21 April 2020

Dear parents and carers

Here we are at the start of week 5 and still adjusting to a new way of ‘normal’. Remember that none of us have past experiences to draw upon, to help us navigate these times, because we have never experienced anything like this before. It’s very natural to feel sad, worried, angry or fearful. We are all in this together, but our stories are not the same, so while we adjust and find comfort in collective experiences and connections with others that are either entirely new or are strengthened, we should bear in mind that it is OK to not feel OK. It’s great to be positive and to look forward, but it is also OK to have bad days and be finding it all challenging.

As parents and carers, we all want to support our children, but it is important to take time to look after ourselves too. Making time to care for ourselves, helps us to stay strong for others. Sometimes we can feel guilty for occasionally putting ourselves first, but it is especially important to do when times are stressful because we need reserves to be able to look after others. It’s good to find a little time to have a peaceful bath, sit in the garden with a cuppa or listen to a podcast or music. Even 10 minutes to do something we enjoy will make a difference to how we feel.

If you would like a version of this to colour you can download it here (the artist has freely shared it and you can pass it on).

http://imagistic.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/This-wont-be-forever-colour-me-in.pdf
Our headteacher, Michelle Johnson, has been busy helping to collate and distribute lovely creative packs to young people, as part of the Oxfordshire Kindness Wave; an initiative in collaboration with @ArkT Oxford and @populateCoop, which aims to support children, young people and families to give them comfort and much needed positive activity during the pandemic. Follow them on twitter @kindness_wave

**Foster carer app update**

Sarah Hazell, our primary lead and SENCo, has been working on a partnership with an organisation called Anspear Ltd, which provides training and guidance for foster carers. The Oxfordshire Virtual School has invested in a digital licence intended to support your professional development as a foster carer - accessible on smart phones, tablets/i-pads and via the web. You can access the training through the Oxfordshire Virtual School, Looked After Child (VSLAC) app.

There are 29 courses available, concerned with supporting your child/ren and supporting young people, none of which take any longer than 3 hours to complete. Each course has been written by experts within the sector and learning can take place off-line (without the need for Wi-Fi) on smart phones and tablets via the Oxfordshire Virtual School, Looked After Child app (VSLAC). This means that learning can take place anywhere and at any time, allowing for greater flexibility around your busy working lives.

**How Can I Access My Licence?** Many of you have already received your unique code in the post from the Virtual School since the official launch on the 24th January 2020. The licences for the app have been purchased by the Virtual School for one year.

**If yours has not arrived, then please do get in touch with** Sarah Hazell who will be able to support: Sarah.hazell@oxfordshire.gov.uk.

Feedback about the app from foster carers has been very positive so far. In the next few weeks of term our team will be monitoring how schools are supporting our looked after children in their access to home learning. It can be hard to navigate the material being sent home by schools so we will aim to provide some guidance on how to get the best out of the online resources in our next letter.

Take care and best wishes from the Virtual School Team.

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