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NEXT ISSUE: JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2027
Booking deadline: 30 November
Feature: Early Years





IN THIS ISSUE:

4-5	News
6-7	Education
8	Early Years
9	Parenting
10-11	Christmas
12	Clubs & classes
13-15	What's on

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Editor's Welcome



Suddenly we have reached the last issue of 2026! It's been a fast and happy year for me, and I'm looking forward to some jolly festivities to finish on a high note.

If you're also looking forward to festive celebrations in the last couple of months of the year, you will love our seasonal what's on guides. There's plenty to keep the family occupied, including local theatre, Christmas markets and opportunities to meet Father Christmas!

We are also lucky this issue to have a fantastic gift guide to provide inspiration for quality presents for children of different ages – take a look on pages 10-11.

Enjoy the fun and keep reading!

Lesley

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Dive into Team Awesome Animals books by Basingstoke author



Welcome to the first three instalments in the Team Awesome Animals series!

Team Awesome Animals introduces six stars, ordinary animals who gain superpowers after a chance encounter exposes them to pieces of a meteor's mysterious energy.

From superfast electrical powers to the ability to fly and control fire, they find their worlds turned upside down. Meeting the prince of an alien planet, they learn their world is under threat and must step up to become superheroes to protect their home and everyone they love.

They're Awesome, they're Animals, they're Team Awesome Animals!

Ben Waugh-Bacchus lives in Basingstoke. He is autistic and has a passion for writing. For several years he has been writing stories set in his Super Animals Universe world. Ben's stories are about friendship, teamwork and never giving up, and he has always wanted to publish these stories to show that autistic people can make a difference.

GIVEAWAY

WIN!

We are excited to be able to offer three people the chance to win a copy of the first three instalments of Team Awesome Animals.

If you would like to enter, please e-mail editor@familieshampshirenorth.co.uk by 30 November.

Three entries will be selected at random after this date and the winners informed soon afterwards.



"Be A Super Dad" Initiative Empowers First-Time Fathers

A dedicated parenting platform, "Be A Super Dad," has launched an online support initiative designed to help first-time fathers navigate the transition into parenthood.

Founded by fatherhood coach Gareth Wall, the platform offers resources such as the free "Dad Ready" course, aimed at equipping new and expectant fathers with practical skills and confidence.

The project addresses the gap in dedicated support for men during pregnancy, labour and early infant care. Covering essential topics from birth preparation and newborn care to emotional well-being and partner support, the platform guides fathers toward building deeper connections with their children while balancing personal and family life.

Recognized by NHS Family Hubs and community support networks, the initiative provides accessible online guides and coaching to ensure fathers feel capable, connected, and active in their co-parenting journey from day one.

www.beasuperdad.com



Anti-Bullying Week 2026 Urges Children to Break the Silence

Schools across England, Wales and Northern Ireland will mark Anti-Bullying Week from 16 to 20 November 2026.

Organised by the Anti Bullying Alliance, this year's campaign has the theme "Break the Silence". It will encourage children and adults to speak out when they experience or witness bullying rather than facing it alone.

The week will begin with Odd Socks Day, when pupils and staff can wear mismatched socks to celebrate individuality and show that everyone deserves respect. Schools and youth organisations will also be able to use campaign materials and activities designed to start conversations about bullying.

Anti-Bullying Week is held each November to raise awareness of bullying and explore practical ways to prevent it. The campaign brings together schools, families and community groups to help create safer spaces for children.

Organisers hope the 2026 theme will remind young people that reporting bullying is not telling tales and that speaking up can help protect themselves and others.

https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk

Children's Lungs Recover Following London Low Emission Zone Launch



Children whose lung growth was stunted by air pollution have shown remarkable recovery following the introduction of London's Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ).

A landmark five-year study tracked more than 3,400 primary school pupils in London and compared them with children in Luton. Researchers found that reduced nitrogen dioxide levels enabled London pupils to catch up in lung capacity with their peers in less polluted areas. The proportion of children suffering from clinically impaired lung function dropped from 14% to 9%.

Leading scientists expressed surprise at how rapidly young lungs can recover when toxic vehicle emissions fall. Researchers emphasized that cleaner air provides a direct medical benefit by promoting healthier lung development during crucial growing years.

The findings offer compelling real-world evidence for urban leaders considering clean air policies to protect child health and reduce long-term respiratory disease risks across cities worldwide.

www.bit.ly/LancetULEZstudy



Study Finds Excess Sugar in Popular Baby Foods

Nearly a quarter of branded baby foods sold in UK supermarkets still contain excessive amounts of sugar, according to a new analysis.

An evaluation of 224 infant products by gut health company Alba Health revealed that 58% breached voluntary guidelines introduced by the government a year ago. A quarter of all items violated two or more standards, with some products deriving over 80% of their calories from sugar.

Brands including Kiddylicious, Piccolo, Heinz and Little Freddie were among those exceeding sugar targets. Experts also identified widespread issues with misleading front-of-pack labelling, such as marketing sweet snacks as healthy fruit and vegetable options.

With six months remaining before the government's February 2027 compliance deadline, health advocates and paediatricians are urging ministers to replace voluntary pledges with mandatory regulations to protect infant health.



UK school rankings diverge

English pupils have pulled further ahead of the rest of the UK in reading, maths, and science, according to newly published 2025 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data. While science scores improved across all four home nations, reading and maths results dropped in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, widening the performance gap.

Run by the OECD, the global study sampled 760,000 15-year-olds across ninety one countries. Overall, the UK performed wel, but regional disparities persist under differing national curricula. Welsh and Scottish officials acknowledged the need to boost standards in core subjects, while English ministers pointed to solid foundations to build on.

The OECD also highlighted a concerning global decline in reading skills. Researchers warned that teenagers are increasingly losing critical evaluation skills essential in the AI era, noting a sharp rise in 'hasty readers' who rush through texts and provide inaccurate answers.

www.oecd.org/en/about/programmes/pisa



New App Pobbly Helps Parents Capture Childhood Memories

A new family application called Pobbly has launched across 175 countries to help parents capture and preserve the funny, quirky or wise things children say before those fleeting moments are forgotten.

Created by Danish former TV journalist Andreas Skadhede Hansen using artificial intelligence tools, the app converts spoken or typed retellings of childhood quotes into digital quote cards. Users can automatically share these memories with selected family members and receive a daily quote notification or home screen widget.

