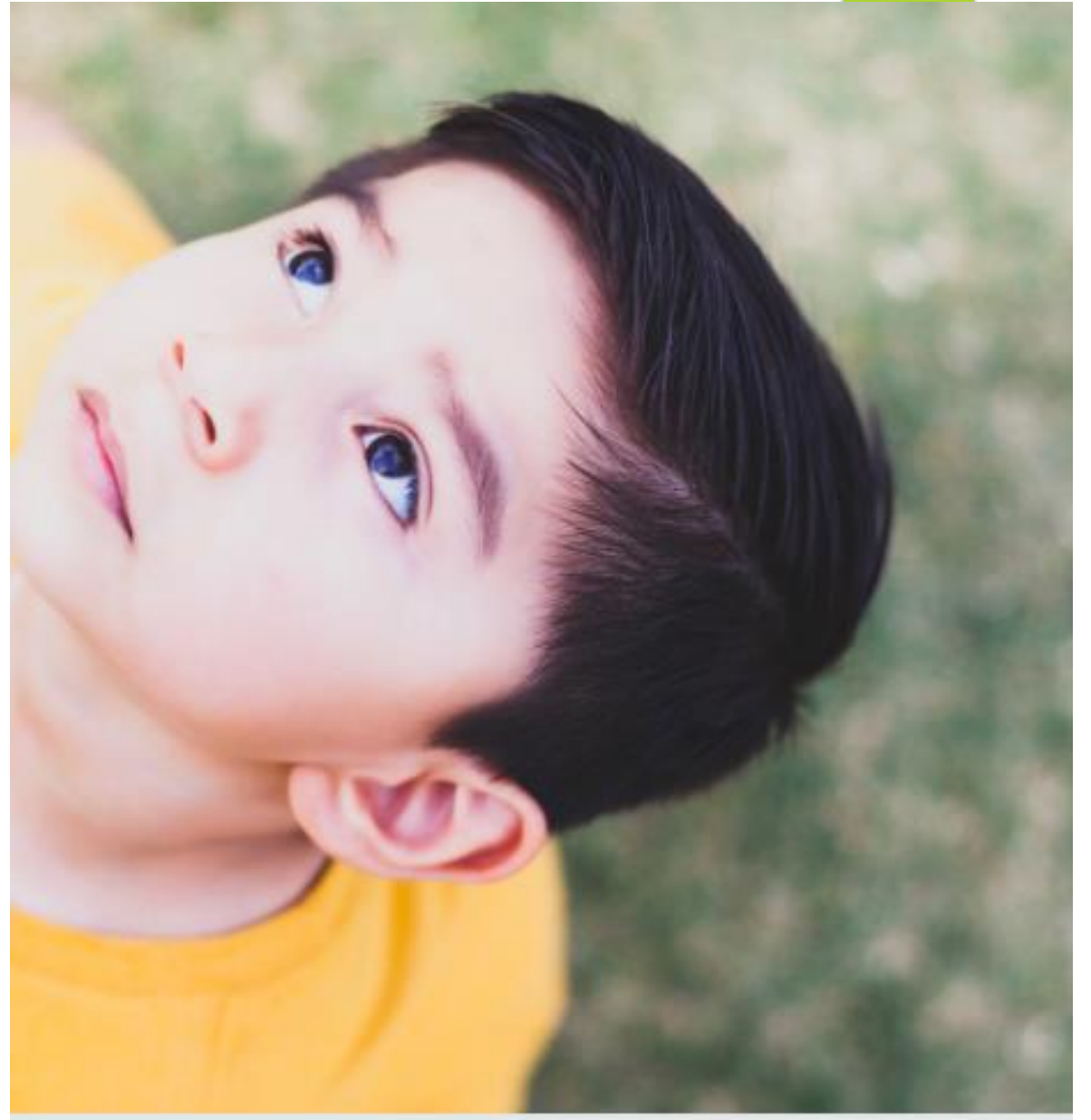


*'Do you see me?'*

This is the big question your child is asking every day.

