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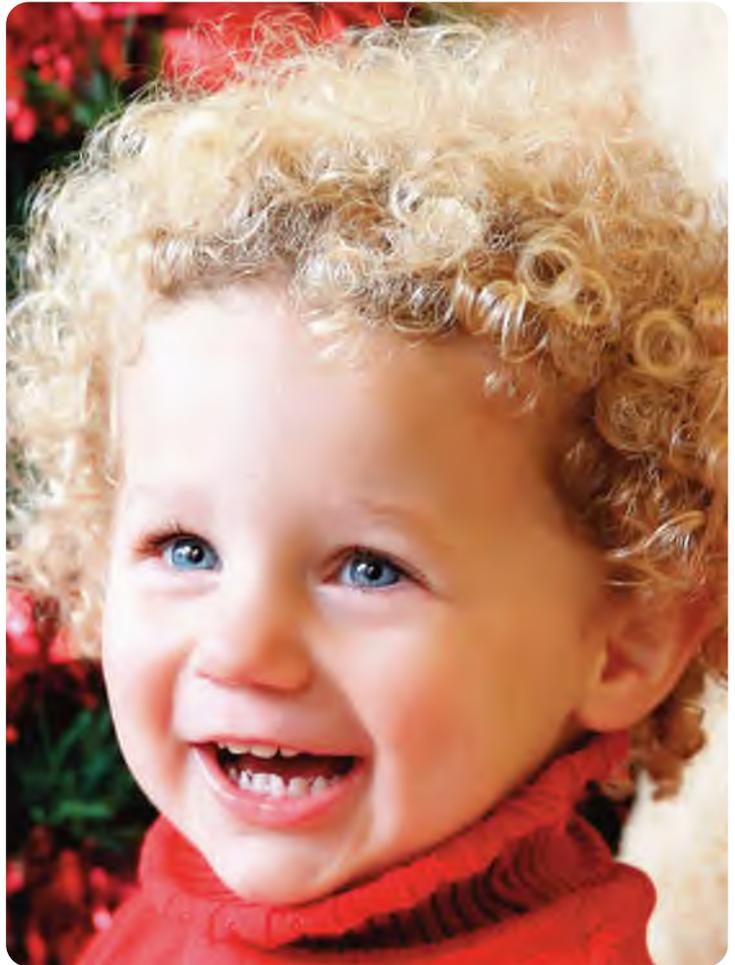
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A word from the editor

Don't even try to hide it - you need some help. We all do at this time of year.

The day after freeing an exhausted pine tree in the garden from its spooky coating of spiders' web, creepy crawlies and miniature skulls, this long-suffering M&D editor was asked by her family when it would be time to re-decorate the same dishevelled tree for Christmas. Apparently, the end of November wasn't soon enough...

But hey-ho, it's the time to be jolly, so we've done the re-decorating – and it does look lovely. In fact, at the insistent pestering of our offspring, all the M&D staff have been gearing up for the festive season early this year. Some of us have already bought a few things from our own Christmas Gift Guide (page 4-5) and wrapped them up, others have booked family tickets for the festive Shows and Pantos (page 10-11), and each of us has managed to find a few places to visit from the Events Watch listings (page 12-13). We can tell you in spring, when the next issue of the magazine is out, whether our choices proved satisfactory. Or you can tell us how the festivities and preparation worked for you – emails, comments on our website, and social media are the best ways to contact us. Saying that, we're always happy to chat, so phone calls are great too!

As always, this issue of the magazine combines festive spirit with topical discussions, practical advice and educational updates. So why not get snug near your Christmas tree and read it all: tips, information, news, and views.

Merry Christmas and see you next year! **Zoe x**

The M&D Out and About listings are always carefully selected to offer our readers useful information. Although every effort is made to ensure that information is correct M&D cannot be held liable for any errors or omissions. We strongly advise you to check details with the event organisers.



Christmas Gift Guide by Paul Wojnicki

Ho, ho ho, it's time for Mums and Dads' latest Christmas gift guide, here to help you if you're stuck with ideas for kids - plus one or two that might work for grown-ups too. Merry Christmas everyone!

Making music



Kids love to make music, but the early days can be difficult on parents' ears. The recorder is a particularly grating culprit, which is a shame because it's one of the easiest instruments to learn. Luckily, the clever people at Carry On have developed a number of Digital Wind Instruments, including a couple that mimic a recorder's finger holes and mouthpiece. These are the ideal gateway for lots of wind instruments such as the flute and clarinet. They include breath sensitivity, for blowing lightly or heavily, have a built-in speaker, and lots of different voices, including recorders, saxophones, and more. Crucially, it's also possible to plug in earphones to give the neighbours a rest while your little angel perfects their skills.

Available on Amazon for **£29.99**

Don't be a cheap 'skate'!



If your kids are anything like ours then they'll love going to the ice rink in the run up to Christmas, and there is nothing like skating around a lit-up tree to

Look uber stylish with a Stanley Quencher

My daughter has been nagging me for this iconic Stanley Quencher H2.0 FlowState tumbler forever. Apparently, everyone in her dance class has one, and she felt left behind with her plain old bottle. These do look great though, and everywhere I look in our office people seem to have one too. They also hold a LOT of water, or whatever beverage you decide to put inside. They're splash resistant, dishwasher safe, keep your drink cold for 11 hours and come in some amazing colours. There are also some limited-edition Barbie versions out there, if you're lucky enough to beat the competition.

Available on Amazon for **£29.99**



Lego: across the generations

When it comes to timeless gifts, it's hard to beat Lego. We all played with it as children, and most of our children will have played with it too. The models just keep coming and usually have their finger on the pulse of whatever's hot this year - as well as perennial favourites. This R2-D2 model is a great example of the latter, as kids (and adults) are always going to have a soft spot for the cutest robot to ever hit the silver screen. It's got over 1000 pieces, a rotating head and is suitable for ages 10+.

Available on Amazon for **£66.99**



Get your critters coding!

Computer coding is now considered an essential skill and is a key aspect of the national curriculum. A great way to introduce the skill to young minds is with a coding robot. Learning Resources have released a range of award-winning coding products for children as young as four. Their early years Coding Critters® robots are screen-free and programmed by push-buttons to navigate obstacles or maps, introducing computational thinking through hands-on play to what could otherwise be an abstract subject matter. They're super cute, as well as educational. Older kids might prefer one of their Artie robots, which you can program to draw images or a realistic PYXEL dog (both pictured); these are more expensive than the "Critters" range but introduce a virtual programming environment by using an inbuilt Wi-Fi server to connect to a computer, tablet or phone.

Coding Critters sets start at **£4** on learningresources.co.uk



festive fun



get into the festive spirit. But regular trips to the rink can be time consuming and expensive, so why not let them perfect their skills on a pair of in line skates? We headed down to our local Decathlon to try out a set and settled on the Oxelo Kids' Inline Fitness Skates Fit3 which are perfect for budding skaters starting out on wheels. Our young skater felt they were really comfortable and we've learned that they'll grow with her feet, thanks to the adjustable settings which cover four whole sizes. They come in a variety of colours and glide like a charm - on Decathlon's shop floor at least.

Available in Decathlon for **£39.99**

Spellbinding fun



Youngsters love magic, and being able to dazzle mum and dad with their own tricks is guaranteed to make them feel proud. My Magic Show from BUKI provides everything kids need to feel like real magicians. It contains 20 magic tricks that are easy to follow thanks to the illustrated step-by-step instructions, and has one of the highest ratings for a magic set on Amazon.

Available at Range for **£23.99**

Football frenzy



Detectorists - hit the outdoors!

There are few things kids love more than a treasure hunt, and rare is the child who hasn't dreamed of unearthing a pile of gold coins with a metal detector. But, the problem I've had with toy shop detectors is that they didn't even find coins I'd scattered around our garden. If you want to get the kids outdoors with an actual chance of finding something, then you'll want a real metal detector.

Minelab has a reputation as one of the best value brands on the market - and also sounds a little like Minecraft! If you just want to dip your toes into the hobby, maybe try the Minelab Go-Find 11 Metal Detector; this entry-level model is lightweight, folds away, is simple to use and budget friendly, has settings that tell you which metal it has detected, and is even usable in shallow water. If you want to step it up a level then the Minelab Vanquish 340 also makes for a non-complicated introduction to the hobby, but boasts technology and power that's normally only reserved for far more expensive machines. Again, it's lightweight and foldable, but with a range of pro features which led industry experts Crawfords Metal Detectors to name it "the best choice for the beginner in the world of metal detecting".

Available at Crawfords Metal Detectors from **£119**



If your child is footie mad, why not invest in a rebounder for the garden? The RapidFire Flash Pop-Up Football Rebounder from Networksports.com is excellent value and has great reviews. There are two size options, both of which are pretty large for rebounders at 8ft x 5ft and 8ft x 6ft, but as they are "pop up" rebounders they're also very portable and can be moved around and popped into position, wherever and whenever the mood takes you.

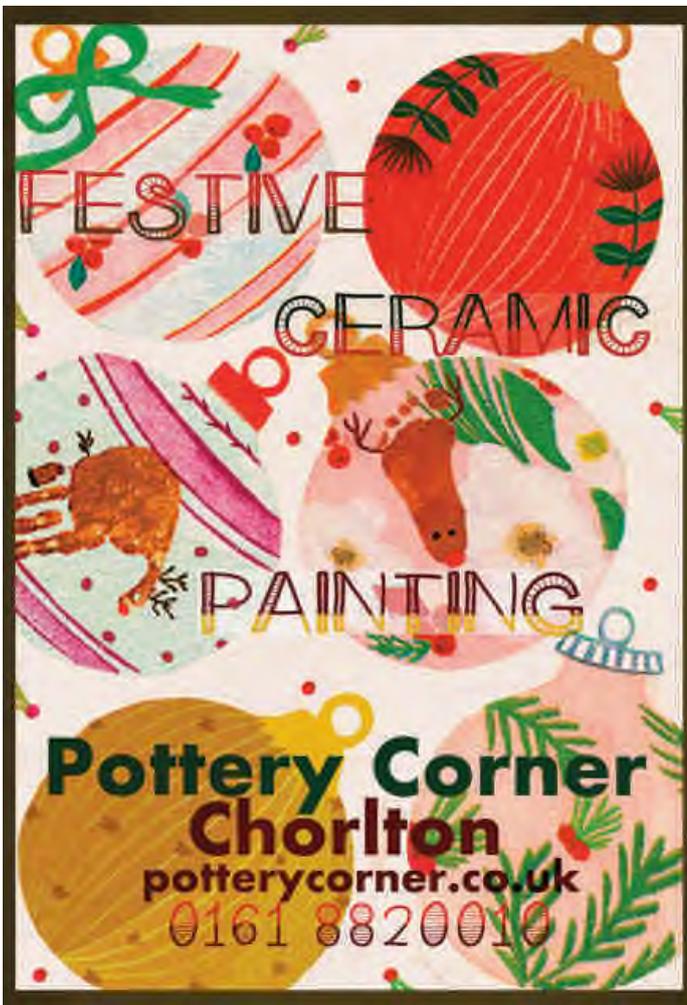
The 8ft x 5ft version is particularly good value at just **£39.99** from Networksports.com and you can also find endless other sports accessories on their website, and we've even dug out this code to get 20% off, just use 'GIFT20' at checkout.



