

SLIDE 1

Welcome back

In this session my focus turns to Chapter 3 –

Stimulating self-awareness and building self-identity in young people

As you know this book reflects several of my passions.

This fishy story illustrates one of my passions for writing TVoBH.

The story goes like this...

There were two fish friends.

They were swimming together in a pond when another fish slowly swims towards them.

As this fish passes by, she nods and says, "Good morning! Isn't the clarity of the water spectacular today?"

The two fish friends return the nod, smile pleasantly at her, and swim on.

A little later one looks to the other and asks, "What do you think? What's water?"

Just as the concept of water was less than an emerging understanding for the two fish friends, most young people we love, nurture and teach are at the beginning of their lifelong quest to learn about themselves and the world.

Here lies our responsibility.

The rich potential of a quality emotional classroom, or home, environment is unrivalled because they offer young human beings a special place to grow, learn and thrive.

I believe, along with growing numbers, that we must be protectors of these special spaces.

Secondly, TVoBH reflects my passion to deepen 'social and emotional education' so kids feel connected - and able to contribute - to community.

We humans are wired for social connection.

And, when the connection occurs, there's a deep difference to how we feel about ourselves, how we relate to others, how we learn, to our resilience and to our wellbeing.

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Classrooms, and homes, are in essence - small communities - and they can be deftly engineered so young people get to feel the joy of being with each other.

The consequence of this, is that later in life, there's an imprint that radiates desire to build community!

Whether its through family, friends, work, volunteer or charity work, a men's shed, a community centre, sporting, gardening, dog or walking group – that desire to connect and be part of others remains.

What a gift to give to our young!

Yes, finding one's tribe - or more to the point - knowing how to find your tribe, is literally lifesaving.

And, the skills to do this begin early in young people's life.

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Yet, the notion of community, and the all benefits it brings, is now under threat – and this is beyond COVID19!

According to Professor Julianne Holt-Lunstad and the WHO, 'loneliness' is shaping up to be a massive global health challenge.

Most vulnerable are children, young teens and the elderly. But, none of us are immune.

What we are learning are that good community bonds are a necessary protective factor against isolation and loneliness.

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Studies alert us that loneliness significantly increases risk for sadness and depression, cardiovascular health, premature death, and a faster rate of cognitive decline and dementia.

Feeling disconnected, is equivalent to the dangers of smoking fifteen cigarettes a day, twice as toxic as obesity, as lethal as alcoholism and the negative effects are greater than those of air pollution or leading a totally sedentary life.

Feeling connected and knowing how to be connected is looming to be a life-saving human capacity.

Now, let's begin.

Since ancient times the idea of understanding who we are, how we fit in, what we stand for or believe in and who we want to be in the future has intrigued us.

It appears human beings are likely the only creatures on Earth with what we call a metacognitive capacity; that's a core ability to think about our thinking.

To readjust it - to reflect on past choices, to assess and discuss the value of making changes, then to make quick changes, and be able to do things differently.

CLICK

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The research suggests that when children, adolescents and adults alike, are given opportunities to reflect on how they fit into the world, and contemplate where their individual differences lie, they gradually become more self-aware.

The consequence of this is that they become ready to learn, and self-regulate their emotions and behaviour.

SLIDE 11

How would you describe your self-awareness?

- **Are you able to appreciate who you are?**
- **Are you able to use your 'self-capacities' to improve the quality of your own life, and the lives of others around you?**
- **Are you secure with your own identity, or are you still inventing or reinventing yourself?**
- **Does building self-awareness and identity ever stop?**
- **How do you teach self-awareness, and encourage the growth of identity in your children, so they secure a sound sense of self?**

The truth is, none of us are born with peak self-awareness, sparkling and ready to serve us.

It slowly emerges throughout childhood, continues to develop and is slowly polished over time as we grow and experience the world.

We now know that when children are given opportunities to reflect on what they value, how they fit into the world, and contemplate where their individual differences lie, they gradually become more self-aware.