*'Can you recognise me for who I am, different from your dreams and expectations of me, separate from your agenda for me?'*

*Shefali Tsabary*



# Resilience: 4 S's

*Dr. Dan Siegel*



**Seen**



**Safe**



**Soothed**



**Secure**

# Resilience

- ▶ How do we as parents create these 4 Ss every day and make sure our children are *seen, safe, soothed and secure*?
- ▶ Through all of the *constant, tiny, ordinary, day-to-day* interactions with our kids – listening, responding, comforting, encouraging...
- ▶ Think back to all of the little interactions you had with your child today which you might not have put much pass on...
- ▶ Can you see how you were actually creating the 4 S's?
- ▶ Realise the value of these opportunities & interactions, be mindful of them & more conscious of them – we underestimate what we are already doing!
- ▶ All time is quality time!

# Ordinary Magic!

To make a difference in someone's life, you do not have to be brilliant, rich, beautiful or perfect. You just have to care.

*Mandy Hale*



# Nurturing Resilience



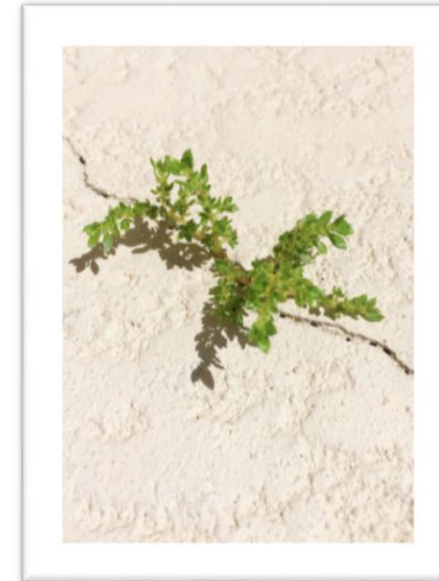
**Support &  
connection**



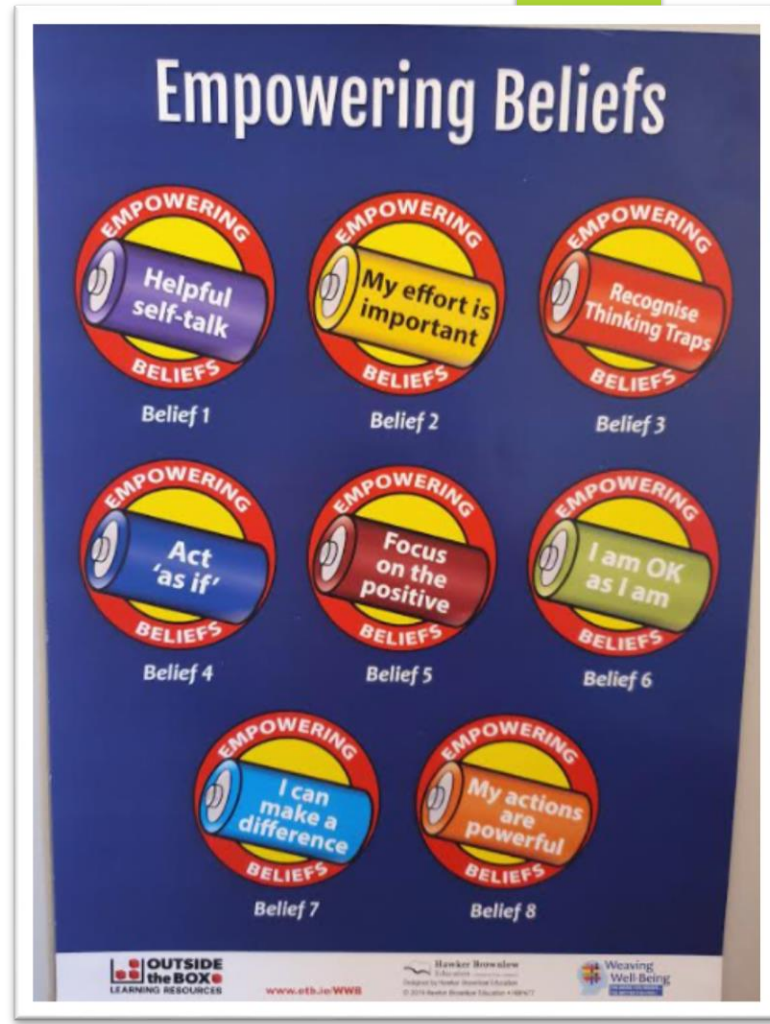
**Teaching  
resilience skills**

# How? Resilience Skills from Positive Psychology

- ▶ **1. Emotional Regulation**
- ▶ **2. Mindfulness**
- ▶ **3. Compassionate Self-Talk**
- ▶ **4. Cognitive re-framing**
- ▶ **5. Healthy Distraction**







