



**Promoting the  
Spiritual Health  
and Well-being  
of Children in  
Primary Schools**

**David Holmes**

David Holmes, September 2012





## To Conclude:



Spiritual health and well-being lies within all our young people. It is their right to have that potential recognised and our duty to do so.

Personal spiritual growth doesn't always just happen and it cannot be made to happen.

It can, however be helped to happen.

Promoting children and young people's spiritual health and well-being isn't a one-fix fits all solution.

It is about:

- believing in, and having a culture that celebrates spirituality,
- having the courage to make it a fundamental part of our school day, our teaching and learning,
- having the confidence to adopt and put into practice strategies and opportunities for our children and young people that will:

inspire belief in their own spirituality,

recognise and rejoice in it,

empower them to grow into spiritually healthy people.

"Come to the edge", he said.  
They said, "We are afraid".  
"Come to the edge", he said.  
They came.  
He pushed them ...  
*and they flew.*

*Guillaume Apollinaire*



*The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes.*

*Marcel Proust*



## Two short stories by way of an introduction.....

A few years ago now, I was taking a group of 8-year olds round the Crooked Spire church in Chesterfield. We had climbed to the top of the tower and the children were marvelling at the intricate spider's web of timbers that formed the inside of the steeple. As they gazed up, Katie noticed an old wooden ladder curving its way into the darkness. She stood in silence staring up at it for what seemed an age before touching my arm and whispering,

'Mr Holmes, do you think the angels use that ladder to climb up and down to heaven?'

On another occasion I was at Chatsworth House with a group of 11-year olds. We were making our way to the Elizabethan hunting tower that sits high on a wooded ridge overlooking the park. Quite a lot of the children had walked on ahead. One of them, Edward, came running back to me. Edward it has to be said wasn't the easiest of children to engage with. He had a very difficult home situation and found life quite challenging at times. He was also well practiced challenging those with whom he came into contact.

Anyway, a breathless Edward grabbed my hand and dragged me as fast as he could towards the tower. As I dropped panting onto the stone steps, he took hold of my head, twisted it from side to side and at the top of his voice said,

'Mr Holmes, look at that \*\*\*\*\* view!'

Thinking that they knew me well and my intolerance of bad language, most of the other children disappeared into the bushes ready for what they assumed would be my impending explosion.

They didn't know me as well as they thought though, for all I could say as I looked at the shine on his face was,

'Yes Edward, it is nice.'

'Nice,' came the reply, 'it's bloody heaven Mr Holmes.'

Two true stories. Different times, situations and children but united by their simple yet deep childhood spirituality. Together their experiences in those stories open the door to this booklet, for in each of their ways they encapsulate the broad purposes of the following pages, namely:

- recognising that all children are inherently spiritual,
- valuing that spirituality,
- finding ways to nurture their spiritual growth,
- promoting their spiritual health and well-being.



### Spirituality, Health and Well-being

Promotion of their health and well-being is the fundamental right of every child. Enshrined within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is the primary duty of care for all who work with and have responsibility for children in any capacity.

Schools, club leaders, social workers, educational professionals, family and friends form an integrated and extended health and well-being network for every child. All have a unique and diverse contribution to make. Each inevitably operates within its own particular sphere, of interest directed by different personal, statutory or institutional priorities and areas of focus. Separately they can all have a positive impact on our young people's health and well-being. When harnessed together though into a cohesive whole there is the potential to make huge difference to the lives of the children everyone has at their heart and purpose.



*Be not afraid of growing slowly, be afraid of only standing still.*

*Chinese proverb*



### Billy Elliot !

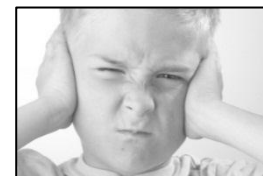
Set against the backdrop of the Miner's Strike, Billy Elliot was the boy from the NE mining community who was able to be his true self and went to the Royal Ballet School against all the odds and expectations. Made famous as a film and stage show, Billy Elliot taps into that aspect of spirituality that connects us with ourselves.

In nurturing their spiritual health and well-being we need to reflect on the ways in which we can open up the paths of life that are right for the unique person that is within each of our children and empower them to walk the one that is right for the person they are.

They can only do that if they have had the opportunity to connect with themselves, and helping them to do that is our challenge through what we offer them in school in lessons and beyond.

*When thinking about ways in which we can promote children's spiritual health and well-being please remember as said, the ideas put forward are not a definitive approach, they are simply suggestions to be taken on board in different ways.*

*What we do need to hold to though is a holistic approach that seeks to encompass and balance the essence of the different ideas as they should not be seen separately but as conjoined elements that inter-weave and support each other in an organic whole that can grow, change and develop as the children it is aiming to help will be ever changing.*



## Quality Time

Having said that there is much we can do to promote spiritual health and well-being within our existing practices, we need to balance that with quality time for its development as well.

Just as you cannot expect a child to apply a mathematical skill that he or she has not learned, so we cannot expect young people's spirituality to be drawn out unless we show them how and help them with it.

Spiritual health and well-being needs quality time and focused attention !

## Spiritual Expression

In exploring ways by which we can promote children's spiritual health and well-being a thread that needs to run across all of them is opening ways in which they can express their spirituality.

This can include a vocabulary of commonly accepted words and phrases that we often use in such circumstances but it involves much more than that.

It is a difficult balancing act between providing the children with words that might help them to understand and express their spirituality whilst not allowing such words to constrain how they express their feelings.

*The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. He to whom this emotion is stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand in rapt awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed.*

*Albert Einstein*



*Keep your face to the sunshine, and  
you cannot see the shadow.*

*Helen Keller*



Although the principal audience for the ideas in this booklet is primary schools, hopefully much of what it is about can impact on all who are involved in the promotion of young people's health and well-being.

Not only can most of what follows be transferred effectively to other settings, but by sharing understanding and approaches we can raise the quality, sustainability and effectiveness of what we are able to bring to health promotion, and in particular to the spiritual health and well-being of those we are working with and for.

Within the educational sphere it is well known and accepted that effective and long term learning can only take place when the children are ready and in a fit state to learn. That not only means physically and mentally able, fit and ready to learn but emotionally as well.

Since the earliest of days it has also been accepted and understood that a key role of education is to enable children to develop and mature as people and prepare them for life in the adult world that they will one day enter – a world with ever-changing roles and values, prospects and persuasions that the children of today need to be made ready for more than ever.

It is a readiness and preparation that needs to be rooted not just in terms of what they know across a set of subjects, but in who they are, the skills they have as people, the values that will form the foundation of their lives and the ways in which they respond inside to all they meet both tangibly and intangibly.

