

# This is My Place

Children's Mental Health Week 2026

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A primary school guide to  
supporting belonging through  
emotionally safe, relational practice

**9<sup>th</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> February 2026**



# Introduction

**Children's Mental Health Week offers schools a moment to pause and reflect on children's mental health and wellbeing.**

Each year, the week brings a different focus. In 2026, the theme **'This is My Place'** invites schools to think about belonging — and how children experience school as a place where they feel safe, included, and valued.

For many children, school is one of the most important places in their lives. It is where friendships form, learning happens, and relationships with trusted adults grow. How children feel in this place matters.

This guide has been created to support primary schools to explore this year's theme in a practical, relational way. It offers simple ideas, activities, and assemblies that can be adapted to suit your pupils, staff, and school context.

You do not need to do everything. Small moments, repeated consistently, make a meaningful difference.

Here at Thrive, our key focus for this year's theme is that **belonging begins with emotional safety — and grows when children feel they matter.**

# Emotional Safety, Belonging and Mattering

**At Thrive, we know that belonging begins with emotional safety and grows when children feel that they matter.**

Belonging is not created through one-off activities alone. It's built through everyday interactions — how children are greeted, how adults respond when things feel hard, and how children experience connection with peers and staff across the school day.

This year's theme encourages schools to notice and strengthen these everyday moments, helping children say with confidence:

**“This is my place.”**

**Our key messages for the week:**

- Belonging grows from emotional safety.
- Small, relational moments make a big difference.
- Calm, attuned adults help children feel safe and included.
- Feeling seen, safe and that they matter supports children's wellbeing and readiness to learn.





# Understanding emotional safety, belonging and mattering.

## What do we mean by emotional safety?

Emotional safety refers to a child's sense that they are accepted, respected, and able to express their thoughts, feelings, and needs without fear of shame, punishment, or exclusion. In an emotionally safe primary school environment, children feel secure enough to make mistakes, ask for help, and be themselves, knowing that adults will respond with care and fairness. This is important because emotional safety is the foundation for learning, wellbeing, and positive behaviour: when children feel safe, they are better able to concentrate, regulate their emotions, build relationships, and engage confidently in learning.

## What do we mean by belonging?

Belonging is the felt sense of being part of a group where you are accepted as your true, authentic self. When children feel this way, they are more able to engage with others, access learning, and feel confident in themselves. The classroom environment is one which children and young people spend a significant amount of time in each week and one in which they should feel accepted, valued and included. We can provide this through the development of positive relationships and connections with staff and peers, celebrating individuality, practicing an open community and establishing safe spaces.

## What do we mean by mattering?

Mattering is the feeling that you are noticed, valued, and important to others. Children feel they matter when adults listen to them, remember them, and recognise them for who they are — not only for what they achieve. Mattering is important because it strengthens self-worth, motivation, and engagement in

learning; when children feel they matter, they are more likely to participate, persevere, build positive relationships, and develop a strong sense of belonging and wellbeing.

## In summary

- Emotional safety helps children feel secure.
- Belonging helps children feel they fit.
- Mattering helps children feel important.



# Relational Moments That Support Belonging and Mattering

**Belonging is built through everyday interactions between adults and children — often in small, easily overlooked moments.**

At Thrive, the ideas below reflect relational strategies used as part of our approach and training. They support adults to build trusting relationships, helping children feel emotionally safe, seen, and valued, and can be used throughout Children's Mental Health Week and beyond.

## What can I say except 'You're welcome!'

**How:** Greet pupils at the start of the day or after breaks in a friendly, unique way. This could be a different handshake, simple dance move, facial expression or signal.

**Why:** A warm, unique welcome helps children feel noticed and sets a positive tone for the day.



# Relational moments that support belonging and mattering

## Holding in mind

**How:** Let children know you have thought about them outside the immediate moment. For example: "Oh Charlie, I thought of you at the weekend when I went to a car show as I saw a red Ferrari! I know how much you love them."

**Why:** This shows children they matter beyond tasks or behaviour and reiterates the value you place on the relationship.

## Listening with attention

**How:** Give children your full attention when they want to talk, even briefly. Pause other tasks where possible, offer eye contact, and show interest through simple responses or by reflecting back what you've heard. If you can't listen fully in the moment, let the child know when you will.

**Why:** Being listened to helps children feel valued, connected, and that they matter.

## Playful connection

**How:** Share moments of humour, playfulness, and shared enjoyment with children throughout the day. This might be through a smile, a light comment, a shared joke, or showing interest in what matters to them. Stay open and available, noticing children's cues and responding in ways that feel warm and accepting.

**Why:** Playful connection helps children feel relaxed, safe, and emotionally close to the adults around them. When children experience adults as interested, accepting, and alongside them, relationships strengthen and children feel valued for who they are.

