

COVID-19 has led to unprecedented measures that have temporarily transformed life for us all. Through it all, however, schools have worked tirelessly to support their children, families and local communities. This continuing connection to school and normality has been an anchor point of stability in a strange new way of living. Thank you for all your outstanding, innovative and impactful efforts - The Education Team

## Pause for thought: The Chains of Worry

In Matthew 6:34, Jesus says, "So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today." This is not pessimistically stating that life is always going to be hard. Rather, Jesus' more helpful message in this section is that none of us can see the future, yet we can be chained by fearing it, preventing us from dealing effectively with the present. The current popularity of mindfulness is based upon this foundation of being present in the "now". You might like to take time to watch this TED talk – [Breaking Free from Anxiety](#). The Greek philosopher Heraclitus stated "change is the only constant in life." Loosing the chains of anxiety can help us thrive, even in the current challenging circumstances. *[If you have time, you might also want to view this TED talk – [How to Make Stress Your Friend](#) – it could change the way you think about stress!]*

## A Sense of Belonging

Before lockdown, every weekend hundreds of thousands of people would put on their team colours and go to watch live sport. One of the many reasons for this phenomena is that we have an innate need as humans to feel that we belong and sitting in a stadium full of likeminded people helps us to feel that sense of belonging.

For many children and staff, our schools are the perfect places to provide this sense of belonging that is such a key foundation for well-being and good mental health. Church schools are founded on the idea of the intrinsic value of each individual and the passionate desire to see each of these reach their full potential. They are loving, nurturing communities that support everyone to grow and thrive.

How do we achieve the aim that everyone feels this sense of belonging in our school family? Some of the important elements are:

- **Having something people want to belong to** – Your distinctive Christian vision, based on the needs of your community and lived out through your Christian values, should be one that draws people in. If it has been developed with the whole

community involved then there will be a sense of ownership and engagement from the start.

- **Removing barriers to belonging** – Sometimes the things we do, often unintentionally, can give someone an idea that they don't belong. We must carefully seek out these barriers and remove them.
- **Being a people who can be trusted** – whether in our dealings with staff or our perseverance with children, the integrity and trustworthiness in how we treat people makes them feel their value to us.

In these times of isolation due to lockdown, there has been much advice about practical ways to stay healthy and feel well. But, alongside that and equally as important, this sense of belonging can be crucial in helping people cope, providing a firm foundation and supporting their mental health. Continuing to reach out and remind people of the school family to which they belong is one of our most important tasks. However, when we return, we will also need to spend time re-establishing and deepening this sense of belonging. Only when this is achieved will normality really begin to return and will children and adults be ready to fully flourish again.

### Digging Deeper:

- [Relationship & Belonging – Mentally Healthy](#)
- [Belonging – Mindset Scholars Network](#)
- [If you want students to learn, they need to feel they belong – Leadership Matters](#)
- [Mental Health and Well-being guidance for schools – Church of England](#)

Our one day course 'Everyone Flourishing: Supporting Mental Health & Well-being' is being held on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2021. To book, please follow [this link to the Eventbrite booking form](#).