All of which is why the promotion of health and well-being is such an essential part of the curriculum and the experiences children have at school. An importance reflected through its place within Personal, Social, Health, Citizenship and Economic Education (PSHCEE), and through the National Indicators that drive national and local government and organisational policy and development.



Given that the notion of 'health and well-being' can be interpreted in a variety of ways and used quite loosely at times, this exploration of spiritual health and well-being will start by exploring briefly how both health and well-being are linked and defined, and what they might encompass in order to set our more detailed look at spiritual health in its wider health context.

In 1947, the World Health Organisation (WHO) developed what was regarded as the first holistic definition of health in describing it as:

*A complete state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.*

This moved away from seeing health simply in physical terms and introduced the notion of positive health. This definition is still regarded as key to understanding what is meant by health, although WHO has now moved its definition forward towards a *wellness* model.

This understands health not as a state of being but a process. This is exemplified by the 1984 WHO Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion which now defines health as:

*The extent to which an individual or group is able to realise aspirations and satisfy needs, and to change or cope with the environment. Health is a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living; it is a positive concept, emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities.*

The new definition is particularly significant if we are to include the concept of spiritual health and well-being within our understanding and promotion of children's health as it encompasses much of what they are both about.

Other thoughts that lend support to including spiritual health in our understanding of health come from a widely accepted ecological definition and, interestingly, the Aborigine people.

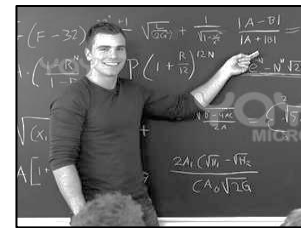


*In everyone's life at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the human spirit.*

Albert Schweitzer



## Teaching



*Today well lived makes every yesterday a Dream of Happiness and every tomorrow a Vision of Hope.*

Native American Saying

Just as we can look at what learning opportunities are already available to us in promoting spiritual health and well-being, so we can explore how our teaching styles support it as well.

- If we were to do a teaching audit with regards to opportunities for spiritual enhancement?
- Do we use a range of teaching strategies that allow our young people to explore by asking questions?
- Do we allow them to question what they are told?
- Are they encouraged to use their imaginations?
- Does our teaching allow them to go along unplanned learning paths?
- Do we believe in them as learning partners?
- Does our teaching promote active and democratic learning?
- Are we bold enough to stop what we are doing and celebrate those special spontaneous moments in a lesson?
- Does our planning balance values and attitudes with skills and knowledge?
- Is there room for our own spirituality in our teaching?
- How do we reflect on what we have achieved each day?

As said earlier, we cannot teach spirituality but by our teaching we can help to open our children up to, give it opportunities to flourish or flatten it !

A note of caution though: RE must not be the sole domain of spiritual health and well-being. We must not get so focused on RE as the way to spiritual understanding that it stifles our young people's true spiritual health and growth through other areas of learning.

RE must also encompass the ways in which different faiths (and those with no faith) approach spirituality. Our role is to walk the tightrope that:

- enables those who hold a particular faith to enhance and strengthen their beliefs,
- opens up the world of faith to others so that they are able to enter that world should they choose to do so,
- promotes the spirituality of those who chose to have no faith,
- meets the potential challenge of respecting those with what are perceived as 'alternate' lifestyles.

The partner curriculum area to RE for the development of young people's spiritual health and well-being is Personal, Social and Health and Economic Education. Together with Citizenship Education it offers a wealth of learning opportunities but more importantly, pathways to self-understanding through the three things that should be at the heart of both of them:

### ***experiencing, connecting and seeking***

Collective Worship can offer times to celebrate together many of the ways in which children's spirituality can be expressed and experienced. As with other things, we need to have the courage and conviction to assess how we make use of those times.

- Do we try to make them special moments?
- Do we see it as a 'coming together'?
- Are there times for children to reflect within it?
- Do the constraints of time, location and numbers and attitudes mean we accept that it cannot be an effective time of spiritual togetherness?
- Do we want to change what we do ?



*For peace of mind, resign as  
general manager of the universe.  
Larry Eisenberg*



*Spirit is an invisible force made visible in  
all life*

*Maya Angelou*



The ecological approach defines health and well-being as:

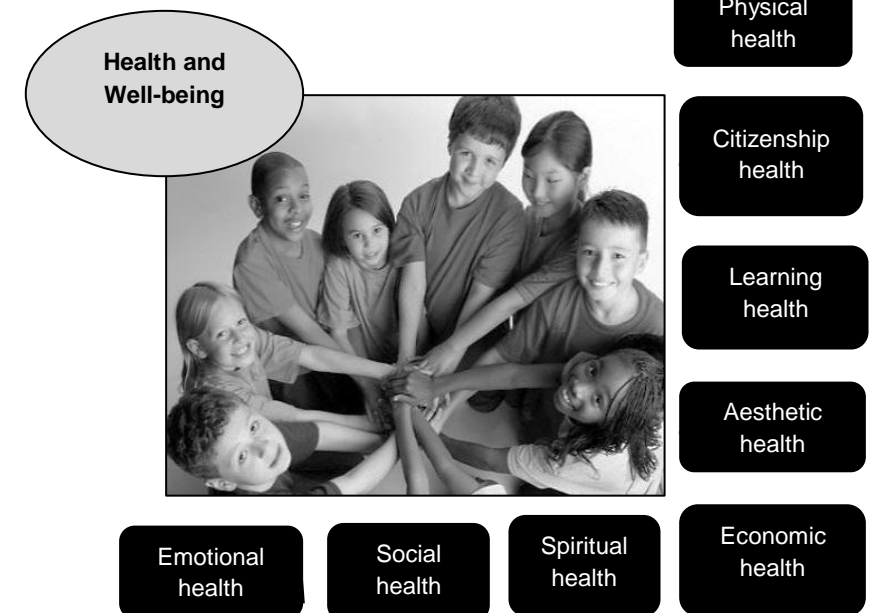
*A state in which humans and other living creatures  
with which they interact can coexist indefinitely.*

*(Last JM. Dictionary of epidemiology. IEA, 1995:73)*

For many generations the Aborigine people have defined health not just in terms of the physical well-being on an individual but refer to the social, emotional, spiritual and cultural well-being of the whole community as part of people's health, all set in the on-going cycle of life and death.

Bringing all of these definitions together, we can see that a real understanding of what health is about has to have an awareness of the way in which a number of essential and distinct elements interact to create a multi-faceted and on-going dynamic that is each person's health and well-being.