## Curious responses

**How:** When children struggle, respond with curiosity rather than judgement. Example: Instead of "Why did you do that/You know that's not ok/What do you think you are doing?" try "I noticed you were struggling to get started on that activity, I wonder if you needed some cubes to help problem solve? I imagine you were feeling a little frustrated, I would be too!"

**Why:** Curious responses reduce shame and help children feel supported and understood. Taking time to support children through distress reinforces that they are important to you.



# Classroom Activities



## Supporting belonging through everyday classroom moments

The following activities are short, flexible, and suitable for both KS1 and KS2. Each can be completed in 10–20 minutes, with minimal resources, and adapted to suit your pupils.

Each activity takes a relational approach, supporting connection between peers and adults and helping children feel that they belong and are valued.

### You may choose to:

- Use all five across the week.
- Select one or two.
- Repeat the same activity daily.

**Choice helps children, and adults, feel safe.**

# Day 1: Metaphor check-in

## Purpose:

Using metaphors gives children a playful, low-pressure way to notice and share how they are feeling. It supports emotional expression without requiring children to explain or label feelings directly.

## How to run it:

Bring children together in a shared space, such as on the carpet or at tables. Invite them to respond to a prompt such as:

- “If you were weather today, what would you be?”
- “If you were a form of transport today, what would you be?”

Model your own response first, briefly explaining why you chose it (for example, “I’m like a train just getting started — it took me a while this morning, but now I’m ready to go”).

Invite children to share their metaphor with a partner or with the class if they feel comfortable. Children may choose to explain their choice, but this should always be optional. Passing is always okay.

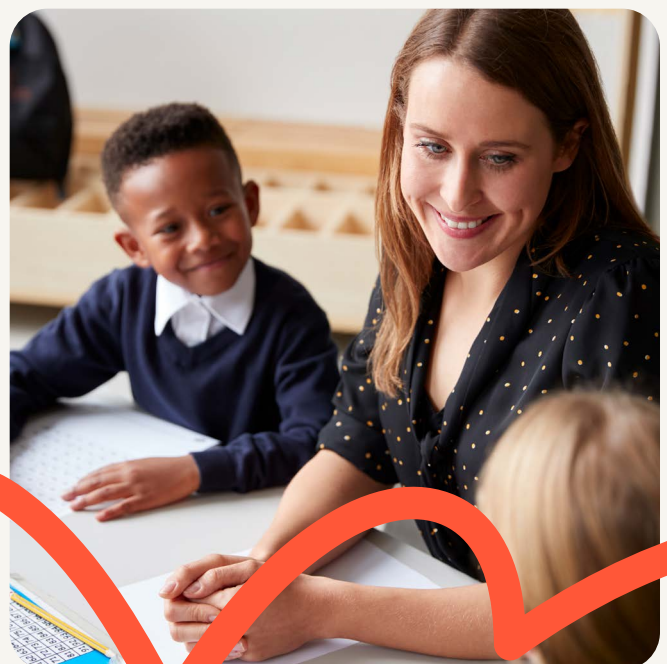
You can gently wonder alongside children by offering simple reflections or questions, without expecting an answer (for example, “I wonder if that feels fast or slow today”).

## Adaptations:

Use visual prompts (pictures, emojis, colours) for younger children or those who find metaphors tricky.

## This can help children to:

- Experience a safe, non-judgemental space to share.
- Feel noticed and listened to.
- Grow confidence in expressing themselves.





# Day 2: Acrostic Poem — Belonging

## Purpose:

Exploring what belonging feels like helps children feel safe being themselves, and recognise what helps them connect with others and feel included at school.

## How to run it:

Write the word **BELONGING** vertically. Use each letter to begin a word or short phrase that describes what belonging feels like at school.

Talk together about what belonging means — in pairs or as a group — and what helps children feel accepted and included at school. Identify that belonging can feel different for different people.

Children can then create a shared class poem or their own individual acrostic.

## Adaptations:

Younger children may draw pictures instead of writing words. Rephrase questions to focus on “what makes us feel happy at school” instead of “what is belonging” for clarity where needed.

## This can help children to:

- Reflect on what helps them feel they belong.
- Recognise and respect different experiences.
- Feel valued through shared ideas and displays.



# Day 3: Keep a straight face!

## Purpose:

Playful interaction builds connection, confidence, and trust. Shared laughter supports emotional safety and positive peer relationships.

## How to run it:

In pairs, children take turns keeping a straight face while the other makes funny expressions. After, bring the group together and invite them to share some of their funniest faces.

## Adaptations:

Use a mirror so children can sit side-by-side if direct eye contact feels uncomfortable.

## This can help children to:

- Enjoy shared laughter and connection.
- Practice turn-taking and social confidence.
- Strengthen positive peer relationships.



