

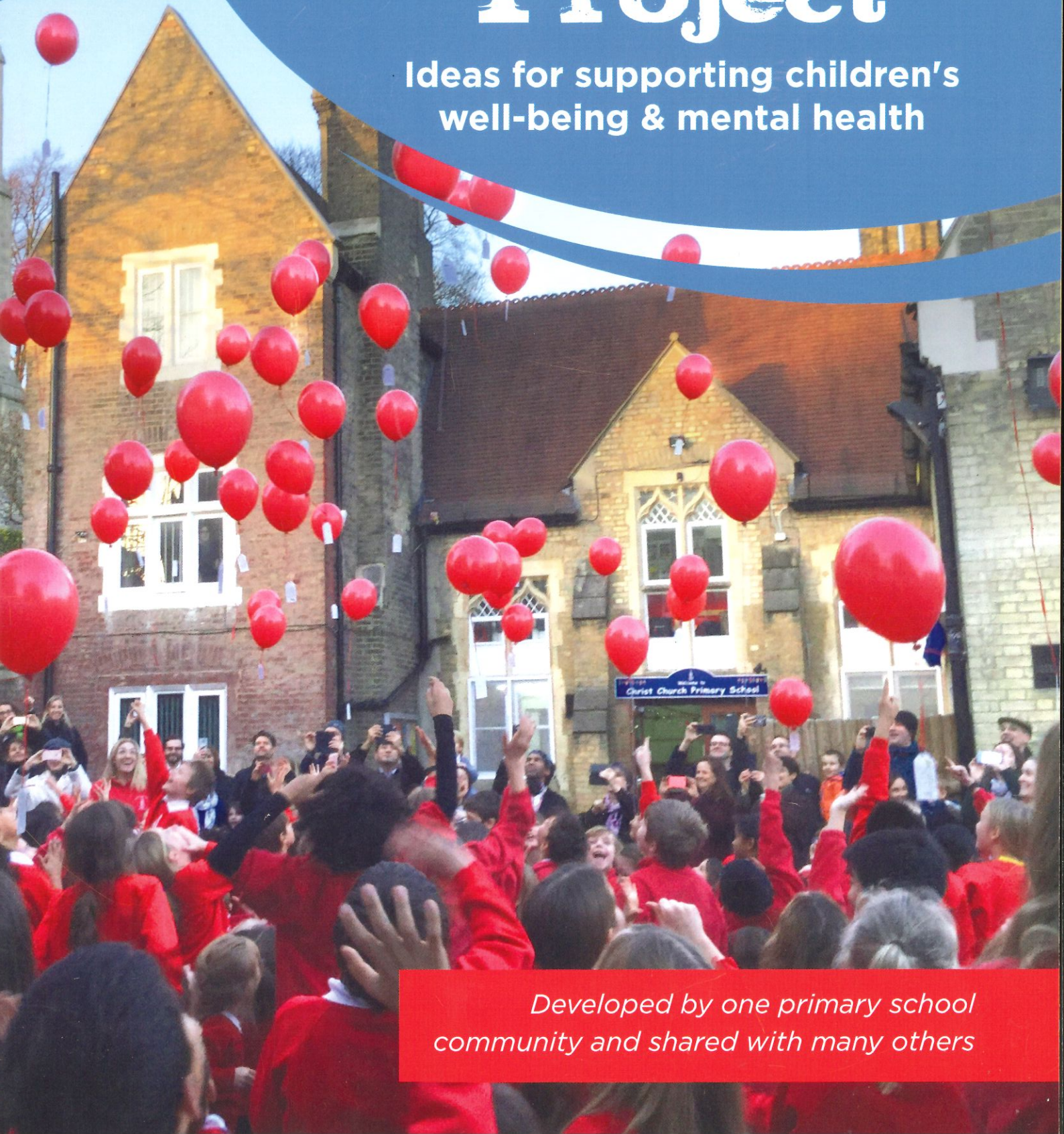


Christ Church School, Hampstead

A village school in London inspiring *life in all its fullness*

Happiness Project

Ideas for supporting children's
well-being & mental health



*Developed by one primary school
community and shared with many others*

**“At Christ Church
our first priority
is for children
and adults to
be happy in
our school.”**

– Katy Forsdyke, Head Teacher

A note from the Headteacher

Aims of our Happiness Project

At Christ Church our first priority is for children and adults to be happy in our school and we are very proud of the positive relationships that exist in our school community. These positive relationships and the happy atmosphere of our school ensure that children are ready to learn and make good progress.

When we developed our first whole school Happiness Project in 2016, we didn't do it because the children and adults in our school were unhappy – we were already a happy school community! Instead, our aims in devising and running our Happiness Project were

- to raise awareness of mental health issues in a way that was accessible in a primary school;
- to help the children and adults in our school community maintain positive emotional well-being for themselves and others;
- to ensure everyone knew when and where to seek help if they needed it.

We know that all children (and adults) experience times when they are less happy and, through our Happiness Project, we wanted to equip them with a range of strategies they could use to help themselves and others at these times. Our hope is that children will be able to fall back on one or more of the themes or activities introduced in our Happiness Project at a moment in the future when they may be feeling a little sad, overwhelmed or anxious. We also hope that children will use what they have learnt to spread a little happiness outside our school, too.