Pobbly offers automatic translation across 15 languages, enabling families to read quotes from children worldwide. The platform prioritizes privacy with data stored securely in the EU without ads, tracking or AI training. Available on iOS and via web browsers, Pobbly provides the first 20 quotes for free before requiring a single family subscription.

https://pobbly.com/en

Families Hampshire North is For Sale!



Since 2023 I have been the editor of this magazine and it has been a wonderful experience. I have enjoyed the feeling of uniting a community and sharing useful local information with thousands of families in a publication that I love reading myself as a mum of two children.

I have always been a big reader, and I still feel that there is something special about words on paper; the relaxation it provides is so much more than I get from scrolling or reading from a screen. Families magazines are proud to be print and have been since 1990.

I love completing projects, and putting each issue together is like a project that comes to fruition every other month. Also, the flexibility of being my own boss has been ideal at a time when I've wanted to be there for children's concerts, sports days and helping out at school.

Nevertheless, children grow and our focus shifts – which is why I am a ready for the next challenge and am hoping to pass this fantastic role on to a new editor.

Being part of the Families network means great support and training at the same time as being completely independent as a franchisee!

If you are interested in finding out more about how you could be the next editor of Families Hampshire North, please drop me a message at editor@familieshampshirenorth.co.uk

Helping autistic children in education

By Pete Wharmby

There is no doubt that school is a challenging environment for autistic children. As I reflect back on my time as both an undiagnosed autistic child and as an autistic teacher, the difficulties and hazards are clear and it is little wonder I found it difficult.

From the sensory overload caused by crowded classrooms and corridors to the pitfalls of interpersonal communication and relationships, the setting is hard for autistic people. This is why we see so many children refuse to attend; after all, who on earth would want to expose themselves to such an environment day after day for fourteen years?

But it doesn't have to be this way.

Most of the difficulties faced by autistic children are grounded in the lack of knowledge and understanding of the adults in the system. School staff don't get sufficient information or teacher training to understand why their building feels so hostile to these children or why they might have an instinctive bias against neurodivergent children.

Parents are forced to upskill themselves, an exhausting and confusing task, as again there is not enough clarity around what autism actually is.

If we can increase the knowledge and understanding that teachers and other school staff have, then we can expect autistic children to have a better time. I would prioritise the following:

Understanding sensory differences

Non-autistic people can struggle to empathise with autistic sensory perception, as it is different from theirs. So, when an autistic child says they're too hot or it is too noisy in the classroom, a non-autistic person might disagree and assume the child is making a fuss about nothing. Differences in sensory thresholds are so poorly understood that, to a non-autistic person, this can seem the only explanation. It is important to step back and recognise that there is a genuine understanding and empathy gap here that the teacher must attempt to bridge.

Understanding communication differences

Non-autistic people can get very upset and angry with autistic



communication methods. Avoiding eye contact or being rather direct with questioning or talking for 'too long' can all be viewed as failings to be corrected, rather than differences to be celebrated. Autistic communication is its own thing and when groups of autistic people get together it works very well indeed. It deserves to be accepted.

Understanding Monotropism

Autistic people tend to prefer to focus on one thing for prolonged periods. Transitions between tasks can be stressful and dysregulating if forced too quickly. Unfortunately, school days and lessons have frequent transitions and autistic students' natural preference for long and singular focus is ignored. Autistic students would love opportunities to spend a little longer on a task or activity – to really get 'stuck in!'

Many typical pinch points can be traced back to one of the three, key autistic differences above. Up to now, these root causes have been misunderstood or plain ignored and the worst has been assumed (ah, they're just being difficult!).

Now we have the possibility of truly understanding where autistic children are coming from. This has enormous potential to transform education for autistic students.

It's vital that we continue to apply pressure to the education system to take these differences as seriously as they deserve to be taken, so that our autistic children can thrive and flourish in school at long last.

Pete Wharmby is an award-winning, international autistic/ADHD bestselling author, speaker and trainer who is passionate about improving education for autistic and ADHD children.

School Open Days

November-December 2026

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

Crookham Infant School
Gally Hill Road, Church Crookham, Fleet, GU52 6PU
01252 615 547
crookhaminfants.co.uk
Tuesday 3 November, 1:30pm: Open afternoon
Wednesday 11 November, 6:30pm: Open evening
Monday 16 November, 9:15am: Open morning
Tuesday 1 December, 1:30pm: Open afternoon

St Nicholas' School
Redfields House, Redfields Lane, Church Crookham, Fleet, GU52 0RF
01252 850121
stnicholas.school
Friday 6 November, 9am: Year 7 (2027) senior school taster event
Friday 13 November, 9am: Reception (2027) taster morning
Friday 13 November, 9am: Year 3 (2027) taster event
Monday 16 November, 9am: Year 6 (2027) / year 7 (2028) taster event

Special interests



Autistic people tend to have interests and hobbies that are very intense and dear to them. These can be a wonderful tool for educators - if you can find a 'way in' to a tricky academic topic using the interests of an autistic person, that can be highly effective.

Try to teach me how to do differential equations and I'll struggle. Do it by using the sinking of the Titanic as a background and I am suddenly much more engaged and focused!

Why some children struggle to tell the time

By Usha Patel

I work with children facing all sorts of curious learning glitches. One increasingly cropping up in recent years is the inability to read an analogue clock. Children who are otherwise perfectly capable, bright and articulate can be completely stumped by a traditional clock face and parents are often baffled as to why.

I'm not the only one to notice this trend. Nicola Woolcock, Education Editor for *The Times,* reported that schools have had to install digital clocks in GCSE exam halls because **so many pupils can no longer read a clock with hands.** Teachers worry pupils could misjudge how much exam time remains or waste precious minutes trying to work it out mid-exam.

Some children learned to tell the time years ago but now that phones and screens do the job for them, have lost the skill. Others never fully grasped the skill in the first place. Either way, it's worth pausing to ask why this apparently 'simple' skill is proving genuinely difficult for so many.

Working with younger children

The truth is, reading a clock is far from simple. It quietly demands several separate abilities working together at exactly the same moment: language, sequencing, working memory, quick processing and sustained visual attention. It is very easy to underestimate just how much a young child is actually being asked to manage when learning this skill for the first time.



