



M U M S & D A D S M A G A Z I N E

For families with children from 0 to 11

• Winter 2017/18

• Issue 59

• FREE

A close-up photograph of a young child with dark, curly hair, sitting and smiling broadly. The child is wearing a red and white horizontally striped long-sleeved onesie. A small, light-colored reindeer patch with a red nose and brown antlers is visible on the chest. The background is a soft-focus white surface decorated with gold and silver star-shaped ornaments.

Christmas party games

Born to dance

Free-range kids



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editor's note

Christmas is here! That blissful time of year when you can finally get the family together, dress them in cute matching jumpers, huddle around the blazing fire, put your feet up and just relax. Right?

Wrong! More like - that frantic time of year when you have to worry about the whole family having somewhere to sleep, the right presents, the right food, the right entertainment - and so the list goes on. But don't worry - with M&D as your seasonal guide, you should be able to transition effortlessly from mid-winter mayhem, to total festive tranquillity, and we've even got that post-seasonal blues period covered with articles to keep you reading all the way into spring.

We've got all your classic Christmas worries sorted. Turn to page 8 for a guide on arranging all your guests tetris-style, browse page 10 for hassle-free party games, and don't forget those all-important gift ideas from Giddy Goat Toy shop in Didsbury and JoJo Maman Bébé in Hale and Knutsford (pages 4 - 5).

At last Christmas is here! ...
and maybe it really will be blissful this year! **Zoe x**

Editor **Zoe Drobniś**
Art Editor **David Aldred**

Cover: JoJo Maman Bébé Reindeer Applique Baby Sleepsuit rrp £16.00

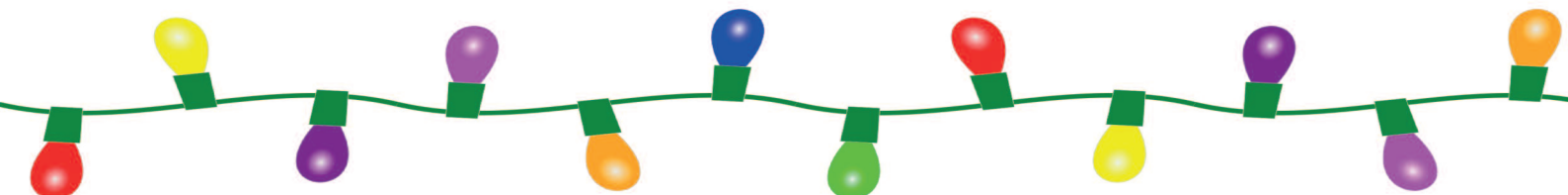
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Festive fashions with JoJo Maman Bébé

Cashmere Mix Robin Fair Isle Dress £26

Baby Elf Set with Hat £18

Penguin Jumper £24

Reindeer Jumper £24

Smocked Party Dress £28

It wouldn't be Christmas without a festive jumper! At JoJo you'll find all the classics; red nosed reindeer, polar bears, snowmen and robins in super soft cashmere mix knits. There's also a cashmere mix cardigan and dress in Fair Isle robin for a new spin on festive style. Jumpers start at 0-3 months so even those celebrating their very first Christmas can get in the spirit. There are also fun festive sleepsuits, bibs, onesies and little outfits for baby's Christmas - don't miss the adorable baby elf set ... you'll need that photo for their 18th birthday. For party princesses there are traditional party frocks with sweet Peter Pan collars, smocking details and checked prints.

As well as festive fashion, JoJo Maman Bébé offers a wide range of toys - the stunning designs come in a vibrant colour pallet but still keep a traditional style. Made with wood, these are toys that won't need to be hidden when your friends pop over for a mulled wine or two! Our favourites are the play kitchen, the picnic basket (complete with thermos!) and the wooden toy garage. If you are looking for presents which are original, imaginative and super sweet, JoJo Maman Bébé has it all.

Available from www.jojomamanbebe.co.uk

Pretty Reindeer Jumper £24

Red Tartan Smocked Dress £28

Wooden Toy Garage £39

Snowman Jumper £24

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Have a Giddy Christmas! by Jane Archavir

In Didsbury and across South Manchester, local independent businesses are pulling out the stops this Christmas to make life easier for you. In Didsbury, many shops, including Giddy Goat Toys will be opening late on Thursday evenings during December, so you can pop in and get your Christmas shopping done in peace.

At Giddy Goat Toys you can also buy online, click and collect, phone and reserve a gift or visit their shop in Didsbury village and browse the hundreds of toys, games, books and puzzles they have in store, and if inspiration fails to strike, they sell gift vouchers too!

If you're buying for kids and stuck for inspiration, the Giddy Goat girls have helpfully come up with their top ten favourite toys this Christmas.

Lottie Dolls (from £18.99)

These relatable, positive role model dolls are aimed at children aged 3+.

There are so many to choose from including Brownie, Stargazer, Fossil Hunter, Footballer, Snow Queen and Muddy Puddles. Which one is your favourite?



Wow Toys Ronnie Rocket £21.99

Wow Toys are known for their sturdy pre school toys, which don't need batteries and are virtually indestructible. Ronnie Rocket is a super-sonic space rocket; pull the cord on Ziggy the robot to trigger the countdown and then, **BLAST OFF!** The perfect toy for children aged 18 months +.



Mini Microscooter from £59.99

Swiss made, sturdy and stylish these Microscooters come in mini (for mini children) and maxi (for older kids). The perfect present for children who are on Santa's nice list.



Qwirkle £23.99



Christmas isn't Christmas without a board game to entertain the family. Qwirkle is a fun game that takes about half an hour to play, it comes personally recommended by Amanda and is great for all ages from 5 to 105.

Perfect for post Christmas dinner entertainment or for family games night.



Sylvanian Families Starry Point Lighthouse £59.99

Sylvanian Families will always be popular and collectable. The Sylvanian Families Starry Point Lighthouse would be a gorgeous "big present" for young Sylvanian fans this Christmas. Climb the seashell stairs and watch the stars twinkle, countdown to firework night or look at the moon right up close. This lovely lighthouse can even project stars onto your bedroom ceiling.



Djeco Geoform £26.99

Geoform is a brilliant magnetic set with lots of play value, which is both fun and educational. The magnetic shapes are a great way for children to learn colour and shape recognition and figure out how shapes can be arranged to make patterns and pictures.

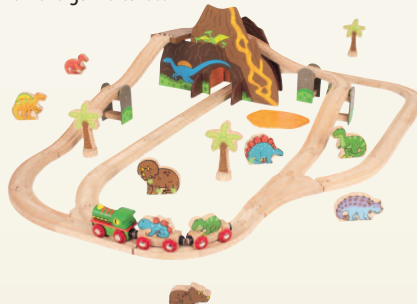


Meowsic £42.99

Possibly one of our favourite toys in our Didsbury shop for its utterly bonkers cat design is Meowsic. Not only does it look great, but this children's keyboard makes five different instrument sounds including a piano, bells, organ, banjo and that all important meowaphone. The perfect gift for musical cat lovers!



Doc Educational Robot £36.99 Doc is an amazing programmable robot, for children aged 5 - 8 years. He introduces children to robotic technology. They'll learn how to program the robot to move around the playmat and then use the robot to help solve the challenges set on the game cards.



Dinosaur wooden train set £54.99 Train sets are cool. Dinosaurs are cool. Put them together and you've got the coolest Christmas present ever! The set includes a dinosaur train, volcano tunnels, various pieces of wooden train track and of course a group of wooden dinosaurs to roam the Jurassic landscape.



Janod Wooden Play Kitchen £79.99

New to Giddy Goat Toys – the Janod Wooden Play Kitchen would be a wonderfully robust and colourful gift for any aspiring mini-chef. Complete with a hob, oven, kitchen sink and an array of utensils, you've got everything you need to cook up a storm this Christmas!

If you've got Christmas stockings to fill, Giddy Goat Toys have a huge selection of toys that are both under a fiver and small enough to fit into a stocking, including a wide range of Papo figures, from princesses to pirates, giraffes to dinosaurs and everything in-between. There are cute wiggly worms for babies and toddlers, and for older children there's a great selection of arty stationery such as scented pens, pencils and diaries. Current favourites such as tubs of slime and hatching dinosaur eggs are also perfect stocking fillers, just add a chocolate orange and a tangerine for Christmas morning smiles.



Giddy Goat Toys also have a fab range of LEGO and Playmobil Advent Calendars and of course Elf on the Shelf. With super-friendly staff who are always happy to help and prices to suit all budgets, let them you make Christmas shopping for kids easy-peasy-lemon-squeezy this year.

2 Albert Street • Didsbury Manchester M20 6RF call 0161 445 1097 or visit www.giddygoattoys.co.uk

Open Mon-Sat 9.30-5.30 and Sun 11.30-4. Open until 7 on Thursdays in December.

'Tis the season to hit the slopes *by Paul Wojnicki*



Book with a reputable operator

With the recent demise of Monarch still fresh in traveller's memories, it's reassuring to book with one of the big hitters when planning a skiing/snowboarding holiday. I always use Crystal as they're part of the TUI group, who will not be going out of business any time in the next century. They also have an excellent reputation for family ski holidays and were recently awarded 'Best Tour Operator' by the World Snow Awards. Some of the outstanding factors in this award were Crystal's excellent family friendly brochures and website, which recognises that we mums and dads need very detailed information and support before booking a ski holiday. Don't take my word for it though, download or order their brochure and you'll find all the ski school and childcare information you'll need upfront, enabling you to plan the perfect holiday for your needs.

Head north for guaranteed snow and non-skiing activities

Last year I wrote about an amazing trip to Ruka in Finland. Harrison, who was three at the time, hasn't stopped talking about it since. I wouldn't be much of a travel writer however if we visited the same destination every year, so this year we've booked Vemdalen in Sweden. We wanted a destination in the far north because it guarantees snow, and there's no worry of the kids struggling with altitude. Sweden and Finland also offer a range of other child friendly options if the kids don't take to skiing as well as you hoped. Dog sledding is fantastic fun and requires no lessons, reindeer rides are a relaxed way of enjoying the snow, and of course there are always plenty of free sledging opportunities if the kids don't enjoy skiing.