reMarkable gift for parents

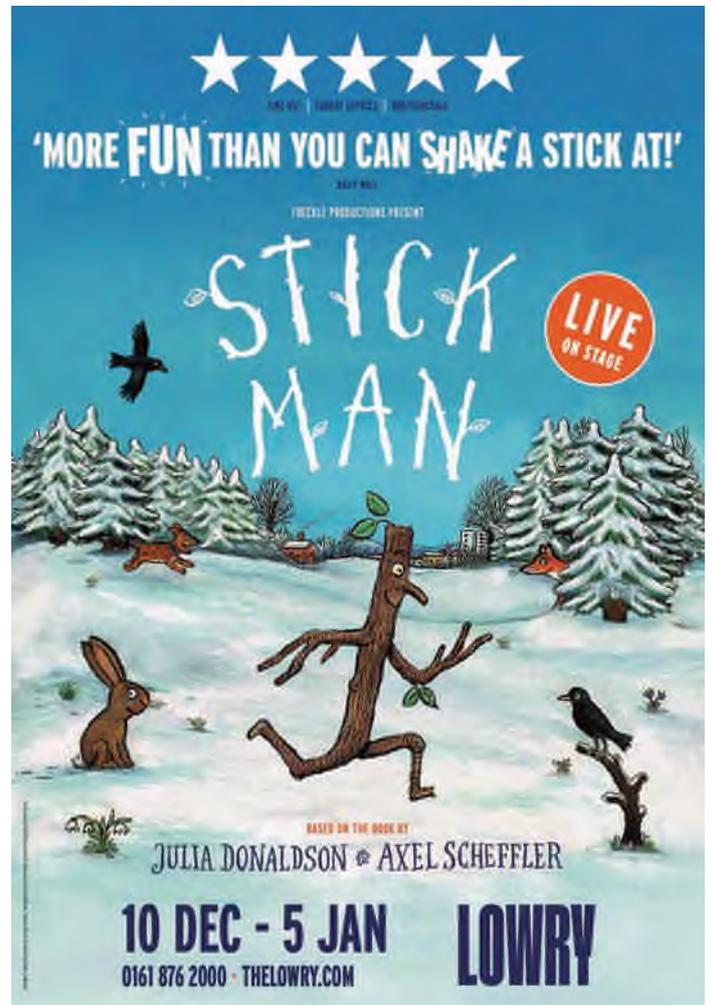
For us, Christmas is all about the kids, but we always treat ourselves to something nice each year - like a new laptop or TV - that the whole family can use. This year we're investing in the recently released reMarkable Paper Pro. These aren't cheap, but they are the absolute crème de la crème when it comes to paper tablets. The Paper Pro is slightly larger than our previous reMarkable tablet - the original reMarkable - but the reason we're upgrading is because the Paper Pro allows you to read, write, work and draw in colour, something previously unheard of on any other paper tablet! Plus, we'll also then have one reMarkable each. Don't confuse these with e-ink tablets or writing on an iPad, the unique pencil to paper surface of reMarkable tablets feels exactly like writing or sketching on real paper. They also remove digital distractions, like pop ups or social media, allowing you to be much more productive. My wife loves the reMarkable for scribbling notes at university and then converting them to text, while others enjoy typing using the "Type Folio" keyboard. It's easy to switch between the two on all reMarkable devices and you can continue your work from other devices by using their desktop or mobile apps.

At the time of writing, the Paper Pro was only available on reMarkable's website in the UK, but the reMarkable 2 can be purchased and tested in Curry's.



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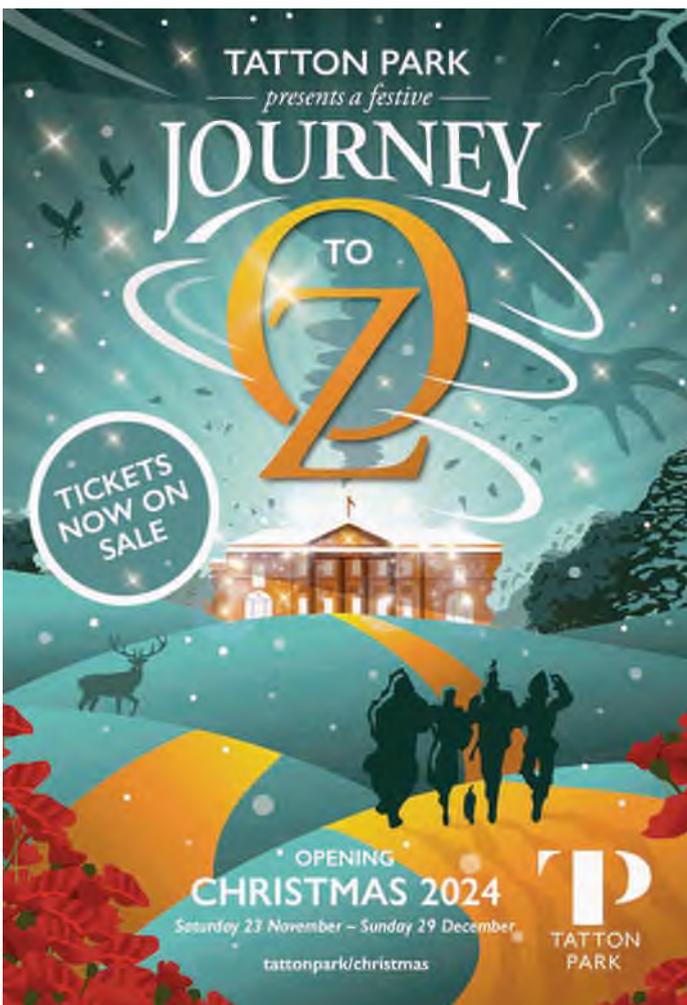


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The nation of Grinches *Brits confess the main reasons they won't attend your party*



As we approach the run up to Christmas and New Year, party season is almost upon us and people in the UK are starting to prioritise their planning. But which celebratory events do Brits favour the most, and what would make them more likely to attend?

With so many occasions building up in people's diaries, searches have increased dramatically over the last month for key terms such as "Christmas ideas" (6,400%), "New Years Eve parties" (3,500%), "best way to gender reveal" (1,000%), "divorce party ideas"

(5,000%) and "engagement party planning" (50%). To help Brits decide on the events they need to prioritise across the winter and to help hosts with preparation plans, greetings card marketplace Thortful has conducted a survey to find out the occasions people like to attend from best to worst, as well as the core reasons they dislike attending any. Topping the list are birthdays, with more than 9 in 10 (92%) Brits revealing that they enjoy attending a friend or family member's birthday more than any other occasion.

Interestingly, more people prefer a friend's wedding over a family member's wedding, with 7% claiming they prefer to celebrate with friends over family. In third place are Christmas Day and Boxing Day, which are priority occasions for 89% of Brits.

Ranking 12th are divorce parties, with an almost 50/50 split in popularity. 17% of those that didn't want an invite say it as "an unnecessary spend". Gender reveal parties also split the vote, while 55% of people in the UK like to celebrate with loved ones, 48% find the idea "cringeworthy".

Engagement parties (85%), house warmings (84%) and big New Year's Eve plans (81%) are all more than welcomed across the next few months with high votes from Brits.

For those of us who are trying to hook as many guests as possible during this busy season and beyond, it's worth remembering the statistics. Brits agreed they would be more likely to attend parties which

- Accommodate children (96%)
- Don't use up much annual leave (95%)
- Don't require dressing up (87%)
- Don't come with the pressure to drink alcohol (85%)

For more information on how to plan the perfect party, visit www.thortful.com/blog

'Twas the night before Christmas...



Christmas Eve is filled with excitement for children with many of them planning to stay awake to catch a glimpse of Santa. A late night can lead to a tired morning for both kids and parents and can also make it hard for adults to set up all of the Christmas magic in advance.

Nic Shacklock, from Online-Bedrooms.co.uk, says: "Putting the kids to sleep on Christmas Eve can be a tough job for parents. The best way to do it is by creating a relaxing evening routine that they'll still enjoy." Check out these suggestions from Online-Bedrooms experts on settling your overexcited kids the night before Christmas. Some of the tips are tried and tested, others are new and tradition-breaking. Choose a favourite or try them all. Good luck and Merry Christmas!

1 Have an active Christmas Eve

Taking a long walk or having a day full of busy family activities can help tire the kids out before they go to bed. The fresh air and energising events can make them feel more relaxed in the evening so they'll be too tired to try and stay awake all night to open their presents.

2 Set a rule for present opening

Introducing a rule that presents can't be opened until 9am or 10am the following morning will lower the kids' expectations of waking up at the crack of dawn to open their gifts.

3 Give them Christmas Eve boxes

It's become a growing trend over the last few years, but having a Christmas Eve box can settle down the

excitement of gift opening so the kids will feel satisfied before heading to bed.

4 Keep them warm and cosy

Hot chocolate under some fluffy blankets while watching Christmas movies could be the trick to getting the kids settled. After an active day, cosying up on the sofa in a calm environment can settle them down before bedtime.

5 Soothe them with fresh bedding

It's a simple tip, but having fresh linen is a delight for anyone to sleep on. Having a clean set of bedding can help to calm children full of Christmas cheer and stop the endless tossing and turning when they attempt to sleep.

6 Wear them out with board games

Playing fun family board games can keep the kids stimulated throughout the evening. By the time it gets to their bedtime they'll be too worn out to stay awake all night.

7 Let them soak in a relaxing bedtime bath

A bubble bath before bed can help children fall asleep more easily as it gives them an opportunity to relax and feel comfortable before heading to bed. You could even surprise the kids by getting them a colourful bath bomb as a pre-Christmas treat.

