

Buddy Bench Background Information

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Appendix 1 – Programme Content (to date)

Each programme comprises

- physical Buddy Bench, installed in the school playground;
- 30-50 minute workshop delivered by our facilitators in the classroom;
- unique Activity Book for each child containing a comprehensive set of creative activities that the child can explore in their own time, at their own pace;
- Teacher's Resource Pack that outlines the thinking and practice behind the programme's design and how it aligns with the Mental Health Foundation's '7 Core Competencies' and the HSE and Dept of Health's '15 Protective Factors', which structure the Social Personal Health Education (SPHE) element of the primary school curriculum.

This is a universal early intervention that seeks to promote a culture of self-expression, listening, tolerance, resilience, and mutual support, in effect validating and mainstreaming within a school how children – we have discovered – already relate to each other, or aspire to relate to each other.

Through supporting core competencies of empathy, creativity, mindfulness and communication, and promoting a child-led culture, **we are empowering a generation of children to create a world where it's OK – i.e. normal, natural, easy and fun – to express yourself.**

The Workshops, consisting of a teaching story, discussions, self-awareness techniques and roleplay, start and encourage **a thought process about feelings**: what they are, how they change, how to express them, and how to receive the self-expression of others.

Each child receives a Buddy Bench Activity Book, which is beautifully produced, contains the teaching story with original illustrations and a comprehensive set of creative activities that teach tools for self-assessment, coping and developing language for feelings.

The class teacher remains present during the workshop, and receives a Teacher's Resource Pack that outlines the thinking and practice behind the programme's design and how it aligns with the Mental Health Foundation's '7 Core Competencies' and the HSE and DOH's '15 Protective Factors', which structure the SPHE element of the primary curriculum.

The values we cultivate with the Awareness Programme include creativity, mindfulness and communication as core competencies that support each child to build personal resilience. Our programme is oriented around:
Thinking and Feeling – the value that each person brings through their own uniqueness;
Finding a voice and Listening – the social value of self-expression, empathy, and mutual understanding.

The Bench acts as a space where children work out together how to support and accept themselves and each other. The Workshop plants the seeds of communication skills that enable the children to continue to grow in mental and emotional wellness. The Activity Book is a private vehicle for reflection, creative thinking, self-expression, and continuous learning and exploring the language and textures of feelings.

Appendix 2 – Mental Health Statistics, Related Problems & Consequences, Opportunities & Solutions

Problem

Evidence

"one in 6 young people aged 11-13 were experiencing mental disorder at the time they took part in two RCSI studies" (2013)

<http://www.rcsi.ie/index.jsp?n=110&a=4048>

"between 2005 and 2012 there was a 54 per cent increase in the number of young people prescribed [anti-depressants] in the UK." (WHO, 2016)

<http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/health-news/number-of-children-prescribed-anti-depressants-increases-by-50-in-seven-years-a6920576.html>

Successful learning environments ensure that learners have the opportunity to reach their potential and prepare learners to play a key role as active and responsible citizens.

Action Plan for Education 2017

<https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Strategy-Statement/Action-Plan-for-Education-2017.pdf>

Schools are not just places where students acquire academic skills; they also help students become more resilient in the face of adversity, feel more connected with the people around them, and aim higher in their aspirations for their future.

<http://www.oecd.org/newsroom/most-teenagers-happy-with-their-lives-but-schoolwork-anxiety-and-bullying-an-issue.htm>

Teenagers who feel part of a school community and enjoy good relations with their parents and teachers are more likely to perform better academically and be happier with their lives, according to the first OECD PISA assessment of students' well-being.

www.oecd.org/pisa

Research has shown that anxiety is the most common form of psychological disorder, affecting up to 20% of children and teenagers.

"high levels of stress and anxiety among 11- to 15-year-olds, especially related to school." (WHO, 2016)

According to Irish Primary Principals Network president Maria Doyle: "We have children as young as junior and senior infants displaying significant symptoms of depression. We have children in primary schools speaking about suicide, we have them self-harming. Now this would not have been the case 10, 15 years ago, but it is currently becoming a problem at primary level." (Irish Examiner)

<http://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/primary-school-children-are-now-self-harming-principals-group-warns-717992.html>

Problem

Consequences

If left unattended, anxiety significantly interferes with a child's development and can cause serious problems in later life, such as social isolation, underachievement, depression and, unfortunately, even suicide. For young children, constant worry about relatively normal, everyday activities (for example: school camps, playing with friends or completing homework) as well as worry about external events over which the child has no control (such as natural disasters and international conflicts) can significantly detract from a child's learning. Such disproportionate responses can also become the learnt behaviour of a child's peers or siblings, multiplying the negative effects.