Those different elements can be identified as:



**Spiritual health** empowers us to connect with, and experience both the real and intangible as we seek meaning.

**Emotional health** is the self-worth and resilience that enables us to enjoy and meet the challenges of life.

**Economic health** allows us to manage our resources and equips us to meet our different needs.

**Social health** is about being able to form relationships and connect with other people.

**Citizenship health** generates a sense of belonging and the values that connect us positively with society.

**Learning health** inspires and empowers us to be lifelong learners and extend our knowledge, skills and understanding.

**Physical health** sustains our physical needs and empowers us to undertake different forms of physical activity.

**Aesthetic health** enables us to connect with the creative and artistic world that surrounds us.

Together these eight 'healths' form a 'wholeness of health' that it should be the right of all children and young people to know and experience and which we should be seeking to promote and develop in their fullness.

*The spiritual life does not remove us from the world but leads us deeper into it.*

*Henri Nouwen*



*Our young people's spirituality must be allowed to grow from within and not 'educated' out of them !*

*Anon*



Our challenge is to kindle enthusiastic learning through a curriculum that nurtures those special learning moments when the children connect with what they are doing and it has a real impact on them as a person. We must have the courage to share in the 'magic' of those experiences and rejoice in them with our children for such experiences are the foundation of a spiritual curriculum.

Many areas of the curriculum, if not all of it, offer huge opportunities for the development of spiritual learning and spirituality.

Through the things we expose the children to in the curriculum we can promote spiritual empathy and engage our young people's understanding of what motivates and inspires the lives of others – be they real or fictional, modern or historical, positive and negative in their impact on the world.

History, Geography, Religious Education and Science have a huge potential for promoting spirituality as they open up the wonders of the world to our young learners.

Art, Music, Dance PE and Drama can be a real treasure trove of spiritual exploration in a whole variety of ways and experiences.

Literature can be a powerhouse for the imagination and Maths can bring to life the order and pattern of number.

Science by its very nature is a world of exploration, experimentation and investigation that can be both empirical and spiritual.

**See, seek and seize the possibilities - the opportunities are endless !**

*Religious Education and Collective Worship:*

Many of us will automatically look to Religious Education as the natural home for learning about spirituality.

In most cases, the syllabus lends itself totally to that purpose and can be a solid starting point from which our young people can step out on the many voyages of exploration that should characterise their learning experiences in this area.



- feed them with ideas if they have not had the experiences to draw on,
- build on and extend / enhance what they are able to offer,
- lead ( and follow ) along the paths they go,
- let them see us responding to stimuli,
- be prepared to go with the unexpected,
- take risks,
- declare that a lesson has been successful when the learning outcome is not the one planned.

## The Curriculum

Promoting children and young people's spiritual health and well-being does not have to be about trying to squeeze yet more into an already over-loaded curriculum. It is about how we approach it !

We can enter into it as something that we 'deliver' or it can be the doorway to a world of exploration, discovery and fascination.

As those responsible for introducing our young people to 'formal' education through the curriculum, we can make or break a love of learning, and the spirituality of discovery across all it can offer.

*Our personal consumer choices have ecological, social, and spiritual consequences. It is time to re-examine some of our deeply held notions that underlie our lifestyles.*

*David Suzuki*



*We are not human beings having a spiritual experience; we are spiritual beings having a human experience*

*Pierre de Chardin*



If we are to achieve the goal that we must have of our young people being healthy in the widest sense of the term, all eight components must be present and active in their lives. Whilst each of them has its own distinctive features and needs, our children's health and well-being is not made up of a set of separate 'boxes' – convenient as that might be at times. All eight parts must form a cohesive whole, overlapping, interweaving, connecting, supporting, counter-balancing and complementing each other. Physical health is affected by our mental health and vice-versa, learning health is influenced by our aesthetic health and so on.

These vital interconnections and tensions ( both positive and negative ) give our young people the wholeness of health they should have. We need to understand them together with the key role they play in both promoting good health and reducing the potential for dysfunctional or imbalanced healthy lives in both the long and short term.

Promoting the positive health and well-being of our children, calls on us to work towards, achieve and maintain a balance of good health built on those eight parts. Such a balance recognises the holistic nature of health and well-being and acknowledges the role and significance of the elements has to play within it.

The balance of good health also seeks to ensure that each aspect of it is given the:

- due weight,
- appropriate 'interest',
- opportunities,
- time,
- energies,
- space,

it needs to become fully developed in our young people as they grow and mature.

Although we talk a lot about the balance of good health and much is put into seeking its achievement, unfortunately it is not always there in how we approach children and young people's health promotion. Understandably there is often an emphasis on physical health and its associate elements, and, to a growing extent, emotional health. These are very important but if we are to see health in its wholeness it is essential to the development of rounded and well young people, that physical and emotional health should not be over-emphasised at the expense of the other parts of it.

Some aspects of health and well-being have been, and still are to varying degrees, under-developed for a variety of reasons, but primarily because:

- they are not recognised as being 'health',
- they are not understood,
- we don't know what to do with them,
- they are not regarded as part of 'our' remit.

Spiritual health and well-being is one of them for each of the above reasons.

All children are inherently spiritual but time and again the 'adult' world fails to recognise their spirituality and so does nothing about it. Because of this, just as a plant trapped in a pot, deprived of light and water cannot flourish so the spirituality of our young people fails to thrive. Their spiritual health needs the space to grow, the time to mature and the careful nurturing of its young shoots.

Sadly it frequently gets little or none of those things either because people can't or don't want to recognise it, or because it is seen as being outside our experiences. As a result it remains a 'taboo' subject, with a fear ( either acknowledged or subconscious ) of us being out of our depth or having our personal and professional 'comfort zone' challenges. We go into denial and follow the 'easier' path of '*don't see, don't touch*'.

Because of this spirituality is either lost completely to our children's school experiences or its identity becomes subsumed into Emotional Health and Well-being (EHWB) or Religious Education (RE).

None of which either needs to happen, or should happen.



*Sell your cleverness and buy  
bewilderment.*

*Rumi*



*The shoe that fits one  
person pinches another;  
there is no recipe for  
living that suits all cases.*

*Karl Jung*



## Connecting with nature and the natural year

There are many opportunities for us to link what we are doing with the changing course of nature and the natural year. Exploring how we can use of those 'natural' links will help our children to engage with what is around them and strengthen their spiritual connection with their world.

How often do we give our children the opportunity to look, feel and absorb the natural world around them and the ways in which it changes over the year?

Do their learning contacts with it focus too much on knowledge at the expense of an emotional experience with it?

And what of the urban environment and the city year? They can also be extremely spiritual places and if they are the environment in which our young people are growing up, we have a duty to them to open them up to the spiritual potential their home can offer.

## Creating time and space for the imagination

We can enhance children's spiritual health and well-being by creating and building on all the opportunities the school day offers to stimulate their imaginations.

This can be done in many, many ways. It is about structuring times and experiences when their creative thoughts can work overtime, and then celebrating and sharing the possibly weird and wonderful things that might result.

