The Gilberd School

Safeguarding & Well-being bulletin December 2024

As the end of the year draws to a close, I have to say, it doesn't feel 5 minutes since we came back to school in September and yet here we are, ready to welcome in a new year. I have included several specifically Christmas related articles but also some pertinent safeguarding and well-being resources too. I hope you find some of these of interest or use. I have included a weblink to some well-being resources and ideas specifically designed for the Christmas period that could be very useful; as I recognise that whilst this can be an exciting time of year, it can be also quite challenging both financially and emotionally.

I wish you all a fantastic Christmas and a happy and healthy new year.

Winter Resources

Resources specially designed by our therapists to support regulation, connection and rest during December.

Download for free here and share with family and friends so everyone can access what they need during this busy time.

OTHER BEACON HOUSE FREE RESOURCES

[Winter Resources](#)

10 Top Tips for Parents and Educators
SAFETY OVER THE FESTIVE SEASON

The holiday season is fast approaching! 🧑 While we hope you're excited to kick back, relax, and enjoy some well-earned rest with friends and family, it's still vitally important that we do all we can to safeguard the children and young people in our care over the festive period 🎁

However, it can be tricky to know what specific steps we can take to ensure our winter break is as calm and risk-free as possible, which his why we've put together this week's free guide. Check out our expert advice on keeping youngsters safe over the festive season ❄️🛡️

All guides are downloaded and attached to this mailing

Sextortion

Don't scare us and use our language to discuss sextortion, say teenagers

To read the full article, follow this link:

Pupil absence reaches alarming levels

Laura Trott, the shadow education secretary, has called on the Government to prioritise pupil absence, following a report revealing that 300,000 children were unaccounted for in schools in 2023. The Education Policy Institute (EPI) reported a 40% increase in absences since 2017, with over 50,000 students leaving the state education system by Year 11 without clear records. Trott said: "Pupil absence is the most important thing for the Department for Education (DfE) to focus on at the moment," highlighting the need to get children back into classrooms. The DfE has plans to introduce measures for tracking children not in school, alongside new protections for home-educated children under social care investigations. However, a source questioned the EPI's estimate, citing data quality issues. The DfE reported that 117,000 children were missing education at any time during the 2023 to 2024 academic year.

Teachers urged to tackle incel culture

The Government has issued guidance for teachers to identify signs of "incel culture" among students, particularly boys over 14, as part of efforts to combat rising misogyny. Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson highlighted the dangers posed by "poisonous" influencers like Andrew Tate, claiming: "With the proliferation of technology and the rise of terrifying influencers, we are witnessing first-hand the radicalisation of young boys." The guidance stresses the importance of early intervention to prevent potential violence and abuse, urging teachers to recognise the language and ideologies associated with incels, who often express intense hatred towards women. In 2023-24, 54 boys were referred to the Prevent deradicalisation programme due to incel views, underscoring the urgency of addressing this issue in schools.

Students ditch phones for social experiment

In a groundbreaking social experiment, pupils at Stanway School in Essex gave up their smartphones for three weeks. Initially, the students struggled with the absence of their devices, with one pupil confessing: "I've just put my life in there, it's completely gone." The experiment, which featured in Channel 4's new show *Swiped: The School That Banned Smartphones*, aimed to assess the impact of phone use on children's mental health. Dr Rangan Chatterjee highlighted the alarming statistic that frequent social media use increases a child's risk of depression by 27%. After 21 days without phones, participants reported an extra hour of sleep each night, suggesting potential benefits of reduced screen time. Dr Chatterjee urged society to reconsider technology's role in children's lives, stating: "If our kids aren't well, no-one is well." The *Evening Standard* suggests the show raises questions about the future of smartphone use among children and the need for healthier technology habits.

