

Families[®]

Hampshire
North

FREE
Take Me Home



IN THIS ISSUE

**Education
Parenting
What's On**

Issue 70 September/October 2025

Familiesonline.co.uk



Discover
more

Book
a
tour



A BRIGHTER SCHOOL

Welcoming pupils from Early Years through to Sixth Form

Senior Prep Open Morning (Year 5 to Year 8) - Friday 19 September 2025

Junior Prep Open Morning (Reception to Year 4) - Friday 10 October 2025

Time to discover a school where individuality is everything

WWW.SHERFIELDSCHOOL.CO.UK

BOOK NOW



Open Morning

17th October 2025 | 9.15am - 11.00am

Come and join our Open Morning to explore the school and meet the children. During your visit, you'll have the opportunity to meet our staff and children, hear from our Headmaster, and enjoy a guided tour of the school led by our pupils.



TO BOOK YOUR PLACE PLEASE VISIT

www.wellesleyprepschool.co.uk or call 01256 882 707

NURSERY



PRE-PREP



PREP



Families[®]

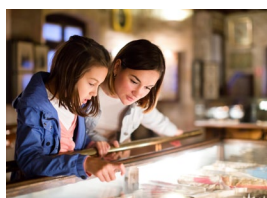
The Team:

EDITOR: Lesley Chambers
07863 790592
editor@familieshampshirenorth.co.uk

SALES SUPPORT: Claire Clarricoates
07812 218331
claire.clarricoates@familiespublishing.co.uk

DESIGN: Rebecca Carr
rebecca@familiesmagazine.co.uk

NEXT ISSUE: NOVEMBER/DECEMBER
Booking deadline: 30 September
Feature: The Festive Season



IN THIS ISSUE:

- 4-5 News
- 6-10 Education
- 11 Early years
- 12 Parenting
- 13 Clubs & classes
- 14-15 What's on



FREE Magazines!

If your school or family-friendly venue would like to receive FREE copies of Families Hampshire North magazine, contact us at editor@familieshampshirenorth.co.uk



Where is Families Hampshire North?



We distribute 16,000 copies every issue!

Families Hampshire North is a franchise of Families Print Ltd of 75 Lisbon Avenue, Twickenham, TW2 5HL. Families is a registered trademark of Families Print Ltd. All franchised magazines in the group are independently owned and operated under licence. The contents of Families Hampshire North are fully protected by copyright and none of the editorial or photographic matter may be reproduced in any form without prior consent of Families Hampshire North. Every care is taken in the preparation of this magazine but the franchise owner and Families Print Ltd cannot be held responsible for the claims of advertisers, nor for the accuracy of the contents, or any consequence thereof.

Editor's Welcome

Welcome to our autumn issue and to a new school year! New beginnings are fresh and exciting, and I hope your family's new beginnings this autumn will go well.



This is the season for school open days, and so this issue focuses on education, including the role music plays in child development, and pre-school literacy. We have lots of fantastic schools in this area and it's great to find out more about them.

We also take a look at the many ways that parenting has changed over the last couple of decades on page 12.

Last but not least, we have found some fantastic autumnal activities for families to enjoy locally, so make the most of this colourful season with another extensive What's On guide!

Lesley

Would you like to **advertise your business** in our **next issue**?

BOOK TODAY

Call Claire on **07812 218331**



TRY A
FREE
CLASS



Now Showing, **CONFIDENCE**

Drama, dance & singing classes designed to help 4-12 year olds shine

Andover, Basingstoke, Bramley, Fleet or Hartley Wintney

To book visit perform.org.uk/try





The Big Toilet Project

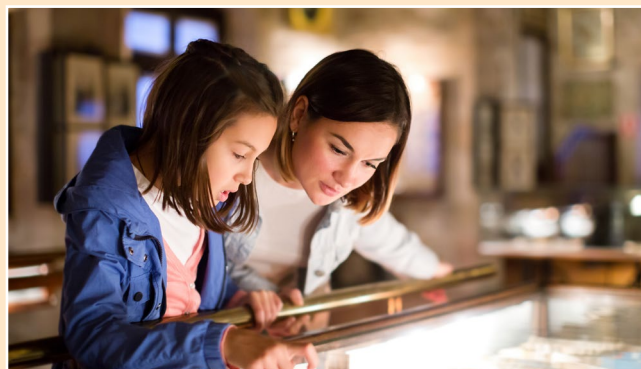
Researchers at University College London have launched the Big Toilet Project to identify the most effective toilet training methods and help parents train children earlier. This comes as the average toilet training age keeps rising, now with many children starting school still in nappies.

The project invites parents worldwide to share their experiences through a survey and optional diaries, aiming to gather evidence for better support and policies. Delays in training are partly blamed on ultra-absorbent modern nappies, changes in parenting, and less support for families. Disposable nappies are a major source of plastic waste, with billions used annually in the EU alone.

The researchers want to move away from "potty shaming" and instead provide practical, evidence-based advice. The goal is to help families, cut plastic waste and understand why trends differ by country and demographic.

Parents can participate by completing a five-minute survey online.

More information at www.bigtoiletproject.org



The Family Learning Festival

The Family Learning Festival which runs from 4 October to 2 November is an annual celebration of the joy of learning together as a family.

This festival encourages families to explore, discover and learn new things through a wide range of educational activities and experiences. It emphasises the importance of family bonding through shared learning and provides opportunities for families to engage in creative and enriching activities.

Organisations across the UK, including schools, libraries, museums, children centres and galleries will be staging a range of FREE and low-cost creative family learning events, workshops in your community that your family can participate in.

Find a local Family Learning Festival event, visit www.familylearningfestival.com and use the interactive map.

GIVEAWAY

Ages 3+

Smoby Black & Decker Tool Box

Now your little master builders can help you with DIY!

Practical storage case with:

Screwdriver

Wrenches

Nuts & screws

Construction elements

Screw together your own vehicle from the kit included

(Drill not included)

2 available

Use QR code or apply at www.familiesmag.co.uk/go

**Worth
£34.99**

T&Cs apply



GIVEAWAY

Ages 3+

Smoby Disney Stitch Cash Register



3 available

**Worth
£19.99**

Your little one will feel just like a shopkeeper!