Francis House: The Festival of Trees - 2024



Francis House Children's Hospice provides care and support to families of children and young people with life-limiting conditions from across Greater Manchester and Cheshire. The hospice tailors its services to meet each family's specific needs, creating moments of joy and a sense of normalcy for young people.

Francis House needs to raise £4.8 million each year to keep its vital services operating. This year they hope to raise funds with your help by running their annual pre-Christmas Festival of Trees event.

Anyone visiting Quayside MediaCityUK outlet mall is in for a real treat with a family-friendly event

running until the middle of December. The Francis House Festival of Trees on the first floor of the mall offers a stunning display of forty Christmas trees decorated with unique gifts donated by top brands, organisations and community groups. There's also a model village window display, raffle prizes and Christmas merchandise to purchase in the pop up shop open until Saturday 14th December 2024.

The Festival of Trees is a unique opportunity to bid on a tree and anyone placing the highest bid before the auction ends on Sunday 8th December gets to take the tree home the following week in time for Christmas.

One of Francis House supporters commented on the last year event: 'I liked the look of the trees and the vouchers have made ideal Christmas presents for the family. The decorations were high quality and most importantly, I didn't have to dress them myself - it was all done for me!'

Shop opening hours are as follows: Monday closed, Tuesday to Wednesday 10am - 4pm, Thursday to Saturday 10am - 5pm, Sunday 11am - 5pm. All proceeds from the sale of the trees and merchandise go to Francis House.

Bids can also be placed online until December 8th by visiting www.festivaloftrees.co.uk

Make your Christmas sparkle *Festive delights from a local charity*

As the countdown to Christmas continues, Mellor Country House's team of volunteer elves is preparing to help locals celebrate in style and spread festive cheer in the run up to the most wonderful time of the year.

Thanks to the volunteers' ongoing dedication, Christmas fundraising plans at Mellor Country House are well underway, including the famous Christmas trees and wreaths sale, which is now in its 9th year. Greater Manchester based Christmas shoppers can buy the beautiful Nordman non-drop pine trees directly from Mellor House or order them on the charity's website. The trees are available in a range of sizes from 4ft to 12ft high, and are sure to brighten festive homes or businesses. Beautiful Christmas wreaths are also on sale, with prices starting from just £20. Mellor Country House is nestled in three acres of gardens and woodland in the pretty village of Mellor, situated on the border of Greater Manchester and the High Peak. It's a UK charity which has been changing lives since its inception at the end of the 19th century, by providing much needed respite for disadvantaged families, elderly visitors, and carers, both groups and individuals from Stockport, Manchester and Salford.

For this small self-funded charity, relying solely on a committee of volunteers, every single visitor to the beautiful Edwardian building and purchaser of the stunning festive offerings makes a huge difference. Katie Clark, volunteer for Mellor Country House, added: "We receive fantastic feedback every year on the quality of our trees and love seeing the many pictures of them decorated in homes around the region. We always offer a free delivery service (which will be on the weekend of the 7-8th December) for those located within a five-mile radius of the house, alongside the option for buyers to collect from Mellor Country House on Friday 6th December if they can't wait to get decorating!" "Once again, we're making Christmas 2024 as easy as possible for our customers and full details are available via our online ordering system which is open now. Forms must be completed by Sunday 1st December for our busy elves to guarantee delivery!" "We love the sparkle of Christmas but

are equally aware how tough the last few years have proved for many. The importance of raising money so that we can provide short self-catering breaks to those who otherwise wouldn't get any respite from the hardships of their day-to-day lives is paramount. The escape we provide has literally been lifesaving to some individuals, and without the much-needed funds required to keep the charity's head above water, we wouldn't be able to continue to help people in dire need of a break." Friends of Mellor Country House are currently recruiting more volunteers to help in and around the grounds and with the Christmas tree deliveries. Anyone interested in offering a one-off helping hand or joining the team on a more permanent basis can email mellorcountryhou@btconnect.com for more information.

For more info on Mellor Country House and upcoming events, please visit www.mellorcountryhouse.co.uk



Santa specials at the East Lancashire Railway



You better not pout and you better not cry, Santa Claus is coming to the East Lancashire Railway! Every weekend from the 23rd November and until 24th December he'll be there waiting for you.

Steam into Christmas on the ELR's famously festive Santa Specials. Your family will make enchanted memories to share as they take a trip through the magical Irwell Valley alongside a host of Christmassy Characters and seasonal surprises.

And of course, no Christmas would be complete without a visit from Santa Claus himself and his happy elf helpers.

Your merry adventure begins at Bury Bolton Street Station where you will stroll through a gorgeously decorated winter wonderland. Say hello to Mrs. Claus and the talking Christmas Tree, and possibly even stop for a quick singalong with the choir of caroling polar bears.

The fun doesn't stop when you board your train. Once you settle into your seat on your decorated carriage you'll enjoy an 80-minute round trip. Along the way you'll meet more Christmas characters and get the chance to crank out a few Christmas classics with the traditional brass band. During your journey, Father Christmas will visit your carriage with a gift for every little one. You'll have plenty of time to have a chat and take a Santa selfie or two.

Grown-ups can look forward to mince pies and a festive tippie or soft drink. For the children there will be a drink, chocolate and an activity pack.

There are also SEND Santa Specials available, specially designed for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

You will enjoy all the magic and wonder of our Santa Specials with a few tweaks here and there to make it more accessible. Changes include making the experience a little quieter and taking out flashing lights to make sure the event is not overwhelming. There will be alternative access for those who don't want to cross the footbridge, a wider arrival window so there's no rush and the inclusion of Calm Carriages.



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Let it show! Winter shows and pantos



22 November – 4 January

The Jungle Book

An Octagon Theatre Bolton production, based on the book by Rudyard Kipling. This madcap jungle adventure will take you on twists and turns as Mowgli learns the law of the jungle. Can he outwit the ferocious tiger Shere Khan and confront the dangers in his path with the help of his friends? Funny, exciting, and wildly entertaining this new musical adaptation will be filled with catchy songs that will leave you howling with laughter. The Jungle Book will captivate the whole family and leave you jumping for joy. Age guidance: 5+ Octagon Theatre, Howell Croft South Bolton, BL1 1SB www.octagonbolton.co.uk

29 November – 8 December

I Wish

By Le Gateau Chocolat, Rachel Bagshaw and Seiriol Davies Step into a whimsical world where wishes come to life, but with a twist! If you're looking for some fun family activities for the little ones join award-winning theatre artist and singer, Le Gateau Chocolat, as they transform into The Wish Giver for an unforgettable theatrical and musical extravaganza the whole family will cherish. Taking inspiration from our most loved fairy tales, I Wish leads you on a fantastical adventure exploring what happens when wishes are granted, but not as expected! Don't miss your chance to experience this enchanting one person show about self-discovery, acceptance and joy. Age guidance: 3+ Home, 2 Tony Wilson Place, Manchester M15 4FN www.homemcr.org

30 November 1, 7, 8 December 14:00

Robin Hood meets Stinky Bear

Forum Hall, Wythenshawe Forum
Simonsway Wythenshawe
Manchester M22 5RX

1 December 11.30am

Hallé Christmas Family Concert

Gather the family, grab your jingle bells (a bunch of keys works too) and head on down to The Bridgewater Hall for a morning of festive fun with the Hallé. Meet Pippa the Christmas Bat (aka presenter Lucy Tuck) who will guide Santa's Reindeer through the night sky on Christmas Eve, taking us past Frozen fractals, on a flight with Buddy the Elf, waltzing with The Nutcracker

and 'Walking in the Air' with The Snowman.

Keep a look out for the big man himself and feel free to wear your favourite Christmas outfit to really get in the festive mood! From 10am, join in all the reindeer games with fun foyer activities! Write your own Christmas carol, take an 'Elfie' in the photo booth with Halle's festive props, meet members of the orchestra and enjoy a festive drink or mince pie. The Bridgewater Hall, Lower Mosley Street, Manchester M1 5HA www.halle.co.uk

1-29 December

The Bear



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. With dazzling puppetry, delicious music, dreamy storytelling, and dozens of laughs, The Bear is a great experience for the whole family and a perfect introduction to theatre. Based on Raymond Briggs' book The Bear c.1994 published by Puffin Books. Age guidance: 3+ Waterside, 1 Waterside Plaza, Sale, Trafford M33 7ZF www.watersidearts.org

6-31 December

Miracle on 34th Street

Based on the classic tale a festive musical this Christmas! A major New York department store is on the brink of collapse and their upcoming Christmas sale has to be a success. When their Santa quits at the last minute they're left with a kindhearted stranger who is convinced he's the real deal to save the day. But when he is arrested, the fate of Christmas is in the hands of a child called Susan. Can she restore the world's belief in Santa Claus? Based on the 20th Century Fox Picture Story by Valentine Davies. Presented by arrangement with Music Theatre International. Home, 2 Tony Wilson Place, Manchester M15 4FN www.homemcr.org

6 December - 1 January

Jack and the Beanstalk

Jack and his mother live a simple life, until one day Jack acquires some magic beans from the

market and grows his very own giant beanstalk. The place he discovers at the top of the beanstalk is beyond his wildest dreams... Brought to you by the incredible team behind Sleeping Beauty and Cinderella, join Jack and a talented cast for another year of festive fun, wonderful music and an enormous amount of Christmas magic. It will be bigger and better than ever before! Autism-friendly performance: Wednesday 11 December 5.30pm. Buxton Opera House, Water street, Buxton, Derbyshire SK17 6XN www.buxtonoperahouse.org.uk

6 December - 5 January

Sleeping Beauty



Magically awaken your dreams this Xmas with the North West's premier family pantomime: Sleeping Beauty. Join a wonderful adventure in a land of enchantment where a beautiful Princess sleeps deeply under a magic spell whilst the heroic Prince battles to find true love which can only be awoken with 'loves first kiss' BSL Interpreted Performances - Saturday 7th December at 7.30pm & Thursday 12th December at 10.30am and 2.30pm Stockport Plaza, Mersey Square, Stockport SK1 1SP. Box office: 0161 477 7779 www.stockportplaza.co.uk

6 December - 5 January

Jack & The Beanstalk - The Garrick Pantomime



Young Jack, his daft-as-a-brush brother, Silly Simon, and his long-suffering mother, Dame Trott, live in a tiny cottage in the shadow of the terrible giant, Blunderbore. With the rent overdue they have no choice but to sell their beloved cow, Daisy. After tricking the Trotts into selling her for a bag of worthless beans, the villainous giant's henchman - Fleshcreep - kidnaps the Princess for his master's supper. Will Jack be able to rescue Daisy and Princess Jill in time? Perhaps those beans aren't as worthless as they seemed... Expect laughs, music, dance, special effects, dazzling costumes, stunning sets, magic beans and bundles of audience participation Altrincham Garrick Playhouse, Barrington Rd, Altrincham, Cheshire WA14 1HZ T: 0161 928 1677 www.altrinchamgarrick.co.uk

