

THE OTTER

THE NEWSLETTER OF OTTERBOURNE CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL.



Dear Families

It's been a while since the last whole school newsletter. I hope that you all received the individual year group newsletters last week. Hopefully you are as excited as we are about what the children are learning about - and the experiences they are getting - this term.

As always, if you are interested in visiting the school to share any of your own experiences, in order to add to this learning, your support is always appreciated. This term we are welcoming a few parents in to talk about various topics, from religious celebration to neuro-diversity and we are incredibly grateful for the time they are giving to the school.

Unlike last term, the Spring is much shorter and it's hard to believe that it is already just two weeks to the half-term break. Shorter doesn't always mean easier though, especially with illness and the cold weather; if there is anything you need to talk to me about, please do get in touch.

Mr Geraghty

YOUNG VOICES CHOIR

Last week, with the help of two wonderful parents, we travelled to London's O2 with 47 children to take part in the annual Young Voices Children's Choir. It was a tremendous day, full of excitement and enthusiasm, fabulous singing and some very tired children (and adults) by the end.

Many of the children's parents were able to attend and watch the performance and from the positive feedback we have had, it seems that a great time was had by all.

My thanks to Mrs Palmer and Mrs Snook for their support on the trip, and to all involved in organising and attending this year's event: Miss Squibb, Miss Whitbread and the incredibly tuneful Mrs Whitwham.

ACTING UP

Now that choir has wrapped up for a while, it is time for the drama club to get in to full swing. Mrs Simpson and Mr O'Dowd are once again directing a huge cast of children, as they work towards two performances at Thornden Hall later in the year. This year's show is Ali Baba and the Bongo Bandits, and I'm already hearing the children singing some of the songs around the school.

MRS SMITH

I have already written to the Squirrel Class parents about this, but just so you are all aware, Mrs Smith is going to be away from school for the next six weeks or so. This is for an operation and a period of recovery. I am sure you would want to join me in sending her the best wishes so she can return to the squirrels as soon as possible.

THE DIANA PROJECT - ANTI-BULLYING

Last week, six of our children from KeyStage 2 visited The Hamble School to participate in Anti-Bullying Ambassador training, along with a number of schools across the district. I have to commend the children for the exemplary manner in which they represented the school, especially considering the nature of some of the content.

The children have already begun putting together a worship to share some of what they learned with the rest of the school, before we then make a detailed plan to ensure that we continue to be able to support the wellbeing of all of the children here at the school.

PARENTS CONSULTATION EVENINGS

You will have recognised that the parent consultation evenings are a little earlier this year. When reviewing the school management plan from last year, we felt that it makes more sense to have a little longer to work together on any of the learning 'gaps' that children might have so that we can help them achieve the best possible outcomes by the end of the year. Following the positive feedback from last year, and recent comments at the gate, I will be asking teachers to once again use a timer to keep sessions to 10-minutes. This helps with keeping to the schedule and avoids you waiting around for a long time when sessions overrun. We will always arrange a follow-up meeting where this is necessary in order to focus on supporting the children.

AROUND THE SCHOOL (OR OUT AND ABOUT)



Today we were joined in school by the incredibly talented and inspiring Caitlin. As part of the Year 5/6 English unit 'I am not a label', Caitlin, who left Otterbourne 9 years ago, came to talk to the children about her incredible success as part of the British Down Syndrome Swimming Team.

The children were mesmerised as they recognised what can be achieved when we show true determination. THANK YOU CAITLIN!

"BAMBOO TAMBOO"

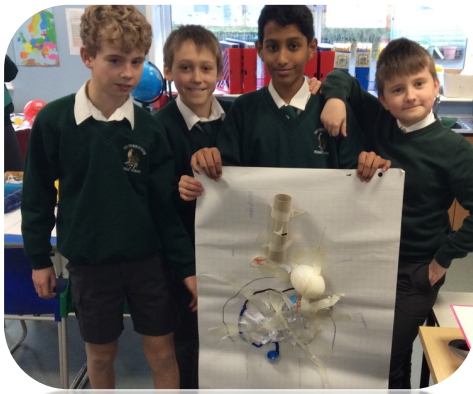
We are really pleased to have Hampshire Music back in school leading the Year 2 children in 'Listen 2 Me' this year.

For the spring term, the children are using these *tubes* which seem to have many different names, but officially they are 'Bamboo Tamboo' (yes...they are actually plastic). The children are working together to create rhythms and learning about making sounds by striking an instrument.