# Day 4: Feather Face



## Purpose:

Gentle, sensory activities support calm, trust, and mindfulness. They offer children a safe experience of closeness and regulation, helping to build trusting relationships.

## How to run it:

Using a feather or soft brush, pupils take turns gently painting each other's faces, hands, or arms. Invite children to notice how it feels.

## Adaptations:

Children may choose to close their eyes, but this should always be optional. If touch to the face feels uncomfortable, pupils can paint their own faces using mirrors or paint their hands or arms instead.

## This can help children to:

- Develop calm focus and body awareness.
- Practice gentle interaction and empathy.
- Feel safe and supported.

*Choice and consent are essential.*



# Day 5: Appreciation Circle — This is My Place

## Purpose:

Reflecting on positive experiences helps children notice moments of safety, support, and belonging, strengthening community and self-worth.

## How to run it:

Sit in a circle. Pass a soft object and invite children to share one moment from the week when they felt happy, safe, or supported.

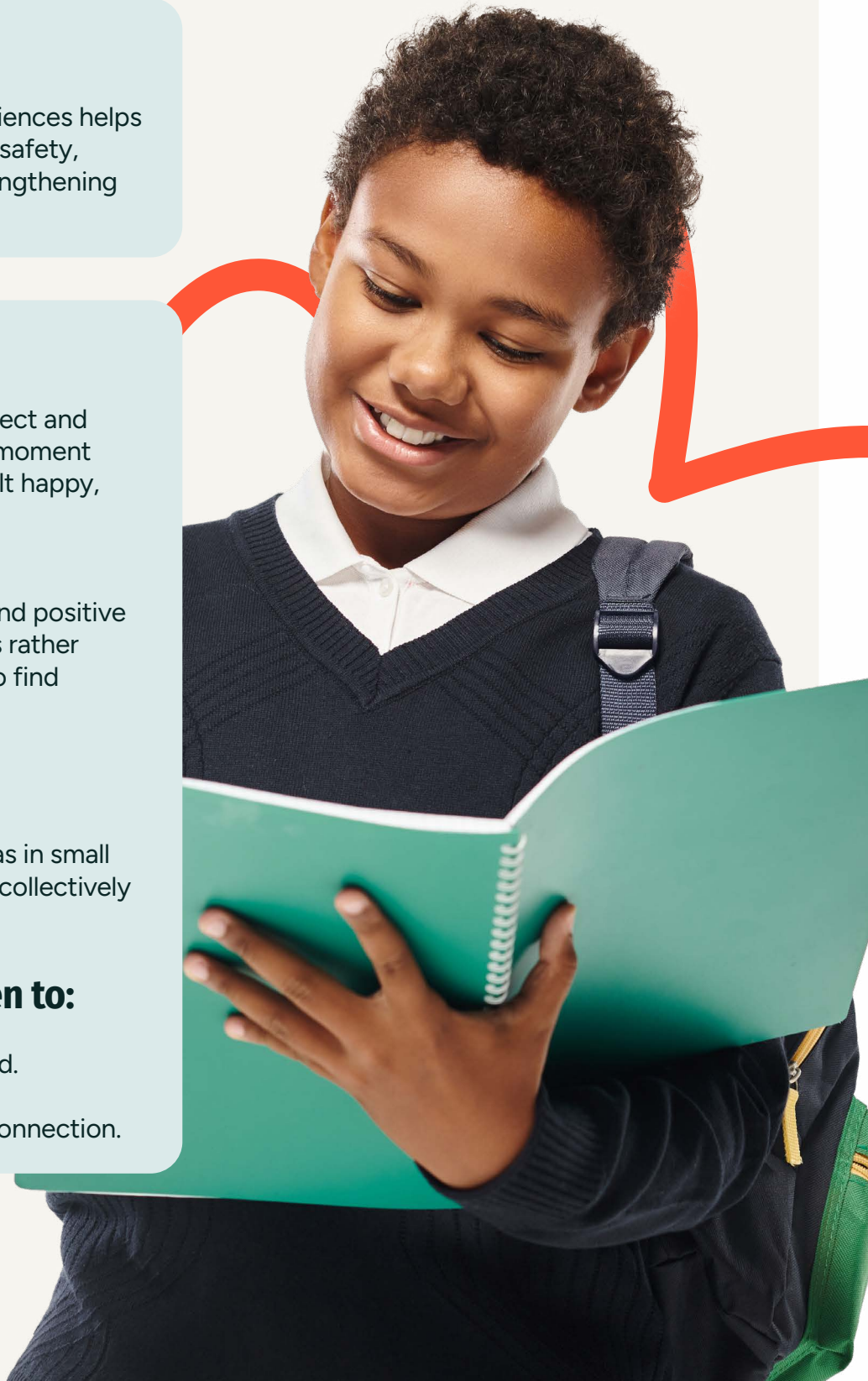
If similar ideas are repeated, acknowledge the strength and positive impact of those experiences rather than encouraging children to find something different.

