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Christmas
Education
Family life

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Get in touch

Competition winners from our July/August issue

Chantal Platt, Lili Phung, Jax Blunt, Karolina Holmes and Emily Adams who received an Orchard Toys Game Bundle. See recipients of a children's wellbeing activity book and Readmio app.

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Welcome

It's time to start planning for Christmas! We have everything you need right here, from fun-to-make Christmas decorations and teachers' gifts to Christmas recipes, games, gifts, songs, audiobooks and ideas to keep the kids busy on Christmas Eve.

In our Education section, find out how to manage the stresses sometimes associated with homework and tips for encouraging your child to become an independent learner.

Do you have a child with a challenge to undertake? **Download the Ladder Challenge** from this issue to take it step by step.

Finally, we have some great treats for you in our **Christmas Gift Giveaway**. Don't forget to apply! And sign up at familiesmag.co.uk/go to receive every issue of this magazine free to your inbox.

SAD ✿ ANGRY ✿ ANXIOUS ✿ FALLING OUT WITH FRIENDS
TRAUMA ✿ BIG CHANGES ✿ CAN'T COPE ✿ LOSS

Play therapy at the Gingerbread House

Play and creative arts therapy can help children to untangle their emotions



Sally Robinson Chatham, Canterbury www.playtherapykent.co.uk

Finding the right tutor for your child

By Kate Hilpern

Here's some ideas of where to start.

Word of mouth. Asking around is the most effective and popular way to source good tutors. Parents whose children have just done the relevant exam, if that's what you're preparing for, are often the best source.

Your child's school. Talk to your child's teachers. They may be happy to help out a little outside school or know of other people who tutor.

Tutor agencies. While you are not getting a tutor recommended to you by someone you know, you can pick the one who seems most compatible and switch if it doesn't work out.

Website agencies. Parents can interview or chat with as many potential tutors as they like before agreeing to start tutoring. Be aware, however, that there may be little support if things go wrong.

What questions should you ask a prospective tutor?

What is your educational background? Particularly in the subject they are teaching.

How much tutoring experience do you have? Are they fully up to date with the current curriculum?



How will you tell if you're suited to tutoring my child? Do they adapt to children who might be very shy or boisterous?

What are your tutoring methods? Is the work all done in the session? Will there be additional homework?

What is your success rate? If they tutor for specific exams, do they achieve consistently good results?

What hours are you available and where do you tutor?

How long do you expect the tutoring to last? Do they teach fixed blocks or until everyone agrees the child is ready to 'go solo'?

What are your fees? Any additional costs? Terms and conditions? Are materials and textbooks included? What happens if either of you have to cancel a session?

Can you provide references and DBS records?

Kate Hilpern is from **The Good Schools Guide**, the leading impartial source of information on schools in the UK, helping parents with every aspect of choosing the best education for their children.

Encouraging your child to become an independent learner

By Bradley Busch and Edward Watson

As children get older and progress within the education system, how they manage their time and how efficiently and effectively they study independently becomes an ever-increasing premium skill. So, what does academic research tell us about how parents can help facilitate this?

Let's look at three different but related techniques.

Improving self-reflection. The more self-aware learners are, the more likely they are to manage potential distractions. Self-monitoring is a skill that can be developed by encouraging children to ask themselves good questions, such as 'how can I get better?' and 'where do I do my best work?'

Better time management. Left to their own devices, people tend to procrastinate. Some studies have found that seventy five per cent of students consider themselves procrastinators, with fifty per cent procrastinating regularly and to a level that is considered problematic.

Research suggests that most students are poor at estimating how long a task will take to complete, as they get distracted or face unexpected obstacles along the way. This is called 'The Planning Fallacy'. Find out more [here](#).



Introduce learners to effective goal setting. This must include flexibility, short and long-term goals and enough challenge to maintain motivation.

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Car booster AND pull along case... in one!



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DIY Christmas gifts for teachers

Fabulously creative and low-cost presents that will excite your kids and delight their teachers.



Make Christmas brownies in a jar



Create origami bookmarks



Make a homemade candle



Make scented soap



Bake a bird feeder



Paint a Sharpie mug



Plant a succulent mini pot



Make a rice heat bag



Create a tissue paper vase

What homework should my child get?