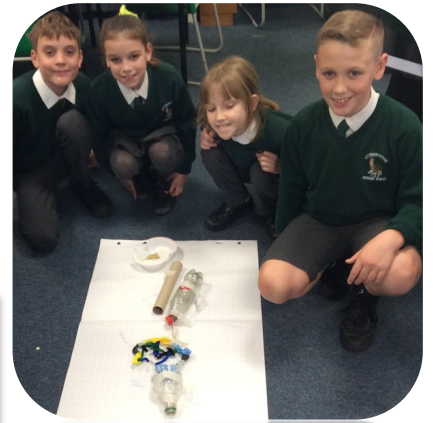
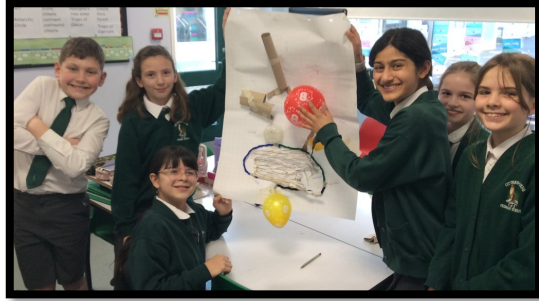


Here is a fabulous team photograph from the recent Year 3 basketball tournament.

We want as many of our children as possible to have the opportunity to represent the school in some way, and by the looks on their faces, the children really enjoyed making the most of being at this particular event.



During science In Year 5/6 this term, the children have been collaborating to create a model of the human body. Here are a few examples:



Year 1 had a big day out at Windsor Castle earlier this month. We are grateful for all of the helpers who came along to ensure the children had a fabulous day of history, which included a tour of the staterooms and grounds, and a thoroughly engaging workshop all about the monarchy.



FRIENDS OF OTTERBOURNE SCHOOL (FOS)

UPDATE

The wonderful parents and staff who make up the FOS are now working really hard on the diary of events for this year. We are all, once again, of course very excited about the big event of the year: our May Fayre, which will include lots of entertainment, opportunities for our old children to learn more about 'enterprise' and the usual end-of-fayre water fight! *If you would like to get involved in supporting the May Fayre, please let us know. **We are especially keen to find someone with a food hygiene certificate who would be happy to run the BBQ***

Before then, you will have seen already that we are holding a Valentine's bake sale and further details will be coming out very soon about the Quiz Night, which is a great opportunity to meet other parents of the school (without the children), enjoy some 'refreshments' and maybe even try to win!

FOS AGM—14th March 2025

Please save the date for this if you would to join us to learn more about how the funds raised are used within the school, or to be more involved.

Accounts for the year 2023/2024 are currently being audited ahead of the AGM. The FOS had a very successful year and expect to make a considerable donation to the school - we will confirm details of the donation at the meeting.

To date, in this year, £6,500 has been raised which includes a large donation from B&Q (thank you parents who work at B&Q) and puts us half-way towards our main aim of buying an iPad trolley (with iPads) for the school.

PARENT VOICE

We'd like to get feedback on our Christmas activities and will send out a survey shortly - please do take the time to reply. Thank you!

FRIENDS OF OTTERBOURNE SCHOOL (FOS)

UPDATE

NEW CHAIR

The Friends of Otterbourne School (FOS) are looking for a new Chair, as Kate has decided to step down at the AGM in March. The chair's primary responsibilities are:

- ♦ manage the committee meetings (which are held each half term)
- ♦ lead the trustees
- ♦ liaise with school on our activities and requirements from school
- ♦ promote good governance
- ♦ ensure the charity meets the requirements for filing returns on the charity commission website
- ♦ oversee the events organised by the PTA

If you would like to learn more about this role, or would like to put your name forward please get in touch.

DONATIONS TO THE SCHOOL

Due to the incredible work of the FOS and the generous support and donations from the community of parents, families and local businesses, the school has, amongst many other things, benefitted from the following:

- * Interactive whiteboards across the school
- * Engaging playground markings
- * New flower beds
- * Woodland seating
- * IT equipment
- * New fencing
- * Phonics resources
- * Visualiser in each classroom
- * Playground equipment
- * Science equipment
- * Music resources
- * Sports equipment

FRIENDS OF OTTERBOURNE SCHOOL INVITE YOU TO



THE BIG PARENT PUB QUIZ

Do you have what it takes to be the ultimate quiz champion? Join us for an evening of fun, laughter and trivia!