## Adaptations:

Older pupils may record ideas in small table groups before sharing collectively with the class.

## This can help children to:

- Feel heard and appreciated.
- Recognise kindness and connection.



# Assemblies



## Exploring 'This is My Place'

**Assemblies offer a shared space for students to explore the theme 'This is My Place'.**

**They are designed to be used:**

- **Assembly 1:** early in the week (launch)
- **Assembly 2:** later in the week (reflection/celebration)

These assemblies bring learning together and support students to feel proud of school as a place where they are safe, included, and valued.

If you plan to hold Assembly 2, let staff know in advance so students can prepare a small example from one activity. Keep sharing focused on belonging, connection and safety, not performance.

# Introducing Children's Mental Health Week: This is My Place

## Purpose:

A story-led assembly supports younger children to understand belonging through familiar characters and shared experiences. Using visuals and stories helps children make sense of big ideas in a concrete, accessible way.

## Session Outline

- As children enter, play a familiar song (for example *You've Got a Friend in Me*) to create a warm, welcoming atmosphere.
- Welcome the children and introduce Children's Mental Health Week and the theme 'This Is My Place'.
- Use the provided slides to explore what a "place" can mean — a classroom, a friendship, a school, or somewhere children feel safe and cared for.
- Share stories or characters shown on the slides (such as those who felt left out, welcomed, or accepted for who they are) and talk together about how they might be feeling.

## Invite simple reflection using questions such as:

- How do you know when you belong somewhere?
- What helps people feel welcome?
- Close by reminding children that school is one of their important places, and that small, kind actions help everyone feel included.
- Replay the entrance music as children leave the assembly space.

## This can help children to:

- Understand the theme through familiar stories.
- Recognise feelings of belonging and safety.
- Begin to notice how kindness supports others.

[Download Slides](#)



# Exploring Belonging and Mattering: This is My Place

## Purpose:

Older children benefit from opportunities to reflect, discuss, and consider their role within the school community. Visual prompts and shared discussion support deeper understanding of belonging and mattering.

## Session Outline

- As children enter, play a reflective song (for example *You Can Count on Me*) to set a calm tone.
- Welcome the children and introduce the focus of Children's Mental Health Week using the provided slides.
- Invite pupils to think about the different "places" in their lives where they feel they belong.
- Use the slides to explore what belonging and mattering mean. Invite a few pupil responses before sharing simple, child-friendly explanations.

**Introduce the character shown in the slides (for example Mervin the Mind) and ask pupils to consider:**

- What might help someone like this feel they belong?
- How could we show them that they matter?

- Acknowledge the range of responses, highlighting that different ideas reflect different experiences of belonging.
- Summarise the week's focus and invite pupils to notice small actions that help others feel included and valued.
- Close by replaying the entrance song and inviting pupils to join in if appropriate.

### This can help children to:

- Develop a shared understanding of belonging and mattering.
- Reflect on their own experiences and actions.
- Recognise their role in shaping a positive school environment.

[Download Slides](#)

# Celebrating the Week: This is My Place

## When to use:

This optional assembly can be held towards the end of the week, if you would like to reflect on the week as a whole and share examples of learning from the classroom activities.

If you plan to include this element, let staff know in advance to give children time to prepare a small piece of work or an example to share.

## Purpose:

By reflecting on what went well, children develop a sense of belonging and self-worth, and the activity fosters a positive, supportive classroom culture where achievements, big or small, are recognised and celebrated.

## Session Outline:

Using the slide decks, invite children to think about what they have explored during Children's Mental Health Week.

## This might include:

- Something they learned about belonging.
- An activity they enjoyed.
- A moment when they felt safe, included, or proud.

## Invite classes to share one small example, such as:

- A picture or display.
- A short reflection.
- An example from a classroom activity.

Keep contributions short and focus on the sense of belonging and connection, rather than performance or outcomes.

## This can help children to:

- Recognise and reflect on moments when they felt safe, supported, or happy.
- Feel heard, acknowledged, and valued through shared reflection with peers and adults.

[Download Slides for KS1](#)

[Download Slides for KS2](#)



# Keeping the work going

**Children's Mental Health Week is a powerful moment — but belonging grows through what happens every day.**

This guide offers a snapshot of how emotionally safe, relational practice can support children to feel included and valued during the week and beyond.

At Thrive, we support schools to embed this work throughout the year.

Through training, tools, and whole school approaches, we help staff respond with confidence and consistency — so every child and young person can feel safe, included, and able to thrive.

To find out more about Thrive and how we work with schools, visit **[thriveapproach.com](https://thriveapproach.com)**