A child who 'should' be able to tell the time by around age 7 may simply be missing one of these underlying building blocks, rather than lacking ability altogether. Recognising this shifts the task into a teaching one.

The good news is that each skill can be strengthened individually. Short, focused regular practice, aimed squarely at whichever skill is weakest, works far better than expecting the entire skill to click into place in one go. Movement-based games help fix abstract ideas like 'before' and 'after' into the body. Talking through the day's events in order builds sequencing. Simple visual-tracking activities support steadier focus on the clock face itself.

Above all, remember this is a skill made of many moving parts, not one flat fact to memorise, so give your child the weeks of gentle, patient practice it genuinely needs.

Usha Patel is a neurocognitive therapist who owns and runs Raviv Practice in London. Download her FREE time teaching tool at www.ravivpracticelondon.co.uk/clock



The five skills involved in telling the time

Language skills: reading a clock relies on understanding 'before' and 'after.' Have your child walk forward while counting up, backwards while counting down. The physical drill works towards 'before,' 'on,' or 'after' the hour.

Sequencing: clocks demand logical order. Encourage your child to narrate their day: 'I had breakfast, then I went to school, then I saw my teacher.' This habit builds sequencing skills that also support other tasks, such as spelling.

Working memory: remembering the short clock hand means hours and the long hand means minutes, while decoding the numbers too, is genuinely demanding.

Processing speed: once the hands are located, a child must instantly recall the five-times table and judge 'to' or 'past' the hour, with no tools to help.

Visual attention: steady eye tracking is essential; wandering eyes create confusion. Visual-motor activities can help.



Signs your child may be struggling

Certain patterns are worth watching for, especially when several appear together.

Confuses prepositional words (like under, over, behind) in speech, not just on the clock.

Struggles with the daily morning routine and the idea that the same things happen every day.

Forgets instructions partway through, indicating weaker working memory rather than simple distraction.

Counts on fingers when most peers have moved on, hinting at slower number recall under pressure.

Loses their place when reading or their eyes seem to wander rather than track smoothly across a page or a clock face.

If several of the above show up together, it's rarely about the clock itself. The clock is often just the moment these underlying difficulties become visible. A short conversation with your child's teacher or a specialist such as a neurocognitive therapist, can help identify which specific skill needs support.

Things that often worry parents (but don't worry me!)

By Helen Davies

I spend a lot of my time reassuring parents about the development of their children. Every week, I hear worries that begin with: 'Is this normal?' or 'Am I doing something wrong?' The truth is, while some things do need a closer look, many of the concerns that keep parents awake at night are actually a perfectly normal part of growing up. Here are ten things that parents understandably often worry about - but that don't usually worry me.

Big emotions. Toddlers aren't trying to be difficult - they're still learning how to manage feelings that often seem much bigger than they are.

Fussy eating. It's incredibly common for children's appetites to change from day to day. Many healthy toddlers eat very little one day and make up for it the next.

Not sharing. Sharing is a skill that develops over time. Young children are still learning that other people have thoughts and feelings too.

Wanting the same book, programme or meal every day. Repetition helps children feel safe and confident while they're learning about the world.

Saying 'No!' to everything. As frustrating as it can be, it's often a sign that your child is developing independence and discovering they have their own opinions.

Playing alongside other children instead of with them. This 'parallel play' is a normal stage of social development, particularly in younger toddlers.

Wanting one parent more than anyone else. Many children go through phases of preferring one parent or caregiver. It doesn't mean that other caregivers have done anything wrong and it won't last forever.



Taking time with toilet training. Children are ready at different ages and rushing the process rarely makes it happen sooner.

Being constantly on the move. Young children learn through exploring, climbing, running and touching. They weren't designed to sit still for long periods.

Needing comfort. Responding to your child's tears doesn't make them clingy. It helps them feel safe enough to become confident and independent over time.

Give yourself a gift and let go of the idea that all children should reach every milestone on the same day. Childhood isn't a race and development rarely follows a perfectly straight line. If you're worrying, it usually means you're paying attention. And more often than not, that attention, plus love, consistency and presence are exactly what your child needs.

Helen Davies runs Essential Parenting (www.essentialparenting.co.uk), a trusted, private health visiting service providing expert support with sleep, behaviour and early childhood development.

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When 'normal' doesn't always look the same

One of the biggest myths about child development is that every child reaches milestones at exactly the same age. In reality, children develop at different rates and that's completely normal.

Some children are early walkers but take longer to talk. Others chatter away before they're confident climbing the playground equipment. Some are naturally cautious, while others are fearless explorers from day one.

It's normal for children to go through phases. A confident child may suddenly become clingy after starting nursery, welcoming a new sibling or moving house. A great sleeper might begin waking at night after an illness or holiday. These temporary changes are often your child's way of adjusting to a big life event.

Try not to compare your child with friends, siblings or the carefully curated snapshots you see on social media. Instead, look at the progress your child is making over time. Every child follows their own path and that's exactly how development is meant to work.

Raising boys in the age of the manosphere

By Dr Billy Garvey

Anxiety, depression and self-harm are on the rise and boys and young men are struggling. Research reveals that young men who most strongly adhere to traditional masculinity rules are nearly three times more likely to experience depression and almost three times more likely to report recent suicidal thoughts than their peers who reject those beliefs.

Alarming as these figures are, they don't have to be our fixed future. When we can understand what leads a boy to this position, we can build a better path forward.

'Manosphere' is the **loose online world of influencers, forums and video content** that seems to offer boys certainty, status and belonging, often suggesting that men are under attack and someone else is to blame. It appears to answer real questions about relationships and identity.

Algorithms reward the most aggressive and provocative voices, so a boy searching for confidence, fitness or dating advice can find himself exploring increasingly extreme content before anyone notices. The manosphere isn't the root cause of boys' distress; it's what rushes into the silence when nobody else is talking to them.

That silence starts early. From a young age, many boys receive messages that toughness, independence and self-sufficiency matter more than emotional openness. They are often **encouraged to manage difficult feelings on their own** and may receive fewer opportunities to develop the language of emotions.

By adolescence, many have learned to suppress what's happening inside, leaving anger, shame and loneliness with nowhere useful to go.

The good news is that none of this is fixed. It requires investment from the beginning and repairing through safe and unconditional relationships when things have gone wrong.

