

Children's Mental Health Week 2026

**Activity ideas to
encourage belonging
in schools**

About this guide

All pupils deserve to feel a sense of belonging at school. Aside from the impact on academic achievement, an increased sense of belonging has been found to positively correlate with overall levels of happiness, wellbeing and even resilience.

The activities in this guide have been separated into key stages and wherever possible include aspects of the focus areas below. Some are very straightforward and others require a little more teacher preparation.

While a few of these activities explicitly focus on reflection about belonging, most do not.

Instead, we have taken the approach that encouraging a sense of connection, collaboration and contribution can strengthen peer and student-teacher relationships, a core component of feeling like we belong.

Connect

Help your pupils find out about their peers and display curiosity and kindness to one another.

Objective: By noticing your pupils, you show them you are holding them in mind and that relationships matter at school. Encouraging these skills in other students helps strengthen peer bonds.



Collaborate

Encourage pupils to work together to achieve a shared goal.

Objective: Applying team building principles and Kagan's Cooperative Learning strategies can help form positive interdependence, improving peer relationships and reducing task anxiety.



Contribute

Enable pupils to make a difference in their school community and beyond.

Objective: Being able to contribute builds purpose, self-efficacy and engagement with the school and wider community.



Class connections

KS1/2

Overview:

Children hold a ball of yarn and throw it to one another when they have a shared connection. The game is extended to demonstrate that kindness can also help bind us together.

You will need:

- One large ball of yarn – plain coloured
- A second ball of yarn – in a bright colour

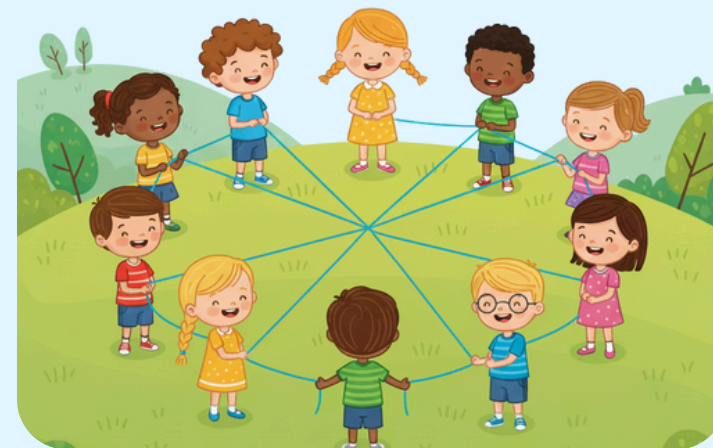


Steps:

1. Ask the class to think about something they enjoy doing that they would be happy to share with the class, for example, "I like watching Marvel films".
2. As each person shares something about themselves, everyone else who also likes doing that activity raises their hand or nods their head. The speaker holds onto one end while the yarn makes its way to one of these people. The recipient then tells the group something about themselves, and so on.
3. Once everyone has had a turn, ask pupils if they can think of one act of kindness that they could do for someone else in their school. For example, offer to work in a group of three if there are an uneven number of pairs, or sit next to someone who is on their own at lunchtime. Once everyone has thought of something, they can share with the group and throw the coloured yarn to another person.
4. Explain that there are lots of things we have in common, but it's ok to recognise that some things are different. Performing simple acts of kindness and appreciating others help to bond us together.

Adaptations:

TAs may be important to help students with this activity or throw the yarn on their behalf. Spread out larger classes in the playground. Older children may be able to share something interesting about themselves that others might not know, or a challenge they have overcome.



Examples to give to pupils

- My favourite song is...
- My favourite movie/TV programme is...
- An activity I did last weekend was...
- Something that makes me smile is...
- The first thing I do when I get home is...
- is the best thing about summer....
- If I had wings I would like to fly to

Belonging octagons

KS 1/2

Overview:

Pupils draw a picture on the front of the octagon illustrating what it feels like when they belong in school. Octagons can be joined up into a tiled wall display.

