



# Fragile Frankie's Guide to Supporting Behaviour

FOR PARENTS



# Introducing Fragile Frankie



I've spent many years understanding children and whether it's been teaching them, including them or supporting them through experiences of mental illness and/or physical disability, I can proudly say that when it comes to kids, I'm a professional.

Yet, nothing prepared me for having my own child and the experience of parenting continues to be a real challenge.

As a teacher, I have continued to see the challenging circumstances and disruptive behaviours parents have to address; and equally I have seen the devastating impact stressed, overwhelmed and uncertain parents can have on their children.

I created and shares the story of Fragile Frankie to help children, parents and teachers alike better understand and support challenging behaviours and mental health issues and have been overwhelmed by the popularity of the campaign. Our ongoing aim is to help parents apply theories and practices relating to supporting challenging behaviour rather than simply sharing information at a conceptual level.





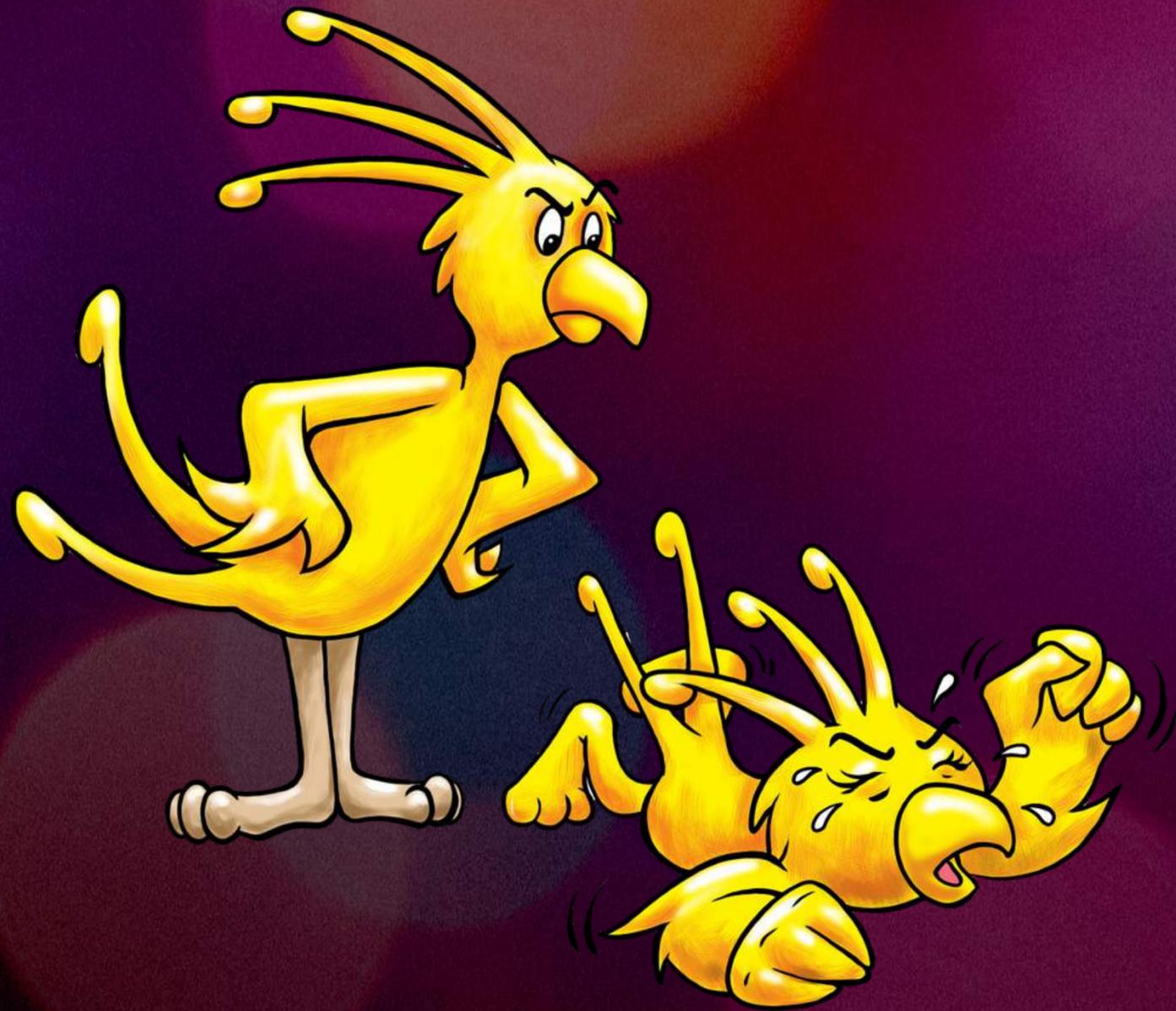
**FRANKIE OFTEN SPENDS TIME WONDERING WHY HIS BRAIN IS DIFFERENT. HE KNOWS THERE ARE TIMES WHEN HE THINKS AND BEHAVES DIFFERENTLY TO OTHER CHILDREN BUT HE DOESN'T KNOW WHY AND DOESN'T KNOW HOW TO TALK ABOUT IT.**