10 December - 5 January

Stick Man

What starts off as a morning jog becomes quite the misadventure for Stick Man. How will he ever get back to the family tree? This award-winning production, from the team behind Zog and Zog and the Flying Doctors, features a trio of top actors and is packed full of puppetry, songs, live music and funky moves. The Lowry, Pier 8, The Quays, Salford M50 3AZ www.thelowry.com

13 - 30 December

Rudolph the Reindeer's Red Nose Roadshow

From the same team that brought last year's sell-out hit Alfie the Elf, this show is a magical treat for primary school aged children and their families: chock full of song, puppetry, cracker jokes and (of course!) reindeer games. Do you have what it takes to become top reindeer and lead Father Christmas' sleigh? Rudolph the Reindeer's Red Nose Roadshow is the perfect Yuletide treat for children aged 3-7 years old and their families. Octagon Theatre, Howell Croft South, Bolton, BL1 1SB www.octagonbolton.co.uk

14 December 13:30

Relaxed Performance of Jack & The Beanstalk

WHAT IS A RELAXED PERFORMANCE? If you are a parent, guardian, or work with people with learning or sensory disabilities – such as those on the autism spectrum – you'll know how difficult it can sometimes be for them to attend regular theatre performances; loud noises, lighting effects and large crowds can make stage shows overwhelming. At a Relaxed Performance, you are free to: - Come and go from the auditorium as you wish, even during the show - Express yourself as loudly as you like, or with physical movement, without judgement - Access the theatre and auditorium early. You'll also notice that the sound and lighting will be reduced to lessen sensory overload, and no pyrotechnics or loud bangs will appear in the performance. Altrincham Garrick Playhouse, Barrington Rd, Altrincham, Cheshire WA14 1HZ Tel: 0161 928 1677 www.altrinchamgarrick.co.uk

14 December

ComedySportz Improvised Panto (Tots)

Bored of the same pantomimes every year? The ComedySportz team are back this Christmas for more Totally Improvised Pantomimes! Heroes, villains, songs and silliness are guaranteed this December as the gang create brand-new pantomime adventures using audience suggestions... and a sprinkling of fairy dust. This show from the award-winning ComedySportz team is sure to delight audiences of all ages with shows for families, tots and even an adults-only show which promises to be raunchier and ruder, but no less silly fun! Each show is a loving pastiche of familiar pantomime tropes and characters where anything can happen. The performers don't know their roles beforehand, and audiences might even get involved in the action! There will be live music and songs, games and plenty of festive fun for all. Waterside, 1 Waterside Plaza, Sale, Trafford M33 7ZF www.watersidearts.org

14 - 23 December

Rumpelstiltskin



Libby loves to exaggerate (she doesn't like to call them fibs!), however when she informs the Prince she can spin straw into gold she may have gone one fib too far... Fortunately, an extraordinary little person is on hand to help

Let it show! Winter shows and pantos



her out of this tricky situation, but at what price? Enjoy a new spin on the traditional tale and explore Rumpel's story as it's never been seen before, featuring puppetry, songs, and so much more to keep your little ones entertained. Especially designed for a younger audience, the show will be interactive, accessible and jam-packed with festive fun! Buxton Opera House, Water Street, Buxton, Derbyshire SK17 6XN www.buxtonoperahouse.org.uk

14 December - 4 January

Aladdin
Aladdin lives at Twankey's laundrette with his brother Wishee Washy and their long suffering mother Widow Twankey. Will Aladdin find his fortune and win the heart of Princess Jasmine? Who is the mysterious Abanazar? And will Wishee become a Ninja champion? Join us for another hilarious magic carpet ride through panto land! Queen Elizabeth Hall, Oldham OL1 1NL www.queenelizabethhall.com

20 December 18:30

Touch Tour: Miracle on 34th Street
Touch Tours give visually impaired customers the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the set, key props and costumes before a show and sometimes even to meet the performers. If you're coming to the tour on your own it can be arranged for a member of staff to accompany you. Guide dogs are also welcome on set, subject to an advance assessment to ensure a safe environment. Alternatively, it can be arranged for your guide dog to be looked after. Home, 2 Tony Wilson Place, Manchester M15 4FN www.homemcr.org

21 - 22 December

The Snowman
Under the guidance of Olivia Clarke, prepare to be transported to a world of fantasy and adventure. Experience the captivating blend of music and storytelling on the Hallé's big screen. Perfect for audiences of all ages. The Bridgewater Hall, Lower Mosley Street. Manchester M1 5HA www.halle.co.uk

28 December - 5 January

Little Penguin's First Christmas



From the company that brought you the sell-out productions of Snowbabies! and Aleena's Garden, Little Penguin's First Christmas is an immersive, festive experience for babies aged 0-36 months and their grown-ups! Filled with puppetry, original music and sensory delights to stimulate and captivate, this show is a perfect first theatrical experience for your little one. The Lowry, Pier 8, The Quays, Salford M50 3AZ www.thelowry.com

18 January 15:00

Pop Princesses – world tour



A Magical show where beautiful Princesses become Pop Stars. They just love to sing! It's the perfect mix! This is the children's pop concert with a big difference. Come and join four fabulous fairy tale Princesses on their epic adventure. Featuring a soundtrack of top pop hits from artists such as Taylor Swift, Meghan Trainor, Miley Cyrus, Dua Lipa, and Lizzo, plus a few of the best songs from all your favourite films and musicals. Join the fun! www.stockportplaza.co.uk

26 January

Crafty Fools: Adventures in Science!
Join 'The Magical Mr West' on an incredible adventure into the world of science! Best known as one half of magic duo 'Morgan & West', he has travelled around the world performing to audiences of all ages with spectacular shows that include magic, science and a good deal of tomfoolery. Now he presents his most amazing show yet, with the help (or possibly hindrance...) of a wisecracking cartoon crow. Expect skills, silliness and the studious application of logic as you embark upon 'Adventures in Science!' The Lowry, Pier 8, The Quays, Salford M50 3AZ www.thelowry.com

5 - 10 February

Floella Benjamin's Coming To England
Floella Benjamin's award-winning book comes to life in this joyful stage adaptation with music, storytelling and song. Much loved by children and families, Coming to England tells Floella's own story of moving to England as a child. Aged just 10, she and her siblings left Trinidad and sailed alone to join their parents. But Floella's excitement for her new life in England is short-lived, with her family subjected to racism and intolerance in 1960s London. Guided by her mother, and working twice as hard as her classmates, young Floella overcame adversity and grew to become Baroness Benjamin of Beckenham. The Lowry, Pier 8, The Quays, Salford, M50 3AZ www.thelowry.com

9 February 11am

Groove Onto The Moon
In this fun sci-fi adventure, children aged 3 to 7 and their adventurous grown-ups will be transported into space, encountering alien creatures, embarking on daring missions, and facing challenges that will put their bravery to the test. Featuring standout musicians from the UK jazz and contemporary circuit, Groove Baby shows are a beloved favourite among families, lighting up theatres and festivals across the UK. Waterside, 1 Waterside Plaza, Sale, Trafford M33 7ZF www.watersidearts.org

17 - 20 February

The Detective Dog
Whether it's finding a lost shoe or discovering who did a poo on the new gravel path, Nell's ever-sniffing nose is always hard at work. So

when the books at the school have disappeared one morning, Detective Dog Nell is ready to sniff out the culprit! Expect captivating puppetry; surprising smells and toe-tapping music. Suitable for ages 3-103. The Lowry, Pier 8, The Quays, Salford M50 3AZ www.thelowry.com

20 - 23 February

Bing's Birthday
Join Bing and his friends Sula, Pando, Coco, Amma and of course Flop as they get ready to celebrate his special day in the brand-new live stage show. It's Bing's birthday and everyone is very excited! Things won't always go to plan but, with the guidance of Flop and his friends, Bing has a birthday he won't ever forget. And you're all invited too! Come along, dress up and have fun with lots of songs and joining in. The Lowry, Pier 8, The Quays, Salford M50 3AZ www.thelowry.com

21 February 2.30pm

The Little Prince
The Little Prince is here to remind us in Lyngo's new collaboration with Norwich Puppet Theatre the most important things can only be understood with the heart. Through mesmerising puppetry and beautiful songs the boy who fell to earth teaches his friend the Aviator about love, life and real happiness. Age guidance: 5+ Waterside, 1 Waterside Plaza, Sale, Trafford M33 7ZF www.watersidearts.org

25 January, 22 February 6.30pm

Comedysportz
You've seen football. You've seen tennis. But have you seen Comedy as a sport? Then you don't want to miss this all ages, all action, all improvised competitive comedy show! Two teams battle it out for laughs with quick-witted gags, games, sketches and songs inspired by your suggestions. There's a referee on hand to ensure a good clean match - it's a family friendly show after all - with penalties for bad behaviour and bad jokes. Who wins? You decide! If you're looking for a comedy show that the whole family can enjoy then this is the show for you! Waterside, 1 Waterside Plaza, Sale, Trafford M33 7ZF www.watersidearts.org

22 February 2.30pm

Jack & The Beanstalk
Fee Fi Fo Fum! It's a giant of a show, we'd love you to come! This classic fairytale now gets the Lyngo treatment so expect lots of surprises and beautiful images as Patrick Lynch (from Cbeebies) tells the gripping story of Jack who sells his cow for 5 magic beans and finds himself in the land above the clouds. It's a show for the over 3's (and their giants) with something for everyone - enormous shoes, tiny houses, showers of silver and gold and a big, leafy explosion! Waterside, 1 Waterside Plaza, Sale, Trafford M33 7ZF www.watersidearts.org

TINY STALL
An accessible adaptation for Deaf and hearing audiences, with British Sign Language, stunning puppetry and toe-tapping music

Based on the book by **JULIA DONALDSON & SARA OGILVIE**

The DETECTIVE DOG

Mon 17 - Thurs 20 Feb 2025
thelowry.com | 0161 876 2000

THE DETECTIVE DOG text © Julia Donaldson 2016 and illustrations © Sara Ogilvie 2016. Published by Macmillan Children's Books.