Teams can be formed on the night so come on your own or as a group, either way it will be a great night and a chance to meet other parents of the school.

Tickets are £9 per person and include a free drink on arrival.

Bring your own snacks and there will be a cash/card bar.

Prizes for the winners and all proceeds go to the school.

Tickets and further info can be found at <https://www.pta-events.co.uk/friendsotterbourne/index.cfm>

Friday 7th March

From 7:30pm in the school hall, quiz starts at 8pm

DON'T MISS OUT, BOOK YOUR SPOT NOW!

FRIENDS OF OTTERBOURNE SCHOOL (FOS)

UPDATE

BAKE SALE

Donations Plea



**READY YOUR MIXERS AND PRE-HEAT YOUR OVENS! (OR
POP DOWN THE SHOP AND HAVE IT DONE FOR YOU)**

**All donations gratefully received, bonus points if they're heart
themed!**

**Thank you to all of you for your support and donations, we just
couldn't do these events without you!**

**Donations to reception on Friday 14th February morning (day of
sale) or at Friday pick up straight to the stall please
(Label your tupperwares for safe return)**

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about

TIKTOK



WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Adults tend to associate online videos with YouTube – but among teens, TikTok is king. The app provides a stream of short clips tailored to users' interests, based on what they've already watched. Around half of British children use TikTok, and while much of the content is benign, Ofcom considers it the app where youngsters "were most likely to encounter a potential harm".

AGE-INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT



While TikTok's Following feed only displays videos from familiar creators, For You is a collection based on a user's previously watched clips. Most of these videos will probably be inoffensive, but the app *could* potentially show something unsuitable. If children then engage with this content, more like it will follow. TikTok's guidelines prohibit the sharing of illegal or inappropriate content, but the huge number of uploads means that a small amount inevitably slips through.

BODY IMAGE AND DANGEROUS CHALLENGES

According to Ofcom, most online harms for teens are body image related for girls (promoting unhealthy eating, body shaming and so on) and dangerous stunts for boys. Both are prevalent on TikTok. One extreme example of the latter was the 'blackout' trend, which encouraged users to hold their breath until they passed out from a lack of oxygen. This led to two families filing lawsuits against TikTok over the tragic deaths of their children.

IN-APP SPENDING

TikTok is free, but users have the option to buy TikTok coins, which can be used to purchase gifts for content creators. Coin bundles range from £9.99 to an eye-watering £99; while that may not sound appealing, the app still generated £7.9 billion in user spending in 2023. TikTok's policy is that under-18s can't make in-app purchases, but it's possible to bypass this with a fake birth date.

CONTACT WITH STRANGERS



With more than 1.5 billion users globally, the potential for contact from strangers on TikTok is high – especially as accounts created by over-16s (or young people using a fake date of birth) are set to public by default. This means that not only is someone's profile visible to everyone else on the app, it also suggests their videos to others and enables anyone to download or comment on them.

MISINFORMATION AND RADICALISATION

Although the short videos on TikTok tend to be more frivolous than the longer ones on YouTube, clips can still influence impressionable minds in a negative way. Not only is there plenty of dangerous misinformation on TikTok, but Ofcom reports that nearly a third of 12 to 15-year-olds use TikTok as a news source – so you should be wary of misogynistic, racist or conspiracy-themed material shaping how they see the world.

ADDICTIVE DESIGN

With its constant stream of eye-catching videos, TikTok can be addictive to young brains. In 2024, UK children spent an average of 127 minutes per day on the app: that's twice as much as in 2020. Excessive use can interfere with young people's sleep patterns – often leading to irritability – and distract them from other, healthier activities. The instantly skippable nature of bite-size videos may also impact children's ability to maintain focus.

Advice for Parents & Educators

ENABLE FAMILY PAIRING



Family Pairing allows parents to link their TikTok account to their child's, and control settings remotely. Parents can then turn on Restricted Mode (reducing the chances of a child seeing inappropriate content), set screen-time limits, make accounts private and manage whether their child can send messages – and if they can, to whom. Children can't alter these settings without parental approval.

DISCUSS THE DANGERS



If a child wants to use TikTok and you're happy for them to do so, it's good practice to discuss the potential risks. Ensure that they don't share any identifying personal information, and that they know to talk to a trusted adult if they're worried by interactions on the app. With more teens using TikTok for news, it's also worth talking about misinformation and propaganda, and how to identify it.