Cool working features

26 accessories included

T&Cs apply

Use QR code or apply at familiesmag.co.uk/go





Jamie's mission to transform dyslexia support

Jamie Oliver, long known for his school dinner reforms, is now on a mission to overhaul dyslexia support in UK schools. Drawing on his own experience with dyslexia, Oliver is partnering with MPs, educators and groups such as the British Dyslexia Association to push for urgent changes. His campaign centres on three key reforms: mandatory dyslexia screening for all primary school children, better teacher training to recognise and support dyslexic students and wider use of assistive technology like reading pens and audiobooks.

Oliver argues these steps would ensure early intervention, boost pupil confidence and allow teaching to play to each child's strengths. While his proposals have been praised by advocacy groups, challenges remain - particularly funding, teacher workload and slow policy change. Still, Oliver's campaign could benefit all pupils by making classrooms more inclusive and adaptable and by improving literacy support for everyone, not just those with a diagnosis.

More information at www.bdadyslexia.org.uk

Get ready for a spooktacular time in the kitchen with this fun and frightfully fantastic book!

Families is giving five lucky readers the chance to win a copy of *My First Halloween Cook Book* by David Atherton, winner of *The Great British Bake Off* and beloved children's cookbook author.

Packed with playful, easy-to-follow recipes perfect for little hands, this colourful book is full of spooky snacks, creepy cakes and ghoulishly good ideas to get kids excited about being in the kitchen.

From monster muffins to ghostly pizzas, David's step-by-step instructions, beautifully illustrated by Jess Rose, make Halloween baking a treat for the whole family.

Whether you're planning a party, getting creative over half term or just want to enjoy some quality time together in the kitchen, this book is perfect. Don't miss your chance to win - enter today and let the Halloween magic begin!

Closing date: 17 October

T&Cs at www.bit.ly/mfcbtcs

Giveaway



Enter at
www.familiesmag.co.uk/go

Families Magazine business for sale!



Would you like to try your hand at magazine publishing?

- Decide your own hours and be your own boss
- Buy an established business to run from home

You could be the new editor of Families Hampshire North!

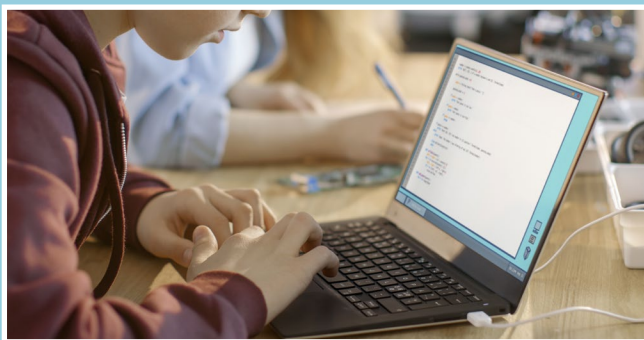
Full training provided.



Work around
your family
commitments
doing
something
you love

Families[®]

For further details email
editor@familieshampshirenorth.co.uk
or call **07863 790592**



Call for free code clubs in schools and libraries

The Raspberry Pi Foundation, the UK's leading digital skills charity, is calling for a free code club in every UK school and library, aiming to equip young people with essential digital skills for a future shaped by AI. An Opinion survey found sixty percent of parents see coding as important, while over seventy say their child isn't taught coding regularly at school.

Already supporting two thousand free code clubs, the Foundation helps kids learn to code and build confidence, teamwork and resilience. It offers free training and resources which make it easy for anyone, regardless of experience, to start a club.

Teachers have seen code clubs open doors for all students to be creative and collaborative, breaking down stereotypes about who can code. The Foundation's position is clear: every child should learn to code to shape an inclusive digital world. Code Club has reached two million children worldwide, with a goal of ten million by 2035.

More info: www.codeclub.org

School Open Days Autumn 2025



Cheam School

Headley, Newbury, RG20 9DJ
01635 268242
cheamschool.com
Friday 10 October, 9:45am:
Open morning

Horris Hill School

Newtown, Newbury, Berkshire,
RG20 9DJ
01635 40594
horrishill.com
Wednesday 8 October, 10am:
Reception open morning

Sherfield School

Sherfield-on-Loddon, Hook,
RG27 0HU
01256 884 800
sherfieldschool.co.uk
Friday 19 September, 9:10am:
Senior prep open morning
Tuesday 30 September, 6:30pm:
Sixth form open evening

Friday 10 October: Junior prep open morning

St Neot's Preparatory School

St Neot's Road, Eversley,
Hook, RG27 0PN
0118 973 2118
stneotsprep.co.uk
Friday 3 October: Open morning

Wellesley Preparatory School

Stratfield Turgis, Hook,
RG27 0AR
01256 882707
wellesleyprepschool.co.uk
Friday 17 October, 9:15am:
Open morning

Open days may need pre-booking. Please check before visiting.

**St Neot's
Prep School**
Shaping brighter futures

Visit us for an
Open Morning
or Bespoke Tour

Learning
adventures
start here

Mastering positive learning language

By Zuzu Jordan

How many times have you found yourself in a standoff because your child says they 'can't' do a challenging piece of homework? That word - 'can't' - creates an immediate mental block. It shuts down part of the brain that could otherwise be open and ready to learn. One word can be powerful enough to shape the success of a learning journey.

What if we could help children use more open, hopeful language? What if the words they used gave them the confidence to try again instead of giving up? Let's look at positive learning language. The way children talk to themselves - and how we speak to them - can completely shift their mindset and learning outcomes. Language is not just about communication; it shapes beliefs, emotions and behaviours. Here are some practical strategies to help develop this kind of language every day:

Acknowledge emotions first

To begin, acknowledge how your child feels. A simple: 'I can see this is frustrating for you' or 'It's okay to feel stuck sometimes' can build safety and trust.

Ban the word 'can't'

Replace it with: 'I can't do this yet' or 'I'm having difficulty with this'. These phrases shift focus from finality to possibility, reminding children that ability grows with time and effort.

Start with what they know

Confidence grows when learners begin from a familiar place. Encourage the phrase: 'Use what you know to figure out what you don't'. For example, using known multiplication facts to solve more difficult ones.

Break the task into steps

Ask questions like: 'What can you already do?' or 'How can we make this easier by breaking it down?' This helps children realise that progress often starts with small, manageable actions.

