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Top family-friendly festivals for 2025

Compiled by Andrew Campbell

Discover the ultimate family-friendly festivals across the UK in 2025, where music, arts and outdoor adventures come alive for all ages. Discover unique experiences which will ensure memorable moments and endless fun for families in vibrant, engaging and often idyllic settings.

Teddy Rocks Charisworth Farm, Blandford Forum, Dorset 2-4 May

Winner of Best Family Festival in 2022, Teddy Rocks is an immersive, intimate three-day music event, with one hundred percent of profits supporting children's cancer research. This multi-award-winning, independent festival hosts over one hundred acts from international to brand new performers. The festival offers activities for all ages, including fairground rides, comedy tent and axe-throwing. www.teddyrocks.co.uk

Bearded Theory, Catton Park, Derbyshire 21-25 May

Set in the heart of the Midlands, this festival features sensational live performances for adults across multiple stages. The award-winning children's offering includes fun, educational classes, a Toddler Tent with soft play, a pop-up library, poetry tent and creative workshops like puppet making. Kids can also enjoy a chill-out area, face painting, circus activities and a talent show. **NEW:** 'Kids Rave On' with club lighting and DJ performances. Evening highlights include LED light shows and the unique DOGSHOW performance. www.beardedtheory.co.uk

Elderflower Fields, Ashdown Forest, Sussex 23-24 May

This delightful, family-friendly event offers a weekend filled with music, sports, nature exploration and arts. Tailored for families with young children, this intimate festival offers a secure environment where kids can freely explore. Highlights include Dragonfly Hill for lively performances and Leapfrog Lawns for crafts and games. www.south.elderflowerfields.co.uk

The Big Retreat, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park, Wales 23-25 May

The festival celebrates wellbeing and adventure with yoga, fitness and live music. It offers diverse children's activities, including storytelling, discos, water slides, circus toys and bushcraft workshops for survival skills and nature exploration. Families can enjoy a creative and inspirational atmosphere filled with arts, crafts, singing, dancing and wellbeing classes – an inclusive experience in which they can have fun, enjoy and learn together. www.thebigretreatfestival.com

Latitude, Henham Park, Suffolk 24-27 July

Award-winning Latitude is among the biggest of the family-friendly festivals with a huge array of activities for both children and parents. It's a proper pop festival in the beautiful grounds of Henham Park with a stunning Kids' Area. Expect fire shows, pizza-making, traditional woodland crafts and exciting science experiments, a more relaxed but packed programme in the Enchanted Garden and an Inbetweeners Teen Area. www.latitudefestival.com

Camp Severn Kids Festival, West Mid Showground, Shropshire 25-27 July

Camp Severn offers an all-inclusive adventure for children ages 3 to 13. This family-friendly event is packed with interactive workshops, outdoor games and themed events such as Space Camp, with Star Wars characters, singing princesses and inflatables. The festival also features engaging science

workshops, blending fun and education. With camping options available, families can immerse themselves in the festival atmosphere, enjoying a hassle-free experience where all activities are included in the ticket price. www.kids-events.co.uk

Festival of Sport, Packington Estate, Warwickshire 1-4 August

The Festival of Sport at Packington Estate offers families an exciting weekend filled with diverse sports activities for children ages 5 to 17. Featuring expert coaching and interactions with sporting legends, kids can explore rugby, hockey, cricket and more. Set in a picturesque location, this festival provides a unique opportunity for children to learn, play and be inspired by sports heroes. www.festivalofsportuk.com

Camp Kindling, Sevenoaks, Kent 15-18 August

A magical, intimate, safe and secure family retreat in an ancient forest, featuring over one hundred activities. Children can enjoy thrilling adventures like water slides, zip lines and rock climbing, while adults delight in live music, theatre and comedy performances. Pre-bookable activities ensure no lost time and there are no hidden costs. www.campkindling.co.uk

Images

Top left: Latitude
Bottom left: Elderflower Fields
Middle: Camp Kindling
Top right: Teddy Rocks
Bottom right: Festival of Sport

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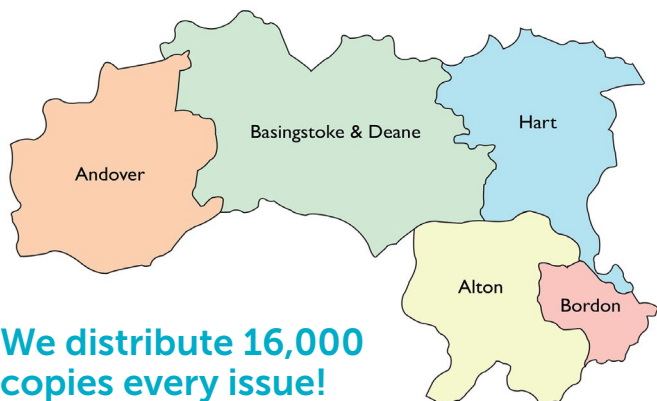
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Editor's Welcome

Happy New Year! The calendar is fresh, and we're ready to go with twelve months of new adventures!

Most people have great intentions when the New Year begins, and our middle pages in this issue provide some inspiration for ways to make 2025 the beginning of something new for the family.

Our busy and stressful lifestyles mean that we increasingly need to step back and focus on mental health. Schools' understanding of the importance of good pastoral care is continuing to grow, and I hope you will be encouraged by our special feature on pastoral care in schools.

We were also privileged to be able to interview the wonderful Aiden, an eight-year-old ambassador, who is championing the great outdoors: get out there and enjoy it!

I hope you and your family have a very happy and healthy 2025.

Lesley



Competition winner

Congratulations to Katie Snelgar, who won tickets to see Sleeping Beauty at The Anvil in our November/December 2024 issue.

Winchester Science Centre

February half term fun!

Live science, Planetarium adventures and hands-on exhibits





Building girls' confidence with safe places

New research highlights that safe spaces can help boost primary school girls' confidence, self-esteem and resilience when it comes to PE.