Talk to boys often. Hold baby boys close and face-to-face. Sing to them too. Treat distress as information rather than a problem to shut down. Keep showing affection as they grow. Support strong friendships; these are among the most powerful protectors for future mental health.



Sex and intimacy need to be part of early conversations too - not something we leave for pornography and peers to answer instead. Guiding boys in this area starts much earlier than most of us assume: **naming bodies, boundaries and consent** in age-appropriate ways from early childhood, so that by the time it truly matters, your boy already trusts you to talk about sex and intimacy honestly, rather than turning first to a screen.

When you see anger, get curious rather than punitive, looking to the vulnerability underneath. And when it comes to discipline, focus on helping boys develop better skills and choices over imposing consequences. Punishment may produce short-term compliance but it rarely builds the self-control, empathy and judgement we're actually trying to teach.

Most importantly, **name the rules of the 'man box' when you see them:**

Toughness
Self-sufficiency
Aggression
Never crying and never needing help

Boys absorb these messages from screens, sporting fields, friendship groups and sometimes from the adults around them.

Redefining masculinity isn't about erasing it. It's a problem with an answer. Boys who feel seen, understood and supported grow into men who are able to offer that same care to the people around them.

Dr Billy Garvey is a bestselling author and leading developmental paediatrician with over twenty years' experience working with children in various settings. His new book *10 Things to Know About Raising Boys* (Vermilion, £18.99) gives hope and practical guidance to parents who want to help boys in an age of a masculine crisis.







Christmas toy guide for kids

Christmas is a magical time for children, full of excitement and the joy of receiving those special gifts. But with so many toys and games to choose from, finding the perfect present can feel overwhelming. So we asked The Good Play Guide (www.goodplayguide.com) for their top picks for the festive season. You can rest assured that these accredited products and the others on their site have been tested by children and reviewed by experts, so you can choose with confidence.



BIBS Cuddle Cloth Kangaroo

From birth

Made from beautifully soft organic cotton, this cuddle cloth is perfect for comforting little ones at home or on the go. The handy dummy attachment and pocket make it easy to keep dummies close so they are less likely to get lost. Its soft texture helps support early sensory development and encourages self-soothing, while the machine washable design makes it practical for everyday use. **£17.50**



Build-A-Buddy John Deere Activity Board

This farm themed construction set encourages children to build, create and explore using a realistic battery powered drill and easy to grip pieces. As they fit screws and turn gears, children develop fine motor skills, hand-eye co-ordination and problem-solving skills. The farm theme inspires imaginative storytelling and roleplay, while the handy storage case keeps pieces organised and ready for the next building adventure. **£29.95**

18 mths +



My Princess Cape Kit

Ages 3+

This fun dress-up set lets children design and personalise their own princess cape using washable fabric markers, then wash and decorate it again. Great for encouraging children to express their creativity before stepping into imaginative worlds of role play and storytelling. With a lightweight design and adjustable crown, children can return to the set to create new characters and adventures time after time. **£9.95**

Strikesphere Soccer Dash Interactive Football Training Set



This interactive football training set turns skill-building into an exciting game. With different modes focusing on speed, accuracy, co-ordination and memory, children can practise their football skills. Competitive modes and team games encourage everyone to get involved. Suitable for indoor and outdoor use, the set is great for playdates, family fun and helping children stay active whatever the weather. **£39.99**

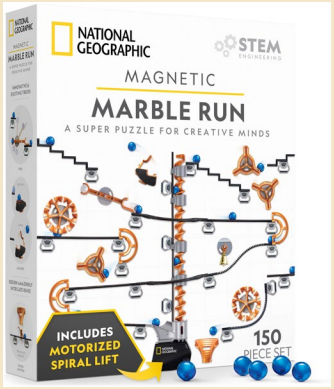
Ages 6+

Play-Doh Toy Story Space Creations Dough and Modelling Playset



This fun Play-Doh set combines creative modelling with *Toy Story* favourites, *Woody* and *Buzz*. Rolling, pressing and moulding the dough builds hand strength, while storytelling and role play encourage creativity and communication. With fun tools, character figures and a rocket ship, there are plenty of opportunities for imaginative play that children will enjoy returning to again and again. **£19.99**

Ages 4+



National Geographic 150-Piece Magnetic Marble Run STEM Building Set

Children combine creativity and problem-solving as they design and build their own tracks with this magnetic marble run. With step-by-step guides and exciting features, including a motorised spiral lift, children can experiment with complex designs while developing logical thinking and learning by trial and error. A fun STEM set for family and group play. **£29.99**

Ages 10+

My First Star of Hogwarts Soft Toys: Harry Potter, Hedwig and Dobby



Children will love the soft textures and friendly features of these toys, which are perfectly sized for small hands to hold and carry. Great for offering comfort at bedtime and quiet moments or inspiration for storytelling and roleplay, *Harry, Hedwig* and *Dobby* support imaginative play and emotional connection. A lovely gift for baby's first Christmas. **£15.99**

From birth

CONNETIX 50 Piece Pastel Transport Pack



This colourful magnetic tile set gives children endless opportunities to design and build their own vehicles. Experimenting with different designs develops creativity, problem-solving and hand-eye co-ordination. The strong magnetic connections make builds sturdy and easy to adapt, encouraging children to keep bringing new ideas to life. **£65.00**

Ages 3+

All ages

Warmies



Warmies are luxuriously soft, microwavable plush toys designed to provide comfort and reassurance at bedtime or during quiet moments. With their gentle lavender scent, weighted feel and cute animal designs, they are sure to become treasured companions. They can be warmed up in the microwave for extra comfort or cooled down in the freezer to help soothe minor bumps. **£24.99**

Playmobil City Action Police Squad Car with Lights and Sound

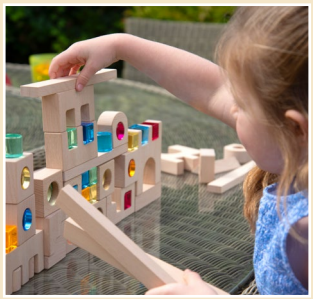
Ages 4+



This detailed police car set brings rescue missions and imaginative adventures to life. Building the set helps develop fine motor skills, while acting out different scenarios encourages storytelling, communication and an understanding of the role of the emergency services. With realistic features, including lights, sirens and police officer figures, it's a great choice for children who love action-packed play. **£29.99**