Visit Chill Factore for at least one lesson before you travel

It's a good idea to try a skiing or snowboarding lesson before you decide to book a skiing holiday, though holidays to winter wonderlands are often fun for non-skiers. Chill Factore have a range of options for families wanting to try out the slopes or hone their skills in anticipation of that big winter holiday. Taster sessions cost as little as £22 for younger visitors and take place on a gentle beginner slope. They are an ideal introduction for children- and adults - who have never skied or snowboarded before.

We couldn't decide between a Fun Taster or a private lesson but we opted with the latter because Harrison and I wanted to learn together and the mixed adult and child taster sessions are designed for kids aged 6+. At fifty minutes, the private lesson was slightly shorter than the fun taster sessions but we got the undivided attention of our instructor, more runs on the slopes and consequently learned a lot quicker. Our instructor Amanda had Harrison skiing after about twenty minutes, though there were one or two tumbles along the way of course. We had an amazing time and Harrison has been pestering me to take him back ever since. Three year old Ella was disappointed that she wasn't yet old enough to join us on the slopes, but Alena took her to Chill Factore's Mini Moose Land- next to the slopes- where she had a whale of a time playing in the snow, navigating the ice maze and sledging down a mini hill on a rubber ring. All in all, Chill Factore was a fantastic day out and was the highlight of the school holidays for us all, while whetting everyone's appetite for our trip to Sweden in Winter.

Pick a resort with slopes close to your accommodation

It goes without saying that skiing holidays can get a little chilly. Layers help, as does a good quality snow suit, but you'd be well advised to pick accommodation that's close to the slopes if you've got younger children. That way you can have a couple of hours in the snow in the morning, take lunch in your hotel and have another couple of hours in the afternoon. We booked Sörgårdarna Apartments in Vemdalen as they are in a central and super convenient location only a 1-minute walk to the slopes and 2 minutes walk to the resort centre. The apartments also have their own cooking facilities, which always helps to keep costs down, and there was a traditional Swedish sauna in each room to warm us up afterwards.

Consider weeks other than New Year and February half term

These weeks are the most popular with families but that means they are the most expensive and the busiest. Christmas week and Easter holidays are at the extreme ends of the ski season but you're still guaranteed snow if you travel somewhere like Sweden.

Oh, and don't forget sun protection

Skin and eye protection is just as important on a skiing holiday as it is on a summer one. Sunshine dancing off the snow can easily burn sensitive skin so a high factor sun screen is essential. It can also be dazzling so wear sunglasses or goggles, which are less likely to fall off and get lost.



Photos: Alena Chalmovska

Visit Santa's Grotto at Chill Factor^e!



If you're dreaming of a White Christmas, look no further - Chill Factor^e have the perfect gift this Winter! It's time to wrap up warm, as Santa's Grotto will be opening at Chill Factor^e, the North's premier visitor attraction, on the 11th November. The Grotto is a truly magical experience for all the family, and what's more, it's the only grotto in the country on real snow!

This year, enter the magical Winter Wonderland and visit Santa's Grotto - inspired by Hansel & Gretel's gingerbread house, with Santa's elves on hand to help spread the festive cheer! The Grotto is an enchanting experience for everyone, with the Christmas trees and festive lights making the snow sparkle. Every visitor will have the chance to meet the man himself, and if you're on the nice list, there may be a gift coming your way.

Entrance to the Grotto also comes with access to the Snow Park for some sub-zero fun. With Downhill Donuts (Santa's personal favourite!), a Snow Luge, the Luge Slip 'n' Slide and the Sledge-O-Mania, it's the perfect excuse to wrap up warm and get in the festive spirit. If your little one isn't old enough for the Snow Park, then Mini Moose Land is the perfect alternative for toddlers, and with prices starting from only £14 for two to visit the Grotto and Mini Moose Land, there's no excuse to miss out!

Santa will be in his Grotto every weekend from 11th November and every day in December from the 2nd right up until Christmas Eve. For more information and to book tickets, please visit www.chillfactore.com/christmas

SANTA, REAL SNOW, MAGIC & CHRISTMAS

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CHILLFACTORE.COM/CHRISTMAS

SANTA'S REAL SNOW GROTTO FROM £14

CHILL FACTOR^e

‘Room for one more?’ by Lucy Burt, Nest Interior Design

As we start to think about Christmas and all the excitement of this wonderful time of year, a common theme for many of us will be ‘... but where will be put everybody’?! A few mismatched chairs and the garden table plus tablecloth can often solve the problem of a few extra people for dinner. The big question is how to house the overnight guests without having to play musical beds with the whole family.

Fortunately, we have a few options for you to suit all styles and budgets and to help keep stress levels low all year around. Often, sofa beds perform neither function well due to firm cushions, thin mattresses and clunky mechanisms. Avoid these and opt for one of the new breed, well-crafted and stylish to boot.

For compact spaces, the Bed in a Bun from Loaf is nothing short of genius. At less than a square metre as a footstool and folding out into a handy single bed complete with headboard, this is ideal for any lounge or bedroom.



Bed in a Bun
www.loaf.com

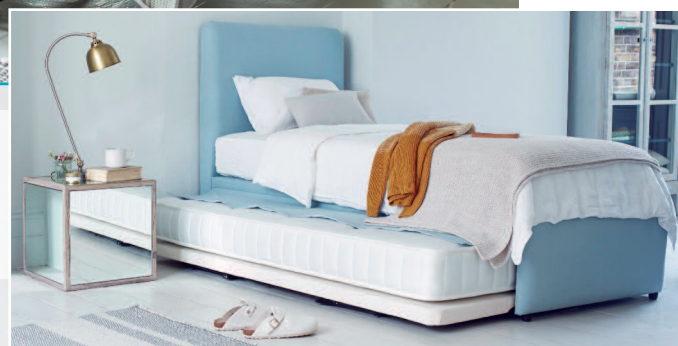


Fargo Trundle Bed
www.littlefolksfurniture.co.uk

Friends
Trundle Bed
www.loaf.com



If you are lucky enough to have a lounge or den with space for a corner sofa then it could make sense to upgrade to a sofa bed version, perfect for those without a spare room. The Milner or Bari models from made.com transform into a double bed and also house a storage compartment for bedding, making extra guests a doddle.



Children's rooms are always an ideal space to tuck away a spare bed for those impromptu sleepovers, but also for Christmas time when the children invariably want to bundle in together. Trundle beds are ideal for this, tucked away neatly to allow more floor space when not in use but quickly pulled out when required. Try the **Friends** bed from Loaf for an upholstered version or the **Fargo** bed from Little Folks for a wooden version in white, grey or blue.

If all else fails and you are short of time, keep a Bed in a Bag stashed in the wardrobe for emergency situations, a futon mattress in a storage bag, ready to roll out.



Milner & Bari Corner Storage Sofa Beds www.made.com



Bed in a Bag
www.futoncompany.co.uk

At nest we work on a variety of projects and we charge by the hour so you can enjoy exactly the required amount of input from us. We can both recommend all relevant contractors and work collaboratively with you to ensure your new space is tailored to your requirements. Just get in touch for an initial chat and quote M&D Winter for 10% off initial consultation fees.

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Gifts that last a lifetime

If you want to give a Christmas gift that really stands out, give an experience that lasts a lifetime. If you know a special someone who deserves a grown-up night out, or someone close to you who would love some quality time with their little one, why not give a perfectly tailored culinary experience with a Food Sorcery gift voucher?

Food Sorcery's *Cooking Together* classes are a great alternative to a restaurant night out. Chef will guide you and your partner or friend through a fun evening of learning how to create a restaurant-quality meal culminating

in sitting down to your self-made top notch food. *Cooking Together* is as much about spending quality time together as it is learning new skills - with plenty of fun along the way.



FOOD SORCERY

Cookery & Barista School



Similarly, *Big and Little Cooks* events are the perfect way to bring you and the youngster in your life closer together with not a screen in sight. Chef will guide you through a fun-filled afternoon of prepping and cooking a side dish,

main course, and most importantly, dessert. When the table is filled with the combined efforts of cooks both big and little, everyone sits down to share and revel in the meal they have made all by themselves.

So, if you're looking for a great night out - with or without the children - you can select the perfect Food Sorcery event for you and your nearest and dearest. To buy a gift voucher or to learn more about Food Sorcery, their classes and events visit www.foodsorcery.co.uk

Eat like a king! Baklava recipe from Food Sorcery

Do you feel adventurous this Christmas? Do you feel like having something unusual for your festive table? Something that you can make in your own kitchen together with your kids?

Baklava is a Mediterranean treat that came to us through centuries and countries. Its luxurious taste still prompts a saying "we are not rich enough to eat baklava every day" - it was a special treat for kings and dignitaries at one point in history and has been served for various traditional celebrations right through till our days. Christmas is one of them.

M&D asked Food Sorcery of Didsbury for their recipe. One which you can use for Christmas and beyond, prepare single headedly or together with your family; and use to surprise your guests with the ancient mastery and modern simplicity of your baking.

Preparation time - Approx 30 mins

Cooking time - 30 mins to 1 hour

Serves - Makes 25 - 30 pieces

Ingredients

18 sheets ready-made filo pastry (unwrap and keep under a damp tea-towel until you are ready to use);
150g unsalted butter, you'll need extra for greasing;



200g chopped nuts (almonds, walnuts, or pistachios are best, or use a combination of them);
2 tbsp granulated sugar; 1 tsp ground cardamon

For the syrup

300g granulated sugar; 250ml water; 1 tbsp lemon juice; 340g of honey; 1 cinnamon stick; Finely ground pistachios for garnish (optional).