The study from Leeds Beckett University, centred around the M2 program—"Where Movement and Mindfulness Meet"—involved girls aged seven to eleven across five schools.

This innovative eight-session initiative combines running/walking with mindfulness to strengthen a girl's self-esteem and resilience. Girls have themed discussions, play games, do structured workouts and capture their experience through words and pictures in their own journal. They finish with a 5KM challenge.

Participants showed marked improvements in fitness, social interactions, and mental health, including resilience and pride. Dr. Annette Stride, lead author of the study, noted, "Our research demonstrates the power of the M2 program. The girls' newfound confidence manifests in their increased classroom participation, positive outlook on exams, and leadership roles."

More info: www.m2club.org.uk



'Crisis' in autism care - years waiting for diagnosis

In England, children are enduring lengthy waits for ADHD and autism diagnoses, with some waiting over four years, according to data from the Children's Commissioner, Dame Rachel de Souza.

This delay is significantly impacting their development and family life. Dame Rachel emphasises the urgency of the issue, stating, "These findings are a stark reminder of the daily fight children and their families face seeking support."

The data reveals that nearly 23% of children with ADHD and 15% with autism faced such delays in community health services.

The government has acknowledged these challenges, committing to a 10-Year Health Plan aimed at reducing waiting times and enhancing support pre and post-diagnosis. Dame Rachel calls for a shift away from diagnosis dependency, urging improvements in mainstream schools and professional training to meet children's needs effectively. The NHS plans to address the surge in referrals with an expert taskforce, striving to transform care for affected families.

More info: www.bit.ly/AutismCareCrisis



Take Part in The Big Garden Birdwatch

Get your family involved in the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch and help monitor bird life in the UK. With 1 in 4 birds in serious decline, it's never been more important to monitor the UK's bird populations.

It's the world's largest garden wildlife survey and over the past 45 years, volunteers from across the UK have helped the RSPB by tracking the birds living in their gardens and local green spaces.

Simply count the birds you see in your garden, from your balcony or in your local park for one hour between 24 and 26 January.

Challenge your children to see who can spot the most birds. Take a bike ride to a local park or make a day trip out of it and spot birds in a new place.

To learn how to take part and how to spot garden birds with a handy free birdwatch guide, visit www.rspb.org.uk/birdwatch

WORD SEARCH

Find the names of these British birds in the grid. Then read the remaining unused letters in lines 7 to 11 from left to right to find a hidden message!

E	L	A	G	N	I	T	H	G	I	N	S	O
N	E	G	L	M	P	H	S	U	Z	K	B	T
V	X	S	U	S	P	A	R	R	O	W	A	V
Q	S	T	O	I	N	J	L	F	O	R	U	S
M	P	A	Z	O	X	T	H	O	G	B	W	W
W	X	R	O	B	I	N	D	K	A	C	B	R
O	D	L	O	N	T	P	F	O	R	G	E	E
R	T	I	T	O	E	T	P	I	G	E	O	N
C	A	N	K	C	E	P	A	R	T	I	W	N
T	H	G	K	G	R	E	A	T	G	A	L	R
D	E	E	N	B	I	R	D	W	A	T	C	H
C	R	H	Z	B	L	A	C	K	B	I	R	D

WREN
STARLING
SPARROW

ROBIN
WOODPECKER
NIGHTINGALE
BLACKBIRD

OWL
CROW
PIGEON

The new childcare offering

By Purnima Tanuku

Early education and childcare is very expensive, especially for our youngest children and as research has shown, many parents end up working just to pay for their child's nursery. So why is UK childcare so expensive compared to childcare in similar countries? The reason is that the government contribution has been so low and until recently it was limited to children ages 3 and 4.

So, when the previous government's plan to expand childcare support for working parents in England was announced last year, this was great news, not just for parents but also for children. Research shows that high quality early education and care supports their development, wellbeing and has an impact on their education all through their schooling.

What is the new childcare offering in UK childcare?

The childcare expansion is being delivered in stages, building on the thirty hours of funded childcare for children ages 3 and 4 which was already available. However, the offer is still only available to families where parents are working at least sixteen hours a week.

The roll out provides:

- fifteen hours funded childcare a week for children age 2 from April 2024
- fifteen funded hours for children ages 9+ months from September 2024

This will be increased to thirty hours funded childcare for all children under age 5 from September 2025.



Although government funded hours make a difference to family finances, this funded childcare still involves costs for parents. It is important to be aware of the following parameters:

The thirty and fifteen hours of government supported childcare is not 'free!' The government only pays for the actual childcare sessions, which does not include any meals, snacks, consumables or additional activities, so families can expect to see settings make charges for these.

The funded hours are only during term time. Most parents work all year round so providers may 'stretch' these hours across the year, reducing the hours per week.

Depending on the length of your sessions, **you will need to pay for any additional hours** you need at the nursery's usual fee especially for early or later hours.

Purnima Tanuku OBE is Chief Executive of National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) (www.nda.org.uk), a charity with a mission to see children and families thrive through access to high-quality early education and care.



It's not 'free', it's 'government-funded'

The offer of 'free' childcare launched by the previous government has now been renamed by ministers as 'government-funded' childcare. Calling the funded hours free has misled parents and created difficult conversations when providers need to charge for meals and other items not included in the funding.

The Department for Education (DfE) announced late last year that it would be consulting with providers in the coming weeks on new guidance regarding charging parents for 'extras' such as meals and consumables. It's important that the government works with providers to create guidance that is clear, fair to parents and sustainable for providers.

Although the government offers funded hours, the rates they pay for these have never covered the actual costs of delivering high quality early education and care. When we speak to providers, the vast majority say funding rates do not cover their staffing and other costs and when funding increases do not keep pace with inflation and staffing costs, that gap only widens.



Why might families struggle to find places?

Following years of underfunding and rising costs, hundreds of nurseries are closing and thousands of qualified practitioners and childminders are giving up the profession for better paid jobs.

The pressure is clearest in more deprived areas, where nurseries depend on government funded hours and less on parent fees, creating childcare deserts.