Behaviour is our innate form of communication and it is important that parents first try to understand what their child is attempting to share when they behave differently to what you expect. Asking questions such as: can we draw a picture of what is happening in your thoughts? What types of noises are your thoughts making today or is there anyway I can help understand what's happening in your head?



**FRANKIE'S MUM WORRIES ABOUT FRANKIE'S BEHAVIOUR AND SPENDS LOTS OF TIME LOOKING AT CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AND BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS ON THE INTERNET. THESE MAKE HER WORRY ABOUT THE UNPREDICTABLE NATURE OF WHAT MAY HAPPEN WHEN FRANKIE IS ANGRY. HER INTERNET SEARCHES OFTEN MAKE HER THINK THERE IS SOMETHING WRONG WITH FRANKIE - SOMETHING THAT NEEDS TO BE PREVENTED OR CHANGED BY PUNISHMENT AND DISCIPLINE.**

It is normal that as parents we think we have to have all the answers but when it comes to our children, we must recognise that we can only provide answers when we ask questions. So engaging, listening and trying to understand is what is most important - the internet hasn't produced material on your child, your circumstances or your parenting style. The starting point is listening to your child and understanding what answers they have before you provide solutions for things they have already understood.



**WHEN FRANKIE IS SCARED, CONFUSED OR OVERWHELMED HE OFTEN SCREAMS, SHOUTS AND MISBEHAVES. HE CAN BE INCREDIBLY CHALLENGING AND IT OFTEN SEEMS LIKE HE IS CHOOSING TO BE NAUGHTY JUST TO GET HIS OWN WAY.**

Mirroring behaviour is natural but when your child is misbehaving, challenging or disruptive, stay calm, emotionally neutral and establish a clear process for restricting behaviour, understanding it and recovering from the incident as quickly as possible. Although this can be very difficult, the best way to do this is to create a process for responding to and supportive negative behaviour when it occurs.



**FRANKIE IS SAD THAT NO ONE SEEMS TO UNDERSTAND HOW HARD IT IS FOR HIM TO MANAGE HIS EMOTIONS. FRANKIE OFTEN GETS TOLD OFF FOR HIS BEHAVIOUR BUT HE CAN'T THINK OF ANY OTHERS WAYS OF TELLING HIS MUM, AND OTHER PEOPLE, ABOUT THE HORRIBLE THINGS THAT ARE HAPPENING IN HIS HEAD.**

It is incredibly easy for us to think we should tell children off for their challenging or disruptive behaviours. Yet, the most important thing we can do when our children are at their most challenging is help them trust that we will listen to understand, that we will support and that we will care about them. Rather than telling your children off, it can be much more productive to talk - to understand how they were feeling, what they were trying to communicate and how the situation could have and could be different in the future



**FRANKIE IS HAPPIEST WHEN HIS MUM MAKES HIM FEEL SAFE AND LOVED - AFTER A CHALLENGING DAY, FRANKIE IS THANKFUL THAT HE CAN FEEL CALM AND CONTENT WITH HIS MUM**

It's unrealistic to think that your family will never face conflict, change or challenge but it is important to have an effective recovery process that provides your child with love, reassurance and confidence. Over time this will help your child know that any issues will be resolved with collaboration, support and understanding. Work on developing de-brief and recovery strategies that ensure your child feels safe, secure and certain of the love and care you have for them. Don't be too proud, you can be vulnerably as a parent, apologise when it is needed and let your child know when you are scared or overwhelmed, unsure or insecure. Being vulnerable with your child is powerful and although it feels unnatural as a parent is incredibly useful in terms of conflict repair and relationship development.