Method

1 Preheat the oven to 180C / 350F / Gas 4.

2 Grease a 17 x 28cm (11 x 7in) baking tray with butter.

3 Melt the remaining butter in a saucepan over low heat or in a microwave.

4 Lay 10 sheets of filo pastry, one at a time, into the tray, brushing each sheet with butter before adding the next.

5 In a clean bowl, mix together the nuts, sugar and cardamon and spread the mixture over the pastry in the tray.

6 Layer up the remaining sheets on top of the nut mixture, brushing each sheet with butter, as before.

7 Using a sharp knife, cut into the top layers of the pastry to make small squares.

8 Place baklava in the preheated oven for approximately 30-35 minutes, or until lightly golden brown, and edges appear slightly crisp. Remove and allow to cool slightly.

9 For the syrup, heat the sugar, water, lemon juice, honey and cinnamon stick in a small saucepan and bring to the boil, then reduce to medium low heat and let simmer for 7 minutes until slightly thickened. Remove the cinnamon stick.

10 Pour the syrup over the baklava and leave to cool. Garnish with some finely crushed pistachios if desired and Cut into small pieces to serve.

It's free to party! Top homemade Christmas Party Games

Christmas is a time to spend with your family and friends. So, step away from your phones, tablets and laptops and enjoy some quality time together! Nothing says good old-fashioned fun like a party game. The kids may roll their eyes at first, but at the end of the day party games are guaranteed to be enjoyed by everyone.



Here, The Money Shop share five of their favourite homemade Christmas party games, all of which can be made at next to no cost at all.

Christmas Charades

Everyone loves a game of charades, and you can easily stick to a strictly Christmas theme.

If you've never played before (in which case, where have you been?!), then here's what you'll need to do: firstly, create a list of Christmas themed songs, carols and films, and put them into a hat.

Next, separate yourself into pairs, and nominate someone to go first. They must pick a term at random, and then act it out without speaking, whilst the other teams guess what it is.

The team who has the most points when all of the terms have been acted out wins!

Pin the Nose on Rudolph

Pin the tail on the donkey just got a festive makeover. Get the kids to draw their best reindeer, whilst you cut out a nose from red paper.

Next, take it in turns to try and pin the nose on Rudolph whilst blindfolded (no peeking!).

The person who gets the nose closest to the right place wins. To extend the game, play multiple rounds, awarding a point to each person who wins the round, with the first person to reach three points the winner.

Find Santa's Friends

This is definitely one the kids will love! All you need are some festive-themed chocolates, which you can pick up cheaply from the supermarket. Hide the chocolates in various places round the house, and give each child their own mini-stocking, before letting them loose to find them all!

Snowball Slam

This game is sure to bring out the competitive side in the whole family, designed by Crystal Underwood, writer and creator of 'Growing a Jeweled Rose' (www.growingajeweledrose.com), a website packed with fun and educational activities for children. Start by styling Styrofoam cups into snowmen using felt, glue, and your imagination. Next, you'll need to locate a 'snowball' - a small beanbag or a ball will be just fine. Once you've stacked the Styrofoam cups into a pyramid, take it in turns to throw the snowball and see how many cups you can knock over. You can also amend this game into Christmas bowling, abandoning the beanbag in favour of a ball, and arranging the snowmen like skittles.

Christmas Scattergories

This is another classic game that's been given a festive spin. You can either make your own list, or print off a readymade themed list from www.mypartygames.com



Once you've all got a copy, pick a letter at random and try to answer as many things on the list as possible in the time given. For instance, if the letter chosen is J, you may want to answer the Christmas-themed song with 'Jingle Bell Rock'. When the timer has run out, go through your answers, with every unique answer scoring a point. After three rounds (using a different letter each time), add up your points and the highest scorer wins.

These games will help to keep your whole family occupied this Christmas, without anyone reaching for their phone or tablet once!

Arty fun and amazing memories



At the Bean & Brush Family Art Café, they understand the importance of collecting mementos of the milestones in a child's life. Michelle Starling, the owner of the café says, "When they age by years in what seems like a month, it's wonderful to have those memories and keepsakes to look back on; nostalgic items that remind you of the time when they were much smaller. This was the idea we had in mind when we opened Bean & Brush Family Art Café. As parents and residents of Sale, we wanted to create the type of local café we would want to visit with our children, for special treats, or birthdays, or simply to spend time together as a family."

Bean & Brush has been open for nearly seven years now and is proud to be a part of Sale's thriving community of independent family run businesses.



The café is located in a quaint reclaimed space, formally Sale's mail sorting office, in the heart of the village.



Divided over two floors, the comfortable café area is overlooked by the art studio mezzanine with a special children's nook tucked away in the corner.

Michelle continues, "We serve a great range of drinks and cakes, as well as sandwiches and hot meals. We didn't want the food to be the standard fare you would expect from a chain run coffee shop. We chose to offer seasonal menus packed with items that are freshly made, using local produce wherever possible. It's a great place for a cosy family meal with dishes to tempt the pickiest of eaters and please the most health conscious of mums and dads. Our menu ranges from healthy snacks to cheeky treats, all served with an impressive range of drinks including locally brewed beer, wine and prosecco."

Eating together as a family is a wonderful way to spend time together and make memories, but it is also great to have tactile reminders - this is where Bean & Brush's art studio comes in.

Here you can create a range of art projects and these are not just drawings that you stick on the fridge door. These are unique items that will take a special place in your home, and in your heart.

Michelle explains, "One of our most popular products is the clay imprints."



These are lasting reminders of just how tiny your child once was and a treasured memento for families visiting our art studio. Just imagine asking your child to put their hand next to the imprint in a few months' time and see how much they've grown.

So often we see children in the studio lovingly and painstakingly decorating gifts with slogans such as 'I Love Dad' or 'Mummy's Cake Plate'. Items that you know are going to take pride of place on desks at work, on mantelpieces or in family kitchens. I have a coffee mug on my desk of my youngest son's handprint turned into a flower with the phrase 'If Mummies were flowers, I'd pick you!' which I absolutely love."

Another way Bean & Brush creates wonderful memories is by hosting amazing birthday parties. What better way to celebrate a birthday than surrounded by all your friends, getting messy and eating pizza and ice cream. Bean & Brush make the day extra special, by giving the birthday child an arty gift, a keepsake decorated with the fingerprints of all their family and friends."

Open seven days a week, very reasonably priced and comfortable for both parents and children, Bean & Brush Art Café sounds like an ideal place for a family day out or for a memorable birthday party.

t: 0161 973 2140

w: beanandbrush.co.uk

e: bookings@beanandbrush.co.uk

Free-range kids - not just for Christmas?

by Sandi Mann



Tis the season to be jolly but tis also the season to relax, chill and forget about bedtimes, routine and the usual regimes. In fact, one of the best things about the whole festive period for many parents is that, for around 7-10 days, the rule book is nowhere to be seen - buried, under an avalanche of wrapping paper, tinsel and glitter and not to resurface until the New Year. Who doesn't love the late nights, snuggled in front of the TV watching a family film whilst little hands dip stickily into boxes of Quality Street? Who isn't enamoured by the lazy lie-ins, untroubled by piercing alarm clocks, as we all emerge dreamily from the cosy caves of our duvets when we (or, most likely, our tummies) feel like it? Which parent doesn't relish the pleasure in being Chilled Out Mum or Dad who languidly turns a blind eye to the sugar consumption that is dominating their children's nutritional intake?

This, after all, is what the festive season is all about. No school, no rules, no regulations. Tis the season for free-range parenting.

For some parents however, this relaxed style of parenting is not a temporary measure and does not start and end with the festive season. For an increasing number of families in the UK, free-range or 'hands-off' parenting is a lifestyle, not a season. For them, there is no school (home-schooling takes

preference), no set bedtimes, no set structure and few rules. The emphasis is a child-centred approach where kids make their own choices and make their own mistakes - and learn to live with the consequences. Thus, a child can choose to stay up till 2am but they will learn that doing so makes them feel tired and grouchy the next day - so they will learn to choose a different bedtime themselves, without that rule being imposed on them externally.

The issue of free-range parenting reached the popular conscience in March this year when so-called 'off the grid' parents, Matt and Adele Allen, from Brighton, allowed their nappy-free one year old to relieve herself live on the set of *This Morning*. The same parents, who watched their kids clamber rambunctiously over the sofas on set, also admitted that their 6 year old son was illiterate (they don't believe in forcing learning on their kids) and still breastfed, and that they all co-sleep in one bed - leading to the accusation that they were bringing their kids up to be 'feral'. Parents were quick to condemn their off-road parenting style but interest in it is growing; recently a Channel 4 documentary explored so-called 'feral families' whose kids can't read or write at the age of 14, and who were pictured brandishing knives and helping themselves to ice cream at 2 in the morning. It all made for entertaining TV and allowed the chattering masses to tut tut their way across twitter, but is free range parenting really so bad?

As a mum of three, I must say that, come January, I already feel nostalgic about the lazy festive period when most of us are happy to let our kids be 'free-range'. It is always sobering when the strict bedtime routines kick in again, the alarm clock is set and the chocolate and sweets go back into the treat cupboard. But, as a psychologist, I believe that the whole reason that we love the freedom of the festive season is because it is in such contrast to the rest of the year. We may wish it could be Christmas every day, but if it were, there would actually be no Christmas at all. Studies have shown that we appreciate things more when they are scarce; eating chocolate all day, every day would not actually give us more pleasure than eating it once a day when we would savour it more.

I also strongly believe that kids need structure and that rules and routine help them make sense of their world. But, I also think we can take a leaf out of the 'free-range parents' book by chilling out a bit too; giving children choice and allowing them to make their own mistakes can foster independence. Today, too many parents are both cotton wooling their kids far too much (apparently, British parents are the strictest of all nations) and imposing so much structure that they don't have the time or ability to make their own choices, to get bored, to create their own fun or to problem-solve. In my book *The Science of Boredom* (Little Brown) I argue that kids need downtime and today's helicopter parent does not provide enough of this.