With the doubling of funded hours being offered to families, the DfE estimates that seventy thousand new places will be needed to satisfy demand by September 2025. To deliver these, providers will need an additional thirty-five thousand staff.

As of last year, the statutory minimum staff to child ratios in England for children age 2 is now one adult to five children. Looking after five two-year-olds is stressful and many providers prefer to work with smaller groups.

Ahead of September, speak to your choice of childcare provider as early as possible to try to secure a place – especially if you live in an area of high demand e.g. city centres.



What do the inspectors expect?

The good news is that Ofsted and the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) now assess personal development, which includes mental health in schools. Areas such as resilience, confidence, independence and how to keep mentally healthy are all covered in their assessments. As part of pastoral care, all schools are now also required to provide a mental health and relationships curriculum.

A school judged 'Outstanding' by Ofsted in the area of personal development will provide **high quality pastoral support** alongside a wide, rich set of experiences which support pupils to be **confident, resilient and independent**. It will offer exceptional quality opportunities for children to develop their talents and interests and strongly encourage take up of these, especially amongst disadvantaged pupils.

Schools that are 'Outstanding' in the area of personal development are expected to promote equality and diversion and teach pupils how to be responsible, active citizens who contribute positively to society and demonstrate their own 'outstanding' personal development.

However, **do look beyond Ofsted's current one-word judgements and check when they last visited** the schools that you are considering too. More than ninety percent of mainstream state schools are summed up as 'Good' or 'Outstanding' and yet, clearly, there is plenty to distinguish these schools from each other. What's more, a lot can change in between Ofsted visits.

For parents with children in the private sector, the **Independent School Inspectorate (ISI)** benchmarks are similar to Ofsted. The ISI is a government approved body that inspects and provides objective evaluation of independent schools. However, **ISI reports are more nuanced** than Ofsted reports and don't give single word summative judgements for each area inspected.

Their recently revised framework has pupil wellbeing running through it, resulting in TES magazine stating:

'The upshot of [the new framework] is that personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is now probably the single most important subject that schools teach when it comes to inspection outcomes.'

Amanda Childs, Chair of the **Independent Association of Prep Schools (IAPS) Pastoral and Wellbeing Committee**, added:

'Pastoral care is what the independent sector is renowned for. It is about a child knowing they are completely valued and cared for; allowing them to feel safe in order to discover themselves, what they are capable of and developing a positive sense of self.'

Pastoral care in primary schools

By Melanie Sanderson

News reports last year claimed there is a child with a suspected mental health concern in every primary school classroom in the country. Figures released by NHS England showed more than 165,000 children ages 6 to 10 were in contact with NHS mental health services at the end of February 2024, while the number of primary-age children in England either waiting or being treated for mental health problems, increased by over a quarter in less than a year.

The picture has never been starker and schools have a key part to play both in terms of prevention and providing expert support. The past twenty years has seen schools evolve from places where it was 'brain first' to spaces where body and mind are recognised as needing equal developmental attention.

Before anything else, **a school should be a centre for care**. Pastoral care encompasses a wide range of initiatives and approaches. A good primary school will embed pastoral care into all it does within the culture of the school: how it teaches, how it protects, how it listens and learns. A pastorally strong school is in the best position to thrive academically.

When they experience anxiety, children can't access learning, making it crucial that all schools have a robust pastoral care system to support pupils' development. Simple measures like buddy benches, mindfulness lessons and worry boxes or mood charts are now widely offered and can make a big difference. Animals are good too. Some schools have a therapy dog and even class pets like goldfish or hamsters can help children open up.

A common thread running through primary schools with a strong pastoral offering seems to be **plentiful opportunities for fresh air, physical exercise and being in nature**. Even in some of the most space-pressed inner-city schools, children are cultivating a mini allotment or growing sunflowers in the playground. Similarly, Forest Schools offering regular outdoor hands-on learning sessions in natural environments, are building young children's confidence and self-esteem.

Extra-curricular activities also play a role, fostering social engagement, personal development and a sense of belonging among pupils. **An inclusive sporting ethos** is often front and centre in schools with good pastoral care, particularly in the co-curricular timetable. However, do look for schools that offer a wide selection of clubs which appeal to all kinds of interests beyond sport too.

Amanda Childs, Chair of the IAPS adds: *'Pastoral care is more than formal PSHE lessons. It incorporates every interaction an individual has in school; from the moment they arrive until they leave. It is about a genuine, positive culture, having excellent role*





models and high expectations, balanced with a kind and realistic view of the support any individual child needs to succeed - and that will be different for every single child.'

Central to a robust pastoral approach is **staff fully trained in mental health first aid and safeguarding**. This also includes the non-teaching staff that children often seek out to talk to such as school nurses, lunchtime and office staff. Sometimes the support offered will be a listening ear, at other times, children might require signposting to additional support. The more mentally healthy schools usually have a school nurse, mental health support teams and even dedicated counselling.

For Dean Taylor, Associate Headteacher at **Seven Kings School**, a co-ed state school for ages 4 to 18 in east London, it's the relationship between staff and pupils that holds the key to positive mental health in schools. Dean says: *'The ethos is more important than anything and you can walk around this school and see that it's inclusive, friendly, safe and with clear and consistent boundaries.'*

Seven Kings pays particular attention to pressure points and makes sure every child has a trusted adult. There's a joined-up approach with the SENCO too, in the knowledge that youngsters with conditions such as ADHD and autism can be particularly at risk of mental health problems. *'The most vulnerable pupils have a one-page profile that's shared with all staff'* adds Dean.

Finally, **successful pastoral care involves the school, child and parents**. Starting school is a huge milestone for the whole family and a carefully managed transition makes for a smoother pastoral pathway right from the start. Likewise, primary schools with good pastoral provision work closely with secondary schools in Year 6 to ensure a seamless transition to the next stage of education.