Remind them of past 'wins'

Say: 'Remember when this was tricky and now it's easy?' Reflecting on past successes helps children see that challenges are temporary and progress is possible.

Celebrate mistakes

Mistakes are mis-takes - opportunities to try again. Reframe



them by asking: 'What can I learn from this?' This teaches that every mistake brings a new chance to grow.

Practise positive affirmations

Affirmations such as 'I don't give up easily' or 'I can work this out' help your child rewire negative thinking. Repeating them regularly supports resilience and self-belief.

Praise effort over outcome

Say: 'I noticed how hard you tried' and 'You're improving every time,' even if the task wasn't finished. This reinforces a mindset that values learning over perfection.

Use the 'Three Bs' Rule

Teach your child to check: **Brain** - think independently. **Book** - look for clues or previous notes. **Buddy** - ask a peer. Only then, ask the Boss (teacher or adult). This encourages independence and self-reliance.

Retrain how they ask for help

Encourage more constructive ways to ask questions: 'Can you explain that a different way?' or 'Can we go over that part again?' This keeps your child engaged and curious.

The learning journey

Positive learning language develops understanding, resilience and confidence. Like climbing a mountain, the learning journey includes setbacks, discoveries and growth. But with the right words, the path becomes clearer and the climb achievable.

By modelling and encouraging this language, we help children build the mindset they need not only to succeed in school but to thrive in life.

Zuzu is a Mastery for Maths Specialist who has taught primary for eighteen years and is Director of Arnett International. For FREE resources and tips, find her on Instagram @edumate_uk

Safe learning environment



Parents play a vital role in making learning feel safe and supportive.

Start by creating a calm, distraction-free space where your child can focus. Use encouraging language and praise effort, not just outcome. Let them know mistakes are part of learning and it's okay to ask for help. Listen without judgement and show patience, even when they're struggling. When children feel emotionally secure and supported at home, they're more likely to stay motivated, confident and open to learning.

Giving feedback



As parents, we naturally want to know our child is doing well at school. Homework often provides the clearest window into their learning. When we support them, we're also giving feedback, sometimes without realising it.

The language we use matters. Focus on their effort, improvements and what they've done well. Be specific and encouraging. If needed, gently suggest how they can improve, using kind and constructive language. Thoughtfully worded feedback boosts confidence, builds motivation and helps children feel supported in their learning.

Helping a child with poor processing speed

By Usha Patel

My student Simone is 6 years old and her mum jokingly tells me she has two speeds: slow and slower! Her mum is concerned because the school says Simone's academics are behind, particularly phonics and reading.

Like Simone, many individuals are affected detrimentally by a slow processing speed. This hinders learning with ease and is one of the things professionals check when testing for neurodivergent conditions

How slow processing affects children

When sounds reaching the brain are not timely, the child either appears not to hear when spoken to or offers a delayed response. It also means they can't process the sounds fast enough to blend them, which impacts mastering phonics when learning to read.

When visual processing is slow, the eyes do not move easily. Children might compensate by moving their head when reading, which can be tiring.

Slow processing leads to delayed motor control, which in turn, impacts the next developmental stage of fine motor control. This leads to laboured handwriting.

Keeping to time

Temporal processing is the activity of keeping to time within the brain; measuring from microseconds to milliseconds and from minutes to hours. It is responsible for many things including detecting where a sound is coming from (as sound hits one ear microseconds before the other), for waking up, putting the brain to sleep at night and for focusing attention, reading comprehension, remembering information, processing speech, motor co-ordination and other activities.

Helping those with weak or delayed processing speed

Babies and infants automatically learn body (temporal) timing when they learn to move, from feeding to crawling, walking and running. As they move, they activate their temporal processing.

Adjusting the pace of movement impacts temporal processing. Using a metronome (set at 54bpm) to pace activities such as clapping, walking or jumping will add a layer of accuracy to help



pace and improve those with slow processing. Even when the child stops this timed activity, there will be an increased speed in other areas as a skill transfers. There are many free metronome apps available for smart phones. Working with a metronome for fifteen minutes daily can have a significant impact on improving processing speed.

Therapeutic methods

Interactive Metronome® (IM) is a professional product for those with diagnosed processing difficulties. It helps the brain keep to its internal timing by asking the individual to clap or step to the constant beat of the metronome. Students use touch pads when moving to the beat and the IM software analyses their accuracy and timing to the millisecond. A child uses headphones to listen to further cues and can adjust their pace if they are going too fast or too slow. The programme is gamified and offers a visual element too.

Importantly, the pace at the start is slow and the duration may only be five minutes. However, with carefully adaptive therapeutic sessions, a child slowly increases their temporal processing speed to an optimum level.

Increasing temporal processing speed results in better communication across the brain. When the different parts of a child's brain communicate better, this improves communication, language, movement, reading, learning and understanding.

Interactive Metronome® has over three hundred research papers. It is an evidence-based programme that can help change the learning outcome for those behind in their studies.

Usha Patel is a Neurocognitive Therapist at Raviv Practice London. She is a qualified Interactive Metronome® provider. For advice on any of these issues, visit www.ravivpracticelondon.co.uk

The importance of music in child development

By Lisa Wander and Catherine Noble

'Music is a more potent instrument than any other for education because rhythm and harmony find their way into the inward places of the soul.'

This quote, often attributed to Plato, highlights the profound impact of music on a child's emotional and intellectual development, emphasising its ability to engage the soul in a way that other subjects may not. A core creative subject, it fosters creativity, engagement, cognitive and emotional skills, social skills and self-esteem. Excellent music education opens **opportunities that stay with children and shape their lives.**

Playing a key role in brain development and impacting various areas of cognitive function, music engages both sides of the brain, thereby improving learning and memory, as well as supporting language acquisition and literacy development.

Songs with rhymes and repetition help develop vocabulary and phonemic awareness. Listening to music and melodies exposes children to a wider range of words and phrases and trains memory skills and recall. **Did you know that music is the only thing that stimulates your entire brain?** When children can't hear you because they are concentrating on something else, try singing to them!

Music can have a huge impact on a child's social and emotional development. It allows children to creatively express emotions which may be difficult to articulate through words alone. As **Hans Christian Andersen** wrote: *'Where words fail, music speaks.'* This emotional outlet works on developing empathy and emotional intelligence. In addition, exposure to music has been proven to reduce stress and anxiety in children. It creates



a calming, positive and engaging environment that **enhances overall mental well-being** and readiness to learn.