**FRANKIE SPENDS LOTS OF TIME THINKING ABOUT HOW DIFFICULT HE CAN MAKE LIFE FOR OTHER PEOPLE. HE DOESN'T WANT TO BE NAUGHTY AND BEING TOLD OFF IS THE LAST THING HE WANTS. FRANKIE FEELS VERY ALONE AND HOPELESS. HE WISHES HE COULD BE BETTER UNDERSTOOD.**

It is essential for us to remember that your children will rarely chose to be challenging. It's important to note that issues are likely to linger in their thoughts long beyond the end of any conversation you have with them and it's also important to remember that when their needs or vulnerabilities aren't communicated by words, they will often be shared via disruptive behaviours. Think of ways that you can establish and strengthen the relationship that exists between you and your child and the ways in which that supports their confidence and calms their anxieties and concerns.



**FRANKIE SPENDS TIME ON HIS OWN WHICH HE FINDS MUCH EASIER THAN HAVING TO BE WITH OTHER PEOPLE EVEN THOUGH HE LONGS TO HAVE LOTS OF FRIENDS. HE THINKS ABOUT WHAT MIGHT MAKE HIM HAPPY AND HOW HE MIGHT BE ABLE TO EXPLAIN SOME OF HIS FEELINGS TO OTHERS.**

As parents we are often attached to the outcomes we want to create, facilitate or engineer for our children. We imagine that they are lonely as soon as they aren't attending every social event on the calendar; struggling as soon as they ask for help and unwell as soon as they have a bad day. However, we must appreciate that children are constantly growing and learning and, particularly those with behavioural problems, may need to time reflect, to allow their brain to catch up and connect the dots or simply switch off. It's important for us to recognise that each child will choose to switch off differently and it is perfectly acceptable for children to want time alone, however uncomfortable that may make us feel as parents.



**WHEN FRANKIE IS HOME, HIS MUM READS SOME STORIES TO HIM FRANKIE FEELS SAD THAT HE ISN'T LIKE THE CHILDREN IN THE STORY BOOKS AND GOES TO BED WONDERING WHY HE FINDS THINGS SO HARD. FRANKIE FEELS IT IS INCREDIBLY UNFAIR THAT HE CAN'T BE LIKE THE HAPPY CHILDREN HE SEES SO OFTEN.**

Storytelling is incredibly powerful but it is important for us to remember that stories help us create and confirm our sense of normality, our understanding of others and our perception of ourselves. It is important that if we share stories that are largely different from that which our children believe to be true, it can be important that we acknowledge, discuss and support that. From family structure and financial status through to appearance and opportunity of the characters, storytelling is designed to inspire imagination and develop young minds. It is important that, as parents, we help our children understand, personalise and shape the information they receive from stories and the last impact they have on their understanding of themselves and others.



**FRANKIE FEELS LIKE HE IS SURROUNDED BY PEOPLE THAT ARE HAPPY. IT MAKES HIM FEEL SAD AND ALONE AND ANGRY AND DOESN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO OTHER THAN SHOUT.**

As adults we understand that there are times we simply become angry whether that be with ourselves, the world or others. We recognise when we may be in a bad mood and are able to share and rationalise our emotions with our peers. Children, however, are unable to understand and rationalise their emotions in the same way but can share them through disruptive and challenging behaviour. It's important to try and ask 'what's wrong' as a starting point in your approach to bad behaviour rather than thinking how to stop it. When children are expressing anger, sadness or loneliness, punishment will often make them feel worse and further fuel the bad behaviour cycle. When children feel like is unfair, if they doubt or dislike themselves or even if they are worried about being a burden or a disappointment to you and those they care about, their behaviour may become challenging and unpleasant but what they need is love and care rather than punishment and isolation.