By Lisa Wander and Catherine Loble

Here's our rough guide.

Reception. Formal homework is rarely set. However, children are likely to bring home first reading books. Listening to your child read is invaluable.

Years 1 and 2. One or two literacy or numeracy tasks weekly. Children should spend no longer than thirty minutes on each task. Daily reading with your child is essential.

Years 3 and 4. Most schools set two homework activities per week of up to forty five minutes each, typically, one literacy and one numeracy.

Years 5 and 6. Two or three pieces of homework weekly totalling approximately two hours per week, in preparation for SATs and transition to secondary school.

Top tips for homework support

A quiet, designated homework area where everything they need is accessible.

A regular study time. Avoid late in the day. Encourage regular breaks.

Eliminate distractions. Ensure screens are off and out of reach.

Start with the hardest work first. Then the rest of the work will feel easier!

Praise work and effort to encourage a positive response to homework.

Teach by example. Work at the same time in the same space, if possible.

Accept help, when needed, from YouTube videos, websites like Khan Academy or even tutors.



Lisa and Catherine are co-founders of **EmParenting**, which works with schools and parents to strengthen children's core qualities like kindness and offers insights and tools to nurture their development and wellbeing.

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Families Magazine



Things to know about class WhatsApp groups

By Claire Winter

Love them or loathe them school class WhatsApp groups make it incredibly easy and quick to communicate with a community with common interests. But, as with most things, there are pros and cons!

Pros

Messages from other parents act as a valuable reminder of the important things you were told in emails from your child's school but have forgotten.

Sub-groups are fabulous for organising the dialogue and mean you can easily be in touch with individual parents or groups of parents with specific shared interests.

Cons

Expect flurries of panicked, confused and last-minute threads! Not everybody in the class group will always check email or previous threads. If you are getting confused yourself, always go back to the official school correspondence.

Tips for using WhatsApp

To find information on a particularly topic quickly, press the three dots in the corner of your screen and click 'search.' Type in a keyword and messages that have



that keyword will appear.

To respond to a specific message, hold your finger on the screen over that message and click the backwards arrow. You'll see the message you want to respond to appear in the chat box and you write your reply underneath.

Getting overwhelmed by different chats in different groups? Decide which groups are important and politely leave the rest.

Don't use your class group like your personal social media pages and post irrelevant videos, photographs, memes, conspiracy theories and articles. Or ask for medical advice! This type of usage can cause tension.

You can also **mute notifications** by clicking the profile at the top and selecting mute if you don't want to be constantly pinged all day.

Tween sleep habits

By Chris Skeat

It's just as hard for tweens to get a good night's sleep, as it is for their parents! Pre-teen/teen experts at **wearetwixt** offer tips on healthy sleep habits for this age group.

Children ages 10 to 12 years should get between nine hours fifteen minutes and nine hours forty five minutes of sleep a night (NHS). But, at puberty (on average, between 10-12 for girls and 12-16 for boys), children's natural sleep patterns may start shifting.

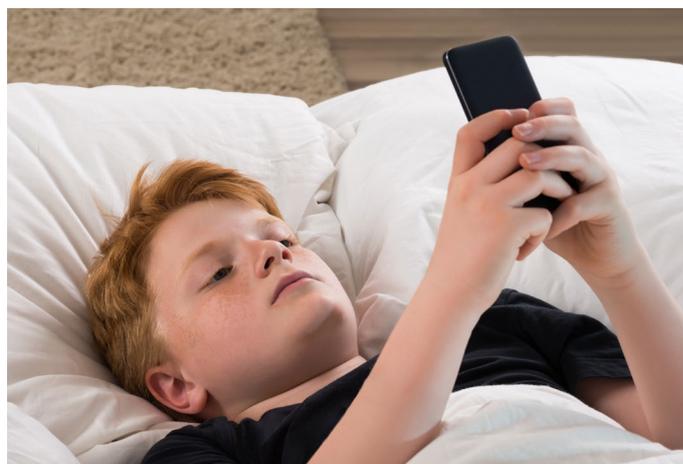
Sleep is essential for forming and maintaining pathways in the brain that facilitate learning and create new memories but research shows **we're now having two hours less sleep a night than in the 1960s.** A key reason? The blue light from digital screens suppresses the body's sleep hormone, melatonin, which helps us drift off.