We also know that having a well-developed 'self-awareness and identity' carries more weight in 'life satisfaction' than a brilliant IQ, 'A' grades or stunning looks!

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One of the biggest supports is to provide reoccurring opportunities for kids to share their dreams and ambitions, listen to those of others, build new ones and understand more about themselves.

Oh? Can you do me a favour – please choose a number between, and including, 1 to 20.

WAIT ... got it?

These are questions to stimulate self-awareness in older children.

So, which number did you choose?

Take a look at your number and read the question next to it.

Have a go at answering it in your head.

Imagine if you were in a safe place; your family or peers in a classroom – and, you had the opportunity to hear others over time answer your question and others.

One idea is to print them out, laminate them and store them in a large jar.

Then, when that spare five minutes presents itself, ask someone to go to the jar, close their eyes and draw ONE question.

Encourage everyone in your family, or class group, to share their thoughts about it.

Anyone brave enough to answer their question out loud?

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And, here are a similar set of questions, for younger children

Use that same number again, and answer the question.

Yes, you can answer in your head!

Self-analysis can be prompted by asking kids questions, letting them listen to the responses of others and compare opinions.

Set up situations where young people can share experiences, compare opinions and learn from one another .

Use the ideas on screen as a catalyst. The ones that get the big discussions pumping are;

- a time when their stubbornness found trouble
- a disaster
- something that warms my heart
- something that leaves me cold
- global warming
- heritage

the list is endless!

CLICK

A simple way to highlight self is for children to complete surveys that compare their unique physical features.

And, rather than doing this statically with hands up, ask your group to get up, move about and find others with the same physical features.

The act of gathering information and completing surveys or graphs that compare your family's or classes' physical features is primary way to build ONE aspect of self-awareness.

If you were here with me, we'd do it!

I'd get you to move about and find others with the similar earlobes to you.

Who has the 'free lobe'? Thumbs up!

Who has the 'attached lobe'? Thumbs up!

Use the same approach to find who can roll their tongue and who can't.

Some of us can curl up the sides of our tongue to form a tube shape. Can you?

We think the variation in this ability is the result interactions between preferred muscles.

We now believe it is possible for all people to learn to roll their tongues.

CLICK

Be on the lookout for those who've learnt to make a wonderful wave pattern on the tip of their tongue.

That's right, they've learnt it – not been gifted it.

Again, help students find those with similarities to form groups. Then, tally the numbers and create a graph by using an online graph maker.

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You might continue to explore left and right handedness, and don't forget those who are truly ambidextrous!

Usually, about 10% of people are left-handed.

What about freckles? Who has them and who doesn't?

These are neat, concentrated spots of a skin pigment called melanin. Most fair-skinned, red-haired people have them. Genes and the environment influence size, colour and pattern. More sun exposure temporarily causes more freckles to appear.

Who has curly hair versus straight hair.

Move to hairline shape – checkout these two!

If your hairline forms a point at the centre of the forehead, you have a widow's peak.

If not, you have a straight hairline.

Ask students to find a group of people who have the same hairline as they do.

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Then, move to hand clasping.

You can do this with me.

Quickly fold your hands together by interlocking your fingers.

Which thumb ends up on top - your left or your right?

This is quirky as it doesn't necessarily represent our right or left dominance, but it is usually consistent for each of us!

Then there's eye colour – black, brown, blue, hazel or green?

Eyebrow shape - arched or straight?

Skin colour – is it fair, mid-brown, dark- brown or ebony?

Face shape – have you got a square, round, oblong, narrow shaped face?

Nose shape – is it small and dainty, button shaped, turned-up, long or broad?

Hair colour – who has black, brown, blonde, red/ginger or grey?

Hands – are they small, medium or large?

Nudging attention to our physical self, through comparison, is a way to kick start self-awareness.

It's also a beautiful way to appreciate human diversity.

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Let's move past the PHYSICAL and play, 'Take a selfie' with your class or family.

To start, one person pretends to take a selfie. As they do this, they say something about themselves – physical characteristics are easier and safer to start with.; tall, short, buff, skinny, small, blonde hair, brown eyes, with freckles, a smiley face and so on.