BLOCK IN-APP SPENDING

If a child is using an iPhone or Android device to access TikTok, you can alter their settings to prevent them from making in-app purchases. We'd recommend enabling this feature, as it can be quite easy for a young person to spend a significant amount of real money buying TikTok coins to unlock more features of the app – sometimes without even realising.

READ THE SIGNS

If you're concerned that a child is spending too much time on TikTok, or that they've been emotionally affected by something they've seen, it's important to know how to spot the signs. Increased irritability and a lack of concentration are potential red flags, as is failing to complete homework or skipping meals. Remember, the parental controls are there for a reason, and it's never too late to introduce limits.

Meet Our Expert

Alan Martin is an experienced technology journalist who has written for the likes of Wired, TechRadar, Tom's Guide, The Evening Standard and The New Statesman.



Source: See full reference list on guide page at: <https://nationalcollege.com/guides/tiktok-2025>

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about HEALTH & FITNESS APPS

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Physical wellbeing apps are useful tools for monitoring and improving our health. They allow us to balance nutrition, set goals, track our activities and sleep patterns, and motivate us to exercise. Nonetheless, there have been some reported drawbacks; this guide outlines some of these concerns and explains how to use fitness apps safely.

LACK OF PERSONALISATION

Many apps take a one-size-fits-all approach, failing to account for the varying ages and abilities of children: a 16-year-old, for example, will have different physical needs to a child of 10. This can create unrealistic expectations and set exercises which may be too advanced for younger children or too simple for older ones.

NOT DEVELOPED BY EXPERTS

Some fitness and wellbeing apps are developed by experts in the field – but a concerning number of them aren't. As such, these platforms may contain inaccurate information. They may present safety concerns by giving incorrect advice regarding physical activities or might include age-inappropriate content which would clearly cause more harm than good.

REDUCED INTERACTION WITH OTHERS

Physical wellbeing apps can remove the social and interactive elements which physical exercise can offer – for instance, meeting people at fitness classes, at the gym or during any other such activities. Research has found that young people generally dislike this aspect of fitness apps, suggesting that they would rather exercise in the company of friends or other like-minded individuals.

DATA AND PRIVACY CONCERNS

Fitness and wellbeing apps tend to collect a lot of personal information from their users, including name, location, date of birth, details of their physical health and more. It's worth keeping in mind that some of these apps may sell this data to third parties. We'd advise that any apps young people download should have the correct legislation in place to protect their safety and privacy while using the service.

ADDITIONAL COSTS

While many fitness apps are free to download, the initial content is quite basic. Users will only receive more helpful content (such as new workouts, nutrition advice or a personalised plan) by signing up to a subscription or paying for extra features. This can incentivise users to spend money on the service – a cost which can quickly mount up.

DEPENDENCY ON THE APP

While physical wellbeing apps can help motivate young users to manage their fitness, there's a possibility that – without being sent frequent rewards and reminders – children could start to lose their natural drive to be active. Young people may also become obsessed with tracking their exercise, health and eating habits; this can have negative effects on their mental and emotional wellbeing.

Advice for Parents & Educators

EXERCISE AND SOCIALISE

Highlight the importance of children enjoying fitness activities with family and friends, rather than always exercising alone. Emphasise the fun they can have by interacting with others rather than solely relying on an app to maintain their regime. Remind them of the importance of staying active, as well as the benefits of doing so with company.

PROMOTE POSITIVE BODY IMAGE

While we want children to be active and healthy, we must also ensure they don't become fixated on how they look and begin take things too far. During childhood and adolescence, the body is still growing and changing. It's vitally important for young people's wellbeing that we promote a positive body image and a healthy relationship with food, empowering them to make informed decisions about their diet and lifestyle.

REVIEW THE APP FIRST

Before allowing someone under 18 to install a fitness and wellbeing app, check its age rating, read its reviews and scroll through its data policy, to ensure its suitability for younger users. You could also try it yourself, to see if it's appropriate for the child's particular needs and decide if you're comfortable with them using it. Ensure that any privacy-compromising features – such as location tracking – are disabled.