So, if at the end of the free-range season you are preparing to return to your usual hectic and exhausting diary that keeps your kids busy (and super-safe) from dawn to dusk, perhaps it's time to downtime their schedule. I'm not suggesting abandoning school, or bedtime, or proper meals, but, actually, it is just possible that those relaxed and chilled-out free-range parents can teach the rest of us a thing or two - and not just at Christmas.

Dr Sandi Mann is the director of The Mind Training Clinic and specialises in the treatment of phobias, panic attacks and anxiety conditions. She is also author of *Surviving the Terrible Teens* and *Dealing With Difficult Eaters*, both published by Crimson. www.mindtrainingclinic.com

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EUREKA!
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eureka.org.uk

From
25 Nov
- 7 Jan

Events Watch

December

December until Christmas Eve 10 - 19pm

Discover the magic of Santa's Gingerbread Grotto this Christmas!

This year you and your little ones can revel in the magic that is Santa's Gingerbread Grotto! Take one step in and feel the crunch of the real snow below your feet! You'll be stunned by the magnificent Gingerbread Grotto that is Santa's home right up until Christmas Eve. Surrounded by real snow sparkling trees, glistening lights and chattering elves.

Chill Factore, Trafford Quays Leisure Village, Trafford Way, Manchester M41 7JA
www.chillfactore.com

December - 2 January every day

DINOSAURS IN THE WILD

You will be able to climb aboard the time machine and travel back to see and feel what it was really like to be there, in the late Cretaceous, 67 million years ago.

Your adventure will take you to TimeBase 67 - an extraordinary research station built in the past - to meet time-travelling scientists who now study real, living dinosaurs instead of fossils.

This unique, immersive live adventure combines theatre, theme park fun and the very latest scientific research

EventCity, Phoenix Way, Off Barton Dock Road
Tel: 0843 487 5555 www.eventcity.co.uk

December - 7 January daily 11:00 - 20:45

The Rink at Cathedral Gardens

The famous Manchester ice rink returns to Cathedral Gardens for another Christmas in the city. Strap on your skates and hit the ice, maybe with some help from the rink penguins! Loads of fun for all of the family.

Cathedral Gardens, Manchester M4 3BG
Tel: 03336 663366 www.ticketsource.co.uk/
therinkatcathedralgardens

December - 17 February every day

Cosgrove Hall Films Exhibition

Waterside, the new home of the Cosgrove Hall Films archive, is celebrating with an exhibition featuring your favourite Cosgrove Hall characters, including Dangermouse, Bill and Ben the Flower Pot Men, Noddy, and many more.

Expect to see original puppets, story boards and props being exhibited together for the first time, alongside behind-the-scenes insights into the creative processes that brought this array of beloved characters to the screen.

Waterside Arts Centre
1 Waterside Plaza Sale
Lancashire, M33 7ZF
Tel: 01619125616
www.watersideartscentre.co.uk

December - March every day

Monday to Friday - 12.30 Saturday and Sunday - 1.30 Duration 20 min

Human and machine go head to head in the ultimate battle of metal versus minds

This show features an array of fiendishly difficult tests and experiments, some that can be done by human, others by machine. Who does it best? The audience will decide. Come along for a light-hearted look into the science, ethics and future of automation.

Recommended for age 7 and older.

Museum of Science and Industry, Liverpool Road Manchester M3 4FP. Tel: 0161 832 2244
www.msimanchester.org.uk/

December - March every day 10:00-17:00

Experiment! - science in action

Stare into the mirror of infinity, create a tornado, and watch your own skeleton ride a bicycle. Find out how the power of gears can give even the weakest of weaklings super strength. Be mesmerised by bubbles passing through giant columns of coloured liquids to demonstrate viscosity, see how many of the city's homes can be lit by using household waste as power, and measure your reactions against the speed of light.

Recommended for all ages
Museum of Science and Industry
Liverpool Road Manchester M3 4FP
Tel: 0161 832 2244
www.msimanchester.org.uk/

Saturdays 11:00-12:30

Saturday Playhouse

A free, weekly art activity for children and their families in the dedicated Lookout space for families. Each week we look out for what we can see both inside and outside, taking inspiration from our theatres, galleries and surrounding landscape at Salford Quays and MediaCityUK

The Lowry
Pier 8, Salford Quays, Salford, M50 3AZ
Tel: 0843 208 6000 www.thelowry.com

Saturdays 10 - 11:15 & 11:30-12:30

Toddler Outdoor Art Club

Workshops that bring art, nature and creativity together that take place come rain or shine.

Sessions designed especially for little explorers, set in the beautiful Whitworth Park. Try sculpting with mud, painting in puddles, making dens, hunting for bugs and lots more led by artists and forest school practitioners. The sessions are run in the park whatever the weather so make sure you come prepared. case.

For children under 5 and their grown-ups.
The Whitworth, The University of Manchester
Oxford Road, Manchester M15 6ER
Tel: 01612 757450
www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk/

Saturdays and Sundays 12.30 and 1.30

Engineer Evan's difficult day

Learn how a steam engine works in this interactive show right in the pulsating heart of the Power Hall. It's lots of fun and a little bit loud. Stoker Sam is learning how to get Pender the steam locomotive up and running, but when Engineer Evan leaves him to his own devices, Sam's going to need to call on the help of his friends.

Recommended for age 7 - 11
Museum of Science and Industry
Liverpool Road Manchester M3 4FP
Tel: 0161 832 2244 www.msimanchester.org.uk/

Mondays 13:00-15:00

Artbaby - Musicbaby - Drop In Sessions

Designed for babies and their grown-ups. Self-led sensory workshops explore sounds, art and music.

The Whitworth, The University of Manchester
Oxford Road, Manchester M15 6ER
Tel: 01612757450 www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk

Mondays 10.00 - 15.00

Early Years Atelier

This free, drop-in space is based on the early years philosophy of Reggio Emilia, where the atelier (or art studio) is a place for child-led artistic exploration, a laboratory for trying out ideas and playing with materials. It is not a

classroom. There won't be a teacher or any pre-designed activities. It is simply a place where children and adults can get messy, play creatively and follow their own interests.

The Whitworth, The University of Manchester,
Oxford Road, Manchester M15 6ER
Tel: 0161 2757450
www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk

1-10, 14-23 December 16:45-20:00

Christmas at Dunham Massey

There's something for everyone at this festive time of year as the one mile sparkling path winds its way through the historic woodland in a magical after dark experience. Father Christmas sees you on your way through twinkling tunnels, a swaying lawn of fibre optic colour and beside glowing waterside reflections. Complete your stroll under the stars with spiced cider, mulled wine or hot chocolate, whilst the aroma of roasting chestnuts fills the air, before shopping for Christmas gifts.

Dunham Massey, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA14 4SJ
Tel: 0161 941 1025
www.nationaltrust.org.uk/dunham-massey

8 - 10, 15 - 17 and 23 December

The Twelve Days of Christmas



Join in with the count down to the big day and learn the secret symbolism behind this well-known Christmas carol. Go on a magical journey through the festive Christmas Mansion, decorated with fresh foliage and greenery, inspired by turtle doves, gold rings and ladies dancing! Music, laughter and secrets weave through the grand staterooms and servants' quarters with festive treats and seasonal craft demonstrations on offer. Tatton Park, Knutsford, Cheshire
Tel: 01625 374400 www.tattonpark.org.uk

8-11, 15-24 December 11:00-15:00

A Regency Christmas

During the Regency when Thomas Legh lived at Lyme, Christmas was a time of celebration. There wasn't the emphasis on gift giving as there is today, instead the focus was on spending time with family and friends at parties, feasts and gatherings. Visit the house on open days to see how the season was celebrated. Carol singing on selected dates.
Lyme Park, Disley, Stockport, Cheshire, SK12 2NR
Tel: 01663 762023
www.nationaltrust.org.uk/lyme-park

8, 15 December 10 - 15:30 (30 min session)

Baby and Toddler meet Father Christmas

A special Christmas baby and toddler storytelling and play session which includes a private family visit to Father Christmas and a gift just for your little one.

Quarry Bank, Styal, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 4LA
Tel: 01625 527468
www.nationaltrust.org.uk/quarry-bank

9 - 10, 16 - 23 December 10 - 11:00

Autism-friendly grotto visits!

Christmas is an absolute feast for the senses - it's one of the things that we love about the festive season: all the sights, sounds, smells and general festive sensations.

However, this rich sensory activity can have the opposite effect for people with autism or other sensory conditions. Grotto visits to see Father Christmas and his elf helpers can be impossible for some families due to the mix of flashing lights, festive music and for some children, even just seeing grown-ups wearing beards or costumes. At Eureka! they created Autism-Friendly grotto sessions! The team are all trained in autism awareness, and for this dedicated grotto sessions are tailored in a number of ways: turning off any flashing festive lights, having bookable sessions to prevent the need to queue (for general grotto sessions it's first-come, first-served), adjusting lighting to suit each child (some prefer dimmed lighting, some prefer the lights right up), turning the festive music off, even removing beards or any costume items if required.

At the start of each 10 minute visit, a special elf will discuss your child's individual requirements, before nipping in to see Santa and make sure that everything is just as you requested.

Eureka! The National Children's Museum
Discovery Road, Halifax HX1 2NE
Tel: 01422 330069
www.eureka.org.uk/plan-your-visit

9 - 10, 16 - 17 and 23 December 11 - 16:00

Father Christmas at the Farm

Come and see your favourite farmyard friends when you visit Father Christmas and his reindeer, Prancer and Dancer. Live music from carol singers, brass bands, children's entertainers, face painting, meet Aunt Mary in her Christmas Cottage who will be making traditional salt dough decorations (take one home to decorate!) and meet all your farmyard favourites around the nativity including our two donkeys, Frosty and Huw.