Good schools take the time to get to really know a child personally; what they like or don't like and what they are interested in. Schools where pastoral care is foregrounded will extend their offerings to parents too. They might offer useful parent talks, for instance on safe use of technology and share wellbeing resources. Crucially, these schools will have the **confidence to collaborate with parents** in robust and trusting ways. If you think your child might need help, your first port of call should be your child's form teacher or tutor who can elevate your concerns to the appropriate staff member.

Melanie Sanderson is Managing Editor of The Good Schools Guide (www.goodschoolsguide.co.uk), which reviews the key components, pastoral care being one, of hundreds of schools per year, providing parents with in-depth, unbiased insights.



Roll out of free breakfast clubs to begin in April

The Chancellor has announced that up to seven hundred and fifty state-funded primary schools will start offering free breakfast clubs from April this year.

This initiative will run during the summer term (April-July) as a pilot phase to prepare for a national rollout.

The Department for Education will work with the schools selected as part of the pilot to understand how breakfast clubs can be delivered to meet the needs of schools, parents and pupils when the programme is rolled out nationally.

The Government claims breakfast clubs will help reduce the number of students starting the school day hungry and ensure children come to school ready to learn. It will also support the government's aim to tackle child poverty by addressing rising food insecurity among children.

More info: www.gov.uk/government/news



Discover Wellesley Prep School

Wellesley Prep School is an independent co-educational school set in 100 acres of Hampshire countryside, with 300 children aged 2 to 13.

The Nursery fosters curiosity and independence, with children regularly exploring the outdoors. Specialist teachers offer music, swimming, PE, and gymnastics. The Pre-Prep curriculum builds strong foundations in core subjects while incorporating art, dance, drama, music, PE, modern languages and ICT.

With sport every day and 40% of pupils' days spent outside, children master new skills across a range of pursuits. Wellesley Prep maintains strong links with top senior schools and guides families in making informed choices for the next step.

Please join one of the open mornings or a private tour:
Prep-Prep Open Morning 7 February 2025, 9.15-11am
Whole School Open Morning 9 May 2025, 9.15-11.30am

For more information, visit www.wellesleyprepschool.co.uk or call 01256 882 707.

Feel more alive in 2025

By Sarah Lindsley

Put your best foot forward



We all know that walking is great for us. Getting your ten thousand steps a day is one of the best low-impact ways to stay healthy and fit. But why walk alone? There are lots of local walking clubs all across the country, so while the kids are at school or busy with weekend activities, you can get walking, talking and exploring in the fresh air. With over five hundred walking groups across Britain, **Ramblers** (www.ramblers.org.uk/) is a great place to start.

Go wild



It might not be for the faint-hearted but there's a reason that wild swimming has had a huge surge in popularity in the last decade. There are no limits on age or fitness levels and the positive effects of cold water and fresh air on the mind and body are indisputable. The promise of a warm coat, flask of hot tea or coffee and all those feel-good endorphins flooding your body when you emerge will help you take that chilly leap of faith.

Make time for a family day



The thought of a family day out can have us all checking our bank balances but quality family time doesn't have to cost the earth. Sometimes just a trip to your local park with a hot chocolate and a game of hide-and-seek is enough to get everyone laughing and chatting. Take a pedal boat out on a pond near you or plan a nature scavenger hunt. Kids also go free at lots of museums and attractions across the country; look out for annual memberships to save money across the year at your favourite spots.

Channel your inner Picasso



The link between doing something creative and positive benefits for the brain is commonly accepted by scientists. Creative activities stimulate both sides of the brain and can even have a similar effect to meditation, reducing stress and helping you to become more mindful and ultimately, happier. Pottery painting is a fantastic way to channel your inner artist and lose yourself in colour and contour. Find your local pottery painting studio, grab your mum friends and make a night of it! Or book in for a memorable kids' party.

Get creative in the kitchen



We all default to repeating the meals that we know won't have the children sulking at the table, especially mid-week with homework, after-school activities and work pressures. But the weekend is the perfect excuse to dust off those old recipe books or search for some mouth-watering dishes online. If you fancy someone else making the decisions for you, companies like **Hello Fresh**, **Gousto** or **Mindful Chef** provide you with all the inspiration, instructions and ingredients to ensure that even the fussiest eaters are begging for seconds.

Get body brushing



Family life means we don't often have time for those 'self-care' moments that we know are so good for us. Yes, a full-body massage might have to be saved for an annual birthday treat. But invest in a good body brush and set aside just five minutes a day to brush your skin in long strokes towards your heart and you'll soon be reaping the rewards with better circulation and glowing skin.

New year, new you. The old cliché is all too familiar and 1 January can stir up strange feelings, piling on the pressure to turn over a 'new leaf' before we have even finished tidying up the remnants of the New Year's Eve celebrations. But the start of a brand-new year can actually be the perfect opportunity to embrace some exciting changes, even if it is just trying out some new dishes or booking that family day out you've been meaning to for ages. Time to feel alive and welcome 2025 with open arms!

Invest in a power bank



While it might not be as exciting as a new phone or other trending gadget you've had your eye on, a power bank – essentially a portable battery that keeps your devices fully charged on the move – is one of those items you never knew you needed until you have one. Whether your family is spending the new year heading to the in-laws or hitting the slopes, this is the best way to ensure there are no howls of anguish from the back seat when your kids' tablets, games consoles or headphones run out of juice.

Put their toys on rotation



The 'I'm bored' chorus is an all-too familiar sound to most households with small children. And when you're tripping over the toys strewn across your floors while you listen to their complaints, this can add to frustration levels. A toy rotation system is a great solution for everyone. Hide or store away half your kids' toys and swap them over every few months; it means less clutter for you and the novelty factor for them

Hold a weekly family games night



Because family life is so busy, how often do we really get to sit down and enjoy screen-free time together? Agree on an evening that works for everyone and switch off the devices. Whether Monopoly, card games or karaoke are your bag, turn up the music, make some popcorn and enjoy some good old-fashioned fun. Get tweens and teens to join in by letting them pick the games or having a friend round. Check out charity shops for second-hand games or start a game swap with friends or neighbours.