Touching hearts and minds, music is a cornerstone of the broad and balanced education that every child should receive; it celebrates and challenges, it connects and moves us.

In the same way that we teach children literacy and numeracy to prepare them for adult life, we must give them the musical tools they need for a lifetime of music-making and enjoyment. For some, music will be the foundation of a career in one of the country's most important and globally-recognised industries.

For others, it will provide **experiences and skills which develop their creativity.**

For many, music will simply be a source of joy, comfort and companionship throughout their lives.

Lisa and Catherine are co-founders of Emparenting (www.emparenting.co.uk), supporting children, parents and families with the insights, skills and tools needed to nurture the development and well-being of the next generation.



Spark curiosity through music and movement!

At Vivace Music School, curiosity is turned into joyful learning with playful, movement-based classes - try a **FREE** class and see for yourself!

From babies to school-age children, every session is packed with singing, games, sensory play and real instruments - igniting imagination while building essential music skills. Classes are active, engaging, and rooted in the renowned Kodály approach, helping children discover their voices, develop confidence, and fall in love with learning through music.

Led by expert teachers, the curriculum supports your child from birth to senior school - nurturing creativity and musicality every step of the way. There are entry level classes for ages 0-7, and children can join at any point during the term.

Try Vivace Music School for **FREE** in Fleet, Farnham or Yateley!

Book at www.vivacemusicsschool.co.uk/book or email info@vivacemusicsschool.co.uk.

Positive effects of music on the brain

Music offers children a unique lens through which to explore cultures, traditions and even history, helping broaden their perspective and understanding of the world around them.

Musical rhythms introduce basic mathematical concepts, for example sequencing and analysing patterns. Research shows a strong correlation between musical training and improved mathematical abilities.

Activities like clapping, dancing and playing musical instruments require the integration of hand, eye and auditory co-ordination which improves fine and gross motor skills.

Musical improvisation, composition and interpretation all foster innovative thinking and problem-solving skills, crucial for overall intellectual growth.

Performing music nurtures self-confidence and provides a sense of achievement, particularly when children have the opportunity to perform in front of an audience.

Quality Music Classes

for curious minds and busy bodies

PROUDLY INDEPENDENT SINCE 1994

WISH I'D LEARNED THIS WAY AS A CHILD

BIRTH TO SENIOR SCHOOL
IN FLEET, FARNHAM & YATELEY

www.vivacemusicsschool.co.uk/book

BOOK YOUR FREE TRIAL

OPEN DAY

By Jemma Zoe Smith

Assessing a school environment

Choosing a school is a very personal decision and it's not just about league tables, exam results or facilities. The real question is: in what kind of environment will your child flourish?

Firstly, take a close look at what's available locally. Some state schools have excellent enrichment programmes and you may be surprised by the range of support on offer. Grammar schools are selective but not always far from home. And independent schools vary enormously - from traditional boarding to creative day schools - so it's worth considering several.

When touring a school, look beyond the official tour route. Are students engaged or glazed over in classrooms? Do teachers seem stretched or supported? Check the toilets (a surprising window into how a school manages care and discipline).

Choose the environment they'll be happy and grow in, regardless of the type of school. Remember, you as a parent know your child best and understand their personality, rhythm and levels of resilience.

Understanding a school from one visit

If you can, it's worthwhile speaking to other parents whose children attend the school.

In addition, as you tour schools, there are usually opportunities to speak to the children that attend and ask about day-to-day school life. Raise the questions you ask teachers with these children too. Children are generally very honest! For this reason, it's good to visit schools during a normal school day or at an Open Day where you know the school's students will be present.

How is stress handled during exams? Does the school understand the culture that your children have been brought up with? Are children expected to do homework late into the evening? What is school lunch like and can students sit with friends or are they rushed through? These are all aspects of school life that you may feel it important to understand.

Don't be afraid to ask practical questions too like: can my child miss lessons for competitions or extra-curricular singing lessons for instance? Are there clubs at lunchtime for those who don't like sport? If you're considering boarding, ask what happens at weekends. Do most boarders go home?

Ultimately you are looking for a school environment in which your child will be happy and grow in, regardless of the type of school. Remember, you as a parent know your child best and understand their personality, rhythm and level of resilience.



Discover Wellesley Prep School

You are warmly invited to visit Wellesley Prep School for their Whole School Open Morning on Friday 17 October from 9:15-11am.

Set in 100 acres of Hampshire countryside, Wellesley is an independent co-educational day school for children aged 2 to 13. They offer a nurturing environment where children grow in curiosity, creativity and character. During the morning, you'll have the chance to meet staff and pupils, explore learning spaces and experience the vibrant life of the school.

From the very start, children are immersed in a broad and engaging curriculum that includes music, languages, drama, PE and ICT. With 40% of learning taking place outdoors, Wellesley's Woodland School plays a key role in developing resilience and teamwork. The school also runs a FREE weekly Nursery playgroup every Friday during term time, 9.30-11am, for children aged 2-4.

To book your place at the Open Morning, playgroup or arrange a private visit, please call 01256 882 707 or visit www.wellesleyprepschool.co.uk.



Introducing Sherfield School

If you're exploring new options for your child's education, come and experience Sherfield School. This is an independent day and boarding school for boys and girls aged 3 months to 18 years, located just off the A33 between Basingstoke and Reading.

Whether your child is thriving or needs a fresh start, Sherfield offers a smooth transition and a warm, welcoming community.

Why choose Sherfield?

- Affordable, with small class sizes and tailored support
- Academic ambition balanced with excellent pastoral care
- 76 acres of woodland and gardens in a safe, stunning setting
- Global education links and enrichment opportunities
- Traditional values with a modern, inclusive outlook

From Reception to Sixth Form, pupils are encouraged to be kind, courageous and respectful, making the most of every opportunity.

Find out more and book a visit at www.sherfieldschool.co.uk or email admissions@sherfieldschool.co.uk

Developing your pre-schooler's literacy through play

By Sophie David

With early education reform continuing to evolve in the UK, there's increasing focus on HOW children learn, not just what they learn. As the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) continues to shift towards child-centred approaches, it's essential to remember that play is not a distraction from learning; it IS learning. Especially in the early years, children make sense of the world, build language and develop communication through rich, hands-on, joyful experiences.