Seligman & Peterson, (2004)

# Emotional Regulation

**Emotional Regulation is the process of consciously managing your own emotions, in order to achieve personal growth, fulfilment and goal satisfaction.**

**Linked to higher levels of life-satisfaction, well-being & resilience.**

*Mayer & Salovey, (1997).*

# How? Emotional Regulation



**Upregulate  
Positive  
Emotions**



**Downregulate  
Negative  
Emotions**

Lesson 2: All Feelings are OK!

**3** Homework Practice saying the poem "All Feelings are OK" with your family this week. Talk about all the different feelings you feel!

**All Feelings are OK**

Tell me how you feel today?  
All feelings are OK.  
Sad or happy,  
Worried or free  
Let it in and let it be.  
It will pass  
and then you'll know  
Feelings come,  
and then they go.

Two cartoon characters, one purple and one blue, standing on either side of the poem. The purple character is on the left and the blue character is on the right. They are both wearing striped shirts and have small antennae.

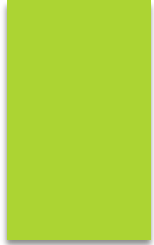
# Upregulate Positive Emotions

What do we mean when we talk about 'Positivity?'

10 particular Positive Emotions have been identified and researched through Positive Psychology

Can you name any of them?





Love

Gratitude

Interest

Joy

Pride

Hope

Amusement

Serenity

Awe

Inspiration

# Upregulate Positive Emotions

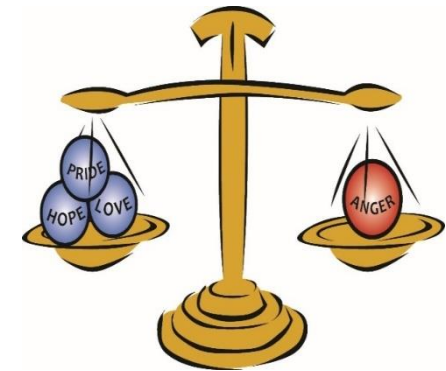
## Research:

**Ratio of a least 3: 1 of positive to negative emotions is needed for flourishing – negativity bias of the brain!**

*Diehl et al., (2011)*

**Now more important than ever!**

**Emotions are contagious!**

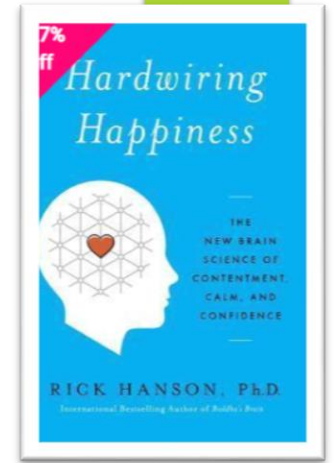


The presence of frequent positive emotions may be a stronger predictor of overall well-being and resilience in children than the experience of stressors.

*McCullough, Huebner, & Laughlin, 2000*



1. Notice & savour these micro-moments – sink in a little deeper!
2. What activities generate these emotions for you and your family?
3. Remember they buffer us from negativity – necessity not a luxury!



Love

Gratitude

Interest

Joy

Pride

Hope

Amusement

Serenity

Awe

Inspiration

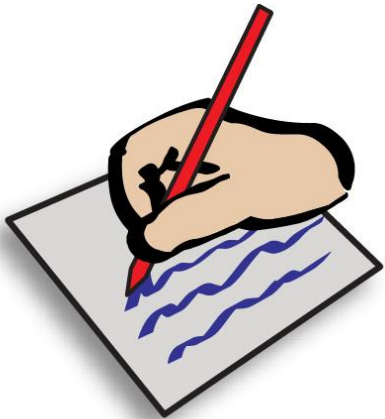
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=jpuDyGgleh0>