Prioritise your gut



Gut health is a buzzword that's here to stay. Scientists are discovering more and more about the link between a healthy gut (which contains trillions of tiny organisms called microbes) and good physical and mental health. Some foods are known to be particularly good for our guts, including sourdough bread which contains natural probiotics which support healthy digestion and the immune system. So, queuing for that Saturday-morning loaf along with your latte is totally justified. Or make your own with the kids!

Try a new sport



Padel is one of the fastest-growing sports in the UK. Dreamt up by a Mexican couple bored on holiday in the 1960s, it's a racket sport combining elements of tennis and squash and typically played as doubles which makes it the perfect mix of fitness and fun for the whole family. Or round up some other parents and kids and get social on a court near you! Even the teenagers will be up for a go! Find out more from the [Lawn Tennis Association](http://www.lta.org.uk/play/ways-to-play/padel) website www.lta.org.uk/play/ways-to-play/padel

Have a mini home makeover



If watching home improvement programmes has you longing for a living room overhaul or a sparkling new kitchen, don't despair! Change doesn't always have to break the bank. Simply moving a piece of furniture to a different position or buying a cool indoor plant can instantly revamp a room and give it a whole new vibe. Or why not paint a 'feature' wall in a striking colour and get the kids to muck in – just remember to put some protective sheets down first!

Becoming a sober parent

By Rachael Shephard

At 3am I opened my eyes and felt the all too familiar jolt of anxiety flooding my chest. I'd done it again. Five days of sobriety had been obliterated by a bottle of red wine.

Why do I do this to myself? I was feeling so much better. Why didn't I just stick to the plan? Why is this SO hard!

Despite my solemn commitment to get sober, yet again I'd (quite literally) run to my local shop to buy a bottle of wine. I was hopelessly addicted.

Years of social drinking and 'mummy wine o'clock' endorsements had convinced me that I was just like all the other mums. How could I possibly have a problem if everyone else was doing the same thing? I didn't drink in the mornings, was successful in my job and managed to spin multiple plates. I couldn't be an alcoholic.

It was the sudden and totally unexpected death of my mum and an acrimonious divorce that fully catapulted me to a two-bottles-a-night wine habit and eventually, to concede that I did actually have an issue with booze. It became horribly palpable. Severe chest pain and blind panic in the early hours. Raging daily hangovers. Putting my boys to bed early so I could drink myself into a nightly coma. Constant fear for my declining health.

Every single morning, I would set the intention to not drink that evening. But addiction is a sneaky beast and in the aftermath of the dreaded school run, Pinot was the obvious answer to all of my problems.



Looking over to my nightstand, my journal was open to a drunken revelation: 'This does not feel good! I didn't remember writing it but something hit home in that moment. Alcohol had finally become pointless. That was the moment the decision to quit finally stuck.

Three years on and now happily sober, I'm living proof that life truly can begin again at age 40. I've started my own sober coaching business, written a book sharing my mistakes and lessons learned and I'm focused on finding joy in as many ways as possible; without alcohol.

I certainly couldn't have imagined it would be so fulfilling; not just surviving, but actually living with purpose and fulfilment. They say that addiction is giving up everything for one thing and sobriety is giving up one thing to gain everything. I couldn't agree more.

Sober Mama, Rachael Shephard's book, is available from www.bookshop.org



First steps to getting sober

Tell everyone who matters to you that you're going to quit. It won't be easy but when you're vocal about your issues with alcohol it gives you accountability and crucially, support from those who care about you most.

Read up on addiction for the sobering facts. When I first quit, I was absolutely staggered at how little I knew about alcohol's effects on the brain and the body. Unravelling the many widely-held false beliefs about alcohol allows you to consider the truth about what it is doing to your body and your life.

Focus on the basics. It takes three months for the body to properly heal and there are a surprising number of symptoms to navigate. Extreme tiredness, desperate sugar cravings, feeling flat and bored due to lack of dopamine production, to name a few. As long as you stay sober, you're winning. So rest, eat as much as you like and keep on top of the bare minimum. When your energy pops back in month four, you'll be good to go.



How to cope with drinking triggers

Stick to daytime socialising until you're beyond the three-month mark. Going out for dinner (sans wine) can be extremely difficult at first. Opt for lunch out instead. This way you can maintain your social life instead of hiding indoors just to avert the risk.

If you have to go to an event involving alcohol eg a wedding, drive. The majority of the internal conflict with triggers is wrestling over the decision of whether or not to drink. By removing the option entirely, there is no choice to make, which makes life a whole lot easier. It also saves you from the inevitable questions about why you're not drinking.

Reduce stress anyway you can. Triggers often follow tense events like work or family dramas. Stress leads to triggers and triggers lead to cravings. Exercise is a great way to reduce stress and burn off cortisol. Meditation can help you to find peace in a moment. Whatever floats your boat, reducing the drama in your life is the key to maintaining early sobriety.

Three simple rules for a peaceful household

By Paul Dix

Ask your children what the rules are in your home and you may get a variety of strange responses: 'Cleaning my room?' or 'Is it not calling Granny 'skibidi bruv' or even 'There ARE rules?' In other words, the rules in your head are likely to be very different from the ones in theirs.

Teaching your household's rules once and never referring to them again by name is common. However, just because you've taught these rules doesn't mean your child has learned them (ask any teacher).

With a lack of clarity around the boundaries, **many children become focused on trying not to upset the adults.** This encourages the wrong behaviours - sneakiness, secretiveness and trying to hide things. Nothing positive is learned here. It is difficult to have a trusting relationship if one side can't be open.

Some homes have rules for every situation. For screens, for travelling on the bus, for where the toothpaste lives, for bedtime - then three new rules in the morning. There are so many rules that nobody can keep track of them. They are quickly forgotten and children don't have the consistency they need.

Your child needs rules to feel safe. You need rules to stay sane. But you only need three and they must be simple. Three rules that can be used in a thousand different situations. Three pegs that you can constantly and consistently use to hang behaviour on; positive and negative.

Every time you talk to your child about their behaviour, refer to one of your rules; each time you celebrate fantastic behaviour, refer back to one of the rules.