Wooden Gem Building Blocks

Ages 3+



This high-quality wooden block set includes a variety of shapes and sizes, from cubes and arches to cylinders and colourful gem blocks. Children can build and explore while developing creativity, problem-solving and early maths skills. The wooden tray doubles as a building surface and provides easy storage, keeping all the pieces neatly together. **£99.99**

Bath Time Playcentre

6 mths +



Make bath time even more fun with this colourful sensory play centre, designed to float in the water or securely attach to the side of the bath. Children will love exploring the different textures, chewing the teether and discovering the bright ocean themed characters. The strong suction pads and machine washable fabric make it a practical choice that supports sensory exploration and early learning through play. **£22.99**

Rebel Girls DIY Journal Kit

Ages 6+

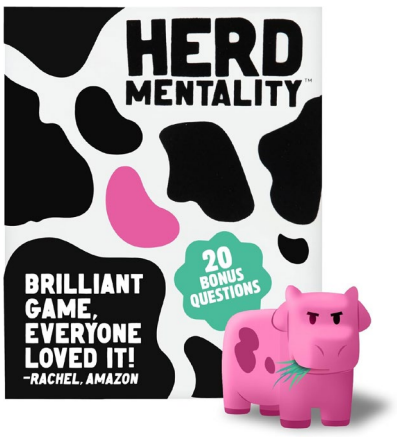


This creative journal kit encourages children to express themselves through writing, drawing and decoration. With a range of art supplies, creative prompts and inspiring stories about real-life women, it helps children explore their thoughts, feelings and ideas while building confidence and self-awareness. A thoughtful, hands-on set that will keep children engaged for hours. **£22.99**

Herd Mentality

Ages 10+

This fun game encourages players to think like the group rather than find the 'right' answer. The rules are easy to follow, with simple prompts sparking conversation, laughter and friendly competition. It encourages social interaction and helps children understand the importance of thinking about other people's ideas and opinions. Great for bringing families and friends together this Christmas. **£19.99**



Unusual class and club ideas

By Andrew Campbell

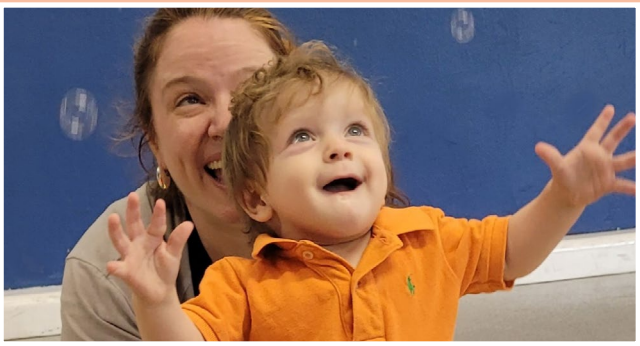
Whether your child is bored with the usual options or simply not interested in the more conventional after school activities, you might be able to entice them to develop a new interest and meet like-minded friends by considering some of these less common activities.

Chess
For children who are naturally quiet or physically small, chess clubs offer a chance to make friends outside of school and improve self-esteem. Children as young as age 4 can play. Schools and libraries can run clubs but there are junior chess clubs throughout the UK. Find out more at **www.chessinschools.co.uk/junior-clubs**

Rock climbing
For the more adventurous young one, rock climbing offers a chance for some healthy, action-packed fun. Plenty of indoor and outdoor options are available for toddlers and up. Try your local leisure centre or check out **www.thebmc.co.uk**

Fencing
An Olympic sport, fencing is ideal option for children who struggle with team sports. As well as improving fitness, it develops mental agility and personal responsibility. For a local club, check **www.britishfencing.com**

Trampolining
All kids love bouncing! Making this a great option for kids who don't like organised sports. The combination of risk and exhilaration will keep them coming back. Clubs can be found at schools, leisure centres, gymnastic associations and at trampoline centres.



Give the gift of curiosity with Vivace Music School

Vivace Music School turn curiosity 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 from first bounces to instrumental success.

Now's a great time to book a **FREE** trial in an entry level class for ages 0-7 in **Fleet, Farnham** and **Yateley,** or email to find out more about sessions for older kids or kids with SEN.

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



Photography and film making
Does your young one enjoy capturing images or footage on their phone? Then, maybe they are ready for the next step. Holiday and after school classes are offered by photographers and photography clubs at venues throughout UK with many providing cameras to use.

Creative writing
Whether your child is a budding storyteller or has trouble expressing themselves on paper, creative writing will tap into their imaginations and ideas and turn them into something special, whilst developing important critical thinking and creative skills. Numerous in-person and online clubs are available.

Archery
Kids love trying this sport at local fetes and fairs. If your child lacks the speed or strength for traditional sports, then archery may be an option. As well as improving concentration, it's physically demanding and very social. To find a local club visit **www.startarchery.co.uk**

Table tennis
Another Olympic sport, table tennis may suit children who don't possess the physical prowess required for other sports. They may have already played the game at home or elsewhere and so may easily fit into a local junior club which can be found at **www.tabletennisengland.co.uk**

Robotics
Robotics is a fun, hands-on way to get your child's creative juices flowing and engage them in an interest in technology, as well as a great way to meet like-minded friends. Clubs can be found in your local area and online.

Sailing
Children as young as age 7 can get involved in sailing and water sports. Local clubs offer free taster training courses overseen by qualified instructors which can progress to team racing. Check **www.rya.org.uk/start-boating**

Skating
Your child may love their annual outing to a local pop-up rink but did you know programmes for children as young as age 2 are offered at ice skating centres throughout the country. These can lead to figure skating, speed skating, ice hockey or even the Olympics! Find a local centre at **www.iceskating.org.uk/rink-finder**



What's On

Family Theatre & Pantomimes





The Little Prince at Phoenix Arts Centre

FESTIVE FAMILY THEATRE PRODUCTIONS

Pantomimes are a great Christmas treat and we have a good selection of pantos in this area. There are also lots of other fantastic shows nearby to enjoy with the family!

7 Nov
Kathakali at Phoenix Arts Centre, Bordon
East Hampshire: get ready to celebrate the incredible arts and culture of Kerala, South India! The renowned Kala Chethena Kathakali Company, from Kerala, South India, is delighted to return with a different story depicting how arrogance, selfish attitudes and cruelty are eventually overcome by kindness and forgiveness.