LOWRY **ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND**

out and about

Guide to Events for Christmas and beyond

Saturdays and Sundays (term time only)
10:15, 11:15 and 12:15

Mini Movers

Calling all Mini Movers to join in clanking, whirring, and clacking our way around the Textiles Gallery. Especially for the younger visitors aged 5 and under, this Makaton-friendly adventure will have you whirring like a cog and turning like a crank to find out how our bodies work like machines. Bring your sense of wonder and be prepared to get silly as you join the Explainers on a fun and creative journey.

Makaton is a visual way to develop communication skills, which helps stimulate sounds and words. The visual way of communicating helps language development, such as putting words together. Makaton helps understanding by giving an extra visual cue to communication.

Science and Industry Museum,
Liverpool Road, Manchester M3 4FP
Tel: 033 0058 0058
www.scienceandindustrymuseum.org.uk

8 November - 1 January

Outdoor ice rink



Get in the festive spirit with Skate Manchester. The outdoor ice rink is located in the heart of the city at Cathedral Gardens. Everyone is welcome - bring your loved ones and book your session for a winter wonderland journey on ice. Glide through our ice path and admire the glorious Christmas tree right on the rink, surely it can't get any more festive than that! The covered ice rink allows you to enjoy your skating experience whatever the weather, so you can skate without the (distinct) possibility of getting soaked in a sudden, very British downpour!

A Week of Giving Back: for every ticket sold during 2-8 December, a 10% donation will be made Cash for Kids' Mission Christmas campaign, helping disadvantaged children enjoy the magic of Christmas across the UK
The Cathedral Gardens, Manchester M4 3BG.
www.skatemanchester.com

14 November until New Year's Eve

The Twilight Trail at Manchester's Mayfield Park

This budget-friendly festive attraction offers an immersive winter light show that will captivate visitors of all ages. The Twilight Trail transforms the 6.5-acre Mayfield Park into a twinkling wonderland, complete with stunning visual installations, a mesmerising lantern display, and a captivating soundscape that will enchant and delight. The immersive light show is designed for all ages, from families, couples, groups, and everyone in between. It takes approximately 30 mins to walk around the light show.

Price: Child (12 and under): £9 Adult: £11
Mayfield Park, Manchester
www.secretmanchester.com

15 November - 1 January 16:30 - 20:00

Lanterns and Light at Chester Zoo

Lanterns and Light is bigger, better and brighter

than ever before! There is a brand new captivating light installations, with all the magic of lanterns and puppets.

Experience the joy of interacting with never-seen-before animal puppets including energetic meerkats, colourful peacocks, and playful snow leopards, joined by lots of your favourites from previous years.

Giant candy canes, fairy lights, ribbon tunnel, neon walkways, oversized festive baubles, and loads more exciting new surprises.

The journey around the zoo takes around 60 - 90 minutes and there are lots of lovely festive feasts for you to enjoy as you travel around.

Price: tickets starting from just £12
Chester Zoo, Upton-by-Chester, Chester, CH2 1EU
www.chesterzoo.org

16 November - 23 December

Yuletide

Step into an incredible glittering adventure at Tatton Park Gardens this season. Fall into a world of folklore, festive tradition and rituals as the characters and creatures from winter myths and stories come to life!

Enjoy live music and fire juggling, storytelling and performance at a winter experience like no other! Roast marshmallows around the fire and warm up with a hot chocolate as you are enchanted by a traditional storyteller weaving tall tales to delight and enthrall the whole family.
Tatton Park, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 6QN
Tel: 01625 374400 www.tattonpark.org.uk

23 November - 24 December

Father Christmas at the Farm



A holiday favourite, families can see Father Christmas and his elf helpers in a festive grotto at the Farm.

Enjoy roaming entertainers, live music with festive choirs and brass bands and stop off for a tasty treat in the Christmas Cafe located in the Clydesdale Barn. Huddle together in Santa's sleigh for a festive photo and make your own magical reindeer food in the Mill to take home and sprinkle around on Christmas Eve!
Prices: Adult £11 (includes Farm entry)
Child £12.50 (includes Farm entry and gift from Father Christmas)

Tatton Park, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 6QN
Tel: 01625 374400 www.tattonpark.org.uk

23 November - 29 December

Journey to Oz: The Christmas Mansion

Be swept away on a wonderful adventure through iconic scenes from the Wizard of Oz, transformed and brought to life within the grandeur of Tatton Park's historic mansion. As you wander through the beautifully decorated staterooms, each corner turned will reveal a new surprise, from the exciting adventure following the Yellow Brick Road to the sparkling Emerald City, all adorned in beautiful festive decorations. Whether you're a fan of Dorothy, have a soft spot for the Scarecrow, or you're intrigued by the Wicked Witch, there's something here to capture the hearts of visitors of all ages. This event is not just a visual spectacle; it's an immersive experience that promises to leave



you with memories to cherish. So, grab your sparkly slippers (or your winter boots!) and join in for a journey over the rainbow.

Tatton Park, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 6QN
Tel: 01625 374400 www.tattonpark.org.uk

29 November - 1 December 10:00 - 16:00

Christmas Gift Fair

Christmas shopping at Tatton ParkA unique shopping experience inside The Mansion's Tenants Hall - a wing of the stately mansion house that is not usually open to the public. You'll find lots of local suppliers selling items including Jewellery, candles, crafts and Gin. Shop for gifts and crafts for all the family plus get some great ideas for presents not usually found in high street shops.

Tatton Park, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 6QN
Tel: 01625 374400 www.tattonpark.org.uk

30 November 11:00 - 18:00

Manchester Made Craft Fair - Winter Edition

The Manchester Made Craft Fair returns to Waterside on November 30, offering visitors a unique Christmas shopping experience. See and buy high quality contemporary crafts made by 25 selected designer-makers from Greater Manchester. Visitors can expect a varied mix of crafts including jewellery, ceramics, textiles, print and woodwork in and around the distinctive Chambers at Waterside. Festive drinks and cakes will also be available in the cosy 'Sup Bar, offering a relaxed, festive atmosphere to shop handmade this Christmas.

1 Waterside Plaza, Sale Trafford M33 7ZF
www.watersidearts.org

30 November 11:00 - 17:00

Welcoming Christmas to Macclesfield

Come to the Market Place for a day of fun, music and festivities. Start the day around the Christmas tree, enjoying a seasonal selection from Macclesfield Youth Brass Band from 11am before a Christmas welcome from the Mayor on the Silk FM stage. There will be stilt-walkers, hula-hoops, face-painting, crafting, live music from Choose Macc and more, all under the beautiful Macclesfield Christmas lights.
www.macclesfield-tc.gov.uk

30 November/19 December 10:00 - 16:20

A Quiet Visit with Father Christmas - Neurodiverse Friendly

Christmas is for everyone, and this year Quarry Bank is delighted to offer neurodiverse friendly sessions to meet Father Christmas. Attendees will experience a special 30-minute session including festive activities, crafts, and of

course the chance to meet Father Christmas and receive a gift.

Without removing the magic and joy of Christmas, these sessions will host fewer guests, no music will be played, with fewer staff/volunteers around. The relaxed atmosphere will give ticket holders the opportunity to explore as they'd like in their own time.

These sessions are open to guests of any age who have additional needs.

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

30 November - 24 December

North Pole Experience at Reddish Vale Farm

A Full tour of the North Pole Christmas Headquarters: Elf Academy, build your own Christmas friend (A Teddy Bear), meet the Pole Office Elves, head to Elf Ville, don't forget to stop at Holly Jolly Gumdrop Sweet Shop and receive a special treat. Visit Mrs Claus to decorate gingerbread with a festive treat for the grown ups. Visit Santa's stables with his farmyard friends. Lots of jolly photo opportunities for all the family including Father Christmas's sleigh! Special personal visit from Father Christmas.

Reddish Vale Farm, Reddish Vale Road, Reddish, Stockport SK5 7HE
Tel: 0161 480 1645 www.reddishvalefarm.co.uk

1 December 10:00 - 11:30

Kids car boot

Have fun while making or saving money! The Kids Car Boot sale is rinning the first Sunday of every month. It's a great place to: make money selling your unwanted baby and children's clothes, books, toys, games and equipment; save money by finding some brilliant bargains, and do your bit for the environment by recycling in our community.

Support Barnardo's by donating your unsold items at the end of the event; to date we've raised over £87,650

The Kingsway School, High Grove Road, Cheadle, Stockport SK8 1NP www.stockport.gov.uk/events

1 December 11:00 - 16:30

Bramall Hall Decorated for Christmas 2024: The Northern Lights



Explore the Hall beautifully decorated for Christmas, with a theme inspired by the Northern Lights. Come and enjoy a cascade of colour to tickle the senses and help you find that Christmas spirit. The Hall has been decorated by a team of some 30 dedicated floral design volunteers working alongside the Bramall Hall team. There is Christmas spirit aplenty!

Bramall Hall, Hall Road, Bramhall, Stockport, SK7 3NX www.stockport.gov.uk/events

1-23, 26-31 December 10:30 - 16:00

1-5 January 10:30 - 16:00

Merry Squeakmas Mouse Trail

Track down a mischief of festive mice through the gardens and even inside the mill, as they help with the final preparations for Christmas. Discover the mice as they decorate a tree, bake cookies, wrap presents and more.