Over the past few years, our Happiness Projects have brought us all great joy and inspiration – after all, what could be better than spending time talking and learning about happiness!

Support for other schools

Our original term-long project was loosely based on the ten themes on the Action for Happiness website, but we have since refined and developed the themes to make them our own and as accessible to any primary school community as possible.

In naming our initiative the Happiness Project, we are not setting up the expectation that everyone can be happy all the time – we know this isn't possible or even desirable. However, we are trying to make sure we look at mental health and emotional well-being in a positive way, whilst, at the same time, equipping children with the tools to identify and manage the full range of emotions.

After a successful Happiness Project in Autumn 2016 and selected legacy activities planned throughout the 2017/18 school year to keep the Happiness themes and ideas fresh in everyone's minds, and after interest from other schools in our mental health work, we decided to expand and develop our project and re run it over the Autumn term 2018. At the same time, we were successful in securing a Camden Learning Bursary with the twin aims of enabling us to support other schools in running similar projects and of using our local Educational Psychology Service to support us in evaluating the impact of the project. Our quantitative

and qualitative evaluations show that our work does have a positive impact on the emotional well-being of children, as well as equipping staff members, parents and the children themselves with the tools to keep themselves and others happy.

We have now supported several successful Happiness Projects in other schools, developing several different formats; for example, local schools have now run projects over an entire academic year, rather than over a more intensive term, and have worked with a targeted small intervention group rather than the whole school. We have shared our work with schools across Camden in various forums and we have now started working with both maintained and independent schools further afield, as well as local secondary schools to adapt and develop our Happiness Project for new audiences and settings.

Nothing in our Happiness Project is very complex or difficult to implement and much of it can be put in place with little additional funding and also adapted to fit with your setting and aims. However, our experience shows us that for a Happiness Project to be successful it does need real commitment from school leaders and the wider staff team: a commitment to introducing or reinforcing each theme in an assembly or at whole school events, a commitment to giving time in a school's already-busy timetable to activities that support emotional well-being and a commitment to keeping parents informed about and involved in the project.



We think that emotional well-being, mental health and happiness are important topics for every school to be tackling and we would love to share our work more widely with other schools. Please have a look at our website or we would be happy to meet with any school that would like to find out more about our ideas, our resources or how we have evaluated our work.

We would love to hear from you!

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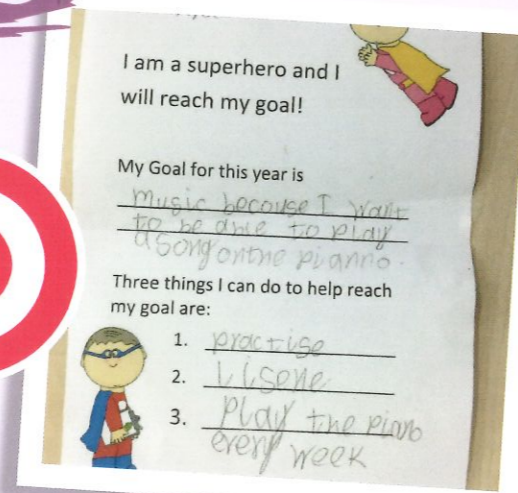
Our ten themes

Setting goals

Set yourself goals to look forward to

Goals give us direction and a sense of control, they can boost our confidence and give us something to look forward to.

- Take an opportunity like the beginning of the school year for everyone to set themselves a goal. Get everyone to aim high but also remember to set the stepping stones you need to take to reach the goal. Store the goals away somewhere and then open them up at the end of the year to see how everyone has done. Have you achieved your goal or one of the stepping stones towards it or have you achieved something different and better instead?



- Think about a future dream job and the stepping stones as well as skills and attributes needed to achieve it.
- Write a letter from your future self, explaining how you have managed to achieve your goals.



Giving

Give to others



Giving to others creates a ripple effect, spreading happiness to others and making the giver feel happier, too.

- Think about what you can give to others that doesn't cost any money – a smile, a compliment, time, respect, support, help or thanks.
- Hold a charity event or find out about volunteering in your local area. Ask someone who volunteers how it makes them feel.
- Involve parents by creating a school giving tree.



Family & friends

Connect with others



- Relationships with family and friends are key to helping us feel happy. Celebrate, value and nurture these relationships by making time for and listening to each other.
- Make friendship bracelets for a new friend in the school and have a special break time to swap them. You can make friendship bracelets in lots of different creative ways.
 - Find out about your family and create family trees.
 - Write letters or draw pictures for family members that you don't often see – ask parents to send in addresses, send off the letters and then wait for the happy replies!

I TRIED SOMETHING NEW



Try something new

Keep learning new things

Trying new things helps to keep us curious and creative as well as helping to build confidence and resilience. You might just find a new skill, talent or hobby, too!

- Hold a 'try something new' week or day. Possible activities include skateboarding, circus skills, balloon modelling, cartoon drawing, robot making, making music instruments and special art projects.
- Take the opportunity to think about how you feel before and after you try something new and to make links to other themes in the project such as the importance of acceptance of your own strengths and weaknesses and the need for resilience.