11 Nov
A Tale of Us at Proteus Theatre, Basingstoke
A celebration of the wonder, joys and challenges of becoming a new parent, blending drama and multi-sensory playtime. Made for parents with children aged 0-18 months

11-13 Dec
Cinderella at Alton Assembly Rooms
Pumpkin Pantos return this festive season with the Fairy Godmother of all pantos... and you're invited to the ball! Prepare to be swept into a world of enchanted pumpkins, glittering gowns and fairytale magic with Cinderella — Alton's brand-new, home-grown pantomime that's proudly local, joyfully silly and fabulously affordable for families.

11-29 Dec
Aladdin at The Harlington, Fleet
Enjoy the Genie-us Pantomime with family this Christmas.

13 Nov
A Tale of Us at Phoenix Arts Centre, Bordon
A Tale of Us is a brand-new play for parents and their babies. Join Ivy and her little one on a funny, frank and magical journey through their first year of life together.

14 Nov
Out of the Box at Phoenix Arts Centre, Bordon
Fresh from five-star success at the Edinburgh Fringe and being named Best Family Show at Brighton Fringe, Darryl J Carrington transforms everyday objects into extraordinary adventures. A toothbrush stars in a balancing act, a string sparks a heist, and a tea party lands on someone's head!

21 Nov
Pied Piper Theatre Presents: Hare & Tortoise at Phoenix Arts Centre, Bordon
Who will finally win the race? Find out in this funny, tender, award-winning adaptation of the well-loved story as we journey through the seasons from bud-bursting spring to snow-falling winter in a tale of opposites, time and friendship, brimming with music, movement and colour.

2-6 Dec
Dear Santa Live at The Haymarket, Basingstoke
From the author of the well-loved children's book *Dear Zoo* comes Dear Santa Live. This Christmas treat also includes an opportunity to meet Santa in his grotto after the show, where every child will receive an extra special gift!

5 Dec
A Christmas Carol at Phoenix Arts Centre, Bordon
With quick character changes, playful invention, and a sparkle of silliness, Four Forty transform the classic into a joyful night of theatre for audiences of all ages. Whether you're a festive fanatic or a self-proclaimed Scrooge, this production brims with warmth, laughter and unexpected surprises.

5-24 Dec
Mrs Christmas' Christmas List at Proteus Theatre, Basingstoke
This brand-new, immersive Christmas show from Scratchbuilt productions and Proteus is so much more than a show you simply watch – it's a world you step into! Scratchbuilt's signature immersive storytelling will bring Mrs Christmas' Christmas List to life.

8-9 Dec
Jack and the Beanstalk – Andover College pantomime at The Lights, Andover
Follow Jack's journey from humble beginnings to the giant's castle in the clouds in a pantomime bursting with music, laughter, audience participation, and larger-than-life characters. A magical treat for all ages.

10 Dec-3 Jan
Beauty and the Beast at The Anvil, Basingstoke
This festive extravaganza promises West End-calibre production values, breathtaking sets, glittering costumes and sensational choreography – all wrapped up in a magical story filled with laughter, romance and wonder. With show-stopping musical numbers and jaw-dropping special effects, this is the definitive take on the timeless tale.

15 Dec
English National Ballet: The Nutcracker at Phoenix Arts Centre, Bordon
Featuring over 100 musicians and dancers, stunning choreography, beautiful sets and Tchaikovsky's iconic score, this festive classic is perfect for all the family. Join Clara on Christmas Eve as she embarks on a magical adventure filled with snowflakes, sweets and the Sugar Plum Fairy in one of the world's most beloved ballets.

17 Dec
Mrs Christmas' Christmas List – relaxed performance at Proteus Theatre, Basingstoke
With reduced capacity, lowered light and sound and a dedicated breakout space for those who need it. Mrs Christmas's Christmas List is a magical, hilarious and interactive adventure for all the family this festive season!

19-22 Dec
The Little Prince at Phoenix Arts Centre, Bordon
This Christmas, journey across the stars with The Little Prince, a magical family adventure based on the bestselling book. Brought to life with mesmerising puppetry and beautiful original music, this enchanting tale celebrates love, friendship and the things that matter most. A heartwarming festive treat for the whole family!

Families® Please say you saw these listings in Families Hampshire North Magazine.



Beauty and the Beast comes to Basingstoke

Beauty and the Beast, at The Anvil, Basingstoke from Thursday 10 December, promises West End-calibre production values, breathtaking sets, glittering costumes and sensational choreography – all wrapped up in a magical story filled with laughter, romance and wonder!

Beauty and the Beast stars *EastEnders'* Ellie Dadd as Belle. Ellie is known to millions of viewers for playing Amy Mitchell in BBC One's award-winning soap.

Basingstoke's favourite funny man Chris Pizzey is returning by popular demand, playing Louis La Plonk - and ready to start plotting his festive shenanigans!

Sarah Jane Buckley also makes a welcome return to The Anvil and joins the cast as the sparkling Fairy Bon Bon.

Joining them are Richard J Hunt as the uproarious dame Polly la Plonk, Aaron Pryce-Lewis as The Prince, and Rory McCollum as the arrogant Hugo Pompidou.

For full details, visit the website www.anvilarts.org.uk

LONGRUNNING SEASONAL EVENTS

Throughout the festive period there are lots of local events that are running for several weeks. Check out the varied selection below!

Until 18 Dec
Ancient Romans vs Ancient Britons at Curtis Museum, Basingstoke
You'll be travelling back 2000 years to the Roman invasion of southern Britain. Pick your allegiance - Roman or Briton - and take on six challenges around the museum to prove your skill and loyalty.

Until 18 Dec
Saxons vs Vikings: Choose Your Side at Museum of the Iron Age, Andover
Tensions are rising as King Alfred's Anglo-Saxon warriors prepare to meet King Guthrum's Viking army at the Battle of Edington. Pick your allegiance - Saxon or Viking - and take on five challenges around the museum to prove your skill and loyalty.

1-28 Nov
Dotty the Dodo's Autumn Fact Trail at Curtis Museum, Basingstoke
Dotty needs your help to uncover fascinating facts about the natural world hidden throughout the museum. Follow the trail, explore the galleries, and discover amazing objects as you hunt for clues scattered along the way.