After completing several rounds, state some of these phrases to inspire deeper responses;

- **what's important to you**
- **a personal quality you value**
- **traits or strengths that you have**
- **things you value**
- **achievements**
- **and ambitions**

This is great fun and the kids will be expert at making pouty, duck face selfie poses.

This simple exercise allows young people to reflect on who they are in the context of how they feel about a variety of choices in their emotional and social worlds. Hand each student the accompanying activity sheet.

Encourage your kids or students to sit together in small groups and colour the thoughts and ideas they believe reflects how they think. Let them chat together and later, as a larger group, encourage them to share their similarities and differences.

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'Line-up' is one of those games where participants help each other to sort out facts about themselves.

It's ideal for larger groups.

To play, use categories as;

arrange yourself in a line, shortest to tallest (if you were here I'd ask you to do it!

- or, arrange yourselves in a line, blondest to darkest hair
- or, alphabetically by Christian names
- or, alphabetically by middle names, and if you don't have a middle name, make out it starts with an 'A'.
- or, chronologically according to birth date, or age
- or, according to your birth year or month

Another idea called, 'My World,' is a way for kids to express what their world looks like and what matters to them.

It's easy! Provide your kids or students with an A4 size piece of drawing paper and pencil.

Then, ask them to draw, label, cartoon and write captions about all the things in their world their world they value.

Before they start, whet their enthusiasm by showing a few wonderful examples previously created.

Photograph and store them digitally.

What an enlightening long-term project where kids do it each year, and can look back and witness their own growth and the growth of friends.

CLICK

In a similar vein, organise your own kids, or your students, to do a self-portrait once a year, every year.

By doing so, kids are able to track their own growth on a number of fronts; the improvement in artistic skills, a rise in the complexity of detail and their physical growth.

The best idea is to photograph and store them digitally.

Then, they're easy to keep and retrieve.

What a revealing long-term project where children can look back at themselves over a period of 4, 5 or 6 years and see their growth.

This is a great way to help children grow into themselves and celebrate what makes each of us incredibly different.

Similarly make a 3-minute video of students, or your children each year.

And, use the same set of questions every time;

- Who are you this year?
- How old are you?
- Who lives in your family?
- Is anything interesting happening in your life?
- What do you like to do?
- What makes you happy?
- What worries you?
- What's made you feel proud of yourself?
- Is there anything that scares you?
- Is there a pet you have, or would love to have?
- What are you good at?
- What do you want to get better at?

What do you dream of doing one day?

Store the clips safely so the kids can re-watch them in the future.

The comparison to their youngest versions provides great opportunity for personal growth!

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As a mum, dad, caregiver or educator be sure to highlight the character strengths you see in your kids and students.

Each of them have their own character traits.

Think of one of your kids right now.

I'll call some character strengths out.

See if any of these apply to this child;

- Sincere
- Honest

- **Loyal,**
- **Intelligent**
- **Dependable**
- **Open-Minded,**
- **Wise**
- **Considerate**
- **Good-Natured**
- **Mature**
- **Earnest**
- **Friendly**
- **Likable,**
- **Courteous**
- **Imaginative ...**

They 'lay in wait' in every young human being.

It's our job, as adults who understand their self-image is slowly awakening, is to mirror back those emerging individual qualities in our language as we chat with them.

So, make it a mission to be able to automatically recall 4 or 5 of these uniquely personal characteristics for each student in your care, and use them freely in conversations with them.

Ask your kids, or students, to choose a character strengths they hold precious about themselves.

Next, help them find a smooth flat rock.

Be sure to share how you see theirs!

Ask them to paint this character strength on the rock and keep it to remind them of who they are and what they value.

Oh? Here's a tip. Get your child or students to Google images based on a search for their character strengths.

This will open a world of ideas and stimulate imagination.

This activity takes on a more powerful perspective when you engineer input from classmates or from each person in the family.

CLICK

Or, go online with your kids, or students, for this free 'Personality type and style' survey.