USE PARENTAL CONTROLS

As with all apps, it's important for parents to familiarise themselves with any controls on the app and to use these on a child's account. The specific settings vary between platforms but – most commonly – these will relate to screen-time limits, disabling or capping in-app purchases, and managing social aspects or features which aren't age appropriate. By utilising these controls, you can help to ensure a child is getting a safe experience.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian Government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



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Source: See full reference list on guide page at: <https://nationalcollege.com/guides/wellbeing-fitness-apps>

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What Parents & Educators Need to Know about JUSTALK KIDS

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

JusTalk Kids is a child's version of the JusTalk app – a highly popular social networking platform – designed for users up to 13 years of age, allowing them to video call, message and participate in group chats. While adults can link their own JusTalk account to their child's and make use of parental controls, it's important to understand the risks associated with the app.

SUBSCRIPTION FOR PREMIUM ACCESS

While JusTalk Kids is free, there's the option to subscribe to a kids' premium account or a premium family account. At a cost, this feature allows children to have access to more fun features such as games they can play with others in a call; exclusive stickers; a badge denoting them as a premium subscriber; and exclusive ringtones and themes.

RESISTANCE TO CONTROLS

JusTalk Kids endeavours to allow children the sense of having a chat-based app while allowing parents to set controls (within the app or from their own adult JusTalk account). The basis behind this is positive; however, some children are challenging their parents by refusing to use JusTalk Kids, preferring to use the adult version without any restrictions in place.

KNOWING THE PARENT PASSCODE

After downloading JusTalk Kids, parents can set a passcode which users must enter to add contacts. The parental controls help to manage which content can be viewed and who children can add as a contact: this then allows children to chat with friends in a controlled environment. However, prospective contacts don't have to know a specific username. In theory, someone could type in a random name and then add them as a friend.

POTENTIAL DATA LEAKS

JusTalk and JusTalk Kids claim to be secure and encrypted, going so far as to state that even the developers themselves won't access your data. However, a security lapse in 2022 highlighted that messages were not in fact encrypted – leading to concerns around the security of the app and the transparency of the development team.

CYBERBULLYING

Online chats can provide a sense of anonymity, leading some users to post things which they wouldn't normally say in person. Combined with the option of group chats, there's a risk that young people might join in with this kind of behaviour, escalating it further and potentially turning what should be a fun experience into something deeply negative.

TOO MUCH SCREEN TIME

A report by the UK Parliament Education Committee highlighted a 52% increase in children's screen time between 2020 and 2022 – as well as finding that 25% of children used their smartphones in a manner consistent with screen addiction. Introducing children to social networking apps when they're too young can lead to bad digital habits and a reliance on technology from an early age.

Advice for Parents & Educators

JUSTIFY THE CONTROLS

If parents allow their child to use JusTalk Kids, they should explain that they're putting parental controls in place to make the app safer. Make sure the child knows not to put their full name on the account and doesn't use a photo of themselves as their profile picture. This type of open discussion will help to ensure that a child is aware of the app's potential risks and knows how to reduce them.

TALK ABOUT ONLINE FRIENDSHIPS

Young children could be excited to use this app. However, highlight that they must do so in a positive, respectful and responsible manner. While it can be easy to get caught up in a group chat, it's important to talk to others politely and call out any unpleasant behaviour. Discuss the importance of limiting their contacts to people they know in real life and use parental controls to enforce this.

DOS AND DON'TS OF SHARING

Some children might not understand the potential dangers of oversharing online. Set clear guidelines around what *is* and *isn't* safe to share on the internet, and discuss the concept of a digital footprint. Children need to understand that the things they say and share online can never be completely erased. Even if they delete it themselves, it can be saved and distributed by others.

ENCOURAGE OPEN COMMUNICATION

Apps like JusTalk can sometimes lend themselves to bullying behaviours. Parents should monitor what their child is sending and receiving, check in with them regularly and encourage them to share their feelings (both positive and negative) at home. Remind them that they can block a contact if someone is treating them disrespectfully.

Meet Our Expert

Dr Claire Sutherland is an online safety consultant, educator and researcher who has developed and implemented anti-bullying and cyber safety policies for schools. She has written various academic papers and carried out research for the Australian government comparing internet use and sexting behaviour of young people in the UK, USA and Australia.



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Source: See full reference list on guide page at: <https://nationalcollege.com/guides/justalk-kids>

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Our Future Energy Landscapes
How might Otterbourne & Allbrook
power their communities
using locally produced
renewable energy?

Tuesday 4th February 7.00 - 9.30pm
Otterbourne Village Hall

Book your free space and get more
information at

<https://esd.energy/events>



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IN CASE YOU MISSED IT!