**WHEN FRANKIE FEELS SAD AND ALONE IT MAKES EVERYDAY TASKS REALLY DIFFICULT. HE JUST WANTED SOMEONE TO UNDERSTAND HIM BUT FOUND THAT HE WAS BEING NAUGHTY ALL OF THE TIME, MAKING EVERYTHING MUCH WORSE.**

In psychology, the catastrophe theory suggests the difference between coping and catastrophising is often one task. In the context of a child, this may mean that when you are asking them to do something as simple as 'put on their seatbelt', it is the difference between staying on top of the challenges they have had at school, the concerns they have about their friendships and the worries they have about themselves and others - and their world being a complete disaster. It's the psychological equivalent of 'the straw that broke the camel's back' and it's important that when our children seem to overreact to the most simple of tasks, that we try to bear this in mind before we react.



**FRANKIE NOTICED THAT HIS MUM WAS ALSO ANGRY MORE OFTEN AND SHE SEEMED TO FIND EVERYDAY THINGS REALLY HARD TOO. SHE HAD LESS PATIENCE WITH FRANKIE, SPENDING LESS TIME WITH HIM AND SHOUTING MORE WHICH MADE BOTH FRANKIE AND HIS MUM SAD.**

As a parent, managing your own mental health is absolutely vital. It is a constant, evolving and ever changing challenge and it is important that you manage the impact this will have on you so that you can be, and stay, the best version of yourself for your children. Take time to understand what you need from your peers and how you may be able to fill any blanks with local groups, or by finding local people using networking apps of community events. Think about how you can express your emotions - perhaps using social media or by creating a blog, writing a journal, keeping a diary or using more creative outlets like painting, colouring, knitting or other crafts. Understand your identity and how it has changed but not been consumed since you have become a mother - what else is there in your life that's important to you? If there isn't anything consider how you could find or support a cause that's important to you, change your job so that it's more fulfilling or play a part in the local community so that you can still be you as well as being mum. Ensure you try and get some form of exercise - even if it is just waking a short walk and ensure you take time to invest in yourself and/or your relationship. Make painting your nails more important than cleaning the kitchen once in a while. Leave ironing the bed sheets and have a long bath instead; and probably most importantly, realise that you can't and don't need to achieve perfection so readjust your expectations in order to be kinder to yourself and more relaxed for your children.



**FRANKIE WAS SO UNHAPPY AND REALISED THAT HE WAS SCARED, THAT HE FELT ALONE AND REALLY, REALLY WANTED TO FEEL SAFE AND LOVED AND HAPPY. HE KNEW HE NEEDED TO DO SOMETHING THAT MIGHT HELP HIM BUT REALLY WASN'T SURE WHAT.**

When your child reaches out for help, recognise the level of vulnerability your child is willing to show you and the amount of bravery it must have taken to reach this point. Be aware of just how unhappy your child must be, how self aware they must have become and how understanding they must be - of their own behaviour and the impact it has on others - in order to reach this turning point. When they reach out, however they chose to do so, approach them with kindness and calm. Forgive and, whether you have any answers or any understanding of what to do, simply be present and help your child have confidence and trust in you and your commitment to them. Try to avoid sharing any of your own concerns, opinions or any issues you may have but instead focus on the positives, your love for your child, the support you can offer and the new hope this decision and bravery brings.



**THE NEXT MORNING FRANKIE DECIDED TO WRITE A LETTER TO SANTA, EXPLAINING THAT HE JUST WANTED TO BE HAPPY FOR CHRISTMAS.**

When your children decide to reach out respond in a way that you as a parent feels is appropriate. You can provide them with suitable resources, opportunities and the information they need to decide how they want to proceed along with the love and support they need to have the confidence to do so. Make sure you give them a strong foundation of care and believe in their ambition. However it is important to ensure you don't make them feel they have to reach out to you or resolve their challenges in the way you choose - they have to see this as their own journey and only make the choices they feel comfortable with.



**SOON AFTER FRANKIE WROTE HIS LETTER TO SANTA, HE NOTICED THAT HIS MUM BEGAN TO LOOK AND ACT MORE AND MORE LIKE A SUPERHERO. SHE SEEMED TO SUPPORT HIM WHEN HE WAS STRUGGLING AND LOVED HIM MORE WHEN HE WAS SAD RATHER THAN LEAVING HIM ALONE AND MAKING HIM FEEL WORSE.**

All of us aim to be supermums yet without a bespoke manual or constant training, how do we manage it? The answer is more obvious than we think but takes patience, self control, objectivity and calmness in order to find it. Our children have the answers - and they can guide us to find the answers they are unable to articulate. It's hard to find calm, to find quiet and to develop the skills in order to create and manage the conversations that help your children understand and voice their needs whilst allowing you to hear what they are asking for, in whichever ways they ask for it.