Guide to Events for Christmas and beyond



This trail is around the gardens and indoors
Suitable for children of all ages
Quarry Bank, Styal, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 4LA
Tel: 01625 527468 www.nationaltrust.org.uk

1, 7, 8, 14, 15, 21, 24 December 10 - 15:15
(1/2 hour performance)

A Winter Experience in the Dunham Massey House

Stuff & Nonsense Theatre bring a touch of winter magic as they lead you on an immersive story told through their unique blend of puppetry, music and laughter.
Follow the enchanting trail of the Earl's tale through some of the hidden rooms of Dunham Massey House. Join the intrepid Earl of Dunham Massey, as he returns from his travels around the world. He brings with him an array of wild animal friends, who he welcomes into his magnificent home. However, the family pets, who have been looking after the place in his absence, have other ideas!
For ages 3-10 but suitable for the whole family.
Dunham Massey, Altrincham, Greater Manchester, WA14 4SJ Tel: 01619411025
www.nationaltrust.org.uk

1, 7, 8, 12, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23 December
12:00 - 12:45 13:30 - 14:15

Choirs in the courtyard

Join in with some Christmas carols in the courtyard at the house and you'll feel jolly in no time. It's the most wonderful time of the year to get together with your friends and family and sing to your heart's content.
Lyme Park, Disley, Stockport, Cheshire, SK12 2NR
Tel: 01663 762023 www.nationaltrust.org.uk

5 December 12:00 - 19:00

Christmas Fayre at Stockport Town Hall



Join in for a festive fayre with a wide range of stalls perfect for purchasing last minute gifts, including food, live music, and a raffle in aid of the Wellspring Stockport. A chance to visit Father Christmas in his grotto (a small fee of £3 applies and will be donated to Reuben's Retreat) Town Hall, Edward Street, Stockport SK1 3DQ
www.stockport.gov.uk

6, 7 December 9:00 - 16:00

Victorian Christmas Market



This unique Victorian Christmas Market will include: a family Christmas picture area, live choirs and bands, fairground rides, Santa with gifts for kids, a live DJ performance, a raffle.
21 Market Place, Stockport SK1 1EU
www.stockport.gov.uk

6, 13, 20 December 10:00 - 16:50

Baby and toddler festive play session with Father Christmas

Join in for a special Christmas baby and toddler activity and play session, with a special visit from Father Christmas and a gift just for your little one. This 30-minute session will include an interactive story/song, a keepsake craft for you to take home, and toys for the children to play with. Father Christmas will make a special visit, giving each child a gift and there will be an opportunity to take a photo with the man himself. This event is designed for children aged 6 months - 5 years, however older children are welcome.
Quarry Bank, Styal, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 4LA
Tel: 01625 527468 www.nationaltrust.org.uk

6-8, 13-15, 20-22 December 10:30 - 16:00

Deck the Hall

Visit Little Moreton Hall this December and make some lasting memories with family and friends. Discover the hall like never before while travelling through Christmas past, without the need for a time machine!
Little Moreton Hall, Newcastle Road, Congleton Cheshire CW12 4SD www.nationaltrust.org.uk

6 December, 24 January 14:30 - 16:00

16 December, 13 January 10:00 - 11:30
Experitots is a regular event specially designed for children aged 0 - 4.
During these playful sessions, toddlers and their adults are encouraged to explore and experiment together. The team of friendly Explainers are on hand to support young explorers throughout the morning. In sessions in the Experiment gallery, you can discover the wonder and delight of science at work whilst making memories with your favourite tiny people. Will you make light move? Can you find the heat in your body? How tall a tower can you build? These sessions are priced £3 per person. Science and Industry Museum, Liverpool Road, Manchester M3 4FP t: 033 0058 0058 www.scienceandindustrymuseum.org.uk

8 December

Tatton Yule Yomp

The 10K trail race attracts both club runners seeking to place and recreational runners enjoying a festive event, many in fabulous fancy dress! The race is a 1-lap course which runs through and around Tatton Park, consisting of undulating terrain, trail, grass, tarmac and gravel. The final 1K is on a fully closed road, back to Race HQ at Egerton Youth Club.
Alternatively you can join (approx) 2km Family Fun Run at 9.35am. Starting just after the main event this is a great occasion for the whole family!
Tatton Park, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 6QN
Tel: 01625 374400 www.tattonpark.org.uk

11, 18 December 16:00 - 17:30

Everyone Can: Gaming sessions from 5 to 18
Technology centre in Manchester offers an unparalleled gaming experience for disabled people: up-to-date equipment, retro arcade games, VR (virtual reality), driving simulators. With alternative control methods for anyone who needs them, everyone can game! Sessions for disabled children are every Wednesday. Floor 1, 25 School Road Sale, Manchester M33 7XX www.stockport.gov.uk

12 December 14:00 - 20:00.

Macclesfield Twilight Market

Make it a social event with family or friends! Enjoy a leisurely stroll around Macclesfield Town Centre for a bit of Christmas shopping and stop by the Christmas Market.



The Christmas Market will be set up on cobbles of Market Place around the Christmas tree. This year the market is hosted by 'Made In Macc' with amazing stalls selling locally made gifts, treats and stocking fillers! Enjoy a bite to eat from one of the food vendors and maybe have a festive tippie under fairy lights, keeping warm in our heated giant teepee whilst enjoying live music.
www.visitmacclesfield.co.uk

13 December 11:00 - 16:30

The Bramall Hall Elf Trail

The elves are back and up to their tricks again! Bramall Hall is beautifully decorated for Christmas, which means the cheeky elves have moved in once more! Discover Bramhall's Xmas critters and earn yourself a festive little treat. Recommended for children aged 3 and up.
Bramall Hall, Hall Road Bramhall, Stockport, SK7 3NX www.stockport.gov.uk

15 December 17:45 - 20:00

Carols in the Courtyard

Wrap-up warm for carols around the Christmas tree in the Bramall Hall courtyard, led by The Gallery Choir. The courtyard will be lit with fairy lights to create a wonderful ambience in the night. Bring a camping chair, a blanket, a lantern, or some fairy lights. Your ticket includes: a viewing of the Hall beautifully decorated for Christmas inspired by the Northern Lights and a glass of warm mulled wine and a mince pie in the interval. Concert starts at 6pm.

A magical evening for all the family
Bramall Hall, Hall Road, Bramhall, Stockport, SK7 3NX www.stockport.gov.uk

17 December 9:30 - 10:30

Deer Feed Safari

Join Tatton's expert ranger team for an exclusive opportunity to get up close and personal to ancient deer herd.
Find out how the Red and Fallow deer are cared for, watch them eating, help serve them their breakfast of crunchy carrots and learn how their diet helps them stay healthy. The rangers are happy to answer any questions during this unique 1 hour experience and you will have plenty of opportunities to take some memorable photos and videos during the safari.

Wrap up warm and finish off your visit with a warming hot chocolate in the Stables restaurant (10% discount with your ticket).
Minimum participation age of 4 years old.
Tatton Park, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 6QN
Tel: 01625 374400 www.tattonpark.org.uk

22 December 15:00 - 16:00

Christmas Carols in the Stableyard

Meet up with friends and family, pick up your song sheet and join the sing-along to Christmas carols and songs in the twinkling Stableyard. Sing-along to Christmas classics and favourites with the King Edward Musical Society Band and choir. Pop to the Gift Shop and Housekeeper's Store for last minute gifts. Warming food and drink to takeaway will be available from the Stables Restaurant.
Tatton Park, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 6QN
Tel: 01625 374400 www.tattonpark.org.uk

26 December 9:30 - 11:30

Coffee, Chill & Spill for Mums

Coffee, Chill & Spill is a really supportive space where mums come together and share experiences with each other with no judgement. Refreshments and a number of therapeutic treatments such as hand massages are provided. The sessions aim to be uplifting: lots of laugh, honest talks, and a safe space if you need to vent or cry. The aim is to reassure, to support any thoughts of self doubt or worry over your efforts of being a good parent as well as supporting you in your own self care. The group is open to all women at any stage of motherhood. It doesn't matter how old your children are, you are welcome! Children are welcome to attend with you.
Heaton Norris Community Centre, Love Ln. SK4 1JA



out and about

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Cat Allen: 07769 155591
cat@noodleperformancearts.com
www.noodleperformancearts.com

Tatton Park receives lifeline grant from government's £1.57bn Culture Recovery Fund



Tatton Park's Education team has been awarded £180,000 grant funding this year as part of the Government's £1.57 billion Culture Recovery Fund. The Fund is to help face the challenges brought by the coronavirus pandemic and to ensure a sustainable future post-pandemic.

Tatton Park is one of 1,385 cultural and creative organisations across the country receiving urgently needed support. £257 million of investment has been announced today as part of the very first round of the Culture Recovery Fund grants programme being administered by Arts Council England.

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, Tatton Park's award-winning, sustainable learning offer welcomed 24,000 school pupils and 1,000 informal learners every year. Learners came from near and far including from the local community, across Cheshire and the North West, as well as inner-city regions.

Since March to the end of September, just one school visit and no informal learning activities have taken place and without additional financial support, Tatton's education offer was unlikely to recover from the devastating impacts of the pandemic.

For over 30 years, Tatton's cultural sites and unique collection of objects and stories have been used as venues and inspiration for learning. Attaining the Sandford Award consistently since 1979, which recognises excellence in heritage education, is testament to the outstanding, inclusive learning product that was on offer.

The grant from the Culture Recovery Fund will ensure this exceptional learning provision will not be lost to the many different audiences who benefit.

The plans will include an outreach offer which would be delivered in person by the team to schools and community locations external to Tatton, and the

introduction of special evening and weekend experiences to support community and uniformed groups like brownies and scouts who find it difficult to visit during normal opening hours. The Education team will also create a series of resources suitable for use in the classroom or at home, and introduce digital workshops for schools, home educators and families.

Laura Cunningham, Tatton Park's Learning and Visitor Services Manager, said:

"Securing this funding not only allows us to continue offering outstanding learning experiences for our audiences, but it also supports the future sustainability and longevity of the education department. We will continue to offer on-site visits for those who are able to attend, but this funding will also allow us to introduce a variety of different formats to suit the changing needs of our visitors. We are passionate about the opportunity to once again be able to share the rich and diverse history of Tatton Park with new educational experiences available for all ages and abilities".

Who doesn't love applause? *Drama classes for neurodivergent kids*



As a child I was terrified of the dark, obviously, and of drawing attention to myself. I never raised a hand in class, lived in fear of being asked a question by the teacher or worse, being made to go to the next classroom and knock on the door (people would hear) and ask for a board rubber or chalk (people would stare and yes, I'm old enough to remember chalk boards).

Unfortunately for someone who had chronic 'I'm not here' syndrome I was related to my worst fear - my nemesis, the no filter, no *cares* given sibling. My younger brother sang loudly in shops from his pushchair, as an older child he told rubbish jokes to anyone who'd listen and generally did anything possible to be the centre of attention. Horrifying.

Interestingly though, my brother and I had one thing in common. We were both really good at performing. My brother from birth, apparently, and I from my teens. My brother was always chosen to play weird and wonderful characters in Gang Shows and school productions. Everyone said he would be the actor in the family though his career went sideways into sales, something he excels at because he has that natural charisma and gift of the gab. I'd place bets on him managing to sell ice skates to Santa.

