

# Shropshire SEND and Inclusion Newsletter

*for practitioners and professionals*

**Issue 2: December 2024**

Welcome to the second edition of the new **Shropshire SEND and Inclusion Newsletter**. This newsletter is aimed at practitioners and professionals who work with children and young people with SEND in Shropshire. Through this newsletter we hope to keep you informed about developments and opportunities in SEND, act as a point of reference for key information, share best practice and develop supportive professional networks.

The newsletter will be uploaded to the Local Offer in the last week of each half term and the link to it will be including in the weekly e-mail to schools.

We welcome articles, contributions and suggestions for content. If you have any enquiries or content for the newsletter, please contact [EQA@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:EQA@shropshire.gov.uk).

## Thank you from the Education Quality Advisors for SEND and AP

During the Autumn term, the Education Quality Advisors for SEND and AP relaunched the SEND and Inclusion networks. Thank you to all those that attended. It was great to meet you in person and to hear your views on how we can support schools and settings going forward. The slides from the network meeting are now available to download on the Local Offer

Thank you to The Marches and William Brookes for providing the use of their facilities.

Future network meetings will also be available to book via The Local Offer – please check for booking links via Eventbrite.

If you did not see the newsletter we sent out last half term, that is also available to read and download on the Local Offer.

Here are all the links you need:

Network meetings (booking and slides): [SEND and Inclusion Network Meetings | Shropshire Council](#)

Newsletter: [SEND and Inclusion Newsletter | Shropshire Council](#)

Some of you wanted to know how to access information and a referral form for the Integrated Practitioner Panels, these can be found here: [Integration practitioner teams and consultation panels | Shropshire Council](#)

Finally, we value your support and feedback and would love to hear from you to provide information on:

1. Can your setting host a face to face network?
2. What CPD needs does your setting have?
3. How helpful do you find the SOAP? How do you think it could be improved further?
4. If you attended one of the network meetings, do you think the network session will benefit your practice in your setting? How can the network sessions be improved?

Please contact [EQA@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:EQA@shropshire.gov.uk) to provide your feedback.

*Emma, Heidi and Sarah*



# SEND and Inclusion Spotlight

**This is where we ask you to share what is working well in SEND in your settings. This issue's spotlight comes from Sadie Howson from the 3-18 Education Trust.**

Over the past few years, the staff at Coleham Primary School have diligently worked to broaden their universal offer. This effort ensures that provisions, once specific to individual children, are now embedded into the school's ordinary way of working and are universally available. This initiative began with the SENDCo creating a school provision document, which is divided into the four broad areas of need and outlines a graduated approach from universal to targeted and more specialist support. This document has been instrumental in helping class teachers understand their responsibility in ensuring adaptive provision is part of their everyday practice, thereby fostering inclusive classrooms.

Here are some examples of how Coleham has embedded support into their universal offer across the four broad areas of need:



- **Cognition and Learning:** The use of coloured pages in workbooks and coloured whiteboards to match overlays for reading, supporting literacy composition.
  - **Communication and Interaction:** Implementation of visual timetables in all classes and the use of Makaton in early years.
  - **Social Emotional Mental Health:** Adoption of the Zones of Regulation as a whole-school approach, rather than just with individual children or classes.
- Physical and Sensory:** Establishment of calm, independent learning stations in all classrooms, equipped with ear defenders and sensory support tools for students to use as needed.

Over time, this approach has evolved to improve consistency across classes and resources, aiding in smoother transitions from one class to another. By making key resources more predictable, we reduce the cognitive load on our young people.

*If you would like to be featured in our next SEND and Inclusion Spotlight and celebrate the positive work in your setting, please contact us at: [EQA@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:EQA@shropshire.gov.uk)*



# CPD for SEND



SEND and AP CPD opportunities will commence in the new year.

These will be available to book on Eventbrite and a dedicated CPD newsletter with upcoming CPD sessions on will come out in January via the weekly Education Update e-mail.

