



SAFEGUARDING NEWSLETTER

Safeguarding at Christmas

This time of year provides additional challenges for schools and education providers, when it comes to monitoring the wellbeing of children in our care. December always sees a spike in safeguarding issues and every year the NSPCC report increasing numbers of children calling them for help, with a large number exposed to domestic and substance abuse. The festive period is also a common time for children to be abused by a relative, other children or close family friends who visit during over Christmas and New Year.

Whether it's the anxiety that comes with spending extended time around family members or not having a family to spend Christmas with, safeguarding practices can apply to all aspects of the holidays.

Safeguarding children over the festive period can pose particular challenges for several reasons.



Here are some of the key issues faced:

Increased stress or family tensions

Christmas can bring added financial strain, family pressures, or emotional stress. This may exacerbate existing family tensions, leading to situations where children might be at risk of neglect, abuse, or harm.

Disruption of routine and isolation

School holidays can disrupt children's regular routine, leaving them with more unstructured or unsupervised time. This could lead to situations where they spend more time in potentially unsafe environments, including online, or with individuals who may pose a risk to their safety.

Children can also feel cut off from their usual support network of trusted adults and friends. Neglected or abused children can experience extreme loneliness, anxiety, or depression.

Increased vulnerability

Some families might face difficulties during the holidays due to various factors such as financial and emotional strain, mental health issues, or substance abuse including excess alcohol. Children in these families might be more vulnerable to neglect or abuse during this time.

Reduced access to support services

During the holidays, some support services, including schools or community organisations, might be closed or operating at reduced capacity. This can limit the resources available to children who may need help or intervention.

Cultural or religious factors

Different cultures or religious practices might impact how families celebrate the holidays, potentially influencing the ways in which children are cared for or supervised.

Expense

Christmas places families under enormous pressure to spend money. Sadly, in the current cost of living crisis, many will be unable to absorb the financial commitments without going into debt.

School tries hard to poverty-proof and, whilst we cannot control what happens outside the school gate, we can make changes to support families throughout the year.



Pressures and Expectations

Christmas time comes with a lot of ideals that many households try to reach. This can bring families and groups closer together – but it can also cause tension. Whether it's the abundance of alcohol or being cooped up for longer periods than usual, conflict can ensue and it can require safeguarding practices to be used.

On top of this, [children in particular can have a very specific and idealised version of Christmas in their heads](#) that may not come true in their household.

Managing the expectations of those within your circle at Christmas is complicated, but the most important thing to remember is to prioritise the people first.

Pressure creates environments that can facilitate abusive behaviour. So, the key is to create a Christmas atmosphere not based on vanity (presents, lights, and whether you can cook the best dinner), but on welcoming values that make all members feel accepted.

Abuse at Christmas

The holiday season is often called the most wonderful time of the year – or at least that's what the songs say.

However, this period can be an anxiety-inducing one for both adults and children [experiencing domestic abuse](#) in all of its forms. It can quickly turn into a frightening time for the victim. In the UK, there is often a [surge in reports of domestic violence](#) from men, women, and children trapped with their abusers.

This is usually after the core period, however, as Christmas time means there are fewer opportunities to report abuse. With many businesses and schools closed, accessing support can prove tricky for victims.



Mental Wellbeing

A consideration for both children and adults is their mental health over Christmas. Those who are or have been a part of households with child protection issues, domestic violence and mental health difficulties can carry those issues into other environments – sometimes unknowingly.

It's been shown that people with mental health problems struggle with self-harm and suicidal feelings due to the pressure of Christmas. Not only can this create hostile environments for adults but the effects can ripple out onto children and young people, putting them in extremely vulnerable situations.

It's important to know how to best [support those with mental health issues](#) at a time where it can seem like they are discarded.



Online Safeguarding

With the prevalence of smartphones and online gaming, children and young people often spend their time over the Christmas holidays digitally connected to both friends and strangers.

These devices are often top of lists for young people and can provide fun for not only them but also the whole family. The catch is, of course, that anything with access to online platforms bring risks of [cyberbullying, scams, and seeing content not appropriate for children](#).

**Stay safe
online this
Christmas**



A parent or caregiver plays a key role in children stay safe online. Any games or gadgets should be checked for safety and appropriate content, while communications and hours spent on them should be monitored.

Lifelines and Support Networks

- The NSPCC are here to help 24/7 and children can call their [Childline](#) number on 0800 1111
- [ThinkUKnow](#) – links to various sites
- [Safer Internet Centre](#)
- [Shout](#) is the UK's first 24/7 text service, free on all major mobile networks, for anyone in crisis anytime, anywhere. It's a place to go if you're struggling to cope and you need immediate help. Text 85258
- Anna Freud Crisis Messenger – If you need support, you can text **AFC** to **85258**. A free, confidential, 24/7 text message support service for anyone who is feeling overwhelmed or is struggling to cope.
- [Educateagainsthate](#) provides practical advice and support on protecting children from extremism and radicalisation
- [Internet Matters](#) provide age-specific online safety checklists, guides on how to set parental controls, and practical tips to help children get the most out of their digital world
- [Talking to your child about online sexual harassment: A guide for parents](#) – This is the Children's Commissioner's parental guide on talking to their children about online sexual harassment.
- [Anti-Bullying Alliance](#) – Detailed information for anyone being bullied, along with advice for parents and schools. Signposts to various helplines and websites for further support.
- [Local children social care](#): If you think a child or young person is at risk or being abused or neglected, contact the children's social care team at their local council. If you do not know where they live, contact your local council's team, the [NSPCC](#) or the Police for advice.
- [Find a food bank](#)