

## SECONDARY-AGE ACTIVITIES

**These ideas to explore the theme 'EXPRESS YOURSELF' are designed for secondary-age young people. They can be adapted for use in school, for home-schooling, online lessons or independent learning.**

**To differentiate or simplify the content, refer to our primary-age group activities.**

**Below are a few key teaching points to consider and discuss with your child or group before engaging in 'EXPRESS YOURSELF' activities.**

### WHAT IS SELF-EXPRESSION, AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Self-expression is about communicating your individuality. This can be through words, clothing and hairstyle, or through art forms such as writing, drawing, music and dance.

Self-expression can help you to showcase your true self – your story, your thoughts, feelings and emotions. But this can also make us feel vulnerable, so you might want to take things one step at a time.

We often get told by our family, friends, school, communities and through social media how we 'should' look, think, speak, and act. These constant messages about what we ought to do, and who we ought to be, can make it difficult to let go of expectations and express our true selves.

### SELF-EXPRESSION HELPS US CONNECT TO OUR TRUE SELF

Self-expression is a great way to relieve yourself of stress and free your mind. Self-expression can help you to reflect on your life, actions, decisions, relationships, beliefs, and thoughts — rather than keep them buried deep down.

### SELF-EXPRESSION HELPS US CONNECT TO EACH OTHER – IN GOOD TIMES AND BAD

By expressing ourselves thoughtfully, we can better communicate, collaborate and build a community with others. At times of crisis, people come together to express themselves individually, and as a group, through the arts.

*Here are some examples:*

- *Gareth Malone's online choir* – bringing self-isolating singers together during the Covid-19 lockdown.
- *Grayson's Art Club* – a series of online masterclasses to help unleash creativity during the Covid-19 lockdown.
- *BBC Lockdown Orchestra* – as part of a ten-day creative challenge, nearly 1,500 members of the public joined the newly formed BBC Lockdown Orchestra as part of a huge virtual performance.
- *Create2030 Solidarity Art Shows* – The World Health Organisation, Create2030 and a group of international working artists collaborated on a project to showcase films, music, poetry and visual art about the COVID-19 pandemic.
- *Te Rito Toi* – using art to help children when they first return back to school in New Zealand following a traumatic or life-changing event.

## ACTIVITY IDEAS

Use different ideas, mediums and art forms to encourage self-expression in your pupils. Even if they don't think of themselves as creative, it's important to create an environment that encourages pupils to explore and be playful so that they can express themselves freely and without judgement.

This is not about producing great art or performances. This is about helping children and young people to connect with their true selves and to others.

Mediums and art forms you may consider include: simple craft making, sculpture, junk modelling, mask making, murals, weaving, painting, photography, film, digital art, dance, drama, mime, poetry and literature, music, singing, gardening and cooking. But there are lots more to choose from.

**Here are some ideas you can try with your group to help children express themselves through:**

### 1. HAVE A GO AT DEFINING YOURSELF

Talk to your students about the idea of us all being a work in progress. You can use Psychiatrist Thomas Szasz's statement as a springboard for discussion:



" THE SELF IS NOT SOMETHING THAT ONE FINDS. IT IS SOMETHING THAT ONE CREATES. "

Consider the following:

- Make sure that your definitions aren't overly narrow or limiting.
- Keep yourself open to new experiences, talents, interests, passions, and opportunities.
- Being an adolescent is all about creating our own identity and expressing it!

## 2. PICK A QUOTATION THAT MEANS SOMETHING TO YOU

Encourage students to choose a quotation about self-expression that resonates with them. This could have been said by a famous person, or selected from a song or book etc.

Here are some examples you could use:

- o Brenda Ueland: "Everybody is talented because everybody who is human has something to express."
- o Fay Weldon: "The desire for self-expression afflicts people when they feel there is something of themselves which is not getting through to the outside world."
- o Deeyah Khan: "Self-expression should not be a challenge that demands extraordinary talent but should be a right accessible to all."
- o Criss Jami: "Everyone has their own ways of expression. I believe we all have a lot to say, but finding ways to say it is more than half the battle."
- o Mahatma Gandhi: "I want freedom for the full expression of my personality."
- o Maya Angelou: "There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you."

Ask your students to put their quotation in the middle of a large piece of paper. Allow them to use art and craft materials to express themselves creatively around the text. You might want to use some of the following questions as prompts: How does this quote make you feel? What does it make you think of? What colours or shapes reflect how you feel when you read this quote?