Young children thrive in environments that are safe, stimulating and full of opportunities for exploration. Whether it's splashing in puddles, baking biscuits or chatting before bed, these real-life experiences are the true foundations of literacy. They spark curiosity, support social and emotional development and help children build the confidence to express themselves. Worksheets and screens have their place but they can't replace the depth of learning that happens through meaningful, playful interaction.

Confidence before letters

Before children can read or write, they need to feel confident in their thoughts, their voices and their ability to make sense of what they see and hear. Literacy begins long before the first book is opened or pencil is held, it starts with expression and connection. When a child feels that their ideas matter and someone is listening, they become more motivated to communicate.

That's where play shines. Whether they're going on a 'sound hunt' through the house, forming letters in flour or retelling a favourite story with puppets, children naturally explore language through creative play. These playful moments lay the groundwork for phonemic awareness, vocabulary growth and narrative understanding, essential components of early literacy. Importantly, these skills develop in ways that are meaningful, relevant and fun for young learners.

From screens to scenes

In today's world, screens are a reality for most families. However, passive screen time can limit children's opportunities to engage in back-and-forth conversation, imaginative play and independent thinking. The goal isn't to ban screens entirely but to find a healthy balance.



Real-world, interactive experiences offer far richer learning. A trip to the park, helping to write a shopping list or building a cardboard post office provides children with valuable vocabulary, opportunities to problem-solve and space to imagine. These everyday experiences are filled with chances to use language with purpose, something even the best-designed app can't fully replicate.

Conversations that count

One of the most powerful tools in developing early literacy is something every parent has: conversation. Talking with your child throughout the day helps develop both expressive (what they say) and receptive (what they understand) language. The more words and ideas children are exposed to, the more prepared they'll be for future reading and writing.

These conversations don't have to be elaborate. Describe what you're doing as you cook. Ask your child to name objects as you tidy up. Tell stories about your day while on a walk. Encourage your child to share their thoughts, ask questions and invent stories. These interactions build vocabulary, deepen comprehension and foster a love for language.

Back to basics

Supporting your child's literacy development isn't about flashcards, early readers or academic pressure. It's about tuning into their natural curiosity and providing rich play and connection opportunities. When children are given time and space to explore the world, guided by a caring adult, they become confident, capable learners.

As the EYFS framework continues to develop, let's stay focused on what truly matters: play-based, relationship-rich learning. It's in the pretend tea parties and the muddy outdoor adventures that real literacy begins.

Sophie David is the author of *READ, WRITE, PLAY: 100 Easy Ways to Make Phonics Fun for Children Aged 3-7*. Available in hardback (£22, Robinson).

Five easy ways to support literacy at home



Go on a daily **sound scavenger hunt** to explore phonics.

Read the same book in silly voices to build expression and intonation.

Bake together, talk through steps and write a menu or shopping list to show how we use reading and writing.

Form letters with playdough or sand to strengthen fine motor skills for handwriting.

Sing nursery rhymes and invent new verses; this boosts phonological awareness and future reading success.



A whole new parenting world

By Ann Magalhaes

In the twenty-two years since I became a mum, parenting advice has shifted from trusty books like *What to Expect* and Gina Ford's routines to sleek apps, algorithms and an endless stream of online advice. New mums today sip their much-needed coffees while scrolling TikTok and Instagram for information and inspiration.

What has changed?

For starters, once the baby phase passes, many parents are turning to evidence-based parenting classes. These offer practical, science-backed ways to help families thrive. Research continues to show that everyday routines, the words we choose and the way we say them and how we support our children through big feelings all contribute to nurturing their development.

And one truth remains: parents are still their child's first and most important teacher.

Today's parents benefit from easy-to-digest information about how a child's brain develops and how that connects to their behaviour. Neuroscientist Lisa Feldman Barrett, in her book *7½ Lessons About the Brain*, says: 'Little brains wire themselves to their world. It's up to us to create that world ... to grow those brains healthy and whole.'

It's a good reminder that the little things matter. Reading, singing, snuggling, just being there still matter more than any educational toy ever could.

Emotional wellness

One big change (and it's a good one!) is how emotional wellness is at the forefront of family life. Parents are learning about the



'4 S's' - making sure children feel **safe, seen, soothed and secure**. And that's not just good for the kids, it's great for the whole family.

Dads are more involved than ever, especially since the pandemic saw us working from home and figuring out how to balance work with family life. Today's parents work more as a partnership, with both mums and dads actively in the mix. Is it perfect yet? No. But the progress is positive.

The rise of baby apps

Today's 30-year-old mum was 12 when the iPhone came out. She's tech-savvy - and now there's an app for everything! One new mum uses **Huckleberry**, an app she describes as 'super user-friendly' and a 'huge help during those overwhelming early weeks.'

At first, the app helped her track things like weight, sleep and feeding, data she could easily share with her GP. I asked if it ever made her feel like she wasn't doing enough (because apps can sometimes make us feel that way!). She laughed and said: 'I always feel like I'm not doing enough as a new mum but I wouldn't say the app itself is contributing to that!'

So, yes, mum guilt is still a thing. No matter what, parents still feel like they're falling short, even when they're doing more than enough.

Positive discipline

One big shift I've noticed is in discipline. Thanks to social media and the abundance of advice floating around (some excellent, some less so), more parents are moving away from old-school punishments, threats, bribes and shouting. Instead, they're learning that authoritative parenting, based on warmth, connection and firm boundaries, is the most effective way to support a child's emotional development and learning.

In the 1960s, psychologist Diana Baumrind identified key parenting styles and her 'authoritative' style - firm but warm, with clear expectations and positive relationships continues to be the sweet spot for raising well-adjusted kids.

Some things never change

Life today may be faster and busier than it was twenty-two years ago, but some things haven't changed. Children of all ages don't need the fanciest toys or the trendiest gear. They need you: your time, your love, your calm and steady presence.

We like to remind parents that they are enough, that their family is unique and doesn't need to match anyone else's. As children grow, learn, make mistakes, gain competencies and become independent, the best way to help them is by embracing positive, connected parenting. Yes, you may still feel exhausted (because parenting is really hard sometimes) but you'll find greater calm and joy amidst the chaos.