Here are some of the important items from previous newsletters.

10 Top Tips for Parents and Educators

SAFETY OVER THE FESTIVE SEASON

The holiday season, marked by Christmas and New Year, brings joy and togetherness but also presents unique safety challenges for children, families and educators. From busy holiday shopping, traveling and family gatherings to managing digital activity during school breaks, staying safe during this period requires heightened awareness. This guide offers practical tips to help families and educators maintain a more secure and fulfilling festive period.

1 MONITOR DIGITAL ACTIVITY



Children spend more time online during school holidays, increasing exposure to potential dangers such as cyberbullying, inappropriate content and online predators. Balancing screen time, avoiding harmful websites and ensuring children engage positively online can be difficult without proper monitoring tools. Set clear boundaries, encourage open discussions about online safety and use parental controls to manage content exposure and screen time effectively. Regular check-ins and positive reinforcement around digital habits encourage safe online behaviour.

2 PRACTICE FIRE SAFETY PROTOCOLS



The incidence of house fires increases during Christmas due to greater use of candles, cookers and electrical decorations. Open flames, electrical overloads and the need for quick response plans can make fire safety challenging. Ensure smoke detectors are operational, keep fire extinguishers on hand and teach children how to respond in case of a fire emergency. Avoid leaving cooking unattended and use fire-safe candles to prevent mishaps.

3 CREATE TRAVEL SAFETY PLANS



More families tend to travel during the holidays, resulting in busier roads, increased traffic accidents and weather-related hazards. Weather conditions, road rage, fatigue and busy airports can all compromise travel safety. Pack emergency kits and adhere to seatbelt laws. Plan routes in advance and allow extra travel time to avoid rushing and mitigate risks on busy roads.

4 BEWARE OF ALLERGIES



Holiday meals often involve many foods that may contain allergens. Cross contamination, unclear labelling and lack of allergy-friendly options can lead to severe reactions. Communicate any allergy needs to hosts, provide safe food alternatives and carry necessary medications like antihistamines or EpiPens. Teaching children how to advocate for themselves and recognise dangerous foods also contributes to safer celebrations.

5 PREVENT THE SPREAD OF ILLNESS



Cold weather and seasonal socialising can increase the spread of viruses like flu and COVID-19. Crowded gatherings, schools out of session and frequent travel can lead to higher infection risks. Emphasise hygiene, encourage vaccination, disinfect surfaces and isolate symptomatic individuals. Communication with children about proper hygiene practices is essential to reduce the spread of illness.

6 STAY VIGILANT ON THE ROAD



Increased holiday traffic heightens the risk of accidents for both drivers and pedestrians. Distracted driving, pedestrian safety and inclement weather can complicate road safety. Encourage pedestrian safety practices, avoid distracted driving and never drive under the influence.

7 MAINTAIN SAFE DECORATIONS



Festive decorations such as Christmas lights and candles can pose electrical, fire and choking hazards if mishandled. Frayed wires, toppling Christmas trees, small ornaments and open flames can be difficult to control, especially in busy households with children. Inspect and maintain decorations, secure Christmas trees, place fragile or small items out of reach and ensure candles are never left unattended. Testing smoke alarms and using flame-retardant decorations can significantly reduce risks.

8 SET BOUNDARIES FOR GIFTS



Some toys and gadgets can present choking, sharp-edge or safety risks, particularly for young children. Ensuring that gifts meet safety standards and are age appropriate can be complex with so many options available. Inspect all toys carefully and ensure any tech devices have parental controls. Setting expectations around safe gift use and discarding packaging that poses a risk also helps to prevent accidents.

9 ADDRESS STRESS & FATIGUE



Holiday pressures can lead to burnout, which affects both physical and mental health. Overpacked schedules and a lack of downtime can cause stress and fatigue, leading to accidents or poor decision making. Incorporate rest, maintain regular routines and seek support to reduce stress. Encourage activities that promote relaxation to create a healthier, happier holiday experience for everyone.

10 DRINK RESPONSIBLY



Alcohol is commonly present at holiday events, raising concerns about safety and supervision. Excessive alcohol consumption can lead to accidents, impaired judgment and lack of supervision for children. Designate responsible adults, limit consumption and provide transportation alternatives for guests. Teaching moderation and modelling responsible behaviour in front of children ensures that celebrations remain positive and secure.