It takes about 15 minutes and is for kids aged 8 years upwards.

Children can do this independently if they have reasonable reading skills, otherwise have a reader read the questions to them.

There are 16 personality types, and each offers an insightful description of who we may be.

My best advice is to do the survey yourself, before you do it with students or family.

Print your own results so you can share. Your kids will love this!

The aim is simple – it's to help young people to better understand themselves.

Oh? Be sure to allow time for sharing and discussion.

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Here's another called, 'The personality Questionnaire for kids

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And, another called the '365 tests'

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As well, explore the colour personality tests! They are revealing too!

These quizzes offer results that will explain colours each participant's style relates to, what is distinct about that colour, and how parents and teachers can use this information productively.

I'm all about purple and these are, apparently my colours and virtues!

Here's another.

As teachers and parents, these are fascinating to do and discuss with kids.

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This one - Which Colour Matches Your Personality? – this one is quick, easy and delicious to do!

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My favourite is the 'VIA Survey on Character'.

It's highly reputable, takes 20 minutes and is geared for children from 10 to 17 years.

Once completed it ranks your 24-character traits from strongest to mildest.

It's fascinating and will get you and your kids thinking and talking!

Being challenged to think about one's self in this way, is the essence of building identity.

We often talk about different animals having specific character strengths.

Ants, for example, are hard workers.

Cats are aloof and independent.

Then there's the playful otter, insightful owl, graceful seahorse and the shrewd snake.

Examine these and ask your students, or your own kids, to find the animal that has similar virtues to them.

There are also some compelling surveys on YouTube.

Your kids and students will love them.

CLICK

Most of us have a favourite dinosaur and we usually know a lot about their style.

As well, we've all grown up delighting in superheroes and appreciate their differing powers and character strengths.

On screen are a few good-humoured personality quizzes.

Their intention is to have fun and connect your kids to the character strengths of a superhero, or dinosaur, with similar traits.

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Similarly, many personality quizzes have been formatted on to video, and can be found, for FREE on YouTube.

They are very engaging.

These strength cards have been developed by St Luke's Innovative Resources.

They are used by teachers, therapists and parents across the world.

Grounded in strengths-based theory, these beautifully illustrated cards open conversations to help people identify personal strengths and skills.

To play, simply spread the cards out on the table and ask kids to pick up cards with strengths and ideas they see in themselves.

Be sure to pull out strength cards you see in them as well.

It is empowering to have one's strengths validated or recognised by others; peers, siblings, mum or dad.

A digital version has recently become available.

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Don't forget books and movies!

These provide an enticing opportunities to watch particular character strengths in others, to talk about them, to visualize them in ourselves and create our own destinies.

Even cartoon characters show character strengths!

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The truth is, some of the joy for living comes from our imperfections, and the challenges they create.

If all we experienced was perfection, then none of us would know how it feels to be challenged, scared, how to find a little courage, give it a go, succeed and feel a rush pride!

It's our flaws and imperfections, that helps us to grow, build resilience and personal identity.

For a full two years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water to his house. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do.

After 2 years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself because this crack in my side causes water to leak all the way back to your house."

AS PLANTS SPROUT...

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of the path, but not on the other pot's side?"

That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back, you've watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate the table. Without you being just the way you are, there would not be this beauty to grace the house."

Ask your students, or your own kids, whether they understand the moral of the story.

The moral, of course, is that each of us has our own flaws or imperfections. They are what makes us human too.

We're all beautifully cracked and it's these quirks that can make each of us unique.

Before you ask them to discuss their own quirks and imperfections, tell them yours.

So often, our beautiful flaws may turn out to be a blessing

What's your learning style?

How do you learn best?

Do your own kids, or students in your class, know theirs?

They need to know!

These days we understand that each of us has a set of learning preferences, that range from most to less effective.

Improved awareness about our learning style, directly improves our engagement and quality of learning.

As you can see on screen, there are seven key learning styles, and these are pretty easy to determine.

CLICK

Here are 4 easy to use learning style surveys!

Better awareness about our learning style, directly improves our desire to learn.