I used drama as a platform to rid myself of my anxiety, it created a persona to cope with it and now as a trained actor and performer of over 25 years I can

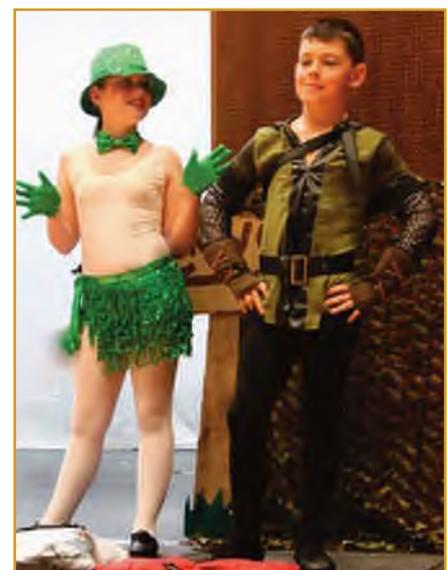
stand in front of an audience, a classroom or any crowd with confidence. I believe truly that had I not been allowed to study drama and dance in high school I would have gone through life as a totally different person to the one I am today and would never have experienced many of the things that have rounded me as an adult. But that's another argument for the benefits of funding the arts in schools so we'll leave that for another time...

Recently, the idea that drama can help young people with neurodivergence to develop and master skills which will carry them forward has gained a lot of traction. Kids with ADHD especially can benefit - people's initial view of them may be that they are disruptive, loud and outspoken. Sounds like perfect material for performing arts! They're joy to teach and any drama class is much more fun with a number of children eager to contribute, get up and do. As someone who has worked with kids for the last ... years, I already know that drama classes are good for shy and for boisterous children, for those keen to implement any creative ideas they may have and those, who are reluctant to use their imagination; but for children with ADHD performing arts tuition can be a real gift. For them, drama lessons can become a safe space where behaviour which may normally be frowned on can be accepted and even applauded. The positives of drama for kids with

ADHD are huge. Here are some examples.

- Freedom to be themselves - the performing arts are perfect for tapping into the wealth of creativity typically found in an ADHD brain, allowing them to excel at games requiring improvisation, a creative input and equally encouraging others to step up to their level; a winning formula all round.
- Aiding focus - the discipline of rehearsal, from learning lines to listening for cues is a fantastic way to channel energy and give children a challenge with a positive outcome.
- Physical fun - for children who struggle with vocalising, things such as character work, physical theatre techniques (mask work or mime) and dance can help with expression and allow them to use their body to communicate ideas and release energy and tension.
- Routine vs spontaneity - both of these elements appear in performing arts classes. The structure of a ballet, singing or drama class, repetitiveness of rehearsal coupled with the learning of new material can give children the security of familiarity while the injection of a creative boost stops it becoming boring.
- Teamwork - it might seem a cliché, but for children that may find social interaction overwhelming, having a platform to give their opinion on a subject tailored to their abilities is both liberating and confidence building. Every role, no matter how big or small, is crucial in a play or musical so being part of that team is an essential part of validating a child's sense of self-worth.

And finally, no matter who you are or why you are on the stage, who doesn't love applause?? The roar of the crowd - at the end of all the rehearsal, line learning, dance practice and effort there is a very real and rewarding prize... appreciation. From Hamilton to Lady Macbeth to the third spear holder from the left; character names are the only labels we give to an actor in theatre. No one watching would know any different, it's truly a blank canvas, an anonymous platform for everyone to fit in.



by Cat Allen - Director of Noodle Performing Arts, Cheshire

viewpoint

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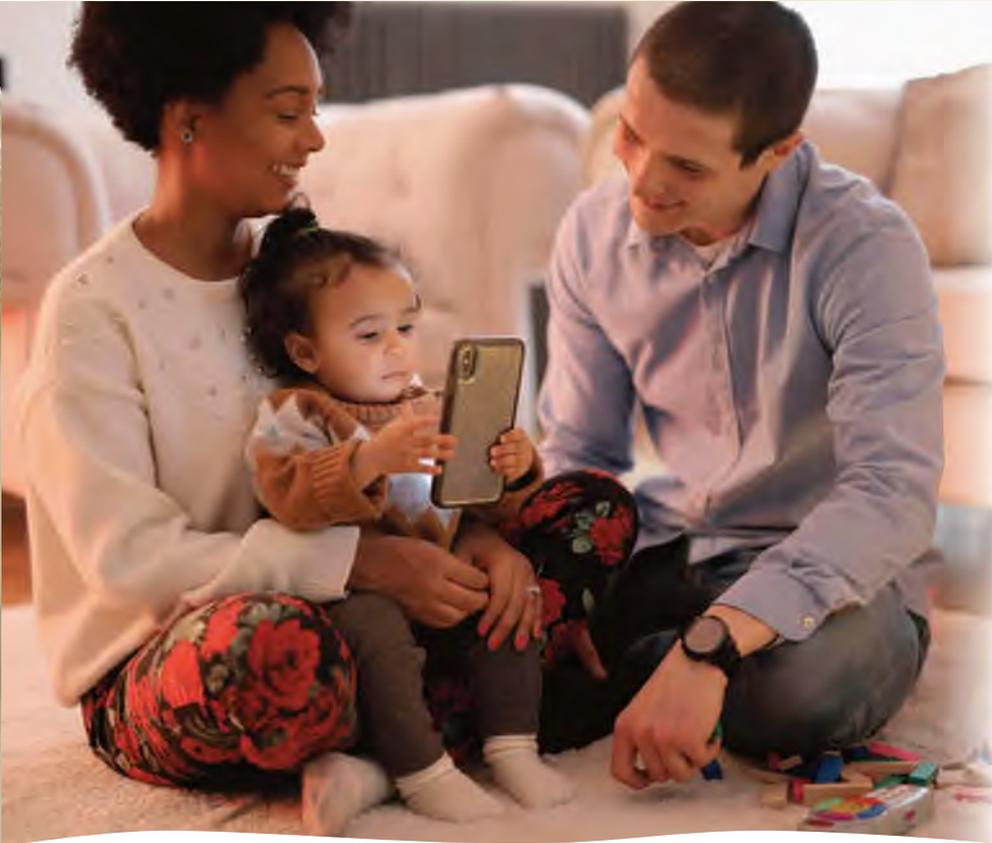
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Left to their own devices

Digital media use: tips for parents of young children



Young children's access to devices is widespread. According to the Ofcom 'Children and Parents: Media Use and Attitudes Report 2024', 84% of 3-4 year-olds now go online. While tablets remain the most frequently used device in this age group, 25% of 3-4 year-olds now have their own smartphone, and 51% engage with social media, despite platforms typically having a minimum age requirement of 13. Furthermore, 34% of parents of young children report that they 'find it hard to control their child's screen time'.

Many parents are feeling an immense amount of pressure and guilt over the decisions they make, due to the constant media bombardment around the unobtainable goal of perfect parenting. But allowing young children access to digital devices is something parents must consider, as there is a growing body of research about the risks to children.

Device use often goes against what we know are the fundamentals that support child development. Firstly, children need to move more and sit less. Secondly, young children are programmed to seek interaction from caregivers, and it is this which supports the explosion of brain activity in the early years. But when children use online devices, it is often in a passive and sedentary way, and displaces other more developmental and interactive experiences.

Research shows the negative impact of excessive and passive use of devices on children's speech and language development, emotional regulation, ability to sleep and to focus on less stimulating off-screen

activities, which are essential for balanced development.

So how can parents harness the potential of digital devices in positive ways and keep their youngsters safe and well online? We need to make mindful and conscious choices about when and what our children access and why.

When should digital devices be introduced? The World Health Organization does not recommend any screen time for children under 2 - there's no evidence showing that digital media benefits very young children - and a maximum of 1 hour per day for those aged 2 - 5.

When devices are introduced, the focus should be on the purpose of the experience, rather than simply tracking the amount of time spent on them.

Remember, you make the difference.

Apps, games and technology targeted at children and their parents is big business. Many companies want to sell you their products which they claim will make your child smarter. The truth is that many of these claims are baseless, the real difference is made during interactions between adult and child whilst using digital media. Not all screen time is created equal. Just watching, scrolling and clicking through content doesn't involve any real learning or development. But there are many amazing examples of how digital media can be used to not only support, but also extend learning. Such as a child:

- learning to speak a foreign language using an audio programme
- watching a live stream from the International Space Station to pursue their interest in the solar system

- using a basic robot toy to learn simple coding
- learning some yoga poses

These examples, coupled with interactions with an adult, provide far more dynamic social and learning opportunities. Just like we consider a balanced nutritional diet for children, so too should we consider a balanced digital diet. We should focus on the quality of what children digitally consume as well as the quantity. Below are some suggestions to consider around device use.

- **Set limits**

Establish age-appropriate boundaries about how long children can use devices, specifying times of day and appropriate platforms/content for use. Devices shouldn't interfere with important routines, such as sleep or mealtimes.

- **Screen-free time**

Designate certain times or areas in the home where screens are out of sight, to encourage social interaction and play, and physical activities to support overall well-being.

- **Encourage active use**

Promote active engagement with digital media, ideally with the involvement of another person to foster social interaction and learning.

- **Create content**

Inspire children to use digital tools creatively, encouraging them to build new skills, discover passions, and make their own content.

- **Be a positive role model**

Make sure you're present for your child and not constantly focussed on a screen or responding to social media. Children will mimic the actions of adults around them.

- **Have conversations**

Take an interest in what your child is doing on a device. Discuss online safety, sharing information, appropriate behaviour and ensure that if your child feels something isn't right, they know to tell you or a trusted adult immediately.

- **Security settings**

Ensure your broadband and all devices in your household have appropriate security controls and settings.

More information, resources and support for parents, available at [eyesafe.lgfl.net](https://www.eyesafe.lgfl.net) and [parentsafelgfl.net](https://www.parentsafelgfl.net).



by Alex Dave, Safeguarding Education Officer, LGfL - The National Grid for Learning

Mental health and early smartphone exposure



by Sam Gibson, Head of Preparatory Department at MHSG

Developmental challenges and emotional regulation

One of the most concerning aspects of early smartphone exposure is its impact on emotional regulation. Emotional regulation is the ability to manage and respond to emotional experiences in an appropriate and balanced manner. This skill is critical for healthy interpersonal relationships and overall mental health. The area of the brain, which governs decision-making, impulse control, and emotional regulation, is still developing throughout childhood and adolescence.

When young children spend excessive time interacting with digital devices, they may become reliant on external stimuli for distraction or emotional comfort. Instead of learning how to manage emotions through interaction with caregivers, peers, or through self-reflection, they may turn to a device for instant gratification or escape.

Social skills and interpersonal relationships

Another critical aspect of early development is the formation of social skills. Much of a child's ability to engage with others, develop empathy, and build meaningful relationships is learned through face-to-face interactions with family, peers, and caregivers. When children spend too much time in front of screens, particularly smartphones, they miss out on these crucial social experiences. This can hinder their ability to form close relationships and engage in cooperative play, both of which are essential for healthy social development.