Banish the blue-light

According to a BBC survey, fifty seven per cent of the UK's children sleep with their mobile phones by their bed and forty two percent of children always keep their phones with them, never turning them off. But a pre-bedtime screen time cut-off and no access to technology in the bedroom is crucial for a good night's sleep.

Switch off before bedtime

Fifteen to twenty minutes before



bed the first week, building to sixty or ninety minutes.

How can bedtime routines and bedroom set ups also improve tween sleep?

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Car booster AND pull along case... in one!




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Great Christmas gifts for kids

Check out our Families gift guide for ideas that will inspire and excite your child - many without lots of packaging!



Brave Girls' Book Club subscription box

Diverse stories & powerful protagonists. Ages 7-12. £17 per month.



Storytime magazine subscription

For story-loving kids! Ages 4-11. From £38.99.



Baked In Junior Baking Club subscription box

Child-friendly recipes for mini-bakers. Ages 5-11. From £7.50 per month.



Young Driver driving lessons

Get behind the wheel for a memorable driving experience. Ages 4+.



Scamp & Dude superpower PJs

PJs with Superpower Button! Boosts and comforts when most needed. From £28.



So Slime DIY Ice Cream Factory

Create three squishy slime ice creams - fluffy, ice and scented. Ages 6+. £20.



SnapWatch

Snaps around the wrist and stays. Interactive, easy to use. Ages 5-12. £9.99 + p&p.



Waboba Moon Ball

Pops and bounces to 100ft! Ages 5+.



Wildflower kit

Three bamboo pots ready to plant. Six hundred seeds to attract bees! £20.

Christmas gift ideas for adults

Eco-friendly, no-clutter and truly memory-making. Check out the Families guide to gift experiences for parents.



Silhouette sitting with Charles Burns

Virtual sitting with the famous silhouettist of Royals/celebs. From £45.



WSET Level 1 Award in Wines

Give the gift of wine knowledge! Highly-regarded award, perfect for beginners.



Box 42 Uncharted Love Island box

Tropical fun. Themed activities & Spotify playlist. From £31.99 per mth.



Books that Matter book box

Thought-provoking and inspiring novel, plus feminist and bookish gifts. From £17 per mth.



Bloom & Wild letterbox flowers

Huge range of letterbox bouquets delivered monthly for your giftee to curate.



Silverstone driving experience

Get behind the wheel of a single-seater race car or top of the range supercar. From £189.



Epsom Bakehouse bread making

Learn to bake, online classes. Baguettes to brioche. From £19.99.



Flying lesson

Learn how to pilot an aircraft in two amazing thirty minute lessons.

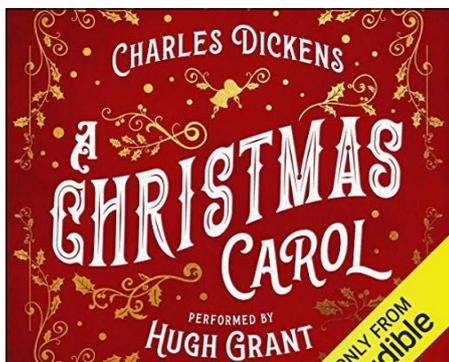


Fender Play guitar lessons

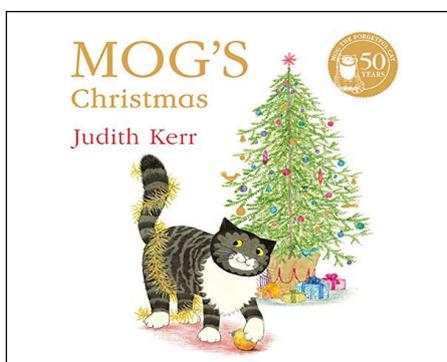
Legendary guitar brand with online platform. Easy-to-follow lessons.