I use **Ready, Respectful, Safe.** A lot of schools do the same. You might prefer Kind, Caring and Cooperative. The words that you choose are not magic; you just need single word rules that can easily be integrated into every conversation about behaviour.

Don't be tempted to negotiate rules with your child: you are the adult so you get to decide the rules. A lengthy negotiation won't give you better rules. It might just overcomplicate what needs to be perfectly simple.



Now set about your work. Make sure your child knows what Safe means when crossing the road and what it means when they are online. Show them what Ready looks like in the morning before school and at night before bed. Teach them that Respect matters as much when talking to granny as it does to people you have only just met.

Celebrate their great moments with equal emphasis on the rules: 'Love how safely you were carrying that,' 'Thank you for being ready. It makes everything so much easier' and 'I've noticed how respectful you have been talking to granny today. Also that you thanked her for the money!'

Three rules are a solid foundation on which to build a new approach to behaviour in your home. One that is consistently safe, with boundaries that are central to guiding your child and your response to their behaviour. With real clarity around expectations, the rules in their heads will be the same as in yours. Soon you won't need to refer to the individual rules and it will simply be: 'This is how we do it here!' Then everything changes.

A good sign?

You might want to cover your fridge in groovy posters with the new rules, paint them as a bedroom wall mural or even tattoo them on yourself. Any of these would be most entertaining but won't do anything to help your child know and understand them.

Instead of redecorating, simply make sure that the rules fall from the mouth of every adult, every time. When your child says to you: 'ALL RIGHT, enough, I know the rules!!' that is a good sign.

Paul Dix is a specialist in children's behaviour and the author of *When the Parents Change, Everything Changes: Seismic Shifts in Children's Behaviour*, available from www.bookshop.org

Teaching the rules



Three rules can cover everything. There isn't a behaviour that I have come across (and I have come across a few) that doesn't fit into Ready, Respectful and Safe. Talk to your child about different situations where they will need to think about the rules.

Prepare them for activities by talking about the rules first; it can save a lot of time later on. 'We are going to walk through this crowd. What do we need to think about using our Safe rule?'



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Being an Ambassador – at age 8!

Families chats with Aiden about being an Outdoor Guide Foundation Youth Ambassador.

Tell us a bit about yourself Aiden

I'm Aiden and I'm 8 - I'll be 9 on Christmas Day. I live in Somerset with my mum and dad, our rescue dog Nevis and my pet snake Cornelius. I do Swimming, where I'm at Stage 7 and Taekwondo where I recently got my Yellow Belt. I also do Cubs where I get to earn badges, play games and be outdoors. I enjoy listening, dancing and singing to music. I like drawing, I love LEGO® and I play Pokémon Go.

How did you first hear about The Outdoor Guide Foundation?

At the very first Outdoor Expo when I was 6, I met Gemma Hunt on their stand and she told us about the plan to give every primary school sets of **Waterproofs and Wellies** so that all children could go outside on rainy days without getting wet and cold or having to stay inside.

What inspired you to help The Outdoor Guide Foundation?

I wanted to help lots of other children go outside more because it's better than indoors, even when it's raining! My parents have taken me camping and hiking a lot since I was really small and got me really good things to wear like proper waterproofs, hiking boots and rucksacks. I'm really lucky that I get to go everywhere like up mountains and I know other children may not get to go to such adventurous places but I really want everyone to be able to get fresh air and stay warm and dry.

Tell us what you've been doing to help

The first thing was a big hike on Dartmoor when I was 6 and a half. I wanted to do it in one day (but mum and dad carried a tent just in case). I did all 16 miles in ten hours! We started at 7am and did lots of up and down on the moor (700 metres of ascent) - my feet hurt at the end. I raised



Aiden, wearing his Waterproofs and Wellies t-shirt

£568 - enough money to get two sets of Waterproofs and Wellies and even had my fundraising doubled afterwards which was amazing!

Then I found out about the Fan Dance, the special forces training hike in the Brecon Beacons. They do it in four hours, carrying heavy kit, so I carried all mine and I did the 22.7 kilometres in under eight hours and this had more than 1000 metres of up - it included Pen Y Fan!

It was harder than I thought it would be, I liked the up bits but not the boring flat bit in the middle. I raised £743, enough money AGAIN for two whole sets Waterproofs and Wellies - and a bit. I think the Foundation will round it up to three though! I can't wait to find out where they go to.

Tell us about being an Outdoor Guide Foundation Youth Ambassador

It means I can represent the Foundation as a young person who is supporting

them and show other children that they don't have to be adults to help too. I spent a weekend helping the Foundation and **Challenge the Wild** who were helping children from families that don't get outdoors much. And I want to keep helping even more children get Waterproofs and Wellies. I like meeting people and I get to feel proud. I even got a t-shirt!

What do you like about being outdoors?

Being outdoors hiking, walking and camping makes me feel peaceful. I love nature and being in the mountains, woods and on the coast, like when we did some of the South West Coastal Path this summer. It's good exercise and I stay healthy.

How do mum and dad support you?

They cheer me on, keeping me going when I feel I don't want to and making sure I have some sweets on hikes for when I get tired. They carry extra kit too and share my fundraising so more people know about it and I can raise more money.

The Outdoor Guide Foundation is looking for more children to become Ambassadors. What would you say to others about getting involved?

That it's a really good thing to aim for and picking something that's a bit of a challenge to you but is also fun can give you ideas on how to help and raise money. Start with something small and keep moving and remember that being outdoors makes you feel good - even if it's raining (you can have hot chocolate with marshmallows at the end!)

If your child is interested in becoming an Outdoor Guide Foundation Youth Ambassador, find out more at www.theoutdoorguidefoundation.org/ambassadors



Aiden with Julia Bradbury, Gemma Hunt and Gina Bradbury-Fox of The Outdoor Guide Foundation

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Vivace – quality music classes that grow with your child

Does your child love music? Would you like to nurture that love and help them gain real music skills for life?