You will need:

- Coloured card (one A4 sheet per pupil) pencils and scissors
- Sticky velcro dots

Steps:

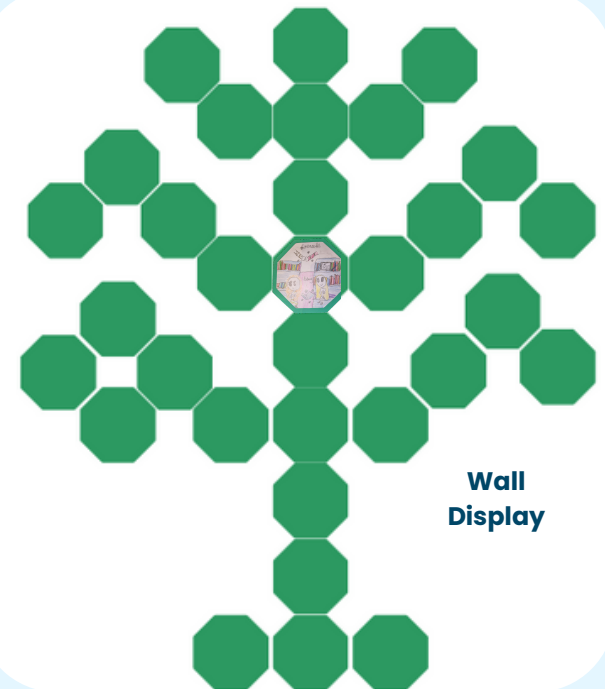
1. On the front cover of the octagon ask pupils to draw a picture thinking of a time they really enjoyed themselves in school and the things that helped them feel that they belonged. Where are they doing this activity and with whom?
2. On the inside, they can then write down one simple act of kindness that might help another pupil to feel like they belong. On the adjacent side, ask them to think about the different places they feel they belong: school, home, mosque, church, in the playground at the park, Brownies, dance clubs, etc. Children with additional learning needs can take part in whatever manner they are able to, for example, adding their handprint and that of a friend.

Use velcro dots to enable the octagon to be opened and closed.

3. *You could create a range of wall displays, depending on pupil numbers, for example, a tree or a tiled pattern with squares. Try writing your class values on each of the squares in between.*