## FRANKIE FOUND HIMSELF HAVING FUN WITH HIS MUM - AND WAS ABLE TO GET RID OF HIS ENERGY AND EMOTIONS IN NEW WAYS

In our increasingly chaotic world, it can be difficult to find time for fun and as parents, we often assume that our children have friends to have fun with rather than wanting to play with us as grown ups. Yet, as mums, we were our children's first source of play, interaction and fun. We likely saw their first laughs and played more peekaboo than we knew possible. Although your children are older, they will still crave and appreciate the simple fun - it's a great way to help them burn energy, release endorphins, relax and importantly, build their relationship with you in ways that only play can.



## FRANKIE FOUND NEW THINGS TO DO TO HELP HIM MANAGE HIS THOUGHTS AND EMOTIONS

Your children will benefit from finding something that interests them, things they are good at and passionate about. This interest, whatever it may be, will help give your child confidence, will support the establishment of their identity and in turn develop their self esteem. You don't always have to know what they will enjoy but instead simply give them the opportunity to experience different things whilst observing their responses. You can capture their thoughts and feelings about different experiencing by creating a journal, a scrapbook or even a video diary of all they are learning and experiencing through new activities.



**FRANKIE FELT THAT HE COULD HELP HIM MUM AND CONTRIBUTE TO THE FAMILY HOME IN WAYS HE HADN'T BEEN BRAVE ENOUGH TO DO BEFORE.**

As parents, we often want our children to help with basic tasks around the home yet there is an assumption that chores are dull and parents often force children to do them or punish them for not contributing. This approach often only creates negative emotion, conflict and disruption. Instead, we encourage to invite children to be part of tasks, make them fun, do them together and ensure you praise your child for their achievements. Thank them and also ensure they know the impact their help has had on your day. Work to develop 'jobs' as fun, family time where everyone works together to get things done.



**FRANKIE NOTICED THAT HIS MUMMY SEEMED HAPPIER, MORE CONTENT AND MORE AVAILABLE TO SPEND TIME WITH HIM. FRANKIE KNEW THAT HIS MUM WAS THERE TO SUPPORT HIM MORE.**

As a parent, it is hard to feel good about yourself or your child when there is a lot of conflict and disruption. Just like when children are babies, they often detect and reflect our mood. This can make it incredibly challenging to move beyond cycles of negative or challenging behaviour. However, over time you may find that there is less conflict, less stress and will note that a few days, weeks or even months pass without conflict and distress. It is likely that you will be able to feel the bond you share with your child improve and strengthen as you share more time together, achieve more together and have fun. It's important that you remain consistent, calm and continue to show your love and kindness towards your child regardless of any hiccups they may have along the way.



**FRANKIE AND HIS MUM STARTED TO DO THINGS TOGETHER AT HOME - FRANKIE FOUND THINGS HE WAS GOOD AT AND NEW THINGS THAT HE ENJOYED.**

We often think the wants and needs of a child are complicated, expensive and never ending. Yet, the reality is that the most vulnerable children often simply want to be part of a family, to belong. They want to spend time with their caregivers. They want to be loved, to be heard and to know that they matter. With a busy and hectic life, it is often hard to make lots of dedicated time for children so it is often easier to share your day to day tasks with them. This will help you feel less conflicted, overwhelmed and occupied and will help your child recognise that they have an integral role in your family function.



**FRANKIE AND HIS MUM FOUND NEW WAYS TO LIVE THEIR LIVES TOGETHER - FRANKIE NO LONGER FELT LIKE HE WAS NAUGHTY AND DIDN'T FEEL UNSAFE OR ALONE.**

When you are unable to share tasks with your children, you can co-exist effectively. Working together but doing different tasks and activities will still help your child feel safe, secure and more confident. Being able to work like this can take some creative thinking and pre-planning to ensure your child always has something to do and a space to share with you but a weekly planner and two way conversation will help, hugely. Ask your children to find out what they enjoy, what they would like to do and how you can create an environment they are happy in. You should begin to notice that your child seems more content and peaceful as shared activities continue.