All aboard the magic carpet – your musical journey starts here! And Vivace is here for life – thanks to a tried and tested birth to senior school curriculum rooted in the ingenious Kodály approach, where children joyfully discover their voices, grow in confidence and learn the language of music.

Babies, toddlers and preschoolers get immersed in a wonderful world of singing, movement and sensory activities as they explore music in an imaginative and multi-sensory way.

School-age kids' classes burst at the seams with fun, helping them playfully learn key skills such as playing, reading and creating music. Expert teachers love nurturing their innate musicality and creativity through games, songs and real instruments, setting them up for a lifetime of success.

Now's a great time to join - visit www.vivacemusicsschool.co.uk or email info@vivacemusicsschool.co.uk to book your FREE class in Fleet, Farnham or Yateley.



Try a FREE confidence-boosting class this spring

Perform is not like other children's drama schools. Its classes have a special emphasis on child development, using a mix of drama, dance and singing to bring out every child's potential. Classes focus on developing the 4 Cs - confidence, communication, co-ordination, and concentration - using drama-based games and activities which are specifically designed to combine learning with fun.

This term, Perform 4-7s are embarking on a sparkling underwater adventure *Under the Sea* whilst 7-12s work on a thrilling adaptation of a classic fairytale, in *Bluebeard's Bride*. Imaginations will soar as children work towards a magical performance for family and friends.

All abilities are welcome at classes for 4-7- and 7-12-year-olds - just come ready to have the best fun of the week! Local venues available at **Andover, Basingstoke, Bramley, Fleet and Hartley Wintney**. To book a FREE trial class visit www.perform.org.uk/try

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What's on

January & February 2025

All listings are correct at the time of publication. Please check with the venue before you visit in case anything has changed.

JANUARY

Until 2 Jan

Moana 2 at Corn Exchange Newbury

Moana 2 reunites Moana and Maui three years later for an expansive new voyage alongside a crew of unlikely seafarers.

www.cornexchangenew.com

Until 23 Feb

Basingstoke's My Home: Local Stories with Global Roots at Willis Museum and Sainsbury Gallery, Basingstoke

This community curated exhibition celebrates different cultures and the diversity that makes Basingstoke a special place to live.

www.hampshireculture.org.uk

10 Jan-9 Mar

Doodle Room at Andover Museum

Draw on the walls of the exhibition space once again and get creative! 10am-4pm

www.hampshireculture.org.uk

16-25 Jan

Sleeping Beauty at Phoenix Arts, Bordon

Featuring a gallant prince, an evil witch, a beautiful heroine and, of course, a hilarious pantomime dame, Sleeping Beauty will have the whole family in stitches.

www.phoenixarts.co.uk

17 Jan-2 Feb

Winter Woodland Lights at Hawk Conservancy Trust, Andover

Beautiful owls will take flight in the woodland, brought to life with music, special effects and lighting to tell a brand-new story that will amaze and inspire. 6pm / 8pm

www.hawk-conservancy.org

25 Jan-8 Feb

Rumplestiltskin at Holybourne Theatre

This is a traditional pantomime performed by an enthusiastic and talented cast of local people. 3pm

www.holybournetheatre.co.uk

29 Jan-2 Mar

Snowdrops at Welford Park, near Newbury

The award-winning grounds of this glorious private estate are open to the public to enjoy the swathes of



snowdrops, hellebores, aconites and winter flowering shrubs.

www.welfordpark.co.uk

FEBRUARY

2 Feb

The Littlest Yak pre-show workshop at Corn Exchange Newbury

Make your own Littlest Yak hat headband to wear to The Littlest Yak show, horns optional. 10am / 12:30pm

www.cornexchangenew.com

2 Feb

The Littlest Yak at Corn Exchange Newbury

LAStheatre's musical adaptation of the award-winning children's book will delight audiences young and old with beautiful puppets, catchy tunes and an uplifting tale of self-acceptance. 11am / 1:30pm

www.cornexchangenew.com

2 Feb

Cirque Entertainment at The Anvil, Basingstoke

This magical production features superb choreography, breathtaking live vocals, and mesmerising circus performers. 5pm

www.anvilarts.org.uk

8 Feb-2 Mar

Dinosaur and Nature Trails at Curtis Museum, Alton

Drop-in for a trail sheet and win

a sticker if you can find all the toy dinosaurs or complete the natural history quiz! 10am-4:30pm

www.hampshireculture.org.uk

14 Feb

Every Other Mother at Phoenix Arts, Bordon

Every Other Mother combines comedy, new writing, poetry and performance to create two hours of cultural nourishment for mums of all ages. 10am

www.phoenixarts.co.uk

14 Feb

Wednesday Craft Club: Valentine's Day Crafts at Andover Museum

Create a unique card and some paper flowers for your loved ones at Andover this Valentine's Day. 10am-4pm

www.hampshireculture.org.uk

Fri 14-Mon 24 Feb

Slime-tastic Fun at Winchester Science Centre

Slime takes centre-stage with a brand-new live science show that takes an in-depth look into the scientific principles of slime through exciting experiments and daring demos.

www.winchestersciencecentre.org

15 Feb

Breathe at Phoenix Arts, Bordon

Breathe explores the inner workings of trees, all beautifully realised

Slime-tastic fun this half term at Winchester Science Centre



It's squishy, stretchy, lots of fun and now slime is taking centre-stage at Winchester Science Centre with a brand-new half term live show, *The Slime Show* from Friday 14 to Monday 24 February.

Love it or hate it, slime is a favourite of children and now Winchester Science Centre is bringing it to the stage in an epic way! Families are invited to join the Science Centre Inspirers in the Science Theatre for a 20-minute exploration into the mysterious world of slime - FREE with general admission. Audiences will discover if slime is a solid or liquid as they delve into the scientific properties of matter. Live experiments and daring demos will bring to life what happens to slime under different types of pressure. And then, for the ultimate slime-tastic test, the Inspirers will attempt to walk on slime! The Slime Show runs throughout the school holiday 10:30am-3:30pm.