Christmas audiobooks for the family

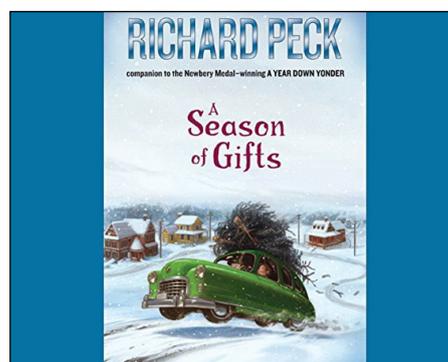
Grab some blankets and mugs of hot chocolate and curl up to listen to these fabulous Christmas tales.



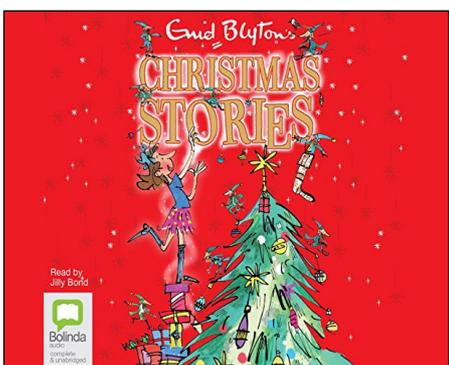
A Christmas Carol
Ages 6+ (2 hours & 44 minutes).



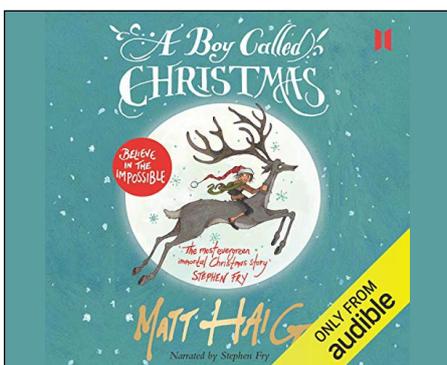
Mog's Christmas
Ages 2+ (8 minutes).



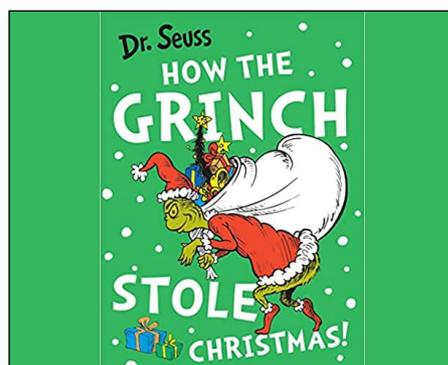
A Season of Gifts
Ages 9+ (3 hours & 50 minutes).



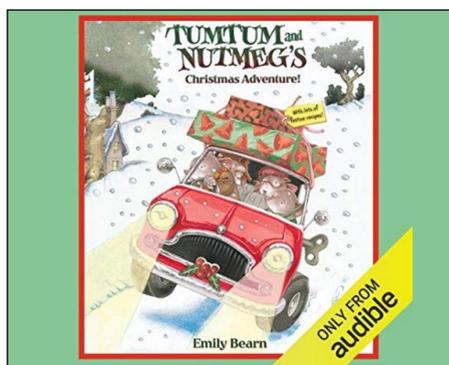
Enid Blyton's Christmas Stories
Ages 7+ (4 hours & 42 minutes).



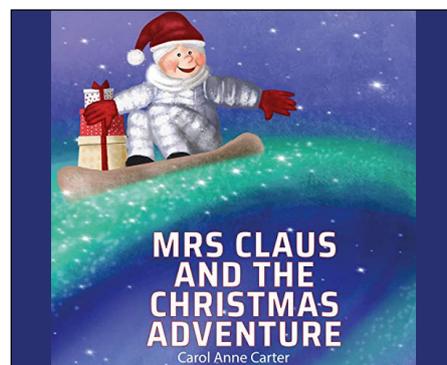
A Boy Called Christmas
Ages 9+ (4 hours & 26 minutes).