Problem

Consequences - Evidence

"young people who experience mental ill-health during adolescence have higher rates of mental disorders and substance misuse during their young adult years and are three times more likely to be unemployed than young adults who did not experience mental ill-health during their adolescence" (RCSI, 2013)

<http://www.rcsi.ie/index.jsp?n=110&a=4048>

"Statistics, released by the Department for Education (UK) in response to a Parliamentary Question, revealed 30 children aged four or under were expelled [for violent behaviour] in the academic year from September 2013, while a further 70 were suspended for a fixed period." (Daily Mail)

Problem

Opportunity

"2.1

"A series of sustained and evidence-based awareness campaigns should be developed, specifically targeted at children and young people, to improve mental health, emotional literacy, build resilience, and aid the development of coping mechanisms

"2.2

"Sustained, quality-assured and evidenced-based training programmes should be funded to provide support to individuals in the public, voluntary and community sectors who have contact with young people so that those trained might be in a better position to promote positive mental health."

(National Youth Mental Health Task Force Report 2017)

<http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/YMHTF-Final-Report.pdf>

Solution

Buddy Bench Aware is a school-based positive mental health programme that promotes emotional resilience. The programme releases the stigma of asking for help, celebrates children who act with compassion, kindness, and empathy, and encourages the development of conflict-management skills, thus relieving anxiety, stress and feelings of isolation.

The Buddy Bench, placed in the school yard or play area, can be used for children when they are new to the school, want to make new friends, their friends are not there on a particular day, they want to play something different from what their friends are playing, or they're having a problem with their friends and just can't solve it right now / want to take a break. Sitting on the bench lets everyone know you are feeling lonely, 'different', are being with your emotions and thoughts, and so others are free to check in with you and see if you're ok.

Despite the good intentions behind Buddy Benches, many fall short of actually helping children because the supporting culture is not in place.

While the Buddy or 'Friendship' Bench is not a new idea, our use of the Bench as both visual tool and entry point for our unique programmes is innovative.

Appendix 3 – Reasoning for Targeting Schools

There is a large body of evidence (which is accepted at the highest levels of policy and funding) that the school should be at the centre of wellbeing education:

“early intervention and prevention are critical in order to prevent a negative downward spiral of poor mental health and well-being into adolescence and adulthood” (Costello, E. J., Egger, H. L., & Angold, A. (2004). *The Developmental Epidemiology of Anxiety Disorders*. In T. H. Ollendick & J. S. March (Ed.), *Phobic and anxiety disorders in children and adolescents: A clinician's guide to effective psychosocial and pharmacological interventions* (pp. 61). New York, NY: Oxford University Press)

“Schools are increasingly considered to be important settings for mental health promotion and intervention” (Merikangas, K. R., Nakamura, E. F., & Kessler, R. C. (2009). *Epidemiology of mental disorders in children and adolescents*. *Dialogues in clinical neuroscience*, 11(1), 7-20)

“Schools not only provide formal education, but are also places that foster personal development and well-being” (Zenner, C., Herrnleben-Kurz, S., & Walach, H. (2014). *Mindfulness-based interventions in schools—a systematic review and meta-analysis*. *Frontiers in psychology*, 5(603), 1-20)

But

“The biggest challenges to implementing mental health promotion programmes in schools are: funding, timetabling, programme fidelity and achieving full participation from all stakeholders”

(*Spotlight. Well-Being: promoting mental health in schools*. (2012) Oireachtas Library and Research Service)

We target Primary school children for these reasons:

- the school provides an easy route to market
- the evidence promotes school-based interventions for mental wellness
- parents experience anxiety about their younger children’s socialisation, integration and coping skills at primary school, where they are outside parents influence, and actively seek out solutions that mitigate this anxiety.

Our focus is on resourcing children before they develop a problem, giving them tools to cope with everyday personal and interpersonal problems. Crucially, Buddy Bench is not about identifying problem children, or children with problems; it’s about facilitating a peer-to-peer child-led culture of easy and low key talking, listening and accepting each other.