As with other things we can do, we have to be prepared to:

We need to ask ourselves as well, how much we subconsciously perpetuate the culture of the perfect through our practices.

If we are to help our children grow spiritually we need the courage to challenge a culture that is perfection oriented and relies on measuring 'success' too much in terms of a very limited range of criteria.

Do we believe that education is a set of even steps to be climbed at a prescribed rate towards a set of given goals that determine you as 'successful' if you achieve them as and when it has been decided that you should do?

Or do we see education as recognising each of our children as unique and wonderful evergreens that need be given opportunities to put down deep and strong roots that are then fed and nurtured by us so that it can grow and mature tree, similar to others, sharing many qualities perhaps, but the tree that it is to be ?



## Listening

It is important that we make time to listen to our children and show them that we truly recognise, respect and value their thoughts, opinions and feelings and take them seriously.

Find time to listen to what they actually want to say, and to listen without commenting on what has been said.

Again not easy in busy days but let's look at the curriculum and lessons to see how we can fine tune what we are doing to generate time for discussions that would allow such talking and listening.

*It is not the years in your life that counts, but the life in your years.*

*Abraham Lincoln*



*People travel to wonder at the height of mountains, at the huge waves of the seas, at the long course of rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars, and yet they pass by themselves without wondering.*

*St Augustine*



Whilst intrinsically connected to both EHWP and RE, spirituality and spiritual health and well-being has its own distinct identity which we need to recognise, identify and value if we are to develop and enhance it as something in its own right.

Having said that, we do also have to acknowledge that like other aspects of health, spiritual health and well-being sits, and must sit comfortably within many different parts of school life (and life in general ) if we are to enhance and encourage it effectively.

It is precisely because of that multiplicity though that we need a clear understanding of what it is, and where it can comfortably and legitimately 'belong' so that like any other part of their multi-dimensional life learning and lifelong learning, it retains its integrity and doesn't become a diluted and indistinguishable flavour in a well liquidised educational soup for life.



## Spiritual Health

So what is spiritual health? In order to answer that question we need to step back momentarily and explore what we understand by both 'spiritual' and 'spirituality' not only because they are both the foundation of spiritual health, but because of the many ways there are of understanding them.

Spirituality is one of those subjects that generates both passion and deep intellectual reflection. It has been the cause of philosophical and theological debate for centuries, and will, without a doubt go on being so for generations to come. Begin to explore it and you can soon find yourself in a maze of different definitions, connotations, manifestations and implications.

The concept of spirituality crosses all faiths and cultures. To many it is the essence of life that lies within all people. For others it is a fundamental divine power woven into the values and beliefs of their faith. To some it is a focus on the *self* and the world within which they live.

There are, it might seem, as many ways to define spirituality as there are people seeking its definition.

We now add another to their number!

In looking at how people seek to bring clarity to what spirituality is about, it is possible to draw together a number of commonly accepted themes and concepts that hold together and encapsulate what we can all understand by it, namely:



*There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.*

*Albert Einstein*



*If there is to be any peace it will come through being not having.*

*Henry Miller*



Let us celebrate that passion and not crush it to conform to some unhelpful stereotypical view that sees spirituality only in terms of calmness.

Our role in these instances should be one of harnessing and guiding energies and passion, encouraging and empowering our children - respecting views and helping them to manage not repress their feelings.



## Perfection

Should we be demanding perfection from our young people? We live in a society and work in an education world that all too often does. Spiritual health and well-being doesn't accept that 'anything' is okay but recognises that we are not all perfect. What it can do is rejoice in that fact and harness its power to help people connect with each other in different ways.

In thinking about 'perfection' we need to question how we assess, record and share the development and 'progress' of the children in our schools? Is it a balanced and holistic approach? Does it reflect the full spectrum of learning, living and wide curriculum experiences we offer our children every day? Or do we concentrate too heavily on one or two aspects of learning, which are important but which are still only a part of what school, education, learning and health are about?

## Diversity and Cohesion

We live in a multi-cultural, multi-faith and atheistic society that has an amazing wealth of practices, traditions, customs and beliefs to be shared and enjoyed by us and within us. Schools already do a lot of important, valuable and creative work to help their children connect with those many things. Where there is still scope for development is in thinking about how we can link that work to the promotion of spiritual health and well-being. We need to link this into the way in which we widen the children's experiences and thereby the way in which they are able to respond to things spiritually and the expressions of their spirituality.

Through activities with the local community, and now with global partnerships, we have lots of opportunities to look at how ideas such as inter-generational perspectives on life and strong local customs can impact on spiritual understanding.

The school as a community further offers many ways of developing the spirituality of cohesion – being part of a group and the ways in which that can impact on us as individuals. Being part of a group, sharing in an event can have a strong emotional and spiritual impact.

## Energy

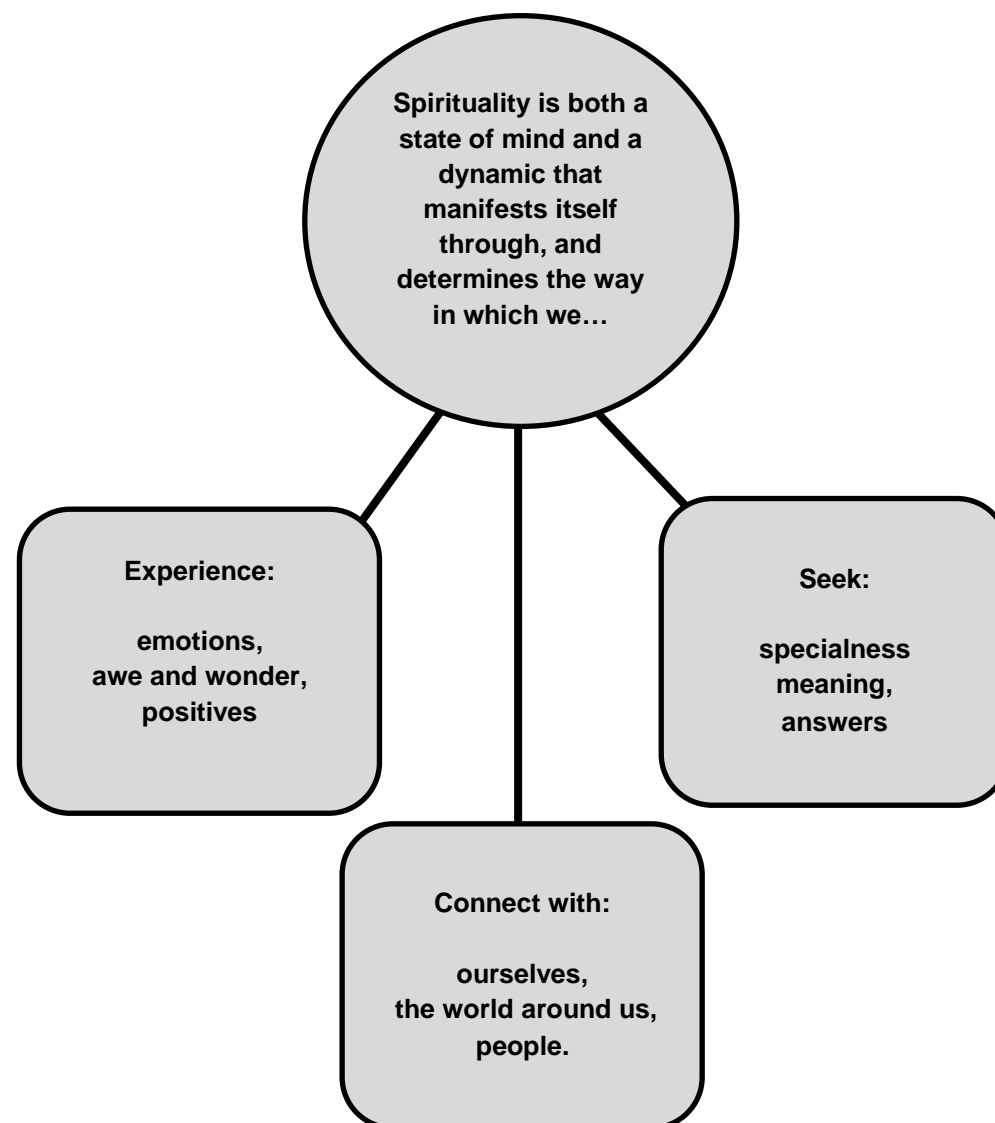
Spirituality is not just about calm and tranquillity. It can be about passion, energy and commitment.