Boys' apathy: Internet's dangerous influence

Tomiwa Owolade writes in the *Times* that the issue of boys' disengagement in education has increasingly been linked to the internet, prompting the Government to provide guidance for teachers. He notes that Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson has highlighted the influence of online figures like Andrew Tate, who promote misogyny. A report from the National Literacy Trust reveals that only 28% of boys aged eight to 18 enjoy reading, compared to 40% of girls, indicating a significant gap in engagement. Owolade adds that this apathy is exacerbated by the instant gratification offered by social media, leading to a decline in motivation and concentration. The author Richard Reeves notes that boys' brains mature more slowly, which Owolade says compounds the issue. He argues that to address this crisis, a re-evaluation of boys' access to smartphones may be necessary, as they contribute to a culture of distraction and disengagement.

Game helps youth process grief

Co-founded by psychologist Louis Weinstock, the video game "*Apart of Me*" is significantly impacting vulnerable young people by assisting them in navigating their grief. Designed for 11-18-year-olds, the game provides a safe space for users to explore their feelings of loss and trauma. "It gives young people an outlet to have those conversations that otherwise might be difficult to have," Weinstock explained. Since its launch in 2018, the game has supported 44,000 individuals in the UK and 160,000 globally. The game encourages players to assist characters facing grief-related challenges, fostering empathy and understanding. Weinstock aims to make therapy more accessible and believes early intervention is crucial to preventing anxiety and depression in young people. The game is currently being rolled out in selected schools as part of a three-year programme funded by the National Lottery.

Resources to Support Contact After Adoption - Research in Practice

Christmas brings into view issues that may otherwise rumble under the surface. For the vast majority of children Christmas is what they've waited for all year. Presents, distant family, hot home cooked food and all the festive trimmings of the Christmas period. However, it is important to remember that not all children have that luxury. Adopted children form an anomaly in this group. As they get older they may become aware that the family they live with, was not the one they originally had. Christmas is one of the time's that this fact may come to impact them. It may become a moment that spurs them to seek out their original family unit. To search for a mother or a father that for whatever reason, and there are many, were not able to provide a home for them. Research in Practice has provided new resources to support contact with birth families. This issue is one that must be handled with care and you may find this guide vital to your efforts, to aid adopted individuals. If interested, please click on the link below:

https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/news-views/2024/december/staying-in-touch-new-resources-to-support-contact-after-adoption

[Staying in touch - New resources to support contact after adoption | Research in Practice](https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/news-views/2024/december/staying-in-touch-new-resources-to-support-contact-after-adoption)

According to findings from the NHS, 1 in 5 children in England suffer from a probable mental health issue, with 420,000 treated for such problems every month 😔 With such high numbers of young people in need of mental health support, it's perhaps unsurprising that plenty of them have turned to using apps intended to help them through these kinds of challenges 📱

Unfortunately, there are plenty of risks associated with these services ⚠️ from data collection to a potentially unhelpful, impersonal experience. It can be difficult to know how to keep young users safe as they navigate these services, but this week's free guide provides expert advice on how to do exactly that, while also breaking down the specific safety concerns of mental health and wellbeing apps.

All guides are downloaded and attached to this mailing

Ofcom Report - Online Nation 2024

Ofcom have released their latest Online Nation report which highlights the differences between the online lives of men and women. In relation to children and young people one stark figure suggests that 22% of 8 to 17 year olds lie that they are 18 or over on social media apps (quick read BBC article **HERE**), therefore rendering protections useless.

Personally I think this figure is low. I know I could easily walk into a Year 6 class and the large majority of children will have accounts on apps such as Snapchat and TikTok. Perhaps they haven't all signed up indicating their age is over 18, but a significant number do, or can't remember which year of birth they used.

Overall, the Ofcom report makes an interesting read and goes into lots of detail, for example:

- The potential harms to teen males and females plus their concerns are significantly different. This is useful to know: what and to whom are we targeting in the curriculum? In other words, is the curriculum differentiated to take into account these harms and the support that is given?

There's a summary of the report **HERE** and the full report can be found **HERE**.