Meet Our Expert

James Whelan is a chartered health and safety consultant with 10 years of experience in promoting family and community safety. Specialising in risk assessment and preventative strategies, he has worked with educational institutions, public health agencies and community groups to deliver safety education and training.



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Source: See full reference list on guide page at: <https://nationalcollege.com/guides/safety-over-the-festive-season>

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about WORRY AND ANXIETY

Worry and anxiety are common emotions experienced by children, often triggered by uncertainty or fear. While worry involves concern about future events, anxiety is a persistent feeling of dread or apprehension. Current statistics indicate a rising prevalence of anxiety disorders among children, and this guide has some expert advice on understanding and addressing these concerns.

UNDERSTANDING WORRY AND ANXIETY

Worry and anxiety are emotional responses to stress or uncertainty. Worry is typically associated with potential misfortune, while anxiety is characterised by feelings of fear, apprehension or unease. Both can manifest physically through symptoms such as restlessness, fatigue or muscle tension. Understanding the distinction between worry and anxiety is crucial for effectively addressing these concerns in children.



DIFFERENTIATING WORRY FROM ANXIETY

While worry and anxiety share similarities – in that they both involve concerns about possible trouble – anxiety tends to be more constant and overwhelming. Worry may come and go depending on circumstances, whereas anxiety can linger regardless of the situation. It's essential to recognise when the former crosses into the latter, as anxiety can significantly impact a child's daily functioning and wellbeing.



WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES

Untreated worry and anxiety in childhood can have potentially lifelong impacts on a person's mental health and wellbeing. Chronic anxiety may increase the risk of developing anxiety disorders, depression or other mental health conditions later in life. Additionally, unresolved worry and anxiety can negatively impact self-esteem, confidence and overall resilience. It's essential to address these concerns proactively and provide appropriate support and intervention.



THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN

Excessive worry and anxiety can have profound effects on children's mental and emotional health. It may interfere with their ability to concentrate, sleep or participate in daily activities. Chronic worry and anxiety can also lead to physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach aches or difficulty breathing. Left unchecked, these concerns can escalate and potentially contribute to the development of anxiety disorders later in life.



THE EMOTIONAL TOLL

The emotional impact of worry and anxiety on children can be significant, affecting their overall quality of life and wellbeing. Children experiencing chronic worry or anxiety may feel overwhelmed, irritable or helpless. They may also withdraw from social activities or avoid situations that trigger their anxiety, leading to feelings of isolation or loneliness. Addressing these concerns early can help prevent long-term emotional distress and promote healthy coping strategies.



ACADEMIC & SOCIAL IMPACTS

Impacts on the academic performance and social interactions of children and young people are very possible. Frequent worry or anxiety may impair concentration, memory and problem-solving skills, making it difficult for children to succeed in education. Anxiety can also hinder social development by causing children and young people to avoid social situations or to struggle with communication and interpersonal relationships, potentially leading to feelings of isolation or exclusion.



Advice for Parents & Educators

ENCOURAGE OPEN COMMUNICATION

Parents and educators can foster a supportive environment by encouraging children to express their worries and anxieties openly. Actively listening and acknowledging young people's emotions can help them feel understood and supported, reducing the situation's intensity. Creating opportunities for regular check-ins and discussions about one's feelings can promote healthy coping strategies and strengthen communication bonds.



CREATE A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Parents and educators play a crucial role in creating a supportive environment that promotes emotional wellbeing. Establishing routines, providing predictability and offering reassurance can help relieve anxiety and create a sense of security for children. Foster a culture of empathy and understanding, where children feel safe enough to express their emotions and seek support when needed.



TEACH COPING STRATEGIES

Empowering children with effective coping strategies is essential for managing worry and anxiety. Encourage the use of relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, mindfulness or progressive muscle relaxation to calm anxious thoughts and promote a sense of composure. Additionally, teaching positive self-talk and problem-solving skills can help children develop resilience and confidence in managing challenging situations.



SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

Recognising when to seek professional help is vital for addressing significant or persistent worry and anxiety in children. If worry or anxiety significantly impacts a child's daily functioning, interferes with their relationships or academic performance, or causes significant distress, it may be necessary to consult with a mental health practitioner. Early intervention can prevent long-term consequences and promote positive outcomes for children's psychological wellbeing.



Meet Our Expert

Adam Gillett is Associate Vice Principal for Personal Development at Penistone Grammar School and works on secondment one day a week for Minds Ahead, which collaborates with schools on improving their mental health provisions.



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