Hopefully if they are connecting, seeking and experiencing, they will be inspired and challenged by some of the things they connect with, find and experience. Their spirituality might manifest itself in passionate and energetic ways that want to challenge, perhaps with anger because a deep and tender nerve has been touched.



*Spirituality does not hide us from the negative but connects us with it in such a way that our experience of it seeks to find meaning to it and helps us to find the positive that can lie within and from it.*

*Anon*



*A good traveller has no fixed plan, and is not intent on arriving*

*Lao Tzu*

Expanding on the diagram gives us:

- **Connecting with:**

**Ourselves** – accepting who we are and why we are, exploring our purpose and where life is taking us.

**The world around us** – having a sharing, caring and two-way relationship with the natural and urban world in which we live.

**People** – perceiving and relating to them in ways that go beyond the immediate and superficial to look at who is on the inside.

- **Seeking:**

**Specialness** – in others, ourselves, places, moments and events.

**Meaning** – to our lives, what is happening in the world, people and nature.

**Answers** – to questions that go beyond the immediate and tangible, accepting that answers might lie in belief or that there are only more questions.

- **Experiencing:**

**Emotions** – in ourselves and others and the way in which we are affected by, and respond to them.

**Awe and wonder** – those ‘tingle’ moments of a sunset or the dew on a cobweb when we are silenced by the ‘magic’ of what we see.

**Positives** – the positive things about ourselves and others, about what we and others do, and all the positive things around us



*Is there one soul, however materialistic, that does not wish to unfold ?*

*There cannot be. It is in the unfoldment of the soul that the purpose of life is fulfilled.*

*Khan*



- the location and environment,
- consistency and commitment,
- timing – think about when in the day,
- how we sit, stand lie etc.,
- preparing the children for it,
- the time we spend in reflection,
- opportunities to feed thoughts back if they want to,
- how to keep focused and other skills needed,
- aids to reflection such as candles, music, pictures, a favourite toy, reflection diary, faces to help reflect feelings, beads to help us think about different times of the day etc.,



*It's the action, not the fruit of the action, that's important. You have to do the right thing. It may not be in your power, may not be in your time, that there will be any fruit. But that doesn't mean you stop doing the right thing. You may never know what results come from your action. But if you do nothing, there will be no result*

*Gandhi*





Reflection needs to start with a belief in, and the valuing of it as an important part of everyone's learning and growth as a person. It has to be respect and given the status of a valid and justifiable part of the school day, from senior management outwards.

It needs, as well to avoid the '*this is the right way to reflect, this is what you should do*' approach. As with many things, it is our role to nurture reflective skills, open them up, feed them and enable to them to blossom in our children, celebrating with them that what works for one, will not be the right approach for another.

As adults we will probably need to be honest with ourselves and each other in acknowledging that we need to take the time to develop and enhance our own understanding of the reflective process and approaches as many of us will be sharing the same journey as the children will be taking. We need to model and be open about reflecting not just on what have been doing, as can often be the focus in school, but wider issues and the way such reflection might impact on us. In doing so we must also remember and respect that reflection is essentially a personal and private process – not a means of assessment !

There are many strategies we can use to promote effective and fulfilling reflection. We can think about:



*The amount of happiness that you have depends on the amount of freedom you have in your heart.*

*Thich Nhat Hanh*



*We do not see things as they are. We see them as we are.*

*The Talmud*



Spirituality is the dynamic force in children's lives that can determine the way in which they connect, seek and experience life, the world and moments.

That connecting, seeking and experiencing then manifests itself in certain behaviours and responses etc. that we recognise as being 'spiritual'.

We in our turn are able to recognise that spirituality because we have experienced it ourselves and / or are open to its existence and what it can do in, for and to people.

A key feature of spirituality is its fluidity. As indicated, it is a dynamic that moves and changes with time and situations ( both internal and external to us ).

This means that the nine different parts forming what might be called the 'avenues of spirituality':

- emotions,
- awe and wonder,
- positives,
- specialness,
- meaning,
- answers,
- ourselves,
- the world around us,
- people,

will inter-weave and inter-play with differing strengths, impact and manifestations.

This, though, is but the core of our children's spirituality. Around these nine avenues we need to wrap a number of additional elements to complete what it fully encompasses, because spirituality:

- **Takes us out of the immediate and into the intangible.**

A key characteristic of spirituality is that it takes us out of the here-and-now and the reality of where we are ( in all ways ) and onto a different plane. Katie and Edward in the recollections at the beginning were moved by what they were seeing and taken to a different 'place' beyond themselves. The other children liked what they saw and responded to the concrete reality of what was in front of them. Katie and Edward had been taken away from that immediate seeing, liking and responding, to a whole new intangible response sphere – the spiritual.

Spirituality does that to us. It takes from immediate worldliness and into a world that has only the logic of spirituality to explain it.