As Gretchen Rubin wrote: *'The days are long, but the years are short. So ... cuddle that baby, or toddler, or tween or teen ... because it goes by so quickly!'*

Ann Magalhaes is part of The Parent Team (www.theparent.team), parenting educators offering classes, workshops and private sessions teaching evidence-based parenting skills and offering parents practical, effective support.



Older fathers on the rise

The number of babies born to older fathers is on the rise, says the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Notable examples include Rod Stewart, who became a dad at 65, and Robert De Niro at 79. Professor Allan Pacey, a fertility expert, notes men over 40 are about half as fertile as men in their mid-20s, making this trend particularly interesting.

Births to parents under 30 have dropped, as more people delay starting families. The biggest decrease is among mothers under 20, with births falling by nearly 5%.

Despite a global trend of declining birth rates, England saw a slight increase in 2024, with 567,708 live births - a 0.7% rise from the previous year. Wales, on the other hand, saw a 2% decrease. Greg Ceely of the ONS said the overall rise in England and Wales reverses a recent downward trend, though delayed parenthood is becoming more common.

More information at www.ons.gov.uk

A to Z of kids' classes

By Andrew Campbell

Out of school activities offer your child the opportunity to try their hand at something new, develop an existing interest, have fun, get exercise and socialise and make friends outside of school.

Welcome to the Families A to Z which should help guide your selection process.

Art and craft. From painting to pottery, art and craft is great for exploring your child's creative talents and for simply just getting messy outside of the home.

Babies. Music, movement and/or sensory classes are particularly suitable as they are designed to help your young baby's social and physical skills develop. They are also a great opportunity to meet other local parents.

Coding. As well as preparing them for the future, classes in coding and robotics teach children logical thinking, maths skills and complex problem solving.

Dance. Not only great for physical health such as flexibility, co-ordination and strength, dance is also beneficial for mental health, as it helps with socialisation, as well as being creative and expressive.

Exercise. From toddlers up, children can get involved in regular simple low-cost exercise classes like local mini-athletics and sports options or junior park run clubs.

Football. As well as the most popular sport in the world, football is one of the most well-rounded, developing a host of physical, social and cognitive skills.

Gymnastics. A demanding sport requiring perseverance and discipline, gymnastics develops strength, speed, co-ordination, flexibility and balance. Mastering complex physical feats helps children face and overcome fears.

Horse riding. Offering both adventure and responsibility, this surprisingly vigorous activity in the great outdoors teaches children about empathy and caring for another living creature.

Interests. Be led by your child's interests when choosing an activity. If they enjoy doing something at home, they are more likely to commit to a regular class.

Judo. Martial arts like Judo are especially suitable for the lively individualist, developing confidence, discipline, focus and fitness. They offer a constructive outlet for excess physical energy.

Kitchen fun. If you have an aspiring chef, cooking classes are great fun and will teach basic life skills and healthy eating. Online options are now available too.

Languages. By starting early, your child will learn faster and more easily; being bilingual improves problem solving, concentration and boosts brain power.

Music. As well as the simple enjoyment, music classes are a great way to explore talent and develop abilities like patience and discipline.

New. Whatever their age, trying a new activity encourages a child to be adventurous and learn new skills. Age brings change, so keep looking for the next challenge.

Offers and trials. Test your child's interest in an activity with free taster days offered at the end of summer or free trials at the start of term.

Performing arts. Children who sing, dance and/or act learn communication skills, gain confidence, improve academic performance and most importantly, can use these classes as a way of letting off steam and having fun.

Quiet. For SEN children who thrive in a quieter and more supportive environment, there are now a wide range of clubs catering to their needs.

Rugby. A great way for children to exercise while learning respect and how to work and function as part of a team.

Swimming. Ever popular, swimming offers a host of benefits including cardiovascular exercise, improving strength, flexibility, stamina, balance and posture – as well as being really enjoyable.



Tennis. Helps children develop co-ordination, agility and focus while engaging in a healthy, active sport, making friends and learning teamwork in friendly matches.

Ukulele. The small size of the ukulele makes it an ideal instrument for children to learn, as it allows them to easily hold and strum the instrument.

Volleyball. A fantastic non-contact team sport that is easy to take up due to lightweight balls and basic rules; it's rising in popularity, especially among girls.

Xtreme. For the child who thrives on adrenaline and risk, consider rock climbing, tree top walking, abseiling, orienteering, circus, go-karting, trampolining or even Parkour.

Yoga. Ideal for the anxious or easily distracted, children learn to manage stress and develop concentration through breathing, awareness, meditation and healthy movement.

Zoo Club. Most zoos offer clubs and programs that give children hands-on experience with animal care and zookeeping.



Give your child a confidence boost this autumn with Perform

As children head back to school after the summer break, a common challenge many face is a dip in confidence. This can hold them back from reaching their full potential both socially and academically.

Whether your child needs a little boost or simply loves to socialise, Perform is the perfect weekly outlet for fun, energy and self-expression with its confidence-building classes in drama, dance and singing for ages 4-7 and 7-12.

"Perform is not a stage school," says Perform Principal, Lucy Quick. "Our sessions are all about teaching life skills through fun, engaging activities. Every class is designed to develop what we call the 4Cs: confidence, concentration, coordination and communication."

Each term ends with a performance, giving every child a chance to shine. And before your child even begins, Perform offers a FREE trial class, with time spent discussing your child's specific needs; whether that's speaking in a group, making eye contact or meeting new friends.

This autumn's magical line-up:

Ages 4-7: Join an adventure with Magical Merlin

Ages 7-12: Star in Ebenezer, a fun twist on A Christmas Carol

To book a FREE trial in Andover, Basingstoke, Bramley, Fleet or Hartley Wintney, visit www.perform.org.uk/try

What's on

September/October 2025

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

SEPTEMBER

6 Sep

International Vulture Awareness Day at Hawk Conservancy Trust, Andover

Celebrating vultures with even more vultures in fantastic flying demonstrations and plenty of other vulture-themed activities throughout the day. There will also be vulture-themed products available from the shop and fundraising for vital conservation work!

hawk-conservancy.org

6-7 Sep

A Weekend to Remember at Highclere Castle, Newbury

The Castle will be open for you to tour and explore at your leisure, should you wish, as well as enjoying reenactments from the Second World War on the Castle Lawns, including activities for children.

highclerecastle.co.uk

7 Sep

Family Yoga at the Corn Exchange Newbury

Led by Ellen Clinch from Yoga Den on the Corn Exchange stage, this gentle morning yoga class will focus on breath, flexibility, and relaxation.