It gives us an access to learning.

Help your kids, or your students, discover whether they process information best in a quiet library or revel in a hands-on environment.

Sometimes we give the impression that if you can't learn successfully in a traditional classroom environment, then you can't learn.

We're beginning to do much better than that!

Here are my results after taking this online survey.

I'm an auditory learner. It weighed in at 40%.

I learn by listening. The things I hear seem to stick!

I also know that sometimes when I'm reading, I'll read out loud just to help ease myself into a sweet spot for better concentration.

If you take a second look at my results, you'll see I have 2 other learning preferences.

They are visual and tactile and these each scored at 30%.

This means learn by pretty well by reading or following pictures, charts, and diagrams.

And, as a tactile learner, I learn by touching and doing.

I have a "hands-on strength where I prefer to touch, move, build or draw.

When I do this survey with some of the kids and teens I work with they score 90% as a tactile learner.

In an instant you know their learning is severely compromised traditional classrooms that largely works on good working memory and processing speeds.

So, help your kids understand how and where they learn best.

Fleming and Mills developed a sensory based system that divides people into five types of learners.

The acronym VARK describes 5 modes of learning;

- **V -- Visual Learners = learn best via images, maps, graphs, etc.**
- **A -- Auditory Learners = learn predominately via listening and talking**
- **R -- Reading and Writing Learners = learn via reading and note taking**
- **K -- Kinesthetic Learners = learn by activity and trying things**

Again, the survey is easy to do, and whoever takes it will discover which learning style they most prefer.

Here are 16 questions as an online survey.

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To round up, let's nudge self-identity!

Self-identity sits at the top of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Here at the top, we are naturally ready to seek the answers to life's BIG questions.

As our 'lower-order needs' are gradually met, we can start to talk about self-identity, highlight it and pave the way for it to grow.

Some of our kids – those who've experienced trauma in their past, or have disability - are still working hard to secure their basic needs; attachment, safety, and wrestling with capacities to self-regulate.

A readiness to explore self-identity will take longer in these young people – so go gently, gently.

Self-identity is a collection of ideas, opinions, attitudes and beliefs we hold about ourselves and our various worlds.

It is the product of past and present experiences, and continues to reshape everything we know.

And, the search is ever expanding and never ending.

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The big questions about life.

Are you ready for a few of the BIG QUESTIONS in life?

Okay, in your head, see if you can rapid-fire an answer for each of these.

- *What it is that makes you, you?*
- *Are you happy with who you are?*
- *What makes you different to someone else?*
- *What makes life meaningful to you?*
- *Or, what is the meaning of life?*
- *Is there a God?*
- *What does being 'true to yourself' mean?*
- *What, or who, do you most care about?*
- *What do you need to do to become the best version of yourself, or is your work done?*

These are hard questions at the best of times.

Be sure to tell your kids, or students this as they try to answer them.

Interestingly, it is often said that the answers to these questions are less important than the search!

Then, there was the conversation between Alice and the caterpillar in *Alice in Wonderland*.

The Caterpillar asks, "Who... are... you?"

Alice responds by saying, "Why, I hardly know, sir. I've changed so much since this morning, you see."

Ask, what's the deeper meanings within the question and answer.

Not only does the Alice show the challenge of such questions, but highlights the fact that our opinions are constantly being challenged and constantly transforming.

What feels right today may not be right tomorrow.

So, go gently as you encourage young people to share their ideas about these big questions;

- Who am I?
- Why am I?
- What am I?
- What things do I most care about?
- What things should I most care about?
- Is it alright to keep changing my mind about what's important to me?

CLICK

Try this activity.

To do this, ask your kids to use only 5 words to best describe how they think about their life.

Ask them to consider;

- *Their character strengths*
- *What they most believe in*
- *What's really important to them*
- *And, how they want to live your life?*

Try this game, 'Have you ever?'

It's a novel way to explore and compare our values, interests and ethics.

As I call out, 'Have you ever ...?' you silently respond with a hand signal.

In case you forget, the prompts are on screen.