- **Can be a physical sensation.**

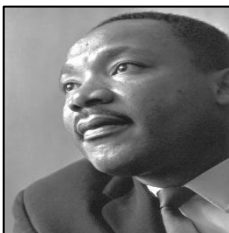
There are times when we can actually feel the spirituality of something – what might be termed a 'tingle time' during which we can feel physically different as a result of what we are experiencing.

- **Has to be respected as a very personal experience.**

It is very easy to judge another's experiences in terms of our own. In encouraging children's spirituality we must avoid such judgements and respect their experiences and expressions when they don't match our own. We as adults are there to facilitate what is in them, not to create our spiritual clones.

- **Manifests itself in many different ways.**

The 'culture of spirituality' that a child lives in may have a significant impact on how it shows itself – be that positively or negatively. Given that children are all different, the same spiritual trigger can result in a variety of responses and manifestations.



*The Longest journey is the journey inwards of him who has chosen his destiny.*

*Dag Hammarskjöld*



We all live with the objective of being happy; our lives are all different and yet the same.

Anne Frank



## Experiences

A key part of our role is to provide the young people in our care with a wide range of experiences and opportunities that might trigger a spiritual response in them.

In doing so we must accept that we cannot make such responses happen, but we can, and should look carefully about what, why and how we do things with our children.

We also have to recognise those moments, as happened with Edward and Katie in the opening stories, when they respond perhaps unexpectedly on our part, to something that they are experiencing. We have to be 'big' enough to go with them in their moment rather than trying to make them go with us and the way we might respond. Enjoy the moment together first and then follow it up – don't educate them out of it !

## Reflection

In busy days that probably already feel as though we are trying to squeeze a quart into a pint pot, making time for reflection can be a real challenge. We have to try though. The children's spiritual health and well-being needs them to have both the time and space to stop, pause and reflect on things. Perhaps the fact that we find generating such time a struggle demonstrates how much it is needed.

If young people have never had the opportunity for reflection, or the experience of doing so, they will find it both a difficult and an unrewarding experience at first that does little to enhance and open up their spirituality. Don't give up! We need to have both patience and perseverance with them ( and for them ) if we are to help them find different pathways into personal reflection and empower them to gain the most from the process.

## Caring and Sharing

There are already many opportunities during the day, and in the life of a school for children to share and care. It happens at many different levels and shows itself in numerous ways. The question is, do we establish such behaviour as an expectation or an exception? Is it the norm to be reinforced by public recognition, or something beyond the expected that gets rewarded?

A lot of work has been done to promote global education and an appreciation of our interdependence, and again children are well-able to take such concepts on board. The question is, how do we put that work into practice?

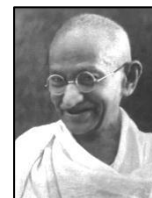
Do our children share and care and connect with others and their world ?

Children need those opportunities and we need to encourage them to take a lead in doing so for it is by doing so that they will really start to connect – when the 'big' world becomes a reality in 'their' world.

And within all that 'doing' they need a chance as well to explore the reasons and motivation that fires why they do what they do, to reflect on and share how their actions impact on others and to think about the long term implications of our decisions.

The children, each of those kids is in touch with nature and traditional aboriginal culture so a very important part of getting performances from them was just letting them be and trying to capture the unique **spirituality** that was in each of them.

Phillip Noyce



*I will never understand all the good that a simple smile can accomplish.*

Mother Teresa



- **Has individual triggers.**

Just as the way in which spirituality manifests in different ways, so the things that will trigger those manifestations will be individual to each person. What draws out the spirituality of one child might not have any impact on others. This needs to be both recognised and celebrated with our young people if we are to support their spiritual journey. Equally we must recognise that there will also be common triggers shared with others. They too should be enjoyed and built upon.

- **Cannot be taught but can be nurtured.**

We cannot teach children to be 'spiritual'. If we do we will either fail or create pseudo-spirituality. What we can and should do is unwrap, reveal and nurture the spirituality that is within them as part of our holistic approach to both their health/well-being promotion and wider education.

- **Doesn't need words but can have a vocabulary.**

Sometimes it just isn't possible to put what we are feeling into words. We have to respect that children won't always be able to articulate their spirituality through the spoken word, and we should rejoice in that with them. Our role has to be the development of a spiritual literacy that opens up children's ability to communicate their spirituality in ways that go beyond spoken and written language. This does not mean that words cannot be used or must be avoided. As educators we should always be looking to expand, enhance and deepen our children's vocabulary, language experiences and use of language in all spheres of life - including the spiritual sphere. We just have to make sure that spirituality doesn't become a vocabulary tick-list.

- **Isn't always about being calm.**

Spirituality can produce great energy and excitement in us. Edward was far from calm at Chatsworth but he was still very spiritual. Spirituality can create strong values and emotions within us. The connections that are at the core of spirituality can produce powerful emotions both positively and negatively. Our challenge is to appreciate that strength and channel the negative into positive ways.

- **Celebrates uniqueness.**

We are all wonderful unique beings. Spirituality both sees and celebrates the things that make us so. It is a celebration and way of seeing that goes beyond people to colour the whole way in which we see the world around us.

- **Is often seen in us by others, but not often recognised or acknowledged by us in ourselves.**

It is easier to see and acknowledge the spirituality of others rather than our own. A reluctance, recognise things within us is common characteristic for a huge number of reasons. As far as spirituality is concerned we need find ways of challenging such a characteristic in order to open our children up to spiritual growth.

- **Moments can be a collective experience.**

Being part of a crowd or at an event with others when you are sharing something can become very special and produce intensely spiritual moments through what is happening.

- **Promotes difference and diversity, cohesion and inclusion.**

It does so by its very nature. As those responsible for young people we should be taking a pro-active approach towards harnessing spirituality's ability to support and promote those four things in our communities of young people.

- **Can be deeply rooted in faith but not exclusively.**

For many, the dynamic that determines the purpose of, and way in which we seek, connect and experience will be grounded in their faith. That is to be celebrated with all children and we should not be afraid of helping them to explore and understand that. It must be remembered that spirituality is not the preserve of faiths. Spirituality is not the gift of the few, but to be found in all children ( and adults ). That diversity must be encouraged, respected and strengthened



*Never limit your view of life by any past experience.*

*Ernest Holmes*



*Everyone and everything around you is your teacher.*

*Ken Keyes Jr*



## Ethics

Closely linked to the exploration of values is that of operating and doing things in ethical ways. We need to open our young people up to the world of ethics from an early age. If done appropriately they are perfectly capable of appreciating how ethical issues and considerations can impact on their lives, their decisions and their world.

How would you answer these questions about your school ?

Does the school have an ethical policy ?

What would an audit of the PSHCEE scheme of work show ?

Do we ever talk with the children about ethical issues ?

Where could ethical discussions be built into the school day ?