Special admission price for this holiday event:
£7 per adult, £6.50 per child (includes gift from Father Christmas). Tatton Park, Knutsford, Cheshire. Tel: 01625 374400
www.tattonpark.org.uk

9-10, 16-17 Dec 10:30-15:30 (30' session)

Meet Father Christmas at Quarry Bank

Wish lists at the ready! Join in with a special half-hour session of festive activities, including a private family visit to Father Christmas and a gift. Suitable for children up to 10 years

Quarry Bank, Styal, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 4LA
Tel: 01625 527468
www.nationaltrust.org.uk/quarry-bank

9-10, 16-17, 21-24 December 9.30 - 16.00

(9.30-13.00 on 24 December)

East Lancashire Railway's Santa Specials

Take a steam train ride to Rawtenstall and back through the beautiful Irwell Valley. Soak up the festive feeling provided by a traditional brass band and carol singing. Say hello to costumed characters on your journey. Be mesmerized by the on-board magician. Meet Santa and his happy helpers as they make their way through the carriages giving a gift to each child. Receive a biscuit and juice drink for children and a mince pie and festive tippie for grown-ups. Hunt for hidden treasure in Bury Transport Museum with the Great Christmas Treasure Hunt.

The East Lancashire Railway, Bury Bolton Street Station, Bolton Street, Bury, Lancashire BL9 0EY.
T: 0161 764 7790 www.eastlancsrailway.org.uk

Events Watch

10, 17 December 10:00-16:00

Artist Sundays

Extraordinary artists invent offbeat and imaginative ways for you and your family to explore the Whitworth - every Sunday.
University of Manchester, Oxford Rd, Manchester M15 6ER. T: 01612 757450
www.whitworth.manchester.ac.uk

13th December (Hall opens at 19:00)

Carols by Renaissance

Returning to Bramall Hall due to popular demand 'Renaissance' will perform a mixed repertoire of secular and Christmas classics. Come along, sing and celebrate the season.

Price: £13.15. Tickets include a warmed glass of mulled wine, a delicious mincemeat pie and a view of the Hall decked out for Christmas, this year in Scandinavian style.
Bramall Hall, Hall Road, Bramhall, Stockport SK7 3NX. Tel: 0161 474 2020

16 December 13:00 - 16:00

Christmas family tour

How did people celebrate Christmas in the past? Which of our traditions began in the Tudor period? Find out on this special, festive version of Bramall Hall family tour.

Price: Children £5, accompanying adult £2, under 4s free. Festive treat included in the price.
Bramall Hall, Hall Road, Bramhall, Stockport SK7 3NX. Tel: 0161 474 2020
www.stockport.gov.uk/events

16 Dec., 20 Jan., 17 February 9:15 - 12:15

Open doors

Open doors is a creative workshop especially for

autistic children and children with other social communication issues, their families and carers. The doors are opened early just for you so that you can come enjoy and explore art together as a family. We have a designated Quiet room in the gallery, a space away from everything to feel safe and calm. For children and young people aged 5-16.

Manchester art Gallery, Mosley Street, Manchester M2 3JL. Tel: 0161 235 8888
www.manchesterartgallery.org

17 December 13:00 - 16:00

Yuletide Sunday

Yuletide Sunday with traditional bell ringers, carol singing and Father Christmas. Visit the Hall and as you see it beautifully dressed for Christmas, listen to the talented Burbage handbell ringers and enjoy carols by local community choir, N-Choir. Father Christmas will be flying from the North Pole and parking his sleigh in the Courtyard.

Price: Adult £5, concessions £3.75, student £3.75, children under 16 free
Bramall Hall, Hall Rd, Bramhall, Stockport SK7 3NX. Tel: 0161 474 2020

17 December 12:00 - 15:00

Father Christmas is in the House

Visit Father Christmas in his grotto in Staircase House and get a present.

Suitable for all those who believe in Father Christmas. Price: £4 per child, one accompanying adult free, £2 additional adults.
Staircase House, 30/31 Market Place, Stockport, SK1 1ES. Tel: 0161 474 4444
www.stockport.gov.uk/events

23 December from 15:00

Christmas carols in the Stableyard

A live band and festive carols in the beautiful Stableyard. Indulge in a spot of Xmas shopping or take some time to relax before the Carol concert. Tatton Park, Knutsford, Cheshire.

Tel: 01625 374400 www.tattonpark.org.uk

31 Dec., 28 Jan., 25 Feb., 11:00 - 12:30

Relaxed Playhouse!

Relaxed Playhouse is an accessible visual art activity for children with additional needs aged 5-11 and their families.

Led by an experienced visual artist this laid back activity will offer families the opportunity to spend time together doing something creative and having fun.

The Lowry, Pier 8, Salford Quays, Salford M50 3AZ
Tel: 0843 208 6000 www.thelowry.com

January

2 - 8 January

Spot of storytelling and animation!

Switch those imaginations on in these interactive story sessions or create your own stop motion animation in one of the hands-on workshops!

Eureka! The National Children's Museum
Discovery Road, Halifax HX1 2NE
Tel: 01422 330069
www.eureka.org.uk/plan-your-visit

2 January - 25 March 10:00-17:00

Hide and seek trail

Museum Mouse has a new trail for you to enjoy. Can you find Museum Mouse in the galleries? Suitable for all ages.

Staircase House, 30/31 Market Place, Stockport, SK1 1ES. Tel: 0161 474 4444
www.stockport.gov.uk/events

5 January, 2 February 10:00 - 12:00

Bramall Hall Dragon club

An exciting developmental discovery session for children aged 2 to 5 with stories, play and exploration in the Hall and park.

Price: £4 per child, normal admission price for adults. Bramall Hall, Hall Road, Bramhall, Stockport SK7 3NX. Tel: 0161 474 2020
www.stockport.gov.uk/events

12 January 11:00 - 11:45

Messy Milliners

An exciting and innovative messy play session with a hat-making theme.

Suitable for babies and early walkers. Hat Works Museum, Wellington Mill, Wellington Rd South, Stockport SK3 0EU T: 0161 474 2399
www.stockport.gov.uk/events

21,27 January 10:30 - 12 or 13:30 - 15

Make a Scarecrow

Join Tatton's talented team of scarecrow makers and help them get ready for our annual festival. Hear about how and why scarecrows have been used, before going on to design your own... you bring the creativity and the rest will be supplied! All scarecrows created will be on public display in the Gardens, as part of the Scarecrow Festival in February - you will receive a complimentary admission voucher as a thank you gift!

Recommended for families with children aged 6 and above - adults must purchase a ticket
Price: £12 p/p. Tatton Park, Knutsford, Cheshire T: 01625 374400 www.tattonpark.org.uk

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Shows and Pantos

21 January 11.00 - 13.00

Winter Birdwatch

Join members of the local Knutsford Ornithological Society and a Tatton Ranger at the 'Allen Bird Hide' for a drop-in session looking at winter wildfowl on the meres. Have a go with a telescope or ask the experts. All donations welcome to help cover the cost of bird feed for the year. Tatton Park, Knutsford, Cheshire Tel: 01625 374400 www.tattonpark.org.uk

February

20 February 9:30-10:30

Deer Feed and Trailer Ride

Take a trailer ride with the Rangers to watch the daily deer feed. Get a close look at hundreds of deer feeding in their beautiful natural setting. Minimum age: 4 years old. This event must be pre-booked and includes park entry admission on the day of the workshop. Price: £10 per person Tatton Park, Knutsford, Cheshire Tel: 01625 374400 www.tattonpark.org.uk

21-24 February 13:00-15:00

Creative family workshops

February half term workshops for families. These sessions are suitable for all ages; there are two artists, who work with children, one with an early years specialism and one who develops activities for older children. Manchester Art Gallery, Mosley St, Manchester M2 3JL. 0161 235 8888 manchesterartgallery.org

17 - 25 February 10:00 - 17:00

Half term museum crafty makes

Pick up one of the craft bags provided and find everything you need to make something crafty linked to the galleries. Examples can be found in the museum's browse area. Price: £1 per activity bag. Suitable for ages 3+ Staircase House, 30/31 Market Place, Stockport, SK1 1ES. Tel: 0161 474 4444

www.stockport.gov.uk/events

23 February 10:00 - 12:00

Mad Hatters art and crafts club

An action packed session of arts and crafts with the emphasis on fun and age and ability appropriate crafts. Dress to get messy. Suitable for 2 to 5 years. Price: £7 (max of two accompanying adults free) Hat Works Museum, Wellington Mill Wellington Road South Stockport SK3 0EU Tel: 0161 474 2399 www.stockport.gov.uk/events

24 February 13:00 - 14:00

Family Tour of Bramhall Hall

Find out interesting facts about Bramhall Hall. Who lived there? What did they eat? Where did they go to the toilet? Suitable for ages 4 plus. £4 per child, normal admission price for adults Bramhall Hall, Hall Road, Bramhall, Stockport SK7 3NX. Tel: 0161 474 2020 www.stockport.gov.uk/events

The M&D Events Watch and Shows and Pantos listings have been carefully selected to offer our readers useful information. Although every effort is made to ensure that information is correct at time of going to press, M&D cannot be held liable for any errors or omissions. We strongly advise you to check details with the event organisers.

Shows & Pantos

Aladdin

The Plaza December - 7 January

Take a magical carpet ride to the North West's home of sensational pantomime entertainment for the glittering production Aladdin. Featuring breath-taking special effects this affordable festive family treat is an absolute must for you, your friends, family or Group to enjoy. The Plaza, Mersey Square, Stockport, Cheshire, SK1 1SP Tel: 0161 477 7779 www.stockportplaza.co.uk

A Christmas Carol

Octagon Theatre Bolton December - 13 Jan.