Front Cover



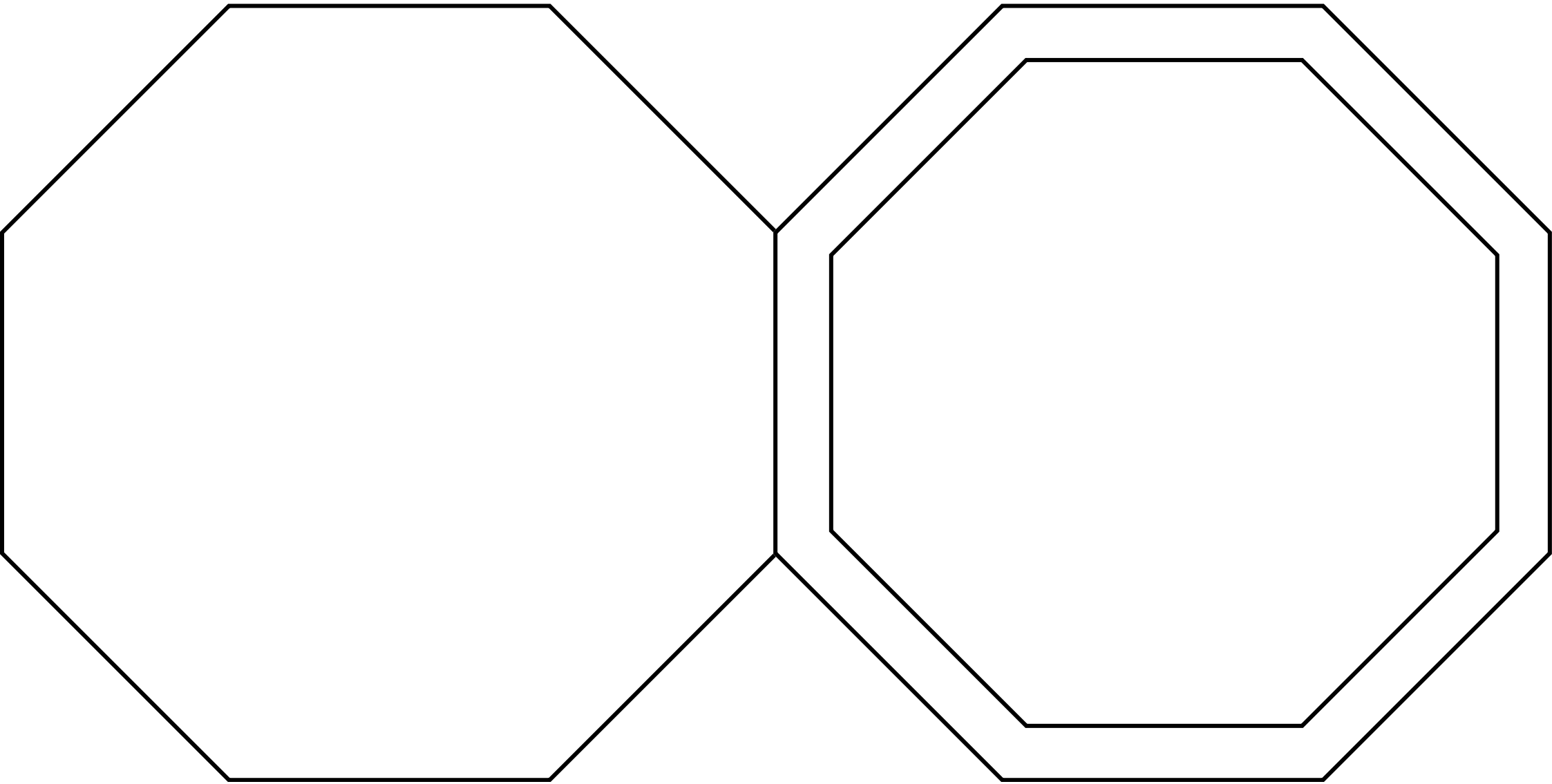
Wall Display

Inside Left

<p>I can help support someone in my class this year by</p> <hr/>	<p>Places I belong include</p> <hr/>
--	--------------------------------------

Inside Right

Belonging octagons - template



Postcard buddies

Year 6

Overview:

Pupils make postcards and write messages of advice and encouragement to younger pupils.

You will need:

- A4 sheet of coloured card (one per pupil)
- A4 plain paper (one per pupil)

Steps:

1. Explain to the Year 6 pupils that they will be making postcards to provide some key pieces of advice to help pupils starting Year 1. Ask them to think about one thing not to worry about and one thing they can say to encourage them, or that they can look forward to doing in school.
2. Ask each child to bring/buy a postcard in from home (you may need to bring a few for children who forget). It can be an old or used one – just put some masking tape or tippex over the back of it.
3. Pop the pupils' name and a photo of them where the stamp would usually go, so the younger pupils have a picture of the sender.
4. Nominate two pupils to deliver the postcards to the Year 1 teacher, who can read them out to the children and give each child a postcard. Let the children send a postcard back to their Year 6 buddy.

This activity can also be adapted to include Year 5 pupils as recipients.



"If only I knew..."

Year 11

Overview:

Older pupils send messages of support to Year 7s by making short videos.

You will need:

- Postcards (old, new or blank ones)
- Magazines
- Pegs and string or twine
- QR code generator



Steps:

1. Ask the Year 11 pupils to create a short video (try to keep to 3 mins) to send to someone who starts school in September. Ask them to answer the question "If only I knew that in year 7". Explain that the purpose is to reassure and encourage new Year 7s to help them know that challenges can be overcome and they can feel that they belong.
2. Upload the videos to the school Vimeo account. Use a QR code generator to make a unique QR code.
3. Ask students to create a postcard. The front cover can be either:
 - a drawing/photo that they feel represents belonging in school
 - their choice from a selection of postcards they feel represents them
 - a magazine cut-out/drawing of a character they admire.
4. Pop the QR code on the back of the postcard.
5. Peg the postcards onto some string and create a display. If possible, keep an iPad by the display so pupils can listen to the messages. Send Year 7 pupils the links to the videos in a Google Doc.

What do I eat at home?