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## Online SEND and Inclusion Updates

Next half term, SEND and Inclusion networks will be online. There are three sessions available, please book on to the session for your age phase(s) via Eventbrite:

**Primary update: Monday 3rd February, 3.30-4.30pm**

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/online-send-and-inclusion-update-primary-tickets-1113625065549?aff=oddtcreator>

**Early Years update: Tuesday 4th 3rd February, 6.30-7.30pm**

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/online-send-and-inclusion-update-early-years-tickets-1113632868889?aff=oddtcreator>

**Secondary and Post-16 update: Wednesday 5th February 3.340-4.30pm**

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/online-send-and-inclusion-update-secondary-and-post-16-tickets-1113644995159?aff=oddtcreator>

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## Early Years SEND Solution Circles

Join us for Shropshire Early Years SEND Solution Circles, where we'll discuss strategies and share ideas for supporting young children with SEND. You can book a place on Eventbrite:

[Shropshire Early Years SEND Solution Circles Tickets, Wed 8 Jan 2025 at 09:30 | Eventbrite](#)



Please continue to provide feedback on training needs for your setting.

Please email [EQA@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:EQA@shropshire.gov.uk)

## **Autism West Midlands Shropshire Family Service Update** **December 2024**

Wow where did this year go?! It has been a fantastic year for the Shropshire team and we are really proud of all the extra support and activities we have been able to offer families this year. We have lots of exciting new things going on in the new year too, including several new 'coffee and chats' popping up over the county. We are also trialling some online training sessions, as we know that the size of Shropshire can make some venues inaccessible.

Keep an eye on the Autism West Midlands Facebook page to be first to hear about our events. Another useful page is 'Shropshire Local Offer' where you will also find a wealth of information for SEN families.

We are continuing to provide online **advice appointments**, book your slot online using the link below. No diagnosis is needed to access this service to Shropshire residents. Face-to-face appointments can be arranged (usually at Sunflower House but other venues may be possible) if you would prefer this, email the team and they will let you know availability. Please see below for details of our online support groups.

**Please note that there will not be any advice appointments scheduled between December 20<sup>th</sup> and January 7<sup>th</sup> but please email if you need to speak to someone as there will be staff checking the email after 27<sup>th</sup> December.**

Have a lovely Christmas and remember to do what works for your family, often less is more!



**Helplines open over Christmas:**

**AWM Helpline 0121 450 7575 (closed Bank holidays, open 27<sup>th</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> Dec)**

**Several useful helplines can be found on this link <https://www.kooth.com/urgent-support>**

We have lots of training coming up both in person and online. The webinars are a great option as you can watch live or use the recording which is available afterwards for a short time. We also have some new training sessions for professionals, see below.



## Information to share with parent carers



### **Autism West Midlands Shropshire Family Service Update December 2024**

**Book an online advice appointment with an Autism Specialist Advisor here...**

#### **Teams Advice slots**

For those who would like some online advice we are offering this virtually via video appointments. Teams also works well on mobile phones. To book a 45 min advice appointment with a specialist autism advisor please book via our shop. If the dates/timings of our online advice appointments are not convenient for you, please contact us to make alternative arrangements – scroll down for details.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/shropshire-online-autism-advice-consultation-sessions-parents-carers-tickets-664530557787?aff=website>

**IMPORTANT – WE EMAIL YOUR TEAMS LINK TO YOU THE WEEK BEFORE YOUR SLOT, MAKE SURE YOU CHECK YOUR INBOX INCLUDING SPAM/JUNK TO GET YOUR LINK**

#### **Virtual Support Group for Parents**

- **Wednesday Mornings 10am - 11am**
  - **Wednesday Evenings 7.30pm – 8.30pm**
- 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Weds of each month (except during Christmas holidays)***

Our online support groups meet twice a month via Teams. This is an opportunity to talk with other parents, share ideas, and offer support. We recommend that you have attended an online advice appointment with a member of the team before joining group sessions (link above).