Original story by Charles Dickens adapted for the stage by Neil Duffield. Charles Dickens' cherished festive tale is brought to life in this enchanting stage adaptation full of joy, song, and magic! Featuring a host of classic Christmas carols this heartwarming and uplifting story is the perfect festive treat. Octagon Theatre Bolton, Howell Croft South, Bolton, BL1 1SB T: 01204 520661 octagonbolton.co.uk

Dick Whittington

Oldham Coliseum December - 13 January

The North West's favourite pantomime is packed with laugh-out-loud gags, thigh slapping songs, and a generous helping of "it's behind you's"! Dick Whittington has fabulous costumes, glitz and glamour, silliness and slapstick and hit songs to sing along to. This pantomime appeals to all the family, from kids to not-so-grown-up grown-ups. A great way to celebrate Christmas. Oldham Coliseum Theatre, Fairbottom Street Oldham OL1 3SW Tel: 0161 624 2829 www.coliseum.org.uk

Around The World In 80 Days

The Lowry 5 December - 7 January

The mysterious and fabulously wealthy Phileas Fogg wagers his life's fortune that he can circumnavigate the globe in just 80 days. Theresa Haskins celebrated production embarks on six month UK tour including a Summer Season in London and a Christmas engagement at the Lowry. A cast of eight play over 125 characters in this imaginative, high-spirited escapade including six trains, five boats, four fights, three dances, two circus acts and an elephant! The Lowry, Pier 8, Salford Quays, Salford, M50 3AZ Tel: 0843 208 6000 www.thelowry.com

The Gruffalo

The Lowry 6 December - 7 January



Join Mouse on a daring adventure through the deep, dark wood in Tall Stories' magical, musical adaptation of the classic picture book by Julia Donaldson and Axel Scheffler.

Songs, laughs and scary fun for children aged 3 and up and their grown-ups, in the much-loved show that's toured Britain and the world! The Lowry, Pier 8, Salford Quays, Salford, M50 3AZ Tel: 0843 208 6000 www.thelowry.com Red Riding Hood and the Wolf

HOME

7 December - 30 December

After last year success Little Angel Theatre came back to celebrate this festive season! You may think you know the story of Red Riding Hood, sugar and spice and all things nice. But there are two sides to every story, so let's hear it from the Wolf himself! Enjoy a whole new spin on this fairy tale and remember to never judge anyone by how they look! Home, 2 Tony Wilson Place Manchester M15 4FN Tel: 0161 200 1500 www.homemcr.org

Sleeping Beauty

Buxton Opera House 9 - 31 December

Welcome to Buxtonia - a happy land full of lovable characters where the beautiful Princess Aurora is planning her 18th birthday party. But vengeful fairy Maleficent has her own plans for Aurora, namely to fulfil a curse made when the princess was just a baby. Will Dame Nanny Nora, her daft sidekick Billy and handsome prince Christopher save the day, or will Aurora sleep for 100 years? There's only one way to find out! Join us at the glorious Buxton Opera House for another rip-roaring panto adventure. James Holmes ('Clive' from the hit comedy series Miranda) returns as Dame Nanny Nora, while Jessica Revell ('Elektra' from CBBC's Tracy Beaker Returns and The Dumping Ground) is the lovely Princess Aurora. Buxton Opera House, Water Street, Buxton, Derbyshire, SK17 6XN. Tel: 0845 127 2190 www.buxtonoperahouse.org.uk

Dick Whittington

Manchester Opera House 9 Dec. - 7 Jan.

This year the Manchester Opera House will journey to London this festive season in the magical pantomime adventure Dick Whittington. Produced by Qdos Entertainment, the world's biggest pantomime producer, join our hero Dick Whittington (and his faithful feline pal) as he seeks fame, fortune and happiness to become Lord Mayor of London. Don't miss the action-packed pantomime full of laughter, music and dance! Opera House, 3 Quay St, Manchester, Lancashire M3 3HP. Tel: 0844 871 3018 www.manchestertheatres.com/operahouse.htm

Comedysportz Improvised Pantomime

Waterside Arts Centre 15 & 16 December

Fed up of the same old pantomimes every year? Then get ready for the brand new all ages, all improvised pantomime from the team behind ComedySportz. See all your favourite panto characters in a fabulous new pantomime made up before your eyes with a few favourite ComedySportz gags and games thrown in for good measure. Inspired by your suggestions, no two shows are the same with this alternative festive treat for the whole family to enjoy. Waterside Arts Centre, Sale, M33 7ZF Tel: 0161 912 5616 www.watersideartscentre.co.uk

The Snowman

The Hallé 22-23 December

Bring all the family along to the Hallé's screening of Raymond Briggs' classic animated film, The Snowman. The film is accompanied by the

Hallé performing Howard Blake's magical score live including a chorister singing 'Walking in the Air'. A Christmas treat not to be missed. The concert begins with Ian Stephens' orchestral take on Michael Rosen's children's masterpiece We're Going on a Bear Hunt. A beautiful concert. The Bridgewater Hall, Lower Mosley Street, Manchester Tel: 0161 907 9000 www.bridgewater-hall.co.uk

Elf - The Musical

The Lowry 24 December - 14 January



Based on the beloved 2003 New Line Cinema hit starring Will Ferrell, ELF is the hilarious tale of Buddy, a young orphan child who mistakenly crawls into Santa's bag of gifts and is transported back to the North Pole. Unaware that he is actually human, Buddy's enormous size and poor toy-making abilities cause him to face the truth. With Santa's permission, Buddy embarks on a journey to New York City to find his birth father, discover his true identity, and help New York remember the true meaning of Christmas. The Lowry Pier 8, Salford Quays, Salford, M50 3AZ Tel: 0843 208 6000 www.thelowry.com

Mother Goose

The Lowry 5 January - 7 January

Mother Goose is coming to The Lowry! We all need a little magic and this delightful traditional pantomime has it all in a golden eggshell. There's laughter, songs, dance and a fabulous cast to take you on an enchanting adventure into the kingdom of Gooseland. The Lowry, Pier 8, Salford Quays, Salford, M50 3AZ T: 0843 208 6000 www.thelowry.com

Salé Nomads: Puss In Boots

Waterside Arts Centre 12 - 21 January

Puss in Boots follows the story of Fairy Moonbeam who has always protected her village from a local ogre but is losing her power for 24 hrs. She makes a magical creature, Puss in Boots, to help protect the village and to beat the ogre once and for all. Waterside Arts Centre, Sale, M33 7ZF Tel: 0161 912 5616 www.watersideartscentre.co.uk

Shrek the Musical

Palace Theatre Manchester 16 - 28 January

Based on the story and characters from the Oscar®-winning DreamWorks Animation film, this hilarious and spectacular production turns the world of fairy tales upside down in an all-singing, all-dancing, must-see musical comedy. Irresistible mix of adventure, laughter and romance, guaranteed to delight audiences of all ages! Palace Theatre Manchester, 97 Oxford St, Manchester M1 6FT T: 0844 871 3019 palacetheatremanchester.net/

Events Watch

The Bear - Waterside Arts Centre, Sale

Tues 5 December '17 – Saturday 6 January '18. Times vary



Excitement is mounting as another of Raymond Briggs' (creator of *The Snowman*) much-loved picture books comes to life on stage this Christmas at Waterside. Ever wondered what it would be like to sit on a polar bear's lap? Or ride on its back? Have you ever tried to give a bear a bath? Or clear up its poo?! Looking after a

bear is exhausting stuff. One night when she's fast asleep, an enormous snowy white bear climbs into Tilly's bedroom. It has a big black tongue and a yawn as big as your head. But Tilly's not scared. Join Tilly and her great big white polar bear friend on a wild and magical adventure. With brilliant puppetry, lovely

music, entrancing storytelling and lots of laughs, this is a heart-warming and joyous show, the perfect Christmas treat for the family, and one they'll remember for a long time.

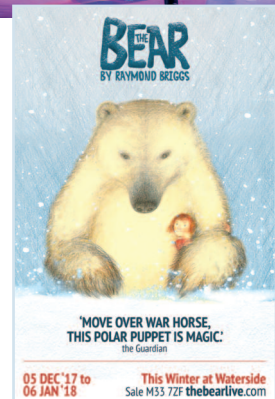
All 6pm shows are Slumber Shows!

Come in your jimjams with your favourite teddy bear and snuggle down for some Christmas fun with *The Bear*. Milk and cookies are also available! See thebearlive.com for the dates of our 6pm shows.

'Move over War Horse, this polar puppet is magic... this production is everything children's theatre should be: sensitive, witty, gorgeously crafted' *The Guardian*.

Don't leave it too late, Christmas shows at Waterside are always very popular, so book your tickets soon at

thebearlive.com or on 0161 912 5616.



HALLÉ THE SNOWMAN AT THE BRIDGEWATER HALL, MANCHESTER



Friday 22 December, 1.30pm
Saturday 23 December, 11am, 1.30pm and 4pm

Bring all the family to the Hallé's screening of Raymond Briggs' classic animated film, *The Snowman*. The film is accompanied by the Hallé performing Howard Blake's magical score live. The concert begins with Ian Stephens' orchestral take on the classic children's rhyme *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*. A beautiful concert – 'we're not scared'!

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Musical Director & Arrangements **ADAM GERBER**
Choreographer **LILY HOWKINS**

BUXTON OPERA HOUSE Bells Shoes Criterion EARL OF BUXTON THEATRE

A pregnant woman is the central figure, captured in a graceful, almost balletic pose. She is wearing a light pink, long-sleeved leotard with a matching full tutu. Her right arm is extended high into the air, while her left hand rests gently on her prominent belly. She is looking towards the camera with a soft smile. The background is a solid, deep black, which makes the woman and her pink attire stand out. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the contours of her body and the texture of the fabric.

"...For me, it's the combination of music and movement and how it is all encompassing - the way you can lose yourself in it."

"It welcomes the young, the old, and everybody in between. Once you start dancing, you never really stop."