**FRANKIE STARTED FEELING MUCH HAPPIER ABOUT GOING TO SCHOOL AND KNEW HIS MUM WAS PROUD OF HIM.**

As your child grows in confidence; as they establish a strong sense of identity and an understanding of purpose, you will see them become more independent, more outgoing and more able to explore their surroundings with certainty. Although as a parent, it can feel like we should hold on to our children for as long as possible, these changes show improved mental wellbeing so it is important that you manage your own emotions and reflect, mirror and appreciate their confidence, ambition and independence.



**FRANKIE STARTED TO HAVE A MUCH BETTER TIME AT SCHOOL - HIS BEHAVIOUR WAS MUCH BETTER AND WHEN THINGS WERE HARD HE KNEW HIS MUM WOULD BE THERE TO LISTEN TO HIM AND SUPPORT HIM ONCE HE WAS HOME.**

Even with our best intentions, we know that life for our children won't always be perfect. However, when you and your child are both connected and collaborating, you will see they issues are much easier to address. Emotions should be easier to understand and easier to support with issues having a clear end point after initial upset, address and recovery. It can be useful to keep a note of your child's reactions so that you are able to recognise the progression that has been made and praise them accordingly. Share the experience with your child and ensure you also note how your own emotions and emotional responses have changed.



**FRANKIE KNEW THAT CHRISTMAS WAS GOING TO BE THE BEST EVER - AND ALTHOUGH HE DID THINK HE WOULD MAKE IT ON TO THE NICE LIST THIS YEAR, HE HAD ALREADY HAD EVERYTHING HE REALLY WANTED AND FELT MORE ABLE TO GIVE GIFTS THAN EVER BEFORE.**

Whether it's giving a gift or attending a party, simple gestures of care and kindness can be incredibly hard for children with a lack of confidence. Some of the questions they may ask are; will I get the gift right, will I show myself in the right way. They may wonder what the other person thinks; what if they wonder why I have bought them something, what if it is wrapped wrong, what if they don't like it or already have it, what if they don't really want me to be there, what if I say something wrong or can't think of anything to say at all. When you are plagued with self-doubt and insecurities, engaging in family life can be incredibly hard so if your children contribute their presence, or presents, make sure you show how much you value them and how thankful you are of their effort. Ensure your children feel they are enough.



**ON CHRISTMAS EVE, FRANKIE REALISED THAT HE DIDN'T FEEL ANXIOUS OR ALONE. HE DIDN'T FEEL AS IF HE WAS GOING TO RUIN CHRISTMAS. HE FELT HE DESERVED TO HAVE A NICE TIME AND WAS ENJOYING PLAYING GAMES WITH HIS SISTER AND HELPING HIS MUM PREPARE FOR THE BIG DAY.**

It can be hard to fathom the amount of over analysis that can occur in the mind of a vulnerable child. As a parent, it can easily seem like your child is being distant, selfish, preoccupied or rude. Yet, in reality, over thinking can, in many instances, be so all consuming that we ultimately struggle to do, process or even attend to anything else. As this worry begins to fade, you will find your child appreciating to be more present and more engaged in day to day activities. Ensure you praise them and help them recognise how valued their time and attention are. Take the opportunity to reinforce their confidence and further develop their self esteem by acknowledging the things they are good at and the positive impact their engagement can bring.



**WHEN IT CAME TO CHRISTMAS MORNING, FRANKIE REALISED THAT HE DIDN'T FEEL FRAGILE ANY MORE. LOOKING AT THE CHRISTMAS TREE AND HIS FAMILY AROUND HIM WITH THEIR SMILES, WARMTH AND LAUGHTER, HE REALISED THAT ALL HE NEEDED WAS TO JUST BE WHERE HE BELONGED.**

In society, we underestimate the importance of belonging. Yet, for children and young people, feeling they belong can have positive outcomes on their general well-being and their behaviour. Feeling a sense of belonging creates trust in others and confidence in ourselves. It shapes our own purpose and identity to help govern our behaviours and ambitions whilst informing our understanding of the world and others. Of all the things we wish you this Christmas, belonging is at the top of our list.

# Things people say about Frankie



He went through the same things as me and made me happy



Frankie realised that he wasn't alone in what he was going through and it's ok to be different



For more information, please visit [www.phoenixeducationconsultancy.com](http://www.phoenixeducationconsultancy.com)