Have the schools ethics been developed with the pupils ?

What ethics underpin school policies ?

## Environment

How often do we stop and take a good look at the physical, social and emotional environment we create for our children?

Whilst many schools excel with the emotional and social environment, and strive to create a varied learning one, how often do we think of that environment in terms of being a spiritual space?

Does it stimulate or depress their spirituality?

Does it offer secure and comfortable places for reflection and quiet?

If we have such spaces where are they and can the children access them easily?

Is their learning environment over-loaded with sensory experiences, words and images or do they work and play in a world that rarely changes, is bland and sensory drought-ridden?

How much do the children in school actually engage with their environment?

Does the environment give the children opportunities to explore and investigate?

Do the images children are presented with in their school environment balance calm with challenge and celebration?

How much input do the children have into creating their learning, playing, spiritually enhancing school world?



*We have a world that is searching for answers, that is searching for a way back to spirituality.*

*Moirira Kelly*



*Spirituality leaps where science cannot yet follow, because science must always test and measure, and much of reality and human experience is immeasurable.*

*Stawhawk*

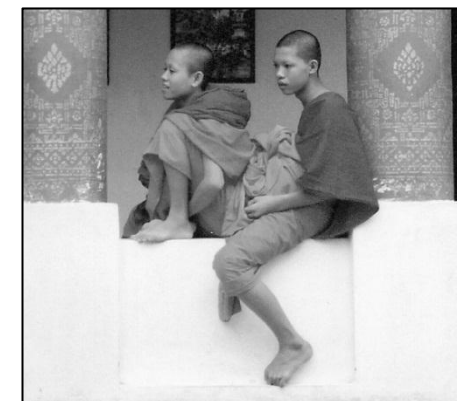
- **Doesn't just happen.**

Whilst spirituality is inherent in all children, it can lie dormant or be crushed. The reasons for this are numerous. We need to give our children the time, space and encouragement needed to believe in and experience their spirituality and establish as fully as possible the right conditions that will enable it to flourish in each child.

Spirituality is not easy to pin down and yet we need to give it some form and structure in order to have the consensus of understanding needed in order to approach it effectively within our schools etc. The preceding ideas should not be seen so much as a definition but as a framework of commonly held views which can be taken away and used as the basic building blocks from which individual schools can build their understanding.

With that building the challenge must not be the creation of a simple, trite definition that we can teach and assess but instead to take the essence of what it is about, to believe in it, give it worth and to do all we can to help it grow in our young people as something that is the norm and not the exception.

Promoting spiritual health and well-being needs us to find an integrated approach that does not lose sight of the whole whilst at the same time enables the building of practical and well-established pathways that will allow our children to make their spiritual journey in learning security and emotional safety.



## Spiritual health and well-being

Promoting spiritual health and well-being is about....

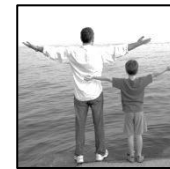
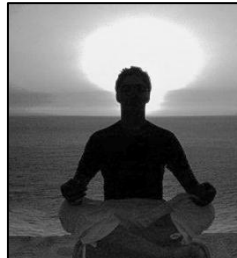
- developing a spiritual school ethos and culture that celebrates people's spirituality,
- creating time and opportunities for spiritual exploration, growth, celebration and manifestation,
- ensuring that the core elements of spirituality are in balance and form a cohesive whole,
- ensuring that spiritual health and well-being is in balance with other elements of health and well-being,
- empowering and enabling children to:

develop their understanding,  
 extend their knowledge and awareness,  
 have a rich range of experiences,  
 reflect,  
 celebrate,  
 learn together,  
 develop self-awareness and understanding,  
 question with security,  
 have respect and be respected.



*In order to experience everyday spirituality, we need to remember that we are spiritual beings spending some time in a human body.*

*Barbara de Angelis*



*Most importantly, the meaning of **spirituality** lays the seeds for our destiny and the path we must follow.*

*Dennis Banks*



- acknowledge and celebrate that they might challenge our thoughts and values,
- help them to discover that there aren't always simple answers or right / wrong answers,
- support them in realising that there aren't always answers just more questions !
- use understandable language and vocabulary.



## Answers

We can often give a lot of thought to the ways in which to ask questions, but how often do we spend time exploring answers? How many times do children give the answer that they think we are looking for as opposed to the one they could be wanting to give? How often do we think of answers in simple terms of A or B, right or wrong, my answer not yours?

As we all know, in reality answers are more appropriately to be found on a continuum of appropriateness, particularly those answering the philosophical, and open questions that we should be encouraging children to ask.

We can help our children's spiritual growth by exploring answers with them. Instead of looking for 'the answer' look for answer possibilities – what possible answers could there be? Use that investigation of possibilities to help the children delve into their own answers. And look at answers as well, not just in the terms of those highlighted in the first paragraph, but by sharing as well, the ways in which different groups, faiths and generations have sought to answer, and look to answer the key questions of life.



## Questions

A fundamental part of spirituality is the questioning of life, purpose and the meaning of things. We need to find ways of helping children to ask such philosophical questions as they, like values, lie within the grasp of all young people, regardless of age. All they need is age-appropriate support, encouragement and opportunities.

The more opportunities they have to ask such questions, the way in which those questions are responded to, and the positive reinforcement given by us as adults when such questions are asked, will extend and enhance our young people's questioning of their world and so promote their spiritual growth and journeying.

It is important that we:

- always respect the question,
- create secure questioning environments,
- encourage pupils to explore answers to their own questions,
- model good practice,
- help their peers to explore answers to pupil questions,
- teach different types of questioning skills,
- provide positive feedback on their use and application of those skills,
- create situations where philosophical questions can be asked,
- accept that at times their questions might over-step the mark and so redirect them sensitively,

*We can no more do without spirituality than we can do without food, shelter or clothing.*

*Ernest Holmes*



*My desire for knowledge is intermittent; but my desire to commune with the spirit of the universe, to be intoxicated with the fumes, call it, of that divine nectar, to bear my head through atmospheres and over heights unknown to my feet, is perennial and constant.*

*Henry David Thoreau*

## The school ethos and culture

A key starting point in the promotion of children's spiritual health and well-being is the ethos and culture of the school / organisation.

Does it have one that is spiritually based? Unless there is, any strategies and approaches will be limited in their effectiveness and meaning for the children.

In assessing and developing that culture, we can begin by asking a few simple questions as follows:

How do we celebrate special times?

Do we all understand what spirituality is?



Do we value spiritual health?

Does everyone get the chance to explore their spirituality?

Does the environment promote spirituality?

Are the adults comfortable with, and model spirituality?