Born to Dance by Tanya J D

As soon as I reached the tender age of three, my parents decided that, like every good little Russian girl, I must be packed off to ballet classes lest the golden opportunity to turn me into a prima ballerina be missed. They showed some leniency however, in allowing me to choose my own dancing establishment, which I am told I went about doing in no uncertain manner. The first school we tried, I allegedly burst into tears when I was invited to join in, and firmly refused to even consider. But I fell in love with the second school: The South Manchester School of Dance. I think this was because, even at such a young age, I could sense that this was the kind of place where an uncoordinated, chronically chubby girl with more enthusiasm than actual skill would be encouraged and nurtured just as much as a lanky, graceful, natural dancer.

My three-year-old self turned out to have great intuition. South Manchester Dance School was the kind of place where everyone was always welcome, regardless of age, appearance, and initial ability. The emphasis was very much on the learning process, on technique and a shared love of dancing, rather than on streamlining everyone into the mould of a perfect ballerina.

It seems clear that nothing has changed since my dancing days. The school is still an eclectic mix of young and old, nearly professional and hopelessly bewildered, tall, short and everything in between. I decided to have a chat with the principal, Denise Cornall (herself an old teacher of mine) to find out a little about the diverse range of students currently learning to plie and pirouette under her watchful eye.

It turns out that the age span of pupils attending the school at the moment reaches a grand total of 60 years. The youngest, at 3 years old, can be found shaking a tail feather in the recently renamed Debut

Dance classes, while the oldest (whose age must be deduced as I shan't spell it out) dances up a storm in the Recreational ballet classes. The recreational ballet classes are, in fact, a perfect example of the South Manchester Dance School ethos. They are especially designed to accommodate those who are returning to ballet after leaving it behind for some time, those who, like so many, gave it up as a teenager and ended up severely regretting their decision.

One of those who returned to ballet after leaving it behind during her adolescent years is Rachel, who has been loving Recreational classes so much, that she kept up her attendance right the way through her recent pregnancy. She started taking classes at South Manchester 12 years ago, because she wanted to keep fit but found going to the gym boring, and felt like it would be much easier to drag herself off the sofa after a long day at work to do something she really enjoyed. And it certainly seems to have worked - she was still dancing at 39 weeks and 4 days - bump and baby in tow! She decided that she would listen to her body and keep going with ballet in pregnancy for as long as she felt able to, and was pleasantly surprised to find that she was able to maintain her balance in class despite her growing bump and ever-changing centre of gravity. Ballet even seems to have helped Rachel with some of those horrible pregnancy side-effects - she explains:

"For me, it's the combination of music and movement and how it is all encompassing - the way you can lose yourself in it. This was a particularly good thing in the earlier part of my pregnancy when I was feeling nauseous a lot of the time - not sure if it actually stopped me from feeling sick or if I was just too busy concentrating on the steps and timing and my own posture to notice any nausea".



There can be no doubt - ballet is a unique form of exercise - it keeps you healthy whilst also honing your musicality, posture and concentration. It welcomes the young, the old, and everybody in between. Once you start dancing, you never really stop. In the words of the current principal of the dance school:

"I have witnessed the sheer exhilaration time and time again, of ladies who put their ballet shoes away when they went to university or had children and have found their way to ballet class again. The moment the plie music begins you see joy wash over their expression; returning to a place of their childhood dreams and sheer relief at using muscles that haven't had any exercise in a while!"

Rachel has already expressed a keen desire to pack her newborn baby boy Edward Emmanuel off to ballet classes as soon as he has found his feet. What better place to introduce him to this discipline, in equal measure rigorous and rewarding, than the South Manchester Dance School, which will welcome him with open arms into a world filled with the most diverse people, all united by their love of ballet.

And what about me? Now that I'm no longer under the watchful eye of my parents, being carted off in the family car every Saturday - do I still love to dance? Do you really have to ask?



photo: still from the video by Megan Olivier Films

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"My daughter has been attending ROKIT for quite a few years now and has recently moved up to the acting pro class, now that she has turned 14. She thoroughly enjoys her classes and has gained two Lamda awards, passing with merit for the first and a distinction with her second exam. The teaching is excellent!"

When and where:

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The schools are located in Knutsford, Wilmslow and Hale and run Tuesday - Thursday weekday evenings. Contact ROKIT PERFORMING ARTS for further information and to secure your child's place for January! Tel: 01565 654482 info@rokitperformingarts.co.uk www.rokitperformingarts.co.uk

activities



Messy Makers of Manchester!

Sticky Tots Messy Play comes to Cheadle and Heald Green with a sploosh!

The brand new classes offer babies and toddlers the chance to explore a variety of multi-sensory activities, messy stations, and crafts which are fantastic for developing many early skills. Each class is focused around an exciting theme and includes activities such as water play, painting, moon sand, gloop, edible messy trays, glitter, feathers, spaghetti, cloud dough, coloured rice, bubbles, foam and music. Don't worry - mini baths are provided to get cleaned up afterwards too! Sticky Tots incorporates areas of the early years curriculum in the planning of class activities and gives

little ones the chance to investigate, spill, squish, pour and create without limits. Most importantly, the classes are fun - the smiley faces of children mesmerised by new experiences and engrossed in their play are what Sticky Tots is all about. The relaxed, friendly classes welcome you to come along and get messy.

Mondays 1pm at Cheadle Village Hall / pay-per-class: £7.50, per child: £5, siblings: block book to save.

Special Seasonal Events - Heald Green 2nd Scout Hut Book your own Sensory Messy Party - tailored to your children's interests or a theme.



Book online at www.sticky-tots.co.uk or contact Katie 07876 598023 stickytots@gmail.com

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Camp Evolution's next four-day residential camp runs from 11-14 February, near Chigwell in Essex, and is both affordable and offers a high return on investment. Camp Evolution provides a free collection and drop-off service from central London, Birmingham and Manchester (so you don't have to do the driving) and friends and siblings benefit from a 30% discount on all-inclusive packages.

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Splat with your siblings by Rachael Cooper, Splat Messy Play, East Cheshire

Speaking to parents who attend SPLAT classes, there are always two reasons why they go. It's about letting their children explore and create and get messy (and not having to do all this at home!) AND it's a place where their little ones can play together, learn together and build their imagination, together.

I know, as a mum, there are lots of classes locally that provide sports, arts, music and language activities but there are not many that aren't age restricted, potentially separating siblings and making it difficult for parents to choose classes. With messy play there's no right or wrong way to 'do it',

meaning children can build their imagination together with siblings and peers. Whilst one kicks about in the playdough squelching it in her toes, her older brother is making me a pizza with the playdough (something we do weekly in Timperley!) It's fab to see mums watching their children make, create and have fun together.

Messy play has a crucial role in brain development in the early years of childhood. The brain is more adaptable and susceptible when we're young so we have the ability to be more imaginative and creative with new and different experiences. This creativity leads to innovation and problem



'The activities are always original and well thought through ...'

Little Stars, Macclesfield



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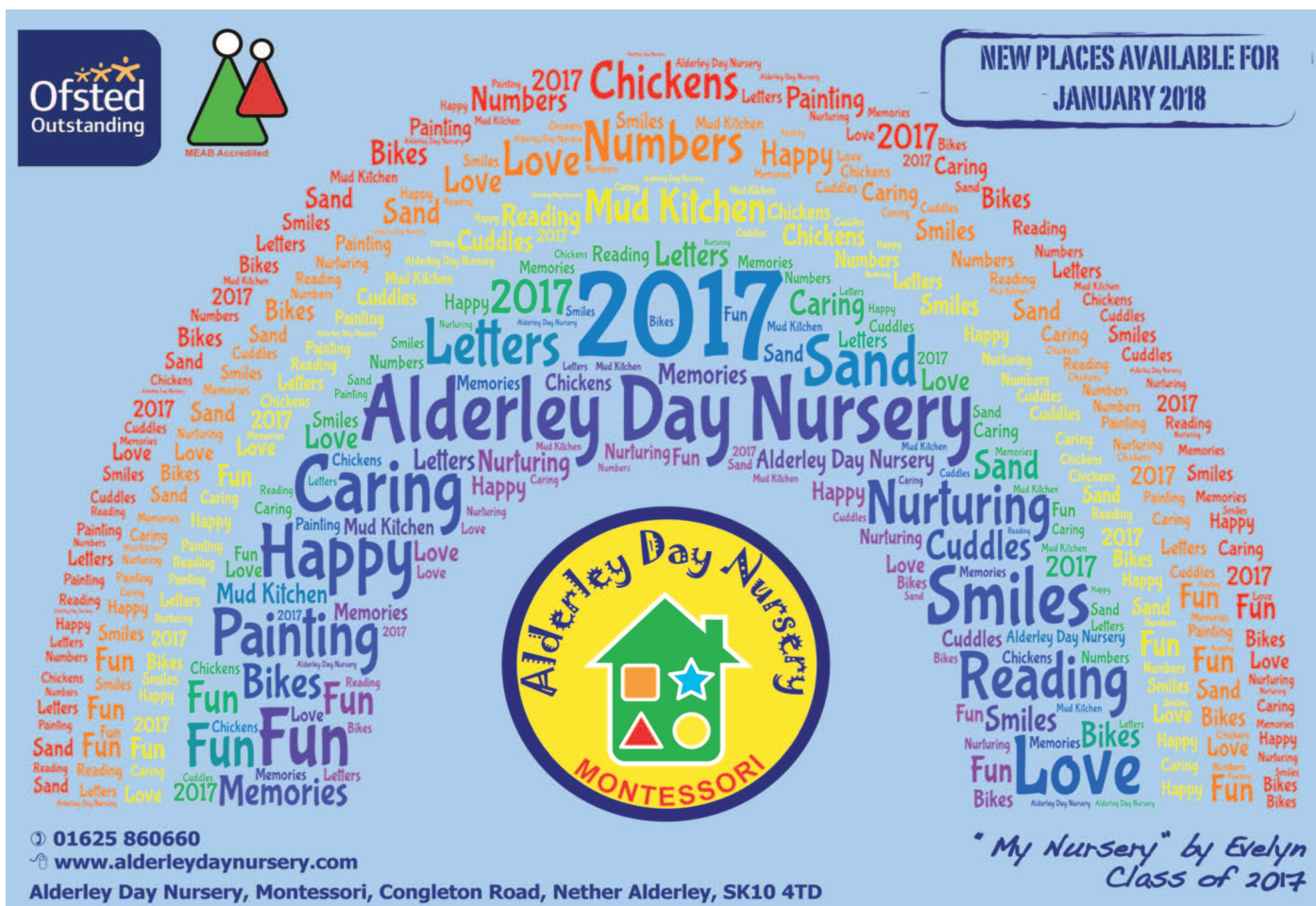
Rachael Cooper 07823 334362

rachael@splatmessyplay.co.uk

facebook.com/rachaelplatmessyplay

solving but unfortunately children's exposure to sensory play opportunities is declining. Even though creativity is one of the highest sought-after skills that employers look for, research shows a drop in creativity in young children since the 90s as they spend more time glued to a screen rather than fostering important creative play skills with siblings and peers.