1 Nov-24 Dec
Visit Santa at Festival Place, Basingstoke
Christmas magic is coming to Festival Place as Santa returns to his festive grotto. Bring the little ones along for a magical Christmas experience, where they'll get the chance to meet Santa and make a special festive wish.

9 Nov-18 Dec
Winter at Welly Park, Wellington Country Park, Riseley
This winter, while the outdoor park takes a well-earned rest, the doors are opening once again to our cosy indoor experience for little ones aged 18 months to 5 years. Step inside a transformed main building space – an inviting adventure zone filled with fun, imagination, and connection for families to enjoy together.

14 Nov-3 Jan
A Christmas Wish at Hinton Ampner, Alresford
Step into a Christmas story at Hinton Ampner this festive season, where every room holds a wish waiting to be discovered. Families can enjoy an elf adventure filled with fun games and lots of photo opportunities along the way.

21 Nov-3 Jan
Christmas Garden Trail at The Vyne, Basingstoke
Leap like a lord over hurdles, join the ladies dancing, help the maids milk a cow, return the partridge to the pear tree, wheelbarrow golden eggs back to Mother Goose, find the calling birds, listen out for the French hens, balance like a swan and play quoits with the five gold rings. Along the way, strike a pose at playful photo opportunities and enjoy festive fun for all the family.

21 Nov-3 Jan
Twelve Days of Christmas at The Vyne, Basingstoke
Glittering Christmas trees, handcrafted decorations and plenty of festive sparkle await on the ground floor of the house as The Vyne brings the much-loved Twelve Days of Christmas carol to life. Many of the decorations have been lovingly handcrafted by volunteers, adding extra charm and personality to the festive displays.

21 Nov-3 Jan
A Jack and the Beanstalk Christmas at Mottisfont, Romsey
Magic comes to Mottisfont this Christmas, as you are invited on a fun and festive adventure into the much-loved tale of Jack and the Beanstalk. The house is transformed with sparkle and theatrical flair, lights and laughs as you journey from a towering beanstalk to a castle in the clouds and a Giant's Christmas banquet.

28 Nov-24 Dec
Christmas at Finkley Down Farm, Andover
Celebrate the season with a magical, immersive festive adventure at Finkley. This full experience is bursting with activities and memory-making moments for the whole family.

29 Nov-30 Dec
'Once Upon a Time' Illuminated Trail at West Green House, Hartley Wintney
A kilometre-long illuminated trail through the lakes and gardens, where you'll discover the magical creatures and fairy folk who inhabit our favourite 'Once Upon a Time' stories. Animal friends are also visiting West Green House this Christmas dressed up in their holiday best to greet you and the family.

1 Dec-27 Feb
Dotty the Dodo's Winter Fact Trail at Curtis Museum, Basingstoke
Perfect for families and curious minds, this seasonal trail is a great way to enjoy the museum together. Learn something new, stretch your detective skills, and see if you can complete Dotty's fact hunt!

3-22 Dec
Museum by Moonlight: Penguin Light Trail at Gilbert White's House, Selborne
Follow the penguins on a magical family adventure through the museum, including the Oates galleries. Enjoy fun hands-on activities, children's crafts, stories of the Antarctic explorers and of course, lots of lights!

12 Dec-3 Jan
The Big Christmas Present Hunt at Hawk Conservancy Trust, Andover
Can you solve the mystery of Santa's missing present sack this Christmas? Bring the whole family along for this festive trail, where you can find clues hidden around the Hawk Conservancy Trust and help get Christmas back on track.



Enjoy a festive family day out at a National Trust property near you

Everything you want from Christmas is all wrapped up at National Trust places in Hampshire. Decorated houses are transformed with sparkle and a dash of magic, inspired by favourite pantomimes and festive stories.

Outdoors, you'll find enchanting family trails packed with playful activities and moments to capture family memories.

Mottisfont's Jack and the Beanstalk festive adventure from **21 November to 3 January** has transformed the house with sparkle and pantomime flair. Meet Jack, Dame Trott and Pat the Cow as you follow our hero on his journey to Giantland, but be careful; is that a fe-fi-fo-fum you can hear? There are plenty of funny things to do too: pose as a Christmas pudding or Brussels sprout in the Giant's festive feast selfie board and perch beside the beanstalk as it twirls skywards. Outside, you'll find lots of games as you race to return the Golden Goose's stolen eggs to their giant nests and repair the Giant's torn underpants before he notices!

Enter a world of wishes as you travel through the beautifully decorated house at Hinton Ampner, filled with twinkling lights and Christmas trees. In each room you'll meet a legendary character and discover their personal wish. Pop into Father Christmas' post room, explore King Arthur's realm, and take in Jay Gatsby's glamorous 1920s party. Outside, there are lots of games to enjoy, on the new elf adventure. A Christmas Wish runs from **14 November to 3 January,** pre-booking is essential.

Handcrafted scenes and glittering decorations bring The Twelve Days of Christmas to life at The Vyne from **21 November to 3 January,** with elegant swans, uniformed drummers and beautiful dancers' dresses. Outside, you can leap like a lord over the hurdles, help the maids milk a cow and race your wheelbarrow of golden eggs back to Mother Goose.

These beautiful countryside places are perfect for meeting up with friends and family, on a frosty walk or over a cinnamon latte and warm mince pie. And you can browse for thoughtful Christmas gifts too, away from the bustle of the high street.

Normal admission applies. Check the website before visiting. National Trust places close on 24-25 December or 25-26 December.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk/hampshire

CHRISTMAS MARKETS

Pick up some unique Christmas gifts and decorations at our lovely, local Christmas markets.

21 Nov
Andover Winter Fair at Museum of the Iron Age, Andover
Browse a wonderful selection of stalls from talented local makers and discover unique handmade gifts, seasonal treats and special presents you won't find on the high street. Families can take part in free festive activities throughout the day, including a seasonal trail, hands-on crafts and fun games for children.

26-29 Nov
Christmas Market at Hawk Conservancy Trust, Andover
Enjoy the run up to Christmas with this delightful, festive shopping experience. With over 80 local businesses attending, you can find personalised presents, Christmas decorations, handcrafted treats, beautiful homeware and much more.

28-29 Nov
Basing House Christmas Fayre, Basingstoke
The majestic Tudor barn at Basing House will be decorated for a wonderfully festive shopping experience, with over 35 stalls offering locally made crafts, produce and gifting ideas to browse and buy.