# Upregulate Positive Emotions

## Three Good Things

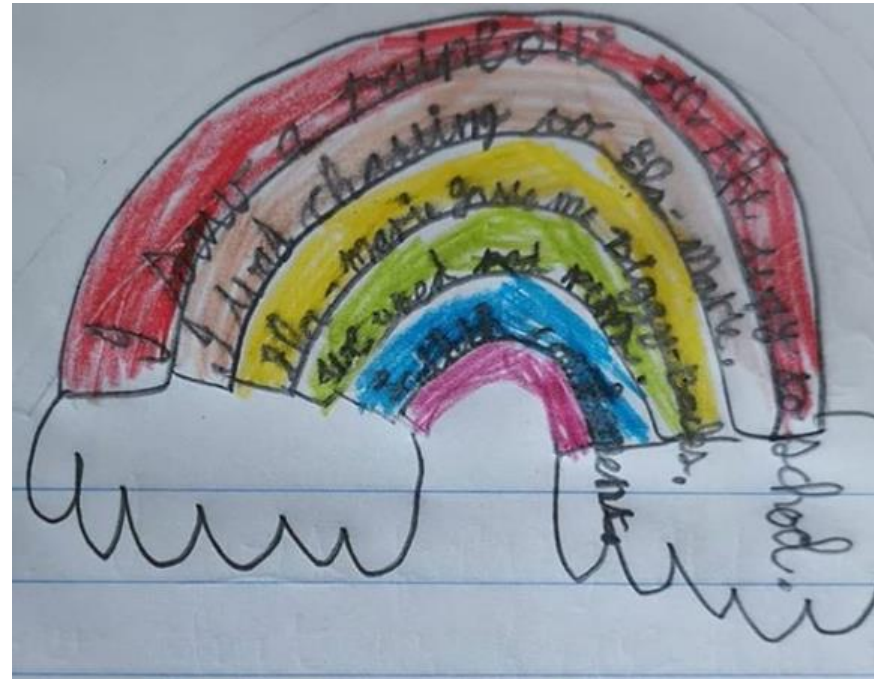
- ▶ Positive Psychology Intervention ‘Three Good Things’ –
- ▶ Write down 3 small positive events of the last 24 hours –
- ▶ Retrains the brain and counteracts the negativity bias
- ▶ Do it for at least a week!



“

Pay attention to what  
you're paying attention  
to.

Every day may not  
be good, but  
there's something  
good in every  
day!



**The little things?  
The little moments?  
They aren't little.**

**- Jon Kabat-Zinn**

# Downregulate Negative Emotions

- ▶ Our kids are experiencing a wide range of uncomfortable emotions at present –sadness, disappointment, worry, frustration, anger, fear
- ▶ Our instinct is to protect them, shield them, avoid them
- ▶ Leads to children being unfamiliar with these emotions and unable to tolerate them
- ▶ Instead we need to teach our children how to accept and express these difficult emotions – all feelings are ok!
- ▶ Remember that the experience of dealing with challenges builds resilience!



# Downregulate Negative Emotions

- ▶ This trend towards 'overprotection' is done with our children's best interests at heart!
- ▶ Balanced approach needed –common sense!
- ▶ Building resilience is done gradually – almost like 'Psychological Vaccination'- small doses!



# Downregulate Negative Emotions

- ▶ **What can we do?**
- ▶ **Allow your child to experience, accept and express these emotions safely – with support – helps them to build their resilience skills**
- ▶ **Be mindful of your own emotions – acknowledge, accept and be open to the difficult emotions that you yourself experience when you see your child upset – co-regulation**
- ▶ **Message: ‘We can cope with feeling uncomfortable’.**

# Downregulate Negative Emotions



Normalise,  
allow, accept  
express &  
validate



Don't rush in  
to try to 'Fix  
it'



Listen,  
empathise  
soothe &  
nurture –  
hugs!



Sensory  
regulation

# Downregulate Negative Emotions

Show your child that you believe in their ability to cope. Remind them of their strengths – their bravery, love, creativity, perseverance, kindness, teamwork...

“

I see your pain, and it's big.  
I also see your courage and  
it's bigger.  
You can do hard things.