With the holiday season edging closer, I'm grabbing hold of imagination with two firm hands; jumping in muddy puddles, firework painting, biscuit decorating and snowflake making. Why not come get creative too?



Open-ended toys for open-minded children



Parents will be looking for that perfect toy for their children this Christmas, but it is easy to be overwhelmed by the range of choices. Soon, shops will be filled with electronic games and brightly coloured gadgets, so how can we ensure that what we are spending on toys is buying the best for our children?

One factor to take into consideration is that children learn through play, so the toys and activities we expose them to will have an important role in their mental and physical development. Real play is about creativity, exploration, discovery, and spontaneity. Many studies show that play is crucial to child development and that children benefit most when parents spend quality time playing with their offspring.

Building up blocks and knocking them down, or pushing toy cars along an imaginary street is developmentally essential for all children. By choosing the right kinds of toys, parents can help children get the most out of their playtime. The best toys are often the simplest. Toys that allow children to direct the play themselves are not only more engaging for young children, they're also more powerful stimulants for development. Genuine creative play will be ninety percent of the child with ten percent provided by the toy.

One definition of open-ended toys is that they engage children's imagination and so have the potential to be different every time a child plays with them. So parents may wish to assess that potential when looking for toys that will encourage open-ended play. They may wish to consider the toys that children have played with for centuries since there are good developmental reasons why those toys have remained popular for so long. The reason why some toys are so good for play and learning is that they require a lot more thinking and creativity on the part of the child since in open-ended play they are using all aspects of their development. Jigsaw puzzles, for example, engage motor skills, problem-solving abilities, perceptual skills and language skills as the child talks through the process with an adult.

So what might we consider when choosing toys?

Is it age appropriate?

Most toys are labelled to indicate for which ages they are appropriate. Of course, there is always some overlap and when choosing toys for their own children, parents know best whether a toy will be well received or not. Children should be encouraged to play together, so choosing toys that children can share and play with together helps to encourage social skills and imagination. For those aged under 3, it is important to follow the advice on the packaging since many toys have small pieces that can pose a danger to young children.

Does it fit with the child's interests?

Children show their interests from a very young age. Some love animals, others may enjoy a particular cartoon character or may show curiosity about music or outer space. Choosing toys that relate to the child's current interests is usually a safe option, since it helps satisfy, enhance and extend that existing interest.

Does it encourage creativity?

Children explore their creativity when they play with toys and choosing toys that target their imaginations enables their inventiveness to flourish. Today, when more and more time is spent passively in front of screens, and 30% of under 3s have their own tablets largely teaching them to follow instructions,

toys that encourage active, creative explorations help children to learn about themselves and their world.

Is it open-ended?

Open-ended toys are those that can be used in many and various ways depending on the child, the day, their imagination, and their wishes. They foster play, creativity, imagination and inventiveness. The more ways a child can find to play with a toy, the more he/she will learn from it.

Does it have educational value?

Educational toys are not only fun, but they can also help children learn new things in an interesting way. When children use the same toy over and over again for the same purpose they slowly gain confidence in their abilities, which aids their learning and development. The best educational toys should promote different aspects of a child's learning and development, including: creativity, imagination, coordination, motor skills, stimulation, physical development, problem solving, social skills, reading and writing, confidence and discovering the world.

Is it appropriate and practical?

Children must be physically able to manipulate and play with the features of the toy and understand how to use it. Parents will want to be sure that their child's current play needs and interests are met by the toy. They will also wish to satisfy themselves that the toy is safe for the uses to which the child will put it.

Parents notice how children can be more interested in the box the toy came in than the toy itself, yet it takes courage for parents to choose toys that don't talk, zoom, or flash, but do provide other, amazing benefits for children. This Christmas, perhaps we could all look for toys which don't provide our children with all the answers, all the words and all the pictures, but leave room for them to invent and develop their own ideas. We might even encourage children when they decide there is more fun to be had with the paper and boxes their presents came in. Or, perhaps we could arrange for some of the present boxes to contain more boxes and papers, cards, string, clips, pegs, paints and glues, and all the other vehicles which allow their imaginations to take flight.

by Mike Stevenson





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The Liberty School



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The Liberty School Manchester is a new specialist school opening in January 2018. The school is set in a peaceful green space in the grounds of St Matthew's Church in Stretford, Manchester and benefits from being easily accessible from the A56 Chester Road. The Liberty School aims to create a village school atmosphere in the city. It will offer a mixed aged primary class with a high staff to pupil ratio. The staff will provide a well-structured warm and positive learning environment. All pupils will receive one to one specialist teaching to help them develop their functional literacy and numeracy skills and reach their full potential.

The school has an emphasis on developing resilience and self-esteem and values creativity and play. As such the curriculum has been specifically designed to be accessible and adaptable to meet the specific needs of learners. The staff recognise the importance

of first-hand experience, structured play and concrete learning. Children will benefit from visiting specialists delivering specific areas of the curriculum. There will be regular visits from an artist, a musician and an Enjoy-A-Ball sports coach.

As an independent school national testing is not required. This means that the school will not teach your child to pass tests at the end of year 2 and year 6 but will focus on functional skills that she or he will carry with them throughout the rest of their education and on into later life. This does not mean that assessments will not take place. Teachers will follow the model of 'assess, plan, do and review.' This means that the teaching activities are constantly being adapted to ensure that they give exactly the right level of challenge. Central to this is the idea of the 'zone of proximal development.' (Vygotsky) This represents the level of difficulty that

is neither too hard nor too easy and is the level at which optimal learning is enabled.

To achieve this the staff will carry out honest and accurate diagnostic assessments to ascertain the exact learning needs of your child on entry and these will provide the teachers with targets to work towards.

The staff at the school are all passionate about meeting the exact individual needs of every child. All the teachers have a proven track record of success in teaching children with additional needs and have spent many years working in a wide variety of schools in the Greater Manchester area.

The school is unique in offering a choice between full time places of 4 days a week or the option of flexi schooling where children attend for 2 days. The Liberty School Manchester is a fee-paying school but will operate on a not for profit basis. Full time fees will be approximately £8,000 and part time fees will be around £4,250 per annum.

For all enquiries please e-mail Michelle or Tom at thelibertyschoolmanchester@gmail.com



The Liberty School

The Liberty School Manchester is a small, specialist independent school for children with dyslexia, dyscalculia, dyspraxia and other learning needs.

To request a prospectus or to arrange a visit please:

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To tutor or not to tutor?

That is the question - a parent's viewpoint

As a child I was tutored. As a parent I have tutored my child and now and again I've turned to a tutor instead of falling out with my daughter! As a teacher, I can see the merits when a child is being supported by a tutor whom they enjoy being taught by.

The key to successful tutoring is you as a parent assessing how tutoring will help your child, not because you are trying to fill gaps in what their school is doing or not doing, but instead ensuring that it is a supplementary addition to what happens at home and at school.

I named home first because, particularly if we are parents of children in private education, we sometimes assume that because we are paying for our child's education, this automatically means we do not have to do any extra learning with our children at home as the school should be taking full responsibility for our child's learning. This leads to huge gaps and missed opportunities in learning.

As a parent, tutoring for me started at home and it began when my daughter was just a year old. It was speaking to her like she was a small person, rather than using baby talk; using our long car journeys as an opportunity to help her analyse and enjoy the world around her. I call this 'verbal comprehension', where you ask your children what they see, what they can hear and help them build their dictionary of words. Comprehension skills are therefore being first taught well before a child starts formal education. My daughter first started to work on these skills when she first started to look around and analyse the world. I would have real conversations with her asking her why she thought something was the way it was. Without even realising it, she was going through 'tutoring' - and it didn't cost me a penny!

I can only talk from personal experience. I have been called a 'tiger mum' which I have laughed off, and then gone back to the 'drawing board'. Assessing the situation I realised that I have a very happy, emotionally stable and well-mannered child. I did teach

her to sit down with her mama for 'Learning Time' at the age of 3, but she has learnt how to learn, how to concentrate in small chunks and to enjoy her learning through play which was the beginning of our beautiful journey of discovery.

As a teacher I believe that when children get older tutoring becomes even more important, and part of it may - and sometimes should be - delegated to a professional tutor. Your child may struggle with maths, and maths may not be your chosen subject. If we are not confident in a subject, whether it is maths, science or English, children will pick up on our tension and lack of confidence. By outsourcing that subject to the right tutor, who your child enjoys sitting with, you are helping your child to enjoy that subject and build up confidence. This becomes even more important when your child enters the stage of retaining and processing exam skills and preparing for High school.

by Nighat Zaman, Manchester

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