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## 3. MAKE A PHOTO MONTAGE OR SHORT VIDEO THAT EXPRESSES WHO YOU ARE AS A PERSON

Encourage your students to make a short video or photo montage about themselves. This could include their current likes and dislikes, strengths, interests, dreams and passions.

Alternatively, you may like to challenge your students to complete a 7-day photo challenge during **Children's Mental Health Week**, for instance taking one photo a day that captures expresses some aspect of themselves, either literally or in abstract form.

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## 4. WRITE A DAILY JOURNAL

Encourage students to keep a daily journal in which they write about whatever comes to mind. Suggest that it can be helpful to carry around an ideas book with you. Jotting down your thoughts can also help you to problem-solve — mind maps are a great tool for this. Creating vision boards about your future dreams and aspirations can also help to motivate and inspire you.

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## 5. MAKE INSIDE-OUTSIDE BOXES

Follow these simple instructions:

- decorate a box with images and words on the outside to represent the qualities you show to the world
  - decorate the inside of the box with images and words that represent the inner qualities, interests and passions that are hidden to most people
  - discuss why we all do this and what stops us sharing all of ourselves with others.
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## 6. SING TOGETHER

If safe to do so, encourage students to sing songs together that focus on self-expression and being your authentic self.

Here are some songs your students could try:

'If you want to sing out, sing out' by Cat Stevens: <https://bit.ly/3iesKBg>

'Express yourself' by Labrinth <https://bit.ly/3kSm8tS>

'Roar' by Katy Perry <https://bit.ly/349L2hZ>

'Brown skin girl' by Beyoncé <https://bit.ly/2GIOnlK>

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## 7. HAVE A DEBATE IN YOUR CLASS

There are lots of ways that you can express yourself as an individual — but some ways are celebrated and accepted more than others. Many people will also feel like they don't have the freedom to express themselves in the way that they'd like to.

Ask your class to come up with a topic around self-expression that they'd like to debate.

We've put together a list of topic ideas to get you started:

- Debate whether YOLO means you can do and express yourself in any way you like. Watch this video of George the Poet to help guide your discussion: <https://bit.ly/33d0Q4j>
  - Does social media promote self-expression?
  - Philosopher Noam Chomsky said: "If we don't believe in freedom of expression for people we despise, we don't believe in it at all."
  - American singer-songwriter Isaac Hayes said: "Self-expression is always a right, but it's still not there to be abused."
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## 8. UNDERSTANDING DANCE AS A FORM OF SELF-CARE

Watch the following videos as inspiration for how dancing can be used as a way to de-stress, join together and express your identity:

- o Dancing Di' Stress Away by Study in Sweden <https://bit.ly/33cBHGO>
- o Dance as self-care by Anna Freud NCCF <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ISxmYT4fbBQ>

Invite students to make up fun dances together. Remember the focus is on having fun and expressing yourself — not on being the world's best dancer!

## 9. DISCUSS THE IMPORTANCE OF TALKING ABOUT YOUR FEELINGS

Choose a video clip and discuss why it is important to acknowledge to ourselves, and express to others, how we are feeling.

Here are a few videos and podcasts you could look at:

- o Premiership football stars and Prince William discuss the importance of looking after your mental health: <https://bit.ly/33bFOD1> (Teacher note: please note the conversation touches on some serious issues including suicide)
- o Nadiya Hussain, the winner of The Great British Bake Off, talks about living with a panic disorder: <https://bit.ly/2S65lYa>
- o Little Mix star Jade Thirwall talks about how she's exploring her Arab heritage on the No Country for Young Women podcast: <https://bbc.in/2S7P4Si> (You may choose to play an extract for example 11:54-14:01, Teacher note: Contains strong language, adult humour and content of a sexual nature).

## OTHER WAYS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH WEEK

1. Hold a '**DRESS TO EXPRESS**' day to raise vital funds for children's mental health <https://bit.ly/3mliHwR>
2. Take part in '**THE BIGGEST SING**' world record attempt [youngvoices.co.uk/biggest-sing](http://youngvoices.co.uk/biggest-sing)
3. Try some of our **assembly plans** from our free schools resources
4. Spread the word by sharing how you plan to take part on social media! Don't forget to use **#ChildrensMentalHealthWeek**