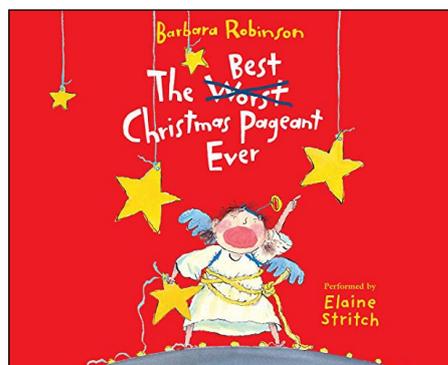
How the Grinch Stole Christmas
Ages 3+ (12 minutes).



Tumtum and Nutmeg's Christmas Adventure
Ages 3+ (1 hour & 26 minutes).



Mrs Claus and the Christmas Adventure
Ages 4+ (1 hour & 9 minutes).



The Best Christmas Pageant Ever
Ages 8+ (1 hour & 26 minutes).

Keeping kids busy on Christmas Eve

Daytime



Bake some Christmas goodies. Make gingerbread, shortbread cookies or cakes for everyone to enjoy.

Make handmade decorations. Allow the kids to decorate their bedrooms with bunting or paper chains and make some last-minute items for the tree.

Feed the birds. Hang edible treats or a feeder in the garden so birds can have a Christmas dinner too.

Go ice-skating. Nothing more festive than visiting a local pop-up ice rink!

Attend a nativity service. Local churches often welcome all to their yearly, special celebration.

Evening



Do a local Christmas light tour. Get some fresh air and check out the neighbourhood decorations.

Snuggle up. Have a pizza dinner, watch a film or read a Christmas story.

Go carol singing. Wrap up warm and treat neighbours to your angelic voices - keeping a safe distance, of course.

Enjoy a Christmas Eve box. Great for relieving restlessness, if the budget allows. Source a board game or jigsaw from a charity shop and add new PJs, a Christmas decoration, mug, activity book and healthy snacks.
Don't forget to leave a snack out for Santa and his reindeers!

Make wildlife-friendly reindeer food!

Make a great snack to help Santa's reindeers keep going on Christmas Eve. It's good for other wildlife too!

Check out this great reindeer food recipe from the RSPCA.

[READ MORE](#)

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Best family Christmas recipes

For the best fun cooking and eating!



[Kid-friendly fruit mince pies](#)



[Gingerbread men](#)



[Strawberry Santa pancakes](#)



[Snowman marshmallow pops](#)



[White Christmas crackles](#)



[Peanut butter cookie dough reindeers](#)



[Snowman pizza](#)



[Easy family Christmas nut roast](#)



[Cheese stars](#)

Improving your little one's speech and language post-pandemic

By Joanne Jones

Masks, social distancing, no parenting clubs or classes and no visitors to the house...that was the theme of the pandemic.

Consequently, children have had less experience of full faces, watched fewer mouths and played fewer turn-taking games such as 'I smile, you smile' with strangers.

Babies and toddlers acquire many of the skills involved in learning to talk from copying and reading facial expressions and copying mouth movements. So, post-pandemic, many parents report that their children are struggling to learn language or to use the words they already know in conversation.

Here are the **key signs to look out for** that might mean your young child would benefit from some extra help:

- Your baby/toddler is not babbling and making a variety of sounds.
- Your baby/toddler is not watching your face when you talk.
- Your baby/toddler is not developing their play abilities to include a variety of skills.
- Your child is not using some words by 18 months old.
- Your two year old is not combining two or more words



together.

- Your child is not using 'learned phrases' to communicate.
- Your child is not chewing or only eating a limited diet and words are not being used.

If any of the above signs ring true for you, firstly, talk to your Health Visitor and ask about a referral to Speech Therapy.

Waiting times may be lengthy but there are things you can do to help your child make progress in the meantime.

You are your child's best teacher and you can make up for their limited earlier experiences.

Implement some of the following ideas.

READ MORE

The Ladder Challenge

Help your child take on a difficult challenge – one step at a time! Download this activity and instructions to get started.





The Ladder Challenge

Taking on a difficult challenge – one step at a time

Instructions for use

We face new challenges every day, and some can seem so big that we want to run in the opposite direction to them!