KS2

Overview:

Encourages children to talk about the food that they like to eat at home. Each pupil contributes by bringing in an item of food.

Steps:

1. Ask the pupils to bring in something that they enjoy eating at home. Explain that it can be any important ingredient, staple food, healthy snack or a treat. If it's been made at home they will need a parent to confirm the ingredients don't contain allergens.

2. Provide some examples of things they can bring in and ask the children in advance what they are thinking about.

When they bring in the food, ask them to get into pairs. One person will ask the other:

Is it a treat, a celebration food, or something that you eat all the time?

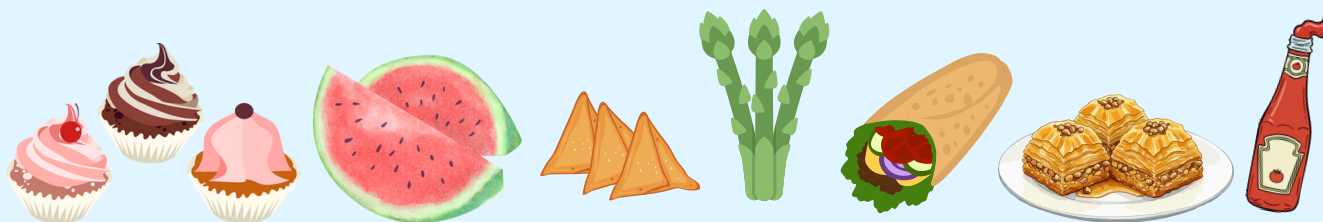
When was the last time you ate this food?

What did you eat it with?

Who did you eat it with?

3. Ask the pupils what other questions they could ask to find out more about the food that's been brought in. How do they feel when they eat it? Has anyone else tried it?

4. Ask each pupil to take pictures/create drawings of the food and put them up on a wall display. At the end of the activity, you can share the non-perishable food with a local food bank or hold a charity table/tombola sale.



Extension

Ask the pupils and parents if they have either a family recipe or a tip for making an amazing snack and whether they would like to share it.

Children could take photos of them making the snack or meal and bring it in to share. Put the recipes/tips in a Google doc and invite parents to add to it.

Class recipe: You could also ask the class to make their own class recipe thinking about the things they value and how they can work together to solve problems. For example:

- Start with a teaspoon of curiosity
- Sift out the worries into a separate bowl
- Mix in two tablespoons of determination
- Fold in a generous helping of kindness
- Add two sprinkles of respectful listening
- Divide and share the mixture evenly
- Bake in the oven and leave to cool

You could even include a line about each person in your class.

My school timeline

KS2/Year 7

Overview:

Pupils build a timeline of their school and/or their local community. They each receive a section of the timeline to work on in groups.

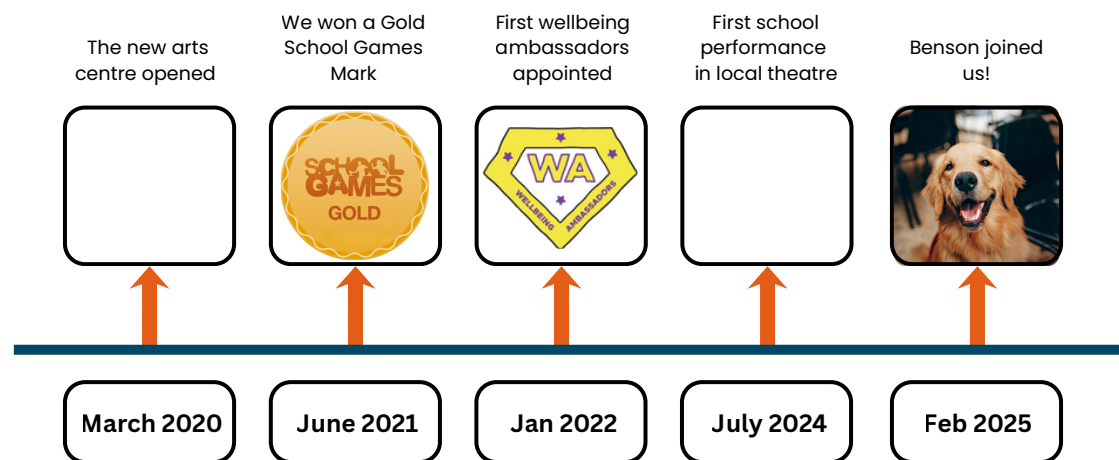
You will need:

- A3 paper for each group with pre-printed boxes and timeline
- Photos of your school and Pritt stick/bluetack
- x6 information sheets describing different time periods in your school's history

Preparation:

Research key facts about your school, dividing them into sensible time periods. For more recent years, look at previous school newsletters for inspiration. Include pictures you can photocopy or print/draw your own icons for the key events you have noted.

You can also include a separate timeline with significant events in the local community, perhaps including when some of your pupils' favourite local places opened, for example, bowling alleys, cinemas, theatres, even a local shop etc. Create one set of cards with the dates on and one with the cut out pictures.



Steps:

1. Divide the pupils into six mixed-ability groups and give them their allocated part of the timeline as well as the time cards and pictures. Explain that they will need to find the right information station, nominate one person to read it to the others and work together to put the pictures and dates in the right order.
2. Give the pupils their A3 sheet with a simple timeline graphic with blank spaces for the pictures and the dates across the bottom.
3. Pupils must try to line up the pictures in the right order. Once every team has arranged them correctly, ask them to line up holding the timeline and explain their section back to the others.

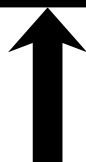
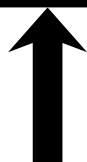
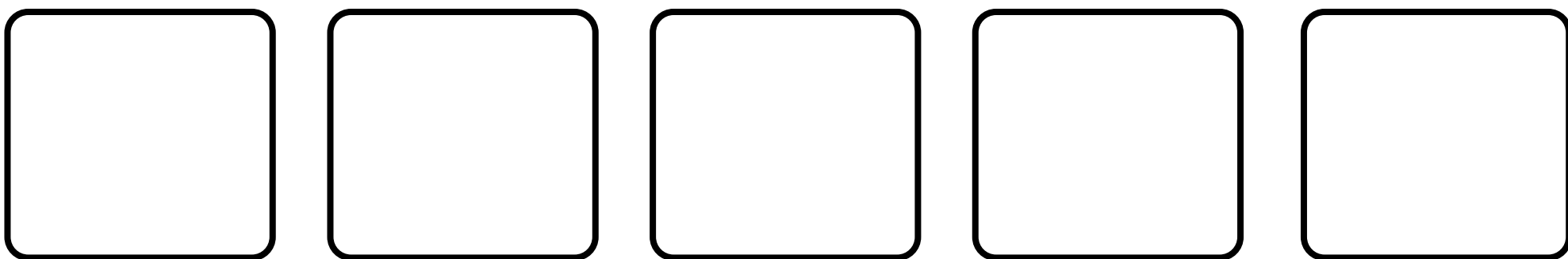
Extension

Secondary:

Students could work in groups to interview people in the local community to find out more about the place they live and work in and what it means to them. They could record audio clips and bring them together into a living audio file about their local area.

Primary:

Create a wall display just for your class. Add new pictures when new children join, when you have class trips, when they do charity fundraisers, lead school assemblies, for birthdays etc. You could also adapt this activity so that each group makes a complete timeline, with each individual contributing a section – this draws on Kagan's Jigsaw cooperative strategy.



Additional ideas

How we show up charter – Secondary

Ask the students to work on a “Show we care” or “How we Show Up” charter in tutor group time. Explain this should be about being a supportive member of the school community. Every time a member of staff notices students demonstrating behaviour that embodies the values, they put a note in a jar or fill in a Google form. When students get enough points they are rewarded with a group treat or outing.

Kindness wall – Secondary

Invite students to note down acts of kindness from others and in turn write compliments and notes of thanks back to them. You can use a stack of parcel labels and drawing pins, string and pegs, sticky notes etc. Make the cork/display board easily accessible. This works best when students don't have to write their name, but can if they want to. Include teaching and non-teaching staff as well!