Appendix 4 - How Buddy Bench aligns with the Social Personal and Health Education Curriculum

(Extracts from **Buddy Bench Aware Teacher's Resource Book**)

Context

Health is defined by the Dept of Health as: **everyone achieving his or her potential to enjoy complete physical, mental and social wellbeing** (Healthy Ireland, 2013).

Positive mental health for children is part of their overall health and is inextricably linked with well-being. It is usually conceptualised as encompassing aspects of emotional (affect/feeling), psychological (positive functioning), social (relations with others in society), physical (physical health) and spiritual (sense of meaning and purpose in life) well-being (Barry and Friedli, 2008).

For the purpose of these guidelines and in the context of school systems, **well-being** may be defined as:

the presence of a culture, ethos and environment which promotes **dynamic, optimal development and flourishing for all in the school community**. It encompasses the domains of relationship, meaning, emotion, motivation, purpose, and achievement. It includes quality teaching and learning for the development of all elements related to healthy living whether cultural, academic, social, emotional, physical or technological with particular focus on **resilience and coping**.

Mental Health is:

A state of well-being in which the individual realises his or own abilities, can **cope** with the normal stresses of life, can **work productively and fruitfully** and is **able to make a contribution to his or her own community**. (WHO, 2001, p.1)

7 Core Competencies

The Mental Health Foundation (2002) suggests 7 Core Competencies possessed by children who are mentally healthy.

They

1. develop psychologically, emotionally, socially, intellectually, spiritually
2. initiate, develop and sustain mutually satisfying interpersonal relationships
3. use and enjoy solitude
4. become aware of others and empathise with them
5. play and learn
6. develop a sense of right and wrong
7. resolve (face) problems & setbacks satisfactorily and learn from them (Alexander, 2002)

15 Protective Factors

Protective factors build and enhance resilience in children (Cooper, Jacobs, 2011). The Department of Health and the HSE have identified 15 Protective Factors that protect positive mental health, enhance the capacity to cope and reduce the likelihood that a mental health problem or disorder will develop (DES, HSE, DOH, 2013).

1. Positive relationships with peers and teachers
2. Positive mental health of school personnel
3. Participation in school and community activities
4. Opportunities for skills development and achievement
5. Recognition of contribution, effort and achievement
6. Sense of security
7. A positive school climate
8. A sense of belonging and connectedness to schools

9. Effective school policies related to mental health
10. Protocols & support systems that proactively support children and their families should difficulties arise
11. Positive classroom management strategies
12. Sharing acquired knowledge and positive behaviour management practices with parents
13. Fostering expectations of high achievement and providing opportunities for success
14. Opportunities for social and emotional learning and the development of problem solving skills
15. Support and professional development for teachers.

Buddy Bench programmes align with these protective factors and core competencies (and therefore meet Teacher's needs vis a vis the current SPHE curriculum) in the following ways:

STRAND 1: The Bench

As well as acting as a visual aid to communicate the Buddy Bench Aware Programme, the Buddy Bench provides a setting for the exercise of **Core Competencies**:

1. develop psychologically, emotionally, socially, intellectually, spiritually
2. initiate, develop and sustain mutually satisfying interpersonal relationships
3. use and enjoy solitude
4. become aware of others and empathise with them
7. resolve (face) problems & setbacks satisfactorily and learn from them (Alexander, 2002).

and the **Protective Factors**:

1. positive relationships with peers and teachers
3. participation in school and community activities
4. opportunities for skills development and achievement
6. sense of security
7. a positive school climate
8. a sense of belonging and connectedness to schools
14. opportunities for social and emotional learning and the development of problem solving skills

STRAND 2: The Workshop

We deliver three different workshop formats, **Little Buddies** is designed for Junior pupils (Junior and Senior Infants), **Buddy Bench Aware** is for 1st–3rd Class, and **You are a Hero** for Senior pupils (3rd–6th Class).

Little Buddies (Junior and Senior Infants)

These activities develop the **Core Competencies**:

1. develop psychologically, emotionally, socially, intellectually, spiritually
2. initiate, develop and sustain mutually satisfying interpersonal relationships
4. become aware of others and empathise with them
5. play and learn
7. resolve (face) problems & setbacks satisfactorily and learn from them (Alexander, 2002).