To begin the game, have students sitting on a seat in a social circle. Once they're listening begin and move along quickly!

Have you ever...

- ... helped an injured or sick animal?
- ... worried about another World War?
- ... felt happy with who you are?
- ... helped a friend even though they didn't want help to start with?
- ... wished you were different; taller, thinner, prettier, stronger or smarter?
- ... had a fight with a friend and fixed it up afterwards?
- ... hurt the feelings of someone and later regretted it?
- ... got really upset or angry because something was unfair?
- ... moved on from a good friend, but have stayed friends?
- ... forgiven someone who upset you?
- ... learnt from a mistake?
- ... lied to a parent?
- ... stood up for yourself, even though it was hard?
- ... done something you still wish you hadn't?

This activity encourages us to think more deeply.

While the big questions around self-identity seem daunting this is fun and a basis for growth.

To play, arrange students into a social circle and make sure they can see the three questions on screen throughout the game.

Begin by asking the first question - *'Who am I?'*

Work your way around the circle, so each student has a chance to say one thing about, 'Who they are'.

Continue around the circle - five, six, even ten times, and record as many responses as you can.

Record responses allows the group to get a visual sense about the vastness of these answers to what may have first appeared a simple question.

Here are typical responses; "I am (my name)," "I am a boy," "I am kind," "I am my family," "I am an animal rescuer," "I'm good at football," "I am me," "I am part of my family," "I am dyslexic" and so on.

In subsequent lessons, explore the other two questions in the same way.

What makes me, me?'

'What do I believe in or stand for?'

Why not make an 'Identity box'.

Firstly, 100 white, lightweight cardboard boxes (150x100x70mm), in various styles, can be sourced online for about \$30.

Give a box in flat-pack form to each student and encourage them to help each other to build.

Once built show them your own, you've prepared earlier, or one a past student has donated to you.

This way, they have an explicit visual model to work towards.

Next, ask students to return their box carefully back to the flat-pack form so they can more easily decorate it with photographs, paint, texta, craypas crayons, papier mache to represent things that are meaningful to them; their style, personality, family, sports, interests, accomplishments, hopes and dreams.

Now it's ready for students to take home and fill it with bits and pieces that are significant or expressive of them.

They might include individual photos, family photos or special events photos, certificates, music and movie play lists, a ballet shoe, karate grading belts, a scout badge, other significant photos, trophies, a bike helmet, a rock, crystal or mineral, a very special pet's collar, favourite colours and so much more!

Pose these questions to your students, or your own kids and let them discuss;

So, why do you dress the way you do?

What's the impression you want to give about you to others?

Most of us develop a clothing style that reflects how we see ourselves and how we want others to see us.

In your head, can you finish these statements?

- *I pay a lot of attention to the clothes I wear because ...*
- *I pay no attention to the clothes I wear because ...*
- *I want my clothes to let people know that I ...*
- *I dress the way I do so I feel ...*
- *I dress the way I do so others will ...*
- *I wear clothes that ...*
- *I wear popular brand clothing because ...*

Our clothes should never define us.

But, what we choose to wear is connected to our self-identity.

Clothes mostly become an expression of who we are.

This brings me to a close.

Once upon a time, not that long ago, there was no formal education to strengthen the concept of self-awareness and personal identity.

Strangely one of the greatest capacities in life – the skill to learn about yourself and discover how you fit into the world – was not taught.

Today it's gaining a rightful place in the curriculum and teachers are beginning to teach young people to discover who they are and who they can become.

Moreover, as adults working with young people in any capacity, there is much we can be doing with our kids to grow this capacity.

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So, teach every young person who comes your way that they are human and wonderfully unique.

That the atoms that merged to make them who they are, did so like never before, and will never do so again.

There will never be another of them anywhere in the universe.

They are a matchless creation on this fabulous blue planet.

Yes, there will be all kinds of challenges ahead.

Our mission is to support them to find goodness and satisfaction within, to feel loved, to be kind to others, and especially gentle on themselves.

Encourage them to rejoice in their humanness.