Maths takeover – Primary

A great one for the end of term. Invite parents into school for a maths lesson delivered by the pupils. Pick a topic that children know well and help them plan out a lesson so that they will all be involved.

Parents can metaphorically “phone a friend” if they get stuck by calling on anyone in the lesson to help. Ask the pupils to give out chocolates (or stickers/healthy snack alternative) to parents who they notice are making an effort.

Class bingo – Secondary

Ask students to work in pairs. The aim is to interview the wider group, ticking off their bingo sheet until they have matched as many people as possible to the things on the list. This is a particularly good activity to do after a school holiday so pupils can get talking about what they've been up to.

Example ideas for the bingo card:

- Swam in the sea over the school break – *where?*
- Has more than three siblings – *what are their ages?*
- Tried a new sport over the holiday – *what?*
- Can speak a different language – *which language?*
- Has a pet that isn't a rabbit, hamster, cat or dog – *what?*
- Supports the same team as you (or none) – *which team?*
- Has watched every episode of this season's *The Traitors* – *who was their favourite?*

If you are using vertical tutor groups, you could do this during form time so children of mixed ages can get to know one another.

Strength gotcha!

This activity is taken from Sue Roffey's book, *Circle Solutions for Student Wellbeing*. Start with a circle session to discuss and come up with ideas for personal strengths.

Hand out three “gotcha” cards to the pupils. Pupils give these to their peers when they see them demonstrating their strength – but no pupil can receive more than three in a week. Circle back to discuss why the cards were given out at the end of the week.

Team building activities

Spider web

Create a giant spider web between two trees in your playground with pieces of string. Each student must pass through the web. Once they go through the gap, it is no longer available for others to pass through.

If you have children using a wheelchair, make sure one of the gaps extends down to the floor so they can cross easily. Ask students to plan out who is going where, in what order, and explain that there is a space for every child.

Cure the toy monsters!

This activity is adapted from Sue Roffey's book, *Circle Solutions for Student Wellbeing*. Ask pupils to stand in a circle and tape a magic ingredient onto the back of a chair.

Each student gets a turn to be the doctor who must wear a blindfold and navigate across the circle, from one side to the other. Their classmates must give them instructions and make sure they avoid the allocated toy monsters in their path! Children take turns to collect ingredients that are combined to make a magic potion to cure the toys.

Jigsaw activity

Cut up pictures of famous celebrities or book characters and get the students into groups to work together to arrange the pieces into a picture. Bring them into a circle to discuss that person's strengths.

Pipeline

Each pupil gets a piece of half-pipe tubing or a pool noodle cut in half lengthwise. The team must transport a small ball or marble from a starting point to a finishing point without it dropping. They do this by lining up their "pipelines" end-to-end and carefully managing the ball's speed and direction. Every single person's role is crucial.

Hula homes

Divide the class into groups. Provide each group with six hoops and ask them to build a house. Now ask them if a team member can crawl inside. See if they can all work together to lift their house off the floor and move it to the other side of the playground.

You can then bring teams into one big group and see if you can build a double or even triple decker house. Full instructions for this are available in the [download here](#) from MrWillPE.com.

If you don't have enough hoops, you can also use garden canes and elastic bands.



Other resources

Kagan's Cooperative Learning structures

There are over 150 Kagan structures which are collaborative approaches to learning that encourage each pupil to play an equal role. Many teachers will already be using the "essential 5", but there are many more ways to incorporate them into lessons.

Find out more in the downloadable document [here](#)

Roffey, S. (2020). *Circle Solutions for Student Wellbeing*. SAGE

Contains lots of brilliant ideas for using circle solutions across different age groups to encourage emotional literacy, overcome challenging situations, promote teamwork and build resilience and empathy.

Alcorn, A., Fletcher-Watson, S., McGeown, S., Murray, F., Aitken, D., Peacock, L., Mandy, W. (2022) *Learning about Neurodiversity at School: Resource Pack*. University of Edinburgh

Designed for children aged 8 - 11 to help them think about neurodiversity, this pack has lots of group and whole-class activities to help pupils build empathy and understanding. Available online [here](#)

Mr Will PE - Hula Hut Architects

Full instructions for hula hut architects can be found [here](#)