Plus, there'll be two epic adventures to enjoy in The Planetarium, huge 'don't-try-this-at-home' demos in Science Live and lots of fun to be had on the two floors of hands-on interactive exhibits.

For more information and to book tickets visit WinchesterScienceCentre.org

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through a combination of puppetry, detailed sets, and live camera work. 2pm
www.phoenixarts.co.uk

15 and 16 Feb
Snowdrop Weekend at Gilbert White's House and Gardens, Selborne

Save the date for this popular event! 10:30am–4pm
www.gilbertwhiteshouse.org.uk

15-20 Feb
Beauty and the Beast at Arlington Arts Centre, Newbury

Following their success with Disney's Little Mermaid at the Corn Exchange, step into a Tale as Old as Time as Kate Izzard Productions bring another Disney classic to life live on stage!
www.arlington-arts.com

15-23 Feb
Spring Half-Term at Finkley Down Farm, Andover

Say hello to spring and come to Finkley to meet the little lambs and many other adorable animals.
www.finkleydownfarm.co.uk

15-23 Feb
Room of Memories Lego Build at Andover Museum

Can you recreate your favourite memories in 3D Lego creations? 10am–4pm
www.hampshireculture.org.uk

17 Feb
Three Little Pig Tails at Shaw House, Newbury

A funny, warm-hearted and interactive rustic tale to make you squeal with laughter, bristling with puppets, live music and lots of joining in. 11am and 1pm
www.westberkshireheritage.org/whats-on

17 Feb
LGBTQ+ Family Morning at West Berkshire Museum, Newbury

A relaxed morning in the Museum's Long Room, providing a safe space for local LGBTQ+ families to meet one another and be involved in a creative activity. 10:30am
www.westberkshireheritage.org/whats-on

17-21 Feb
Create and Make at Corn Exchange Newbury
Your child will get to work with professional practitioners to explore the creative arts, develop new skills and make new friends. 10am–4pm
www.cornexhangenew.com

18 Feb
Make and Take: Family Pottery Sessions at the Allen Gallery, Alton

In this loosely guided session, you will learn how to make a small pot or other creation, following a general theme. 11am
www.hampshireculture.org.uk

18 Feb
Museum by Torchlight at Curtis Museum, Basingstoke

Bring a torch and explore the museum at night with a family trail! 10am–4:30pm
www.hampshireculture.org.uk

18 Feb
Museum Explorers at West Berkshire Museum, Newbury

A relaxed morning for children with additional needs and their families to enjoy West Berkshire Museum when there is less hustle and bustle. 10:30am
www.westberkshireheritage.org/whats-on

18 Feb
Movie in the Hall: Wonka at Shaw House, Newbury

The wondrous story of how the world's greatest inventor, magician and chocolate-maker became the beloved Willy Wonka we know today. 10am
www.westberkshireheritage.org/whats-on

18 Feb
Rumpelstiltskin at Watermill Theatre, Newbury

A magical, mystical, musical re-telling of Rumpelstiltskin followed by a day of family fun at the Watermill. 10am–2pm
www.watermill.org.uk

19 Feb
Family Activity Day at Shaw House, Newbury

Using fibre tip pens and a selection of other craft materials, make a

simple card and straw pop-up puppet in the design of your choice, such as a mouse popping out of a block of cheese, a princess in a tower or a mole coming out of a mole hole. 10am–3pm
www.westberkshireheritage.org/whats-on

19 Feb
Play in a Day: Spies and Detectives at Watermill Theatre, Newbury

Inspired by our Youth Ensemble production of Emil and the Detectives, discover your inner spy and create your own mystery play to share with friends and family. 9am–4pm
www.watermill.org.uk

19 Feb
Wednesday Craft Club at Andover Museum

Make and take family crafts. 10am–4pm
www.hampshireculture.org.uk

19 Feb
Weaving Workshop at the Allen Gallery, Alton

An introduction to the art of backstrap weaving - a traditional, loom-free process where you will learn how to construct a beautiful wall-hanging or table runner. 10:30am–4pm
www.hampshireculture.org.uk

21 Feb
Messy Museum Day at West Berkshire Museum, Newbury

Make an oversized Iron Age gold coin (also called a stater) from air-drying clay and then paint it a shiny gold on top. 10am–3pm
www.westberkshireheritage.org

21-23 Feb
Four Seasons at Corn Exchange Newbury
A theatrical love letter to nature for children and their families.
www.cornexchangew.com

22 Feb
Whipped Up! at Proteus Theatre, Basingstoke

Whipped Up! follows Dottie, an eager-to-please 50's-style diner server on their first day on the job - where the baby is the customer, and caregivers are along for the ride. 10:30am / 12pm / 2pm
www.proteustheatre.com

26 Feb
Whipped Up! at Phoenix Arts, Bordon

Stimulating for tiny audience members with sensory play served up throughout the show, and hilarious for parents/adults watching their loved ones take on roles in an unfolding comedy. 10:30am / 12pm / 2pm
www.phoenixarts.co.uk

From 26 Feb
Mini Messy Museum at West Berkshire Museum, Newbury
Five art and craft sessions will be themed around objects in special exhibitions and the permanent exhibition telling the story of West Berkshire. 10:15am
www.westberkshireheritage.org/whats-on

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Put Thursday 6 March 2025 in your diary for World Book Day 2025 and start planning your child's costume.

Marked in over one hundred countries, children and schools get involved by dressing up as their favourite book characters and reading together to celebrate authors, illustrators and books.

Each year World Book Day releases a brand-new line-up of £1 books and issues tokens that children can use to choose one of the books for free.

This year's books include short stories from family favourites *Bluey* and *Paddington Bear* for beginning and early reading abilities, a search-and-find story from **Julia Donaldson** and **Axel Scheffler** and a selection of poems from the 2022-2024 **Children's Laureate, Joseph Coelho**. For more fluent and independent readers, **Benjamin Dean** captivates young adults with a standalone thriller, while **Tom Palmer** scores with *The Soccer Diaries: Rocky Takes the Lead*.

More info at www.worldbookday.com

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