11:15am

cornexchangenew.com

19 Sep

Basingstoke Wildlife Watch - Bat Evening, Overton

You will be using bat detectors and torches to look at the bats as they swoop over the river. This is a wildlife watch event for children aged 5-15 years. 6:30pm-8:30pm

hiwwt.org.uk

20 Sep

Surrey Jazz Band presents Swingin' for Charity at Phoenix Arts Centre, Bordon

A lively and heart-warming afternoon featuring a dynamic big band, The Surrey Jazz Orchestra, and a talented vocalist, all in support of local care homes. 3pm

phoenixarts.co.uk

20 Sep

Cirque: The Greatest Show - Reimagined at The Anvil, Basingstoke

Get ready for a dazzling fusion of musical theatre and jaw-dropping circus acts, taking this original spectacle to thrilling new heights. 3:30pm/7:30pm

anvilarts.org.uk

20 Sep

Pokémon Club at the Corn Exchange Newbury

Pokémon continues to appeal to all ages, and this free event is a great opportunity to meet other Pokémon fans in the Balcony Bar. 10:30am-1pm

cornexchangenew.com

20 Sep-2 Nov

Autumn Colour Wheel and Garden Scent Challenge at Hinton Ampner, Alresford

Young children will love exploring colour and scent in vibrant autumnal landscape in the gardens at Hinton Ampner. 10am-5pm

nationaltrust.org.uk/hinton-ampner

25-27 Sep

Hampshire Medical Fund Art Show at Pinglestone Barn, Alresford

Art lovers are invited to a vibrant exhibition and sale of contemporary art, sculpture and ceramics. 10am-5pm

hampshiremedicalfund.org

26 Sep

The Music of Animation - In Concert at The Anvil, Basingstoke

Featuring music from *How to Train Your Dragon*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Shrek*, *Chicken Run*, *Up* and more, this is a cinematic experience not to be missed! 7:30pm

anvilarts.org.uk

28 Sep

Michaelmas Fayre at Whitchurch Silk Mill

There will be something for everyone with stalls for early Christmas shopping, autumnal

crafts and family activities.

10:30am-4pm

whitchurchsilkmill.org.uk

OCTOBER

4 Oct

Outdoor Cinema: Hocus Pocus (PG) at The Vyne, Basingstoke

For a spooktacular movie under the stars, don't miss this screening of *Hocus Pocus* on The Vyne's north lawn. Picnics are welcome and hot beverages and snacks will be available to purchase. 5:30pm

nationaltrust.org.uk/the-vyne

4-5 Oct

Apple Weekend at West Green House, Hartley Wintney

Celebrate everything apple, with experts from Sparsholt College exhibiting displays of heritage apples. Book children in for The Johnny Appleseed Trail, with quiz sheet in hand to find the different apple trees in the garden.

westgreenhouse.co.uk

4 Oct-30 Nov

Agent 114: The Mottisfont mystery Trail at Mottisfont, Romsey

Inspired by Ian Fleming, this outdoor experience invites budding secret agents to crack codes, create disguises, and take on undercover challenges. Packed with spy-themed fun and surprises. 10am-5pm

nationaltrust.org.uk/mottisfont

5 Oct

Outdoor Cinema: The Nightmare Before Christmas (PG) at The Vyne, Sherborne St. John

Don't miss this Tim Burton family



Seasonal family fun at The Shed

This autumn, The Shed is bursting with seasonal fun for all ages! Every Saturday, enjoy free live music in the heart of the venue - perfect for relaxed weekends with friends and family.

On **Tuesday 28 October**, little ones are in for a treat at **Halloween Toddler Tuesday**, filled with themed play and spooky surprises. Creative kids can join **Daisy's Crafts** on **29 and 30 October**, where they'll enjoy hands-on seasonal activities. Then, on **31 October**, don't miss a magical Halloween special: a screening of **Wicked the Musical** on the big screen, accompanied by enchanting Wicked-themed crafts for younger visitors.

Whether you're looking to groove to live tunes, spark your creativity, or get into the Halloween spirit, The Shed has something for everyone this autumn. Entry to all events is free (charges apply for Daisy's Crafts). Come along and make the most of the season!

www.theshedwb.com



Autumn at Gilbert White's House and Garden

Autumn is the perfect time to spend quality family time in Selborne, with magical autumn colours all around and a great programme of activities to get stuck into. No matter what time of year it is there is always a trail to do around the house and garden to keep the whole family engaged. Last year's pumpkin trail was extremely popular, so make sure you keep an eye out to see what this October brings!

On **29 October** the **Wild Wednesday** theme is Spider Safari - all things arachnid. Wild Wednesdays are an hour of hands-on activities for children and their parents to experience local wildlife that happen every Wednesday when the schools are off. They are suitable for ages 5-11.

For the adults, autumn brings harvest **Gilbert's Garden days**; these are days when the gardeners will be on hand to show you how they work. On **17 September** they will be harvesting the kitchen garden and on **15 October** they will be harvesting apples.

www.gilbertwhiteshouse.org.uk

favourite on The Vyne's north lawn. Pack a blanket for when the sun goes down or bring a camping chair. 6pm
nationaltrust.org.uk/the-vyne

10-12 Oct **The Very Hungry Caterpillar Show at the Corn Exchange Newbury**

The critically acclaimed production of The Very Hungry Caterpillar Show created by Jonathan Rockefeller features a menagerie of 75 lovable puppets and the production faithfully adapts four stories by author/illustrator Eric Carle.
cornexchangenew.com

11 Oct-2 Nov **We're Going on a Ghost Hunt™ at The Vyne, Sherborne St. John**

Based on the bestselling children's books, this Halloween the bunnies are setting off on an adventure to find the ghosts hidden around The Vyne with heaps of exciting things to see and do along the way. 10am-3pm
nationaltrust.org.uk/the-vyne