Anxiety, depression, and the 'comparison trap'

As children grow older and become more active on social media, the risks associated with early smartphone exposure evolve. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the negative effects of social media. These platforms often present an idealised version of life, where users showcase their best moments, achievements, and appearances. For young people, this can lead to feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and low self-esteem as they compare their own lives to the seemingly perfect lives of others.

Indeed, this aspect of social media disproportionately affects girls, who spend more time than their male peers using these platforms.

Continued on page 20 ...

Those of us old enough to remember the 70s and 80s will recall the time when 'fast food' emerged in the US with the expansion of McDonalds and thereafter swept the world. More commonly referred to as ultra-processed food nowadays, we now have a much greater understanding of the science which has proven that the consumption of these products is associated with a higher risk of succumbing to many diseases. Dense with calories, convenient to use, highly palatable and perniciously addictive, we are all familiar with the temptation to eat these items and the consequential accelerating rates of obesity in the developed world. Furthermore, these products are manufactured by enormous organisations with an eye on profitability more than 'genuine' health and well-being. I use the word 'genuine' because some of the so called 'health foods' advertised ubiquitously, are amongst the worst offenders.

I think that there are many parallels to be drawn from the revolution in the way we eat, to the advent of smart technologies on the health of our young people. I do not mean to exclude adults from this assertion, but I am concerned with the education of young children, and this is where my focus lies. The advent of Smart technologies has, since its inception, been peddled by large corporations as super helpful, convenient and intuitively easy to use. We have been told that they can help us become more creative, smarter and faster. Tapping into our primitive brains and activating the dopamine system, the millions of applications and social media platforms at our disposal have created a compulsion which is

very hard to resist, not unlike that triggered by ultra-processed food.

In today's hyper-connected world, it is hard to imagine a life without smartphones and they are not going to go away. These devices have revolutionized the way we communicate, learn, and engage with the world. However, as parents, and educators, we must seriously consider the impact of early smartphone exposure on the mental health of young people. With growing research into the developmental and psychological effects of screen time, we are gaining insights into how early and excessive use of smartphones can influence the well-being of children as they approach adolescence. Understanding this impact is critical if we are to foster environments that promote healthy development.

The rising tide of smartphone use

It is not uncommon to see toddlers swiping through screens or staring at YouTube. This trend raises important questions about the long-term consequences for mental health, especially as children grow into adolescence, a period marked by significant emotional and psychological development.

A growing body of research indicates that the use of smartphones in early childhood can have a detrimental impact on mental well-being. These effects can manifest in a number of ways from increased anxiety and depression to difficulties in attention, self-regulation, and sleep patterns. The relationship between early smartphone exposure and these challenges is complex, often involving a range of social, emotional, and neurological factors.

Mental health and early smartphone exposure

Photo: Katie Lucas Photography



safer alternative. Recently, we were privileged to host Dr. Susie Davies, founder of PAPA (Parents Against Phone Addiction in Young Adolescents), who conducted informative workshops with our Years 5 and 6 students. Her visit culminated in a valuable evening presentation for parents, addressing the risks of phone addiction and offering practical strategies to manage it.

Fundamentally, we have a responsibility as educators to help prepare our pupils for their future world and ensuring that they have the life skills needed to interact positively with those around them and to avoid unhealthy habits lie at the heart of a truly holistic education.



Striking a Balance: The Role of Schools and Families

While it is clear that early and excessive smartphone use can have detrimental effects on the mental health of young people, it is important to recognise that technology itself is not inherently harmful. Smartphones offer numerous educational benefits, providing access to information, fostering creativity, and facilitating communication. The key is finding a balance between healthy screen time and opportu-

nities for real-world interaction, physical activity, and unstructured play.

At Manchester High School for Girls, we fully support the principles of the Smartphone Free Childhood Movement, which recommends delaying smartphone use, or at the very least, limiting exposure until the age of 14. Mobile phones of any sort are not permitted in the Preparatory Department, but for those girls who need to be contacted while travelling, we advocate the use of 'brick phones' as a

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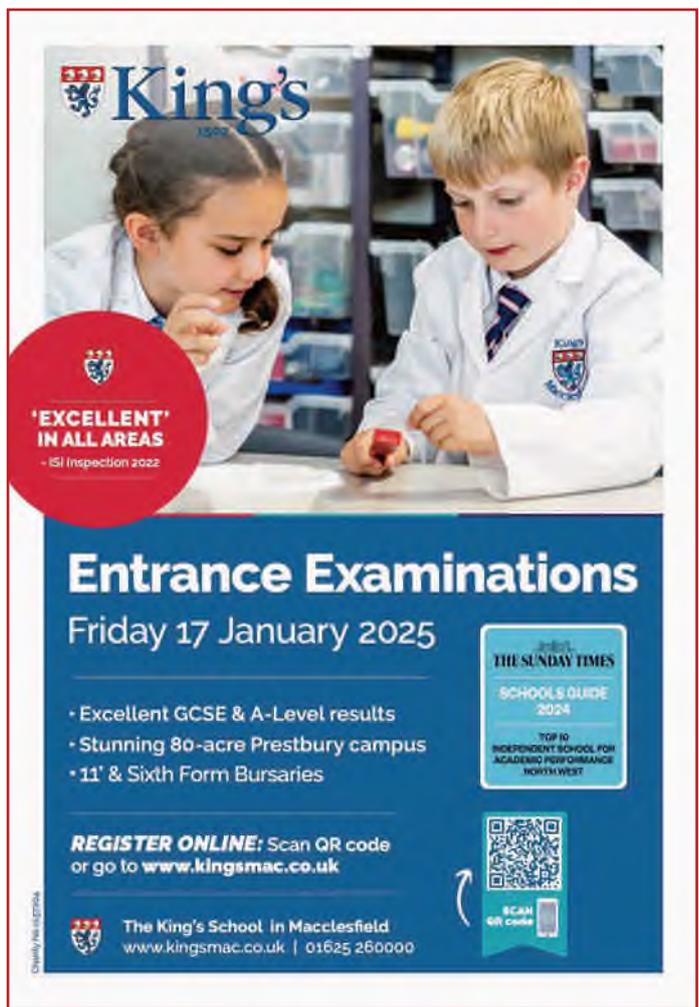


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Winter wonderland by Paul Wojnicki



It takes less than a minute for us to walk from our apartment in Pyhä to a prime viewing spot for the northern lights, and as we arrive I notice a Finnish family walking just behind us, heading to a nearby restaurant.

"Hei" they greet us.

"Hei," I reply, pointing up to the sky, where the green lights are dancing away.

They say something in Finnish that sounds like the equivalent of 'oh' and then, without stopping to watch for even five seconds, they enter the restaurant.

I guess here in Lapland, the Aurora Borealis is no big deal. In Pyhä, the people seem far more interested in the skiing than the Northern Lights. I can't say I blame them all that much, since Pyhä (pronounced Pu-Ha) is the perfect place for beginners and families to ski. The long, wide, slopes today were virtually empty, which is incredible considering that this is the Christmas holidays. Even the red and black runs higher up the mountain were nowhere near packed, and there have been no real lift queues the whole week.

Maybe the temperatures dropping below minus 20 degrees on some of the days have played a part in this, but it hasn't stopped us. When it did get that cold, we dealt with it by skiing for an hour at a time, and then warming up again in the apartment, which was right next to the ski lifts.

We've also tried our hands at ice climbing with Bliss Adventure on a frozen waterfall, just a ten-minute walk away from our apartment. None of us are climbers, as such, but everything was provided including climbing gear, instruction, hot drinks, and a warm fire, and we all managed to push ourselves beyond where we thought we would climb.

Harrison loved the climb and talked me into trying the Pyhäkuru Adventure Park right next door; the best way to describe this is "Go Ape on Ice", with

ziplines and rope bridges spanning a frozen canyon and waterfall. Harrison loved it!

The kids are heartbroken when it's time to leave Pyhä. I cheer them up by reminding them that we're not going home just yet, and are spending two days in Rovaniemi, capital of the Arctic, where they'll get to go ice skating at Snowman World and meet Santa and his elves at Santa Claus Village.

Ninety minutes later, we arrive at Apukka Resort, near Rovaniemi Airport and the Santa Clause Village. The resort is located in a dark sky area, which is even better for viewing the Northern Lights than Pyhä. As a result, they've built numerous "Aurora Cabins" and glass igloos, so you can watch the lights from the warmth of your room.

The first thing we notice is a strange, ghostly sound coming from the other side of the road. This turns out to be the howling of huskies from the resort's on-site husky farm. The resort does offer various husky safaris, but we're here for a sauna and ice bath experience on a frozen lake. I won't lie, I'm terrified at the thought of plunging into icy water, especially as the thermometer reads minus eighteen degrees.



Our sauna host leads us to the frozen lake, past a small sledding slope, and we spot some groups ice fishing a few hundred meters from our lakeside sauna. The host has already heated the wood-burning sauna and laid out towels, robes,

and slippers. After a safety briefing, he informs us that the swimming hole is smaller than usual due to the extreme cold. "Great," I mutter, as he assures us that we're in for an amazing experience.

After changing, we sit in the sauna for about five minutes, until we're all thoroughly warmed up, then head out to the steps leading down to the ice hole. Harrison and Ella have volunteered me to go first and are watching eagerly as I dip my toe in the freezing water. Alena records the moment I lower myself into the icy lake, trying to keep a straight face, though every inch of my body is screaming, "no!"

Moments later, I'm back in the sauna, laughing at Harrison as he steps into the water, his face a mask of pain. To his credit, he stays in longer than I did, but once he's out, he bolts for the sauna like a polar bear is chasing him. A few minutes later, we've both thawed out and, being gluttons for punishment, we're ready to take the plunge again.

• Practical information

Ryanair flies to Rovaniemi until late March, with flights from Liverpool as low as £40 return. The Santa Clause Village and Snowman World are very close to the airport and the ski bus from Rovaniemi Airport stops at the Santa Clause Village. The ski bus runs four times a day to Pyhä, taking about 90 minutes, and costing around €33/€16 each way for adults/kids. Apartments next to the slopes in Pyhä cost as little as €460 for four nights in February half-term 2025.

Apukka Resorts is also close to the airport and the Pyhä ski bus stops there. They offer several sauna experiences, including a sauna on a sled which can be delivered to your cabin. They also have wilderness resorts and city-centre apartments in Rovaniemi, where we stayed for one night.



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