Emotions

Look for what's good



It's important to be able to recognise and name emotions, both positive and negative.

Humans have a natural negative bias, but focusing more on the positive emotions can help squeeze more joy and happiness out of life. Gratitude, being thankful and appreciative can have a powerful effect on our levels of happiness.

- Use drama workshops or stories to think about the range of emotions we experience.
- Make emotions necklaces or books to help you recognise emotions in other people.
- Create your own emojis.
- Keep a gratitude diary, noting down three positive things from each day.

Healthy body

Take care of your body



Keeping our bodies healthy helps us to maintain positive mental health and well-being.

- Learn about the importance of a healthy diet, including plenty of water, exercise and the right amount of sleep.
- Introduce a school 'wake and shake' session every morning or every week or hold skipping or yoga workshops.
- Launch a new 'hydration station' or salad bar at lunch time or work with your catering provider to introduce new fruits and vegetables to try.
- Give each class a fitness tracker which children take it in turns to wear for a day – use the data for data handling activities in maths.
- Share top tips for getting to sleep.



Mindfulness

Live life with awareness



"Mindfulness is a Superpower that everyone can have!"

Mindfulness, or paying attention to what is happening in that moment, can help us to feel happier by calming our brain and enabling us to deal with negative emotions and make better decisions.

- Learn some breathing exercises or relaxation techniques.
- Build short mindfulness activities into the school day, especially after busy break times.
- Make glitter calming bottles to take home.
- Hold mindfulness workshops for children, parents and staff.
- Take walks in the local area to appreciate the natural world around us.

Resilience

Find a way to bounce back

The importance of resilience runs through many of the Happiness Project themes.

Knowing when to ask for help, having supportive family and friends around us, keeping our bodies healthy, understanding our emotions and knowing our strengths and weaknesses can all help to build our resilience.

- Introduce the concept of 'bounce back ability' with a weebill!
- Give everyone some impossible puzzles – how do they make us feel?
- Make stress balls from flour, rice and balloons.
- Use this opportunity to talk about asking for help with your feelings – when should you ask for help and who can you go to? Talk about the importance of listening to each other or use the Anna Freud 'You're never too young to talk about mental health' resources.



Celebrating differences

Be comfortable with who you are

Everyone is unique and we all have so many differences to celebrate and be proud of. It is important to know and accept ourselves as we are, to be kind to ourselves and to be aware of our strengths and weaknesses, too.

- Use fingerprints to create characters or art work celebrating everyone's uniqueness.
- Create a 'happiness tree' with a leaf from every member of the school community saying why they are unique and wonderful.
- Differences or perceived differences are often a trigger for unkind behaviour or bullying so consider how to link this theme to your anti-bullying work. Perhaps hold an odd sock day!



Belonging

Be part of something bigger

Belonging to something bigger gives us meaning, purpose and happiness in our lives. Working together in groups or teams helps to connect us together and give us common goals.

- Think about and share the wide range of groups we all belong to: our school, our classes, our families, faith groups, clubs, sports teams or music groups.
- Create a whole school jigsaw with each piece filled with the faces and names of a class and the school's parents, staff and governors.
- Join together in a whole school event like a concert or a sports event.



Celebration!

End your Happiness Project with a whole school celebration event to remind everyone of the ten themes.

This could be a concert – get everyone to nominate songs that make them feel happy - or even a biodegradable balloon release to send messages of happiness into the wider world. You never know, you might get some messages back!



Getting everyone involved



It's important that the Happiness Project and your work on mental health reaches every member of your school community so that messages can be reinforced by all staff members and at home, too, and so that the whole school community can support each other.

- Hold parent workshops on issues such as 'what is mental health?', positive self-esteem, resilience or the importance of sleep or healthy eating.
- Send home a letter or email to parents about each theme and how they can get involved or support at home.
- Take the opportunity to hold staff training sessions on topics related to mental health.
- Give children stickers related to each theme to wear home when they have completed a Happiness Project activity – this will keep the learning and conversation going with family members.
- Set up a Happiness or well-being community notice board including reminders of key messages and signposting to sources of help and support.

Evaluation & impact

Our LA Educational Psychology service helped us to carry out a quantitative evaluation of our projects using a Happiness Scale pre- and post-questionnaire and we found that children's scores in all year groups increased as a result of our work on emotional well-being.

However, the best evidence of the impact of our work comes from comments from children, staff and parents and from the way every member of our school community continues to support each other.

FEEDBACK

“ I have learned that trying new things and giving to others, like giving a smile, makes you feel happy. ”

- Child

“ The main thing is that my child now knows that being happy can be within her own control. I also thought the focus on resilience was excellent. It has definitely added confidence and made her think of other people's happiness as well as her own. ”

- Parent



“ It has given them a vocabulary and way of expressing their feelings with far greater nuance. ”

- Parent

“ There are so many different things we can do ourselves to make us 'happy' - so many things I can personally do for myself, for others at school and to pass on to my own children. ”

- Staff member



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