GLENNON DOYLE



**Express &  
regulate!!!**

**Talk to a trusted adult**

**Physical exercise**

**Creative activities**

**Mindfulness & meditation**

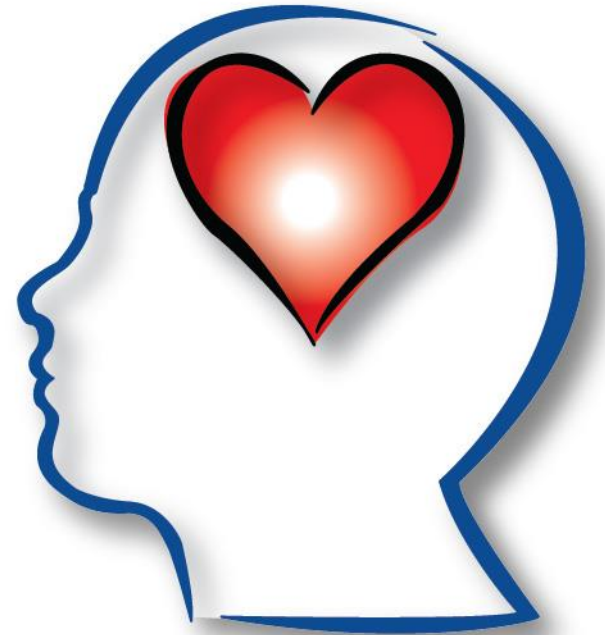
**Journaling**

**Listening to music**

**Crying**

# Compassionate Self-Talk

- ▶ **Compassionate Self-talk (kind self-talk)**
- ▶ **Teach children the power of self-compassion from an early age!**
- ▶ **More important to focus on developing their self-compassion rather than their self-esteem!**



# Compassionate Self-Talk

- ▶ Children can be very, very hard on themselves at times.
- ▶ Just like adults, they can be their own worst critics and judge themselves very harshly.
- ▶ They may be constantly comparing themselves to others and feeling that they don't quite measure up. This can start at an early age, and the pressures and challenges of modern life can make this worse as they get older.
- ▶ Constant, critical self-talk like this can lead to low confidence, increased anxiety and low self-worth.
- ▶ Make sure that you are counteracting this every day through your words and messages



The way we talk to our  
children becomes their  
inner voice.

Peggy O' Mara

**I don't have to be perfect.**

**My best is good enough.**

**I don't have to be, or feel, amazing all of the time.**

**I don't need to compare myself to anyone else.**

**I don't need to have everything figured out right now.**

**Aim for progress, not perfection.**

**I'm stronger than I feel right now.**

**I don't need to beat myself up over this!**

**Pause, breathe, keep going!**

**Nobody has it all figured out!**

**I can cope with my strong feelings.**

**What can I do right now to help myself to feel better?**

**3**

### Homework

Read the poem 'Hand to heart' with your family this week.

#### Hand to heart

When I'm feeling  
small or sad,  
not good enough  
or just plain bad.

I put my hand  
against my heart  
and tell myself  
I'm strong and smart.

I'm good enough  
just being me  
and no-one's perfect  
as can be.