## A successful culture of spirituality:

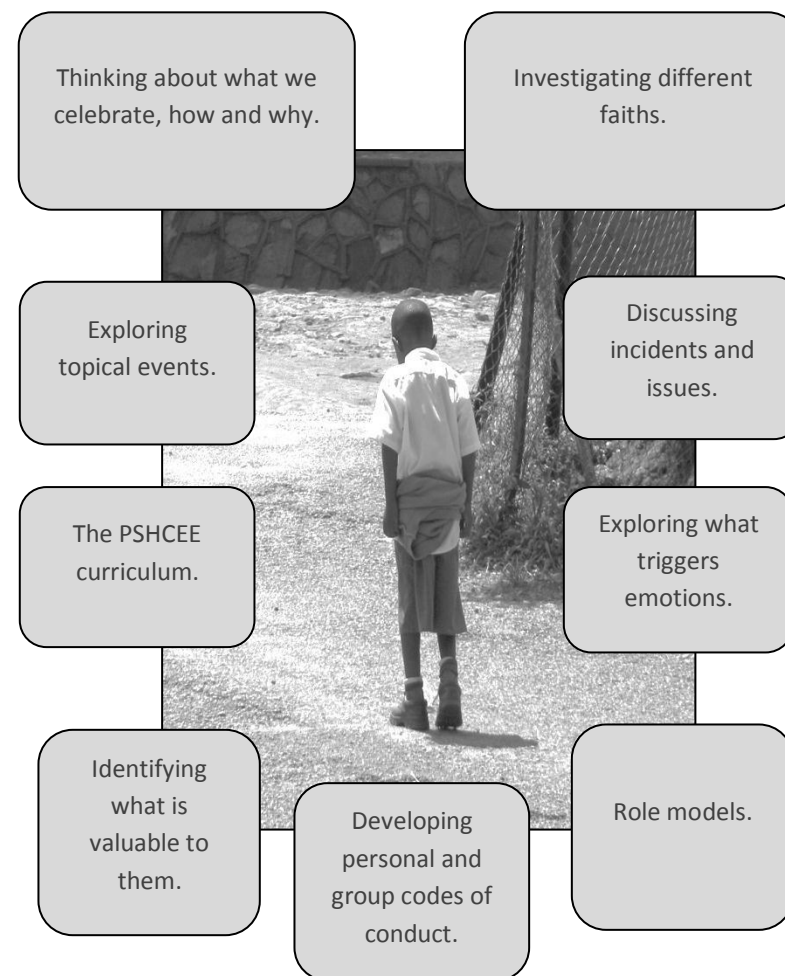
- is based on everyone sharing a common understanding of what spirituality is,
- has respect for people's spirituality and responds appropriately when that respect is not shown,
- values spirituality in people - encouraging and celebrating its expression,
- has a pro-active approach that looks at what can be done to promote it rather than allowing it to happen,
- has adults who are comfortable with spirituality and allows them to model it in a positive way,
- provides a safe and secure environment in which children can explore who they are,
- accepts spiritual expression as the norm but not a requirement,
- is built on supportive partnerships between adults and children, between the adults themselves and between the children,
- has an ethos of personal evolution,
- nurtures, draws out and guides,
- takes a holistic approach that crosses all aspects of school life and development,
- has on-going opportunities for collective spiritual moments – remembering that these cannot be made to happen, and will not happen for all involved,
- sees adults as the facilitators of spirituality and spiritual expression rather than imparters of 'the right way to do the right thing'.

**Using the above as the basis of an audit, what would it say about the spiritual ethos of your school ?**



*Immature love says: "I love you because I need you." Mature love says: "I need you because I love you."*

*Ghandi*



## Values

Children and young people need opportunities to develop the values and beliefs that will help to direct their spiritual health and well-being and its expression in different situations.

They need to have time to reflect, and assess what is important to them and then be equipped and empowered to hold fast to those values.

This is not about telling the children what to believe or imposing (be it knowingly or unwittingly) our personal values on them, but sharing, fostering and introducing them to ways and ideas that the school, faith groups ( and others ), society and families might hold as their bedrock.

In exploring values with the children in our care we need to think around how we:

- provide them with the skills they will need to hold to them,
- help them to respect ideas different to their own,
- enable them to resolve conflict over and around different values,
- have self-belief and worth,
- show them some of the positive and negative impacts that holding fast to beliefs and values can have.

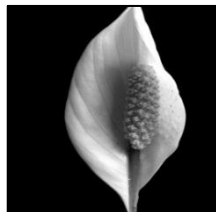
There is no age barrier to the exploration and adoption of personal values. Even the youngest of our children should be included as long as they are introduced to them in age-appropriate ways.

Values can be developed, reinforced and be given time to mature across all aspects of the school day and within the life of the school. Ideas can include:



*Spiritual power begins by directing animal power to other than egoistic ends.*

*John Ruskin*



*Sometimes people get the mistaken notion that spirituality is a separate department of life, the penthouse of existence. But rightly understood, it is a vital awareness that pervades all realms of our being.*

*David Steindl-Rast*



## Promoting spiritual health and well-being

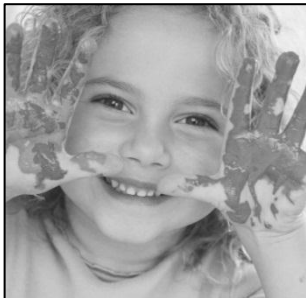
Promoting spiritual health and well-being builds on the foundations of a spiritual ethos and culture by exploring practical ways in which it can be developed. If spirituality is truly understood and valued, those approaches will:

- take a whole school approach,
- be planned and considered,
- have consistency,
- provide continuity and progression,
- be given time to work,
- be appropriate for both adults and young people,
- take ideas forward in ways that keep people feeling secure,
- will be prepared to challenge existing ways and norms,
- celebrate success and accept what does not work,
- allow for reflection,
- embody what we are trying to achieve.

**The following pages offer a number of practical ideas to support the promotion of children's spiritual health and well-being.**

They are:

- Values
- Questions
- Answers
- Environment
- Ethics
- Caring and sharing
- Experiences
- Reflection
- Diversity and cohesion
- Energy
- Perfection
- Listening
- Connecting with nature and the natural year
- Creating time and space for the imagination
- The curriculum
- Teaching
- Quality time
- Spiritual expression
- Billy Elliot



*The world is our  
school for spiritual  
discovery.*

*Paul Brunton*



*Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day. And you will come at last to love the whole world with an all-embracing love.*

*Fyodor Dostoyevsky*



What follows is not designed to be the definitive list of what should be done or what will work. Some will be appropriate for your setting, some not. Many will be already in place, some you will be ready to introduce, others will be further down the line.

Please use them:

- selectively,
- as a starting point,
- as triggers for your own ideas,
- alongside other initiatives.

