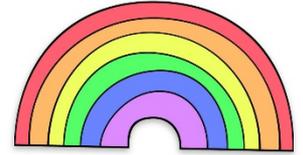
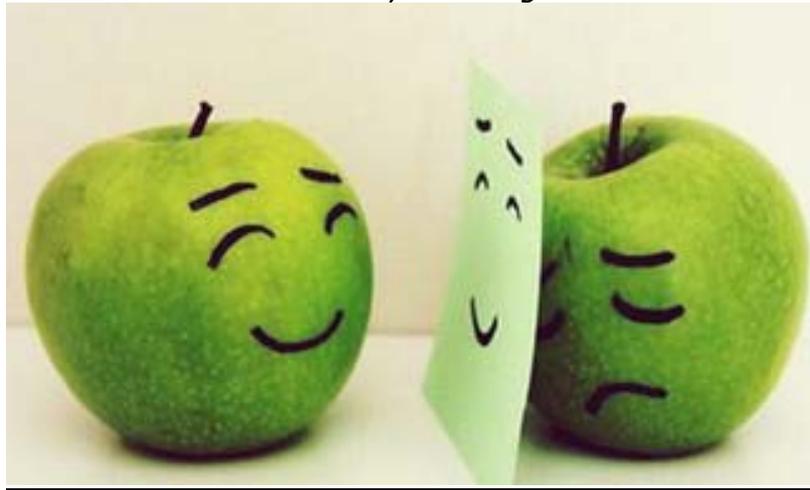




How are you feeling?



"There is no health without mental health." (World Health Organisation, 2009)

Emotional health is just as important as physical health, and both can be severely compromised during these unsettling times. **Self-care** is more important than ever; we are often the last person we think about and look after.

It's so important during these unprecedented times to enable us to be as resilient as possible for ourselves, and also to manage and alleviate our children's worries and to provide them with much needed reassurance.

Hopefully you will find these links helpful:

Mental Wellbeing audio guides- from NHS Every Mind Matters

Understanding anxiety - colourful guide from the Priory Group

A free app for sleep, anxiety and stress- from Insight Timer

e-learning: staying mentally well through Covid19 - from Pooky Knightsmith

Working from home wellbeing action plan - from the Charlie Waller Memorial Trust

With this in mind, as we move towards schools re-opening, we wanted to outline our guiding principles for how to move forward through this transition as smoothly as possible.

We are thinking of adopting the following imagery and acronym:



With huge thanks and credit to Dr Pooky Knightsmith from Creative Education.

Safe

We want you and your children to feel safe, calm and reassured. We all need to know that it will be okay to come back to school, so we are already working on creating an environment that is and feels physically and emotionally safe for all of us. We want to build up predictability and consistency around hygiene and other safety rules which school staff will role-model noticeably and praise the children for following accordingly. We will support any child through any misunderstandings and refer to the benefits of what we are doing.

It's so important that you, as parents and carers, are aware of the differences your children will see in school when they return. We really need you to start to reinforce our new rules and messages at home before your children come back to school. We have produced two leaflets for you to share with your children: one for Foundation Stage and Key Stage One and one for Key Stage Two. If you can, please take some time to look at these with your children in the coming days and weeks. It's vital that they are as prepared as possible. Although we will do our very best to make school as 'normal' as possible, it will be a different school environment to the one they are used to.

We hope to involve the children to some extent in co-creating rules surrounding playtimes; if we work with them, they will have a sense of ownership and the rules would have more meaning for them.

Welcoming

When the children return, we want them to feel excited and happy about coming into school and we want them to know that we are genuinely delighted to have them back and to be able to see them again. We have sincerely missed them. They will need to know that they belong, and feel a part of things and we will do everything we can to enable this. We have many values at Red Oaks, but Friendship, Happiness, Unity (which is the value we are continuing into term 6) are more important than ever at this unsettling time.

All Togetherness

So, how can we generate these warm, welcoming feelings of care and nurture when we can't touch and need to keep a safe distance? We need to create a truly inclusive environment in which the children feel surrounded by care and support and know that they can rely on all of the adults around them. We will all be reinforcing the same messages and sense of togetherness. There is nothing quite like our Red Oaks Team!

Nurturing

Recent research conducted at Reading University highlights the importance of allowing the children time and space to play and to re-connect both socially and emotionally with their friends and classmates. We will be playing the long game here, not rushing ahead with trying to make up for lost time or to add intense academic pressure and stress to the children, some of whom are already in a high alert state.

We will focus primarily on settling your children in, on meeting their social and emotional needs first and foremost, as well as on their readiness to learn skills. The general expert consensus is that we should be laying the foundations for them in terms of nurture, not solely teaching them in the plain, traditional sense.

This Covid generation of children are going to be unique and we want to enable them to flourish. We have the potential to do a lot of good here and to repair the significant rupture that this virus has caused. We want to prepare our children to be strong adults in the future as well as happy and resilient children in their present.

Anticipating their concerns

It's important to recognise that each child is unique. They may have had very different experiences of Home Learning and staying at home, even within the same family. Many children will naturally have mixed feelings and attitudes about coming back to school.

A tip is to be alert and attuned to how your child is feeling as they might have a particular worry about returning to school that can be addressed. With younger children (3-7), playing together may be your best way of identifying what their concerns are. They often play and draw what they are thinking about, sometimes repeatedly. Observing role play can be particularly informative with the younger age group: what they act out with dolls, teddies and action figures can give a real insight into what's going on inside their heads. With older children, talking can be easier through a shared activity like going for a walk, baking a cake or doing some gardening together. Children often find it easier to talk when doing an activity because it is less confrontational. They will naturally feel more relaxed and conversation will flow much more easily.

We would like to take this opportunity, as a whole staff, to say a huge **THANK YOU** for everything that you are doing to support your children at home. We know it's not easy. Juggling home schooling alongside working from home and other family responsibilities is really tough. Like your amazing children, you have risen to the challenge and are guiding them through these unsettling times whilst trying to keep everything 'normal'.



"You're not failing at anything - you're surviving everything"
(Nin Sambhi - Life Coach)

5 Steps to Well-Being

The NHS has put together a 5 step guide for improving mental health and well-being.

Evidence suggests there are 5 steps you can take to improve your mental health and wellbeing. Trying these things could help you feel more positive and able to get the most out of life.

<https://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/Pages/improve-mental-wellbeing.aspx>:

If you give them a try, you may feel happier, more positive and able to get the most from life.

- **Connect** - connect with the people around you: your family, friends, colleagues and neighbours. Spend time developing these relationships. Learn more in [Connect for mental wellbeing](#).
- **Be active** - you don't have to go to the gym. Take a walk, go cycling or play a game of football. Find an activity that you enjoy and make it a part of your life. Learn more in [Get active for mental wellbeing](#).
- **Keep learning** - learning new skills can give you a sense of achievement and a new confidence. So why not sign up for that cooking course, start learning to play a musical instrument, or figure out how to fix your bike? Find out more in [Learn for mental wellbeing](#).
- **Give to others** - even the smallest act can count, whether it's a smile, a thank you or a kind word. Larger acts, such as volunteering at your local community centre, can improve your mental wellbeing and help you build new social networks. Learn more in [Give for mental wellbeing](#).
- **Be mindful** - be more aware of the present moment, including your thoughts and feelings, your body and the world around you. Some people call this awareness "mindfulness". It can positively change the way you feel about life and how you approach challenges. Learn more in [Mindfulness for mental wellbeing](#).