If you would like to join either of the support groups, please email the team here:

[shropshire@autismwestmidlands.org.uk](mailto:shropshire@autismwestmidlands.org.uk)

#### **Advice and support**

We also offer advice and support over the phone and via email. Parents/carers and professionals can contact the team directly to arrange an appointment including face-to-face if preferable.

Shropshire office: 01952 454156

Mon - Fri	Kerry McLafferty	07900784186
Mon, Tue, Wed	Dawn Lewis	07706309382
Mon, Tue, Thu	Nicola King	07706337511

**Email** [shropshire@autismwestmidlands.org.uk](mailto:shropshire@autismwestmidlands.org.uk)

Please remember - No formal diagnosis is needed to access the AWM Shropshire service and there is no formal referral route – parents/carers can self-refer by booking an advice appointment or contacting us directly on our Shropshire email address. You can also use our helpline.

# Find out more about Autism support in Shropshire

Autism Awareness event for all ages

**Wem**

**Thursday 23rd January**

**10am - 12.30pm**

**Wem Library, High St, Wem, SY4 5AA**

**We will be available to offer information, advice & guidance for adults & parent carers of children & young people - at any stage of diagnosis.**

**Come & join us for an informal chat.  
We look forward to seeing you!**

**The event will be hosted by Autism West Midlands  
& the Shropshire Adult Autism Hub**

**If you have any questions, please email:  
[Pip.Long@Shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:Pip.Long@Shropshire.gov.uk)**



**autism**  
west midlands

Shropshire Virtual School have been busy creating opportunities for young people from our School Council to have their voices heard and influence providers to help children and young people to feel included and to belong in their education setting.

They recently represented Shropshire at the West Midlands Virtual School Conference for Designated Teachers and led an experiential activity which put education practitioners “in our young people’s shoes” (see photo). The impact on colleagues was clear to see and our young people felt they had really made a difference.



One of our young people also spoke very successfully at the recent SVS Network to Senior Leaders across Shropshire about how their School Council is aiming to improve services for young people – and they have been engaged in the current SEND Consultation to ensure that Looked After Children (CLA) play a part in shaping these essential services. One young person followed this by going on to speak at the Corporate Parenting Board meeting to talk more about inclusion and some aspects of social care they would like to change. We are very proud of their work to help adults reflect on how we can develop our practice to support a “you said we did” approach.



Shropshire Virtual School has been supporting primary and secondary schools within the **Hearts and Minds project**. This has a focus on inclusion and Attendance for Children with a Social Worker (on CIN and CP Plans as well as CLA) with a whole school approach to becoming an Attachment and Trauma Responsive setting plus a trained Emotion Coaching setting.

Impact and data from the schools who took part in Phase 1 is starting to feed through and we have started Phase 2 with some new schools taking part – we are really pleased to welcome the Grove, Severndale and Broseley Primary on board!

There is an additional opportunity built in for each school which is bespoke to their own journey and builds on relational practice, some schools are working with Mark Finnis to develop their whole school practice for example. Any schools/settings with an interest in a discussion around engaging with this project please contact [jo.kelly@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:jo.kelly@shropshire.gov.uk)

 **nurtureuk** Nurture update - the Autumn phase of the Nurture project is well under way with schools (including several secondaries) taking part in the accreditation and forming a nurture resource in their schools. This approach forms an integral part of the Inclusion workstream and SEND & AP Change Programme across the county. For more information on how secondary school approaches can use this intervention please see the attachment and also Shane's story: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ibS9f-y3sTA?>

Last but not least!... Shropshire Virtual School has a **new Training page** on our website – please see here for what we currently have on offer [Training | Shropshire Council](#)



## ICB SEND Team Update

The ICB supports the health element of the SEND agenda for children and young people. We work in partnership with local authorities to contribute to the implementation of the SEND reforms. We would like to introduce our team to you and outline the areas we are working on.