Updated Resource - So You Got Naked Online

This free resource from South West Grid for Learning has been through various iterations since 2012 and the latest version brings the guidance for young people and parents right up to date including:

- The risks of sexting and sextortion: how to respond to threats or pressure.
- Legal and safety support such as Report Remove and CEOP.
- Emotional recovery and self-care tips.
- And much more.

For further details and to download click **HERE**.

Caution on smartphone bans in schools

London Evening Standard

During her maiden speech in the House of Lords, Baroness Cass cautioned against imposing smartphone restrictions in schools without involving young people. She highlighted that "two recent studies of 13- to 18-year-olds found that 15% to 20% reported addictive-like smartphone use," which correlates with increased anxiety and depression. Lady Cass emphasised the importance of engaging young advocates in discussions, warning that without their involvement, restrictions could lead to behaviours similar to "smoking behind the bike shed." She advocated for a "public health-style approach" to educate parents and teachers on the risks and benefits of smartphone use, aiming to foster a collaborative environment that supports students' mental health and learning. Baroness Kidron and Lord Knight of Weymouth also contributed to the debate, stressing the shared responsibility of families and schools in managing digital consumption.

Ofcom warns social media firms over fake ages

BBC News

Social media companies face punishment if they fail to take significant extra steps to prevent children from pretending to be adults online. This comes after analysis by media regulator Ofcom found that 22% of those aged between 8 and 17 lie that they are 18 or over on social media apps. With the Online Safety Act (OSA) requiring platforms to improve age verification, a responsibility that will come into force in 2025, Ofcom said its "alarming" findings show that tech firms have a way to go to meet that new legal standard. The watchdog added that firms would face enforcement action if they failed to do so. Ian Macrae, director of market intelligence at Ofcom, said 2025 is set to deliver a "real step change in online safety." He added that Ofcom would "take action" if firms do not comply with the OSA, noting that the legislation allowed for companies to be fined 10% of their global revenue.

Bullying impacts mental health deeply

Bullying is a pervasive issue that deeply affects young people's emotional and mental well-being, often leading to anxiety and depression. The 'Embracing Difference, Ending Bullying' Impact Report, produced in collaboration with the Department for Education, highlights that marginalised students face higher bullying rates, with 32% of secondary students bullied due to their sexuality and 34% due to their appearance. Alex Fies-Bryce, CEO of Diversity Role Models, emphasises the importance of education in combating bullying: "When young people see themselves and others reflected in the stories they hear, they are more likely to develop a sense of belonging and respect." The initiative encourages everyone to 'Choose Respect' in their daily lives, fostering environments where kindness and understanding prevail over bullying.

Parents urged to talk early with kids about sex

Discussing sex with young people is crucial in today's digital age, where explicit content is easily accessible. Milly Evans, a sex educator, emphasises the importance of starting these conversations early: "You always want to be ahead of the stage that your child is at." Experts recommend creating a safe space for open dialogue, using correct anatomical terms, and avoiding euphemisms. Justin Hancock highlights the significance of casual discussions, suggesting that "a lot of the time, the useful conversations about sex and relationships happen in cars." Furthermore, parents should not solely rely on schools for sex education, as the quality of teaching can vary significantly. Instead, they should equip children with critical thinking skills regarding online content, especially pornography, which can often present unrealistic expectations. Ultimately, fostering an environment of openness and support is key to effective communication about sex and relationships.