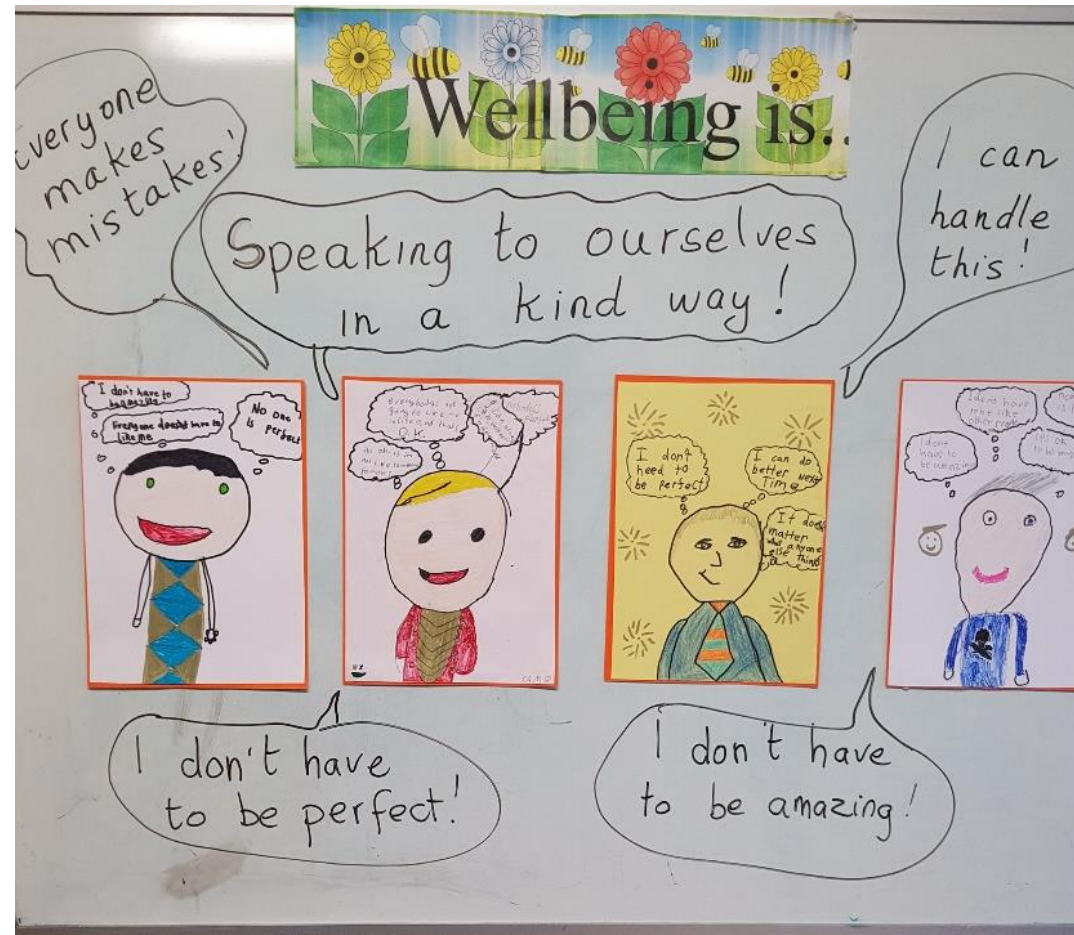
So then I smile  
and smile a lot.  
I'm good enough  
no matter what.

Draw a picture of yourself showing how you used your 'Hand to heart' this week.



Don't forget Mo and Ko's Challenge this week is to remember that you are

# Compassionate Self-Talk



# Final messages!

- ▶ Remember that resilience is *ordinary magic* and there are lots of things you can do to enhance it!
- ▶ Spend time nurturing the unique connection you have with your child – you are building the 4 S's!
- ▶ Remember that challenges bring psychological vaccinations! These can prepare your child for the inevitable disappointments and challenges of life!

# Final Messages!

- ▶ **Look after your own well-being and remember to prioritise self-care!**
- ▶ **Take the time to savour and enjoy this precious time with your child!**

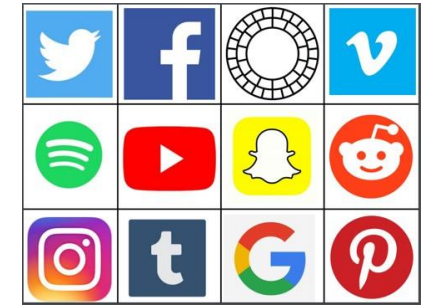


Promise me you'll always  
remember –  
You're braver than you  
believe,  
Stronger than you seem,  
Smarter than you think  
And loved more than you  
know  
A. A. Milne



# Thank you & questions!

- ▶ Thanks so much again for the opportunity!
- ▶ Thanks so much for joining me!
- ▶ Contact – [fiona.forman@gmail.com](mailto:fiona.forman@gmail.com)
- ▶ Twitter - @FionaWellBeing
- ▶ Facebook – Fiona Forman Well-Being
- ▶ Instagram –fionaformanwellbeing



# Further Reading

- ▶ **Online article: Ideas for Supporting an Anxious Child (Fiona Forman)**
- ▶ <https://www.alustforlife.com/tools/mental-health/supporting-an-anxious-child>

## Books

- ▶ **Love in, Love Out** – Dr. Malie Coyne
- ▶ **The Whole Brain Child** – Dr. Dan Siegel & Dr. Tina Payne Bryson
- ▶ **Perfectly Imperfect Parenting** – Dr. Mary O’Kane