The **Protective Factors** activated are:

1. positive relationships with peers and teachers
3. participation in school and community activities
4. opportunities for skills development and achievement
5. recognition of contribution, effort and achievement
8. a sense of belonging and connectedness to schools
14. opportunities for social and emotional learning and the development of problem solving skills

Buddy Bench Aware (1st–3rd Class)

"Look Up, Look Around and Look Out for Each Other"

The workshop expands on the understanding of how the Buddy Bench works, the kinds of reasons to use the Bench, and appropriate ways of relating to others at the Buddy Bench, and contributes to development of these **Core Competencies**:

1. develop psychologically, emotionally, socially, intellectually, spiritually
2. initiate, develop and sustain mutually satisfying interpersonal relationships
4. become aware of others and empathise with them
5. play and learn
7. resolve (face) problems & setbacks satisfactorily and learn from them (Alexander, 2002).

The **Protective Factors** activated are:

1. positive relationships with peers and teachers
3. participation in school and community activities
4. opportunities for skills development and achievement
5. recognition of contribution, effort and achievement
8. a sense of belonging and connectedness to schools
14. opportunities for social and emotional learning and the development of problem solving skills

You are a Hero (4th–6th Class)

This workshop asks: How can you be a good friend to others?

“You can’t be there for others if you don’t take care of yourself first!”

Core Competencies:

1. develop psychologically, emotionally, socially, intellectually, spiritually
2. initiate, develop and sustain mutually satisfying interpersonal relationships
4. become aware of others and empathise with them
5. play and learn
6. develop a sense of right and wrong

Protective Factors:

1. positive relationships with peers and teachers
3. participation in school and community activities
4. opportunities for skills development and achievement
5. recognition of contribution, effort and achievement
6. sense of security
7. a positive school climate
8. a sense of belonging and connectedness to schools
13. fostering expectations of high achievement and providing opportunities for success
14. opportunities for social and emotional learning and the development of problem solving skills

STRAND 3: The Story & Activity Book

The Story (Little Buddies & Buddy Bench Aware)

Through engaging in the story, the child exercises the **Core Competencies** to:

1. develop psychologically, emotionally, socially, intellectually, spiritually
2. initiate, develop and sustain mutually satisfying interpersonal relationships
3. use and enjoy solitude
4. become aware of others and empathise with them

The **Protective Factors** activated are:

6. sense of security
8. a sense of belonging and connectedness to schools
14. opportunities for social and emotional learning and the development of problem solving skills

The Activities (Little Buddies & Buddy Bench Aware)

Core Competencies:

1. develop psychologically, emotionally, socially, intellectually, spiritually
3. use and enjoy solitude
4. become aware of others and empathise with them
5. play and learn

Protective Factors:

4. opportunities for skills development and achievement
5. recognition of contribution, effort and achievement
8. a sense of belonging and connectedness to schools
14. opportunities for social and emotional learning and the development of problem solving skills

Appendix 5 - How Buddy Bench aligns with the National Youth Mental Health Task Force Report 2017

Our online portal for the delivery of mental wellbeing programmes through blended e-learning, and supports for teachers, students and parents, aligns with the following policy recommendations from National Youth Mental Health Task Force Report 2017:

“2.1 - A series of sustained and evidence-based awareness campaigns should be developed, specifically targeted at children and young people, to improve mental health, emotional literacy, build resilience, and aid the development of coping mechanisms

“2.2 - Sustained, quality-assured and evidenced-based training programmes should be funded to provide support to individuals in the public, voluntary and community sectors who have contact with young people so that those trained might be in a better position to promote positive mental health.

“3.1 The Taskforce recommends increased investment in age-appropriate, scalable digital youth mental health supports in conjunction with existing providers to ensure all young people ages 0-25 have access to an active listening service and dynamic signposting tool.

“4.1 Families, guardians and carers should be supported in parenting children and young people through the provision of universal, quality-assured and evidence-based parenting information and support programmes

“5.1 The Department of Education and Skills should support teaching professionals in schools and centres for education with the knowledge and skills to understand their role in supporting young people with mental health issues and how to access information about services and supports available to them.

“5.2 Principals and teachers should be supported to implement the wellbeing junior cycle curriculum.”

