

Wholeness and wellbeing

God's design

Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus: 'For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us' Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

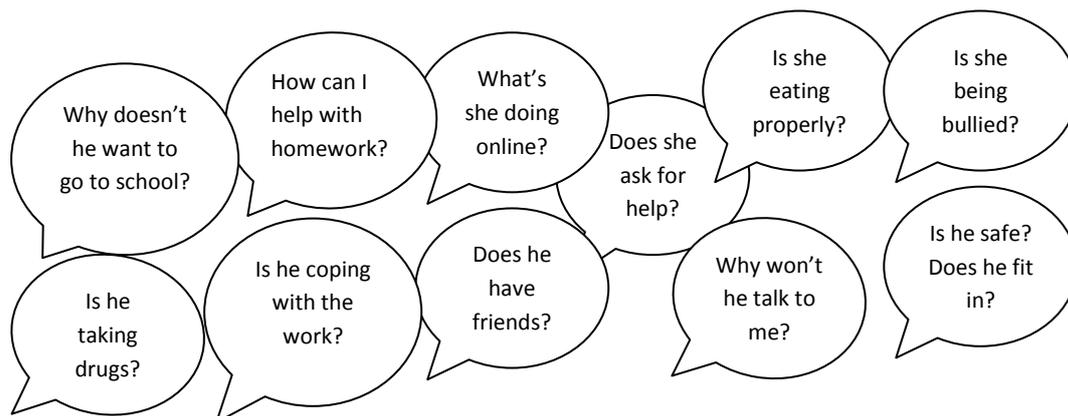
Although God created us to be whole and to glorify Him, we live in a broken world and that is nowhere more evident than in the lives of many children. We face a tsunami of mental health issues as their lives are fractured by family break up, loss of relationships and parents who can't cope with their own lives, leave alone nurture their children's. Many face academic pressure to achieve, in schools which have become exam factories. Others live in daily fear of bullies, particularly the menace of cyber bullying. Knife crime and the threat of global terrorism add to the fear. It's a toxic mix.

'We are God's masterpiece'

It's a parent's responsibility to nurture the social skills needed by children to navigate these pressures, to ask for help and to know right from wrong, good from bad. It's also a parental responsibility to use loving discipline to teach children to behave responsibly. But the school environment can also help or hinder wellbeing through the values which it embraces.

Fear

All parents have anxieties about their children's school lives: here are just a few of them!



Encourage your child to share fears with you as well as hopes. Don't just reassure them when they worry – find a solution to the problem. And above all, place your child daily into God's hands – Psalm 121 is full of hope and assurance to parents! Verse 8 says 'the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.'

Bullying

Bullying is prolonged, persistent and intentional, and it has lifelong consequences. Broken friendships and unkind comments are distressing, but they are visible and can be resolved. It's important to know the difference. Bullying is hard to see, as victims hide what is

'The Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you.'

happening in case intervention makes it worse. All you may notice are changes in your child's behaviour, including eating and sleeping patterns. If you are concerned, talk to your child and the school as soon as possible. Ask for the anti-bullying policy and ensure that it is followed. Pray with your

child in the light of Deuteronomy 31.6: 'Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you' and pray, too, for the bully.

Stress

Our system promotes economic success as the purpose of education, so children are subject to frequent high-stakes tests. This culture of measurement says 'We value you for *what* you are', rather than, 'We value you for *who* you are.' During tests, make sure your child is eating properly, resting and exercising. Talk about how to handle failure and above all, reassure them that your love won't alter whatever their academic achievement. God will continue to value them as His precious possession regardless. He doesn't measure success. He loves just because. Show them that economic success and the acquisition of shiny new things is not God's purpose for us and nor is it the route to happiness.

Digital diet

How much screen time is too much? It's a key question which you, as a parent, need to answer. Schools have strict policies to safeguard students and so should you. Agree clear guidelines with your child and, appropriately to their age, discuss the risks involved in social media engagement. Cyber bullying is a growing problem and even home is no longer a place of safety. If you're online, they can get you. If you go offline, you become a social outcast. Either way, you lose. Encourage your child to talk to you openly about anything online that bothers them and make sure that your own online behaviour is a positive model.

For more information:

- Raising Children in a Digital Age: Enjoying the best and avoiding the worst. Bex Lewis (Lion Books)