

January 2021

Dear All,

Welcome back to another academic year and the beginnings of another school term! Whilst I recognise that your Christmas break would have been impacted by events going on throughout the world, I hope that, nonetheless, you were able to enjoy some time with loved ones and family.

This first week back to school has not been an easy one for anybody involved in education. Flip flopping between one decision and another has put a heavy burden on those of you who are trying to maintain children's education and support them and their families. Add to this the extraordinary scenes we have witnessed across the pond in Washington DC, and it will come as no surprise to hear that the number of children experiencing mental health difficulties is soaring. Anxiety and depression, together with corresponding sleep difficulties, panic attacks and heightened loneliness are amongst the most common complaints.

Out of control!

Much of this can be traced back to control and the sense that the world is spiralling out of control with little hope of us being able to do anything about it. For some, this sense of 'being out of control' can feel like falling backwards down a dark hole with no sense of which way is up and nothing to grasp hold of to stop the fall. Given the difficulties that we are all experiencing and the length of time that we have been 'doing battle' with this situation, I would suggest that some degree of mental health struggle is normal. I, like many, have had periods when it has all started to feel 'a bit too much'; when facing another day of life in lockdown has seemed overwhelming and I just haven't 'had it to give', not to myself nor to the people in my world. These 'dark' periods have sometimes lasted 2 or 3 weeks rather than just days and I have needed to withdraw a little and actively seek ways to resource myself and support my wellbeing.



Stepping Stones

One of the strategies I have developed is to think about my day as being like a river and my task is to create 'stepping stones' that enable me to forge a path over to the other side. The 'stepping stones' are the points I create in the river that allow me to cross it without needing to wade through the torrents and drench or drown myself.



As we hunker down to take to a third lockdown, my challenge has again become a daily one. To counteract this, as I sit with my first cup of tea in the early hours of the morning, I allow myself a quiet moment to picture my river and to try and gauge how 'fast' it may be flowing that day – how busy my day is and how emotionally equipped I feel to 'take it on'. This helps me to assess how deep the river may be in places and therefore how many 'stepping stones' I might need. Each 'stepping stone' gives me an opportunity to pause, reflect and look at how I can resource myself to move on to the next task. At the weekends, this might involve a socially distanced walk with a friend, followed by a hearty egg and bacon breakfast on return. A stint at my desk during the week might be broken up with a coffee and catchup with one of my children or a quick zoom call with a friend. I might take 10 minutes over lunch to look through a recipe book and see which new meals I might like to attempt later in the week. In the evening I have to end my day with a cup of chamomile tea and the luxury of a hot bath - even if I can only manage 5 minutes, I find that the routine calms my mind and prepares me to unwind for bed.

We will each have our own 'stepping stones' and there may be times when we need lots of little ones rather than a small number of wider ones to get us through the 'torrent' of another day. There may even be times when we feel like we haven't the energy to jump from stone to stone, and, like I said, this too is OK – good days and bad is to be expected given what we are living through and how long we have been living through it.

The most important thing to focus on as we climb the last hundred metres of this COVID mountain is that, rather than attempting to keep wading through the heavy waters of lockdown 3, you spend a moment to think about *your* 'stepping stones' and plan *your* path across, remembering always when you reach the other side, to pat yourself on the back and acknowledge what you have achieved. It's been a long haul, and, hopefully, we are almost there – you have done extremely well.



As ever, if there is any way that you think that we at Making Me can help you or help the children and families in your schools, please do not hesitate to contact us: schools@makingme.org.uk. In the meantime, we applaud your continued hard work and commitment to the children in your care and we wish you, your staff, your children and their families a very happy 2021.

With our very best wishes,

Liz

Liz and the Making Me team.