<http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/YMHTF-Final-Report.pdf>

Appendix 6 - Evaluation of Buddy Bench Programme by Maynooth University

Excerpts from

A pilot evaluation of the Buddy Bench (Ireland) Aware Programme

by Penny Quinn and Sinéad McGilloway (2018),
Centre for Mental Health and Community Research,
Maynooth University Department of Psychology

CHILDREN:

- almost 96% of children responded positively to having a Buddy Bench in their school
- Over 90% of the children felt that **there should be a Buddy Bench in every school.**
- over two-thirds used the word '**happy**' to describe how they felt about having a Buddy Bench in their school.
- Almost all of the children reported having 'liked learning' about the Buddy Bench in the Buddy Bench Aware workshop.

WHAT CHILDREN SAID, IN THEIR OWN WORDS:

(1) "Can you name one difference that the Buddy Bench has made to you?"

"Helped me make friends."

"It has made the school better."

"It made me feel more included."

"Yes, I if I was sad, I would sit on it."

"I know there is a place I can go when I feel sad."

(2) "Can you name one difference that the Buddy Bench has made to your friends?"

"Now we have it, I can go over and help."

"It made my friends a lot happier."

"They can sit down on the Buddy Bench and I could go over to them."

"They have a place to go now when they feel sad."

(3) Can you name one difference that the Buddy Bench has made to your school?"

"Everyone will have a buddy."

"Children are happier."

"We are all kinder."

"I think the school is very happy."

"It made our school the best."

"Everyone is playing together."

Can you tell us something you learned about feelings in the workshop?

“That it is ok to be sad.”

“Everyone has different feelings at different times.”

“Always care about people.”

“You can tell how someone feels by their body language.”

“That everyone needs time to think.”

TEACHERS

- Five out of 5 teachers described the BBAP as covering ‘some’ or ‘a lot of the SPHE curriculum’.
- Four out of five teachers said that they would be ‘very likely’ to recommend the BBAP to other schools.

PARENTS

The programme itself was described as something that ‘*gets people talking*’

- ... parents expressed the desire to see the BBAP as something that would continue to be delivered in their child’s school into the future.
- ... the BBAP should become a ‘new culture’ in the school
- ... This, they believe will result in the BB becoming more readily accepted and becoming the ‘cultural norm’ in the school.