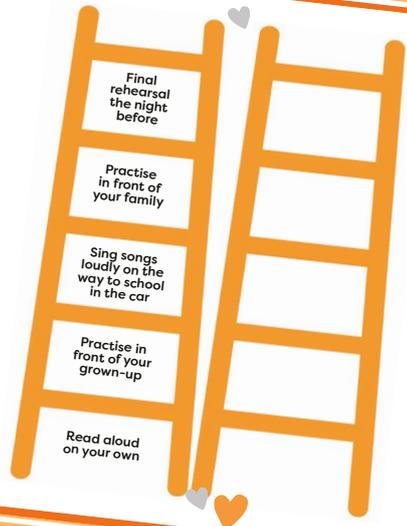
The best thing to do to make a challenge less scary is to break it down into steps so you can build up the confidence to tackle it.

Look at the ladder on the next page to see how a big challenge can be broken down into simple steps. Now use the empty ladder and write the thing you find most challenging at the top.

Next, think about what smaller steps you can take to reach your goal and write them on each step – ask your grown-up to help if you like.

Building up your confidence with each step will equip you with the positive mindset needed to tackle any challenge.

The Ladder Challenge is an activity for children taken from *The Happy Workbook: The Feel Good Activity Book* by Imogen Harrison, published by Summersdale.



Final rehearsal the night before

Practise in front of your family

Sing songs loudly on the way to school in the car

Practise in front of your grown-up

Read aloud on your own



DOWNLOAD FOR YOUR KIDS HERE!

Become weight neutral!

It's all too easy to talk about food and weight with and in front of our children in a way that may foster unhelpful attitudes towards body image and nutrition.

Do you use either of the comments below or similar?

Download our chart for some suggestions for alternative ways of thinking and speaking which may help foster more nurturing, mindful, conscious and intuitive eating habits and skills.

I can't eat dessert because I'm on a diet.

Cakes and chocolate are bad for you.

Swap these often used phrases for others

Say This	Instead of This
Nothing!	Any comment about your own or another adult/child's weight.
Nothing!	I wish I was lighter/heavier, had more muscles...or anything that rejects yours or their body.
All bodies are good bodies.	Being overweight is unhealthy.
All bodies are different and worth looking after.	We have to lose weight to get healthy and be happy.
I love moving my body in new and different ways.	I need to exercise more so I can eat treats.
I'm not hungry for dessert right now.	I can't eat dessert because I'm on a diet.
Are you hungry in your head or in your tummy?	You can only have dessert if you eat up all of your dinner. (Overriding hunger and fullness cues and moralising good/bad/treat/healthy reinforces a guilt/virtue cycle).
We can enjoy cakes and chocolate and peppers and carrots and grapes and apple and bananas...	Cakes and chocolate are bad for you.
Did you know veggies can help our brains and bodies do amazing things?	You must eat up your veggies because they are good for you.
I'm hungry! a burger sounds nice today.	I'm going to be bad and have a burger for lunch.
Let's get outside for some fresh air.	We need to go for a walk to burn some calories.
We're not having cake right now, we're having fruit and yoghurt instead.	We're not having cake for snack, because it's not healthy.
Our bodies are amazing! They're designed to change shape many times as we grow up and get older.	I wish I could lose the baby weight; boys should be big and strong!
Isn't it wonderful to have 7.5+ billion different kinds of faces and bodies on the planet?	Isn't so-and-so really pretty, handsome, strong (appearance praise reinforces stereotypes and good/bad/better/worse)?
(to someone who has changed weight)	However well intentioned... 'weight change praise' will always have unknown impact, we could be praising an eating disorder, an underlying health condition or simply equating worth with body size.
How are you?	

With thanks to **Nutriri**, an organisation created by volunteers to offer weight neutral support, through intuitive eating and movement for joy courses, hypnotherapy 1:1 or in groups.

DOWNLOAD NOW!

Living safely with a dog

By Caroline Wilkinson



For children, having a dog for a pet can provide so many social benefits - from having a 'friend' to share their worries with, to learning how to be caring and responsible. In fact, being around dogs has benefits for the whole family, with the household more likely to be physically active and suffer lower levels of stress.