29 Nov
Christmas Fair at Holybourne Theatre
Unique handmade gifts, local crafts, festive treats and more!

3 Dec
Brocante de Noel at West Green House, Hartley Wintney
Featuring a lovely line up of stallholders selling festive delights, textiles, decorative pieces and antiques for your home this winter, as well as plants and flowers. Enjoy fabulous shopping with lunch or tea in the gardens newly appointed tack room or in the tearoom, now festively decorated for Christmas.

5-6 Dec
Milestones Christmas Market at Milestones Museum, Basingstoke
Wander cobbled Victorian streets dressed for the festive season, browse twinkling stalls tucked between historic shopfronts, and find that perfect gift for loved ones. Milestones Christmas Market brings together the best of the season, unique gifts, festive food, live music and family fun, all set within the bustling cobbled streets of Milestones.

What's on

November & December 2026

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

NOVEMBER

Until 8 Nov
Who's in Your Book? at The Vyne, Basingstoke
In The Vyne's gardens, set off on a fun-filled interactive trail through the magical world of Tom Fletcher's *Who's In Your Book?* series. Search for your favourite characters, solve playful challenges, and discover how every page can become an unforgettable adventure. **FREE** event, normal admission charges apply.

Until 8 Nov
Stranger Folk Digital Adventure at The Vyne, Basingstoke
Perfect for ages 7-12, this magical adventure played by mobile app comes to The Vyne. As the spirit and human worlds collide, sneaky goblins, cunning beggars and Stranger Folk are slipping through the crack to stir up trouble. Gather your team, harness the elements and seal the rift before the creatures take hold. **FREE** event, normal admission charges apply.

3 Nov
Timothy's Tots: Creatures of the Night at Gilbert White's House, Selborne
Join Timothy, Gilbert White's pet tortoise, for interactive pre-school sessions, connecting your child to nature and the changing seasons. Sessions start with a welcome from puppet Timothy, followed by sensory activities in the garden and house plus songs, craft and stories.

Wed until 9 Dec
Toddler Group at St Nicholas' School, Church Crookham
A warm welcome awaits at St Nicholas' Toddler Group. Designed for little learners aged 18 months to 3 years, each session offers plenty of opportunities to play, explore and create in a nurturing and stimulating environment.

17 Nov
Timothy's Tots: Winter Weather at Gilbert White's House, Selborne
Join Timothy, Gilbert White's pet tortoise, for interactive pre-school sessions, connecting your child to nature and the changing seasons. Sessions start with a welcome from puppet Timothy, followed by sensory activities in the garden and house plus songs, craft and stories.

17 Nov
Fred the Cat's Story Club: Room on the Broom at The Lights, Andover
Once a month Amanda from Merry-go-Round Storytelling will bring to life a favourite story or classic tale with music, movement, early years drama, and lots of imaginative fun. Sessions include sensory props and a chance for children to be characters from their favourite stories.

DECEMBER

1 Dec
Timothy's Tots: Twinkle with Timothy at Gilbert White's House, Selborne
Join Timothy, Gilbert White's pet tortoise, for interactive pre-school sessions, connecting your child to nature and the changing seasons. Sessions start with a welcome from puppet Timothy, followed by sensory activities in the garden and house plus songs, craft and stories.

4-12 Dec
Owls By Moonlight at Christmas at Hawk Conservancy Trust, Andover
Kick off the festive season with a magical evening with owls! You'll see awesome owls flying under moonlight at this special time of year with a few festive features to get you in the Christmas spirit.

5 Dec
Elf on a Shelf: a crafty Christmas trail at Whitchurch Silk Mill
Make your way along the trail and find activities for the whole family. Take part in the 10 elf-themed activities around the site and collect your chocolatey reward.

12-13 Dec
NJ Toys - Pop Up at The Shed, Bordon
Pop along and browse a fantastic selection of Needo squishies, advent calendars, fidgets, bubbles and much more. Perfect for treats, gifts and stocking fillers!

15 Dec
Fred the Cat's Story Club: Stick Man at The Lights, Andover
Once a month Amanda from Merry-go-Round Storytelling will bring to life a favourite story or classic tale with music, movement, early years drama, and lots of imaginative fun. Sessions will include sensory props and a chance for all children to pretend to be the characters from their favourite stories.

18 Dec
West Green House Christmas Choir at West Green House, Hartley Wintney
Many of the beautiful voices who sing each summer at West Green House Opera have come together to perform the music of Christmas; the Carols and Christmas hits in the glittering Greenhouse. Join in the singing of the carols we love best, making a night for all the family.

18-19 Dec
Carols by Candlelight at Milestones Museum, Basingstoke
Step back in time and experience the warmth of a traditional Christmas with carols, candlelight, costumes and cheer! This enchanting event is suitable for all ages and invites you to immerse yourself in the sights, sounds and tastes of a Victorian Christmas.

18-21 Dec
Christmas Carols and Owls at Hawk Conservancy Trust, Andover
Sing along with Christmas carols, both traditional and modern, under the night sky accompanied by rousing live music. You will also be invited into the magical world of the trust's owls during the evening as you witness these beautiful owls twist and turn in the moonlight and skim silently over the top of your head.

20-24 Dec
Breakfast with Father Christmas and VIP Storytime at Proteus Theatre, Basingstoke
Enjoy a delicious festive-themed continental breakfast, followed by a special story-telling session, before joining the 11am performance of Mrs Christmas's Christmas List in festive surroundings and get a sneak peek of the magical settings for the show. You will meet and interact with the colourful characters from the show and spend some quality 1-2-1 time chatting with Father Christmas himself!

29 Dec
Coral Challow Hurdle at Newbury Racecourse
Situated ideally between Christmas and New Year, it's the perfect excuse to get family and friends together and enjoy a day out at the races – but then again, who needs an excuse. The day – which features the Grade 1 Coral Challow Hurdle on the track – also boasts a host of free family-friendly activities and fun off it.





National Trust

Christmas near you

© Photography: National Trust Images/Arnel de Serra

Festive family days out at...

Hinton Ampner
Mottisfont
The Vyne

For more information please visit nationaltrust.org.uk/hampshire

Please check the website for latest opening dates and information.

*Family membership for 1 adult. One adult (aged 18+) and all children or grandchildren (17 or under) named on the membership. Under 5s go free.

Family membership from under **£10** per month*

Rock up and sign up