Buddy Bench Workbook

THIS WORKBOOK BELONGS TO

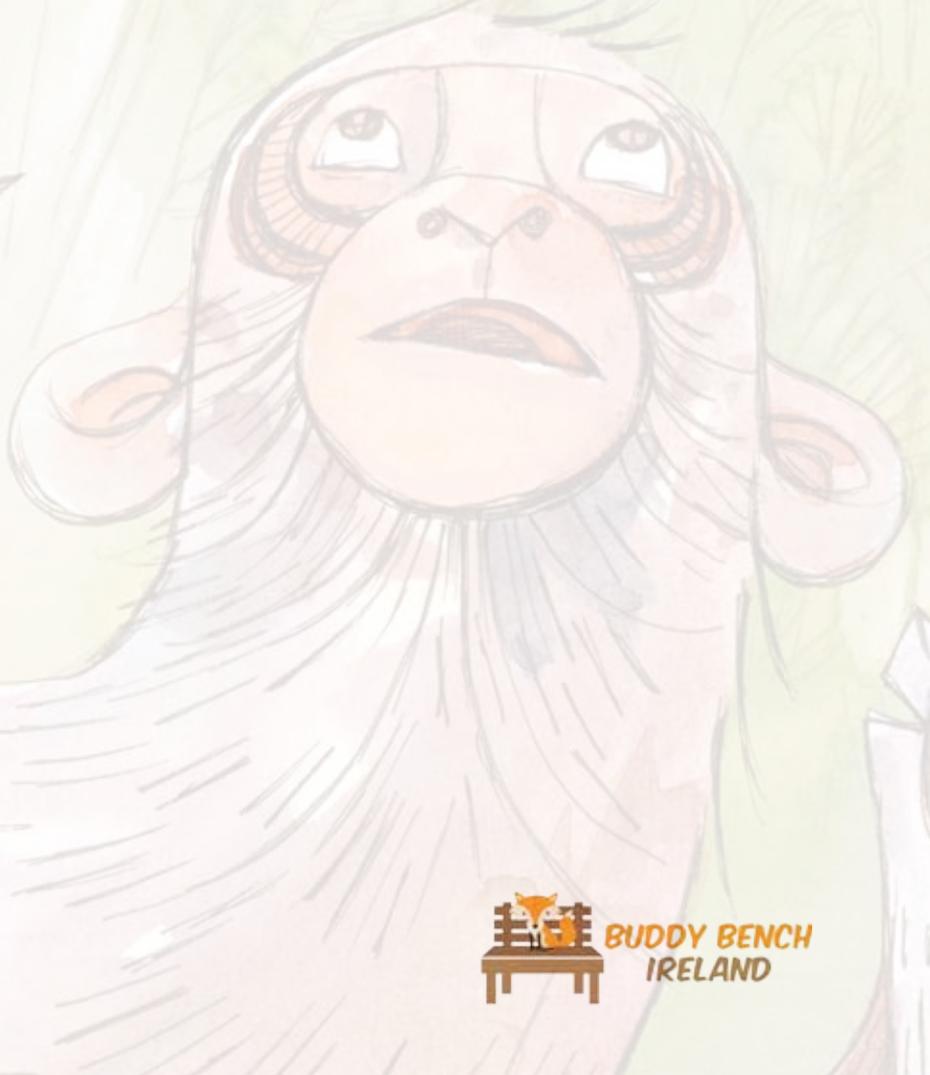




Buddy Bench Aware Program Workbook 2016
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www.buddybenchireland.ie





A message from
Buddy Bench Ireland
to you:

You are a special child of the universe.
You are needed, you are loved
and there is no-one on earth who is just like you.
We know you can find the power inside yourself
to dream your dreams and make them all come true,
because we at Buddy Bench Ireland believe in you.

And remember:
Look up.
See those around you that might need a friend.
Remember
being different means being unique
not the odd one out.

**LOOK UP, LOOK AROUND,
LOOK OUT FOR EACH OTHER!**

On Monday,

a child sat on the bench,
when along came a fox.

She was slinking along,
head down, ears back,
nose to the ground.

As she passed the child,
the fox stopped for a
moment and looked up.
The fox was curious.

“What are you doing?”
asked the fox.

“I am just sitting here,”
said the child.

“Just sitting?” said the
fox.

“I am thinking,” said the child.

“Ah,” said the fox. The fox understood thinking, because the fox was always thinking of ways to get her next meal.

“I like thinking,” said the fox. “A penny for your thoughts.” And she looked long, long into the child’s eyes. The fox’s eyes were a deep dark pool in the woods. The fox’s mind was a forest. Birds sang in the distance there, and the wind ruffled leaves in the treetops.

“Thank you,” said the child. And the fox went her way. The fox’s name was Kin.



What do you understand these keywords to mean?

curious

thank you

understood

thinking

What do you think the child was **thinking** about?
Draw a picture of the child's **thoughts**.



A large rectangular area enclosed by a dotted orange border, intended for drawing a picture of the child's thoughts.

What would you say to the child?

On Tuesday,

the child sat on the bench. The leaves were turning brown.

A squirrel came scurrying along, collecting nuts. The bench sat in the shade of a hazel tree. The squirrel looked up.

“What are you doing?” the squirrel asked the child. “Why are you sitting alone?”

“I am having a feeling,” said the child. “I am sitting here feeling my feeling.”

“Ah,” said the squirrel, who understood feeling, for it often felt very big and interesting feelings while it slept through the long winter, its tummy full of lovely nuts.

“I like feelings,” said the squirrel. “Here is a nut for your feelings.”

“Thank you,” said the child. And the squirrel, whose name was Elfe, hopped away.



Dear Parents and Teachers,

We hope you enjoy helping your children work with our Buddy Bench Aware Workbook.

The function of the Buddy Bench Aware Program is simply to start and encourage a thought process about feelings: what they are, how they change, how to express them, and how to receive others' expressions. Please remember that emotional development varies from child to child and so therefore all answers are valid, even if that's no answer!

Give your children space to take on the thoughts presented in this book in their own time, at their own pace, in their own words and in their own order.

Encourage your child to find their own answers to these open questions, and remember that these answers can, and should, change over time.

For this reason, **it's not always necessary for children to write their answers into the book.** Allow and encourage them to think about the questions, to discover their own thoughts and feelings, to explore their own ability to imagine, to be creatively inspired to draw, write, sing, dance, walk, talk, cook, laugh, explore...

The best example you can give is to accompany your child through this process, by offering your own honest and open responses to the questions inside.

**There are no right answers,
only answers that feel right at the time.**

Enjoy!!
Buddy Bench Ireland