To enjoy all the benefits, we need to ensure that children are helped to act safely around the dogs they live with. So how can we do this?

[READ MORE](#)

Understanding under 5s

By Dr Sarah Mundy



One moment a young child can seem like a rational human being, the next, for no apparent reason, a little monster! How do we understand what's going on for them?

Our ability to understand our children, think about their feelings and experiences and hold their mental states in mind is 'predictive of a child's attachment relationships, ability to understand and manage their feelings and social and play skills' (Fonagy et al, 2002).

[READ MORE](#)

Top tip for dog care

Write a list of the daily jobs including feeding, providing water, grooming, providing social interaction, training and walking.

Assign a job to each family member.

It eases the load on you **PLUS** it gives everyone an opportunity to have a social relationship with your dog.

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Overcoming racial bullying

By Tamsy Ashman



Studies show that, recently, racial bullying has increased in schools. A poll of one thousand children aged 6 to 15 found about thirty two percent of children had heard someone be racist at school. (*The Guardian, 2020*). So what can we do to overcome racial bullying?

[**READ MORE**](#)

Moving from two incomes to one

By Steve Hennessy



Only Mums & Dads support parents to make the best decisions for their family during separation/divorce. Their inbox indicates that one of the most common anxieties for a couple separating is transitioning from a two-income to a single-income household.

[**READ MORE**](#)

Travelling with children with different surnames

By Emma Newman



Planning to head abroad this year? Are you are a parent with a different surname to your child? If so, you may be required to prove that you are your child's legal guardian. So what documentation do you need to take when you travel?

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Make your own Christmas decorations

Get the whole family in the mood for Christmas with a crafty decoration-making afternoon.



Lemon star biscuits



Button snowflake



DIY wrapping paper



Sugar charms



Christmas crackers



Glue string ball



Paper snowflake wreath



Paper Christmas tree decorations



Festive pine cone mouse

Christmas song sing-along

Tunes to get the whole family busting their lungs and up and dancing!



Santa Shark



Underneath the tree



Santa Claus Is Coming to Town



Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer



Last Christmas



Frosty the Snowman



We Wish You a Merry Christmas



All I Want for Christmas is You



Merry Christmas Everybody

Christmas games for the family

Some of the best fun at Christmas can be had playing games. Here's our top seasonal picks.



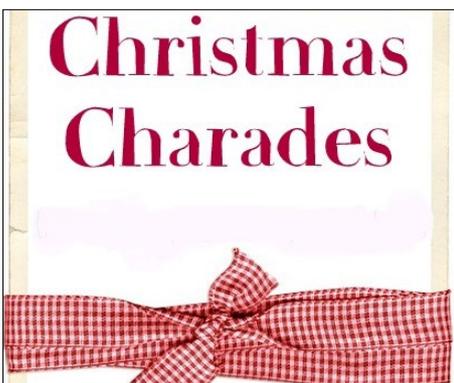
Christmas song emoji guessing game



Christmas bingo



Outdoor Christmas scavenger hunt



Christmas charades



Christmas memory match



Christmas scent game



Candy cane fishing game



Who am I?



Pin the nose on the reindeer

What can I recycle after Christmas?

Christmas trees



Cut, real Christmas trees: can be recycled and councils often have a specific collection for this.

Living Christmas trees: can be replanted for use next year.

Artificial Christmas trees: **CANNOT** be recycled. Reuse or give away.

MORE INFO

Christmas cards



Save to make into gift tags.

Cut into pieces for kids' projects.

Or recycle BUT only AFTER cutting off any glitter, ribbons, foil, plastic and other unrecyclable elements.

MORE INFO

Wrapping paper



Plastic based or containing foil or glitter: **CANNOT** be recycled.

Other paper: scrunch into a ball. If it stays scrunched it can probably be recycled. Remove all sticky tape and decorations first. **AND** check with your council as some won't take it.

MORE INFO

Decorations



Plastic, glitter or glass: **CANNOT** be recycled. Reuse or donate to charity shops if in good condition.

Natural wreaths: compost if they have no glitter.

Fairy lights: CAN be recycled at household waste recycling centres.

MORE INFO