18 Oct-2 Nov **Wilma the Witch Halloween Mystery Trail at Hinton Ampner, Alresford**

Perfect for ages 4-7, enjoy two weeks of magical adventures in the gardens. Tackle bean bag challenges, leap, jump and dash your way through the quest finding clues and solving puzzles to solve the mystery. 10am-5pm
nationaltrust.org.uk/hinton-ampner

22-24 Oct **Mini Hallo'Welly'Ween at Wellington Country Park, Riseley**

Enjoy story adventures, bubbly surprises, cheerful shows, playful role-play zones and a gentle Halloween-themed train ride. With friendly animals and seasonal treats. 10am-3pm
wellingtoncountrypark.co.uk

25 Oct **Basingstoke Wildlife Watch - Wildlife on the Farm at North Waltham**

You will be walking around the farm to learn how the farmer is working to look after nature.
hiwwt.org.uk

25 Oct **You Choose at The Haymarket, Basingstoke**

Based on the book by Pippa Goodhart and Nick Sharratt, Nonsense Room Productions brings you an interactive musical show for all the family. 11:30am
anvilarts.org.uk

25-31 Oct **Hallo'Welly'Ween at Wellington Country Park, Riseley**

Giggle and groove at lively stage shows, marvel at the family circus, and climb aboard the Halloween Train Ride for a whimsical journey through spook-tacular scenes.
wellingtoncountrypark.co.uk

25 Oct-2 Nov **Finkley Halloween Happenings at Finkley Down Farm, Andover**

Enjoy a frightfully freaky Halloween at Finkley, filled with so many special spooky sensations!
finkleydownfarm.co.uk

27 Oct **Top Secret: The Magic of Science at The Lights, Andover**

Experience a non-stop action packed interactive magical science show with experiments and magic that will capture the imagination. 2pm
thelights.org.uk

27-28 Oct **The Greatest Showman: Youth acting, singing and dance workshop at Holybourne Theatre**

Learn new techniques, grow in confidence and take part in a performance for family and friends on the second day. 9:30am
holybournetheatre.co.uk

28 Oct **Tom Gates EPIC Stage Show at The Haymarket, Basingstoke**

With catchy tunes and hilarious performances, this fantastic new stage show brings the best of The Brilliant World of Tom Gates into one live performance! 1pm/3:30pm
anvilarts.org.uk

29 Oct **Wild Wednesday: Spider Safari at Gilbert White's House and Garden, Selborne**

Wild Wednesdays are an hour of hands-on activities for children and their parents to experience local wildlife. 10:30am/2pm
gilbertwhiteshouse.org.uk

29 Oct **Halloween Trail at Whitchurch Silk Mill**

Take part in the 10 Halloween-themed activities around the site and collect your Bag of Treats at the end. 10:30am-12pm/1:30-3pm
whitchurchsilkmill.org.uk

29-30 Oct **Daisy's Craft Room at The Shed, Bordon**

Daisy's Craft Room is back at The Shed for another round of hands-on, Halloween filled fun! 11am-2pm
theshedwb.com

29-30 Oct **Owl-O-Ween at Hawk Conservancy Trust, Andover**

Prepare yourself and your little ones for a wickedly spook-tacular family evening this Halloween. Enjoy ghostly storytelling and marvel at the owls as they put on two mystical flying displays against the backdrop of moonlit grounds. 5:30pm
hawk-conservancy.org

29 Oct-2 Nov **Halloween at West Green House, Hartley Wintney**

Find a witch's hat trail, winding past pumpkins, the last of the autumn's flower, where spooky things hide till you arrive at the 'trick or treat' basket awaiting you.
westgreenhouse.co.uk

31 Oct **Villains Unleashed! at The Lights, Andover**

Prepare to be spellbound with this hour-long show of spine-tingling songs, chilling choreography, and devilish party dances guaranteed to get you trembling in your seats. 1pm
thelights.org.uk

Don't forget to say you saw these events listed in Families Hampshire North Magazine



Hallo'Welly'Ween returns with Spooky Family Fun

Step into a world of magical mischief as **Hallo'Welly'Ween** returns to Wellington Country Park from 25 to 31 October for its 13th spectacular year!

Perfect for little ones and their grown-ups, this enchanting event promises light-hearted Halloween fun. Wander through the **Mini Pumpkin Patch** and let imaginations soar with Junk Jodie's creative craft sessions. Giggle and groove at lively stage shows, marvel at the family circus and climb aboard the **Halloween Train Ride** for a whimsical journey through spook-tacular scenes.

For smaller explorers, **Mini Hallo'Welly'Ween** returns on **22-24 October**, 10am-3pm. Designed especially for toddlers and preschoolers, it's packed with joyful, age-appropriate fun. Enjoy story adventures, bubbly surprises, cheerful shows, playful role-play zones and a gentle Halloween-themed train ride. With friendly animals and seasonal treats, it's the perfect autumn day out for younger families!

www.wellingtoncountrypark.co.uk/whats-on



Autumn fun at National Trust

At The Vyne, enjoy **outdoor cinema** (4 and 5 October) with *Hocus Pocus* and *The Nightmare Before Christmas*. Book online. Don't miss the halloween trail **We're Going on a Ghost Hunt™** (11 October to 2 November), 10am-3pm. Inspired by the bestselling children's books, find ghosts hidden around The Vyne and there are exciting things to see and do along the way. **FREE trail**, normal admission applies.

Young children will love the autumn colour wheel and garden scent challenge at **Hinton Ampner**, while older children can explore self-led country walks. From **11 October**, eye-catching **pumpkin displays** will be dotted around the garden making a great family photo backdrop. Young adventurers can help **Wilma the Witch** on the fun-filled halloween mystery trail (**18 October to 2 November**) 10am-5pm. £2 per trail. Normal admission applies.

At Mottisfont, enjoy a family adventure trail **Agent 11¾: The Mottisfont Mystery** (4 October to 30 November). Inspired by *Ian Fleming*, this outdoor experience invites budding secret agents to crack codes, create disguises and take on undercover challenges. Packed with spy-themed fun and surprises. **FREE trail**, normal admission applies.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/hampshire



Halloween half-term fun

at The Vyne, Mottisfont & Hinton Ampner

This autumn let's pack the diary with family fun.
There's Halloween adventures to be had and
magical memories to make this October half-term.

nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/hampshire

For everyone, for ever