Research Reports on Youth Violence - Youth Endowment Fund

Over the past 12 months 20% of teenagers told the Youth Endowment Fund, that they've been a victim of violence. Over half of those incidents led to an injury. This year these violent acts have affected just shy of half-a-million young people. Many of those attacked once were attacked repeatedly in that year. The mission of the Youth Endowment Fund's research reports is to see what is driving this tragic fact. On their home page four excellent in depth reports on youth violence can be explored. Their contents cover who suffers from violence, the role of social media, the differences experienced by boys and girls and young people's views on the police. With a fifth report coming out later this year, now is an excellent time to get ahead of the latest analysis of this phenomena. To find out more, please follow the link below:

https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/reports/children-violence-and-vulnerability-2024/who-is-affected/

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about
MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING APPS

When looking at options for supporting a child's mental health, the sheer volume can be overwhelming. There are many wellbeing apps available, but unfortunately not all are trustworthy. It's important to evaluate which resources are suitable, reliable and effective. This guide lets you know what to consider before installing such an app, to determine just how useful it's going to be.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

QUALITY & RELIABILITY

Mental health apps can be a useful starting point when looking for wellbeing advice and strategies and can be a useful extension to the in-person services available. However, they aren't a substitute. Information on the quality of some of these apps is scarce. They may look cute and child-friendly, but have they been designed by a mental health professional? Furthermore, do they have research to back up their content?

PLACE RESPONSIBILITY ON CHILDREN

Some apps add the words 'kids' or 'children' to their title or use cartoon icons to make them more appealing to young people. When signing up for some of these apps, some will speak to the parent directly, saying something along the lines of "Your child is good to go. Let them take it from here". It's important to remain involved in the child's mental health journey, so regular check-ins are recommended.

DISREGARDING APPROPRIATE SUPPORT

Young people who feel anxious and have trouble sleeping may download a mindfulness app to help. While this is a good strategy initially, it's not addressing the root of the problem. A child could simply try managing these symptoms themselves (as opposed to speaking out and seeking professional help), which could potentially worsen their anxiety in the long run.

LACK OF PERSONALISATION

Mental health or wellbeing apps are useful tools for the short term, teaching users several helpful habits to manage their condition – such as keeping an illness diary, improving nutrition and practising mindfulness exercises. As every person is unique – and children especially will grow and develop in different ways – these apps struggle to tailor themselves to users' individual needs. For example, many apps don't distinguish between the ages of users and can offer extremely generic advice.

DATA SECURITY

As with any other app – not just those for mental health and wellbeing – it's wise to check out the privacy policy before downloading it. Some of these applications may share data with third parties for numerous reasons (such as targeted advertisements), and if a user is sharing personal and sensitive information within the app, they probably don't want it ending up elsewhere without their consent.

IN-APP PURCHASES

Many apps will provide their most basic features for free but will require you to pay for other aspects – such as a more tailored experience or access to additional resources. This could be a one-off fee or a regular subscription. Consider whether this is actually required. Is it benefiting the child, or could they receive the same support from a medical professional?

Advice for Parents & Educators

CHECK THE CREDIBILITY OF THE APP

Before you download a mental health and wellbeing app, investigate the developers. Have they consulted with qualified mental health professionals to create their resource? Also check whether the app is affiliated with any government or mental health organisations, as these are solid indicators of legitimacy. Reviews can also be a useful signpost to the app's quality. There are many good apps out there, but there are just as many that miss the mark.

READ THE PRIVACY POLICY

Look into the app's terms of service – especially its privacy policy. Do so by yourself first, then go over it with the child who is considering using the app, to ensure they know what data will be collected and how exactly it will be used. Use all of this information to make an educated decision on whether or not to download that particular app.

SEEK PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Trusted mental health and wellbeing apps designed by qualified, reputable organisations can be used alongside the personalised advice and support of fully trained professionals. These apps should never be considered a substitute for counselling or other tailored medical help. If you have real concerns about a child's mental wellbeing, you should seek appropriate advice from a suitable source, such as their GP - or **Childline**, who can be contacted by calling **0800 1111**.

ENCOURAGE OPEN COMMUNICATION

Mental health and wellbeing apps can be useful for writing down feelings, tracking your own health and other such activities. These can help if the problem is short-term and temporary – such as a child getting stressed about approaching exams – or if you're currently waiting for professional support. Nonetheless, it is important that children aren't solely reliant on the app and have a safe space to talk about their feelings and experiences in the real world.

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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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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