The SEND team is made up of:

Vanessa Whatley – Chief Nursing Officer and Executive Lead for SEND

Laura Powell - Designated Nurse for Safeguarding Children and ICB Senior Responsible Officer for SEND

Jennifer Griffin - Designated Clinical Officer for SEND (on maternity leave)

Carrie James - Designated Clinical Officer for SEND (interim)

Hilary McGlynn - SEND Change Programme Partner (Health)

The team provides oversight and obtains assurance of service delivery regarding SEND to achieve the following:

- Improving health outcomes in population health and care
- Tackling inequalities in outcomes, experience and access
- Enhancing productivity and value for money
- Helping the NHS to support broader social and economic development

We work closely with our commissioned health providers and local partnerships, Parent and Carer Forums and lived experience groups to support the development of service delivery.



# Updates from Health



## **Current priority areas:**

We are working with partners:

- to understand the referral rates and waiting times, and support children and families while waiting for
- neurodevelopmental assessments
- mental health support,
- therapy services
- community paediatrics
- to improve the quality of EHCPs.
- to enhance inclusive practice - which is the good quality, inclusive teaching and resources which should be available for all children and young people with special education needs/ disabilities.

## **Current initiatives we are supporting:**

### SEND and AP (Alternative Provision) Change Programme

The SEND Change Programme is a national programme to test some of the changes the Government wants to make to the system for supporting children and young people with SEND.

It is being delivered by “Change Programme Partnerships” in each of the nine regions of England, each led by at least one named local authority.

Telford and Wrekin have been selected as the Lead Local Authority for the West Midlands Region and are working alongside Shropshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

For more information [SEND and AP Change Programme - SEND - Local offer \(telfordsend.org.uk\)](https://telfordsend.org.uk)



# Updates from Health



## Early Language and Support for Every Child (ELSEC)

ELSEC is a pilot programme working in 30 mainstream primary schools and early years settings across Telford & Wrekin.

It is working to improve the identification and support of children with speech, language, and communication needs in early years and primary school settings; in turn improving access to and the quality of inclusive practice.

## Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools project (PINS)

This is a nationally funded pilot project for 2024/25, building on the success of the national Autism in Schools Project.

PINS is bringing health and education specialists and expert parent carers into mainstream primary settings to:

- Help shape whole school SEND provision
- Provide early interventions at a school level
- Upskill school staff
- Support the strengthening of partnerships between schools and parent carers

Twenty mainstream primary schools in Telford and Wrekin and twenty in Shropshire are taking part in the PINS project.



# Updates from Health



## Healthier Together website

Healthier Together provides advice for those caring for babies, children and young people in Shropshire and Telford. You'll find clear information on common childhood illnesses for both physical and mental health, and information on long term conditions, with details of where to go to seek help if required.

The Healthier Together website provides consistent, accurate and trustworthy healthcare advice for parents, carers, young people and professionals. All the information on the site is checked by clinicians, and local organisations and involves parent carers in its content development.

[Home \(stw-healthiertogether.nhs.uk\)](http://stw-healthiertogether.nhs.uk)

The website has sections on common illnesses which can help Parent Carers decide what to do when their child or a child in your care is poorly. It has information on:

- Coughs and colds
- Fever / high temperature
- Rashes
- Sore throats
- Vaccinations

Other sections of the website are particularly relevant for parent carers of children and young people with SEND. There are sections on asthma, epilepsy, learning disabilities and neurodiversity.

The Neurodiversity section of Healthier Together includes sections on Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Tic and Tourette's Syndrome and Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Alongside the condition specific webpages, there are pages outlining the [local support offer for children and families](#). These pages show the range of local support available across Shropshire and Telford, the majority of which do not require children to have a diagnosis of a neurodivergent condition.

[Neurodiversity \(stw-healthiertogether.nhs.uk\)](http://stw-healthiertogether.nhs.uk)



# Updates from Health



When children and young people have needs related to communication, they may require support from a range of services. The Healthier Together site now includes information about the support for Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) available in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin.

[Support for Speech, Language and Communication Needs \(SLCN\)](#)

The Epilepsy Nurses have worked to provide information about the support services they offer to Children and Young People across Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin.

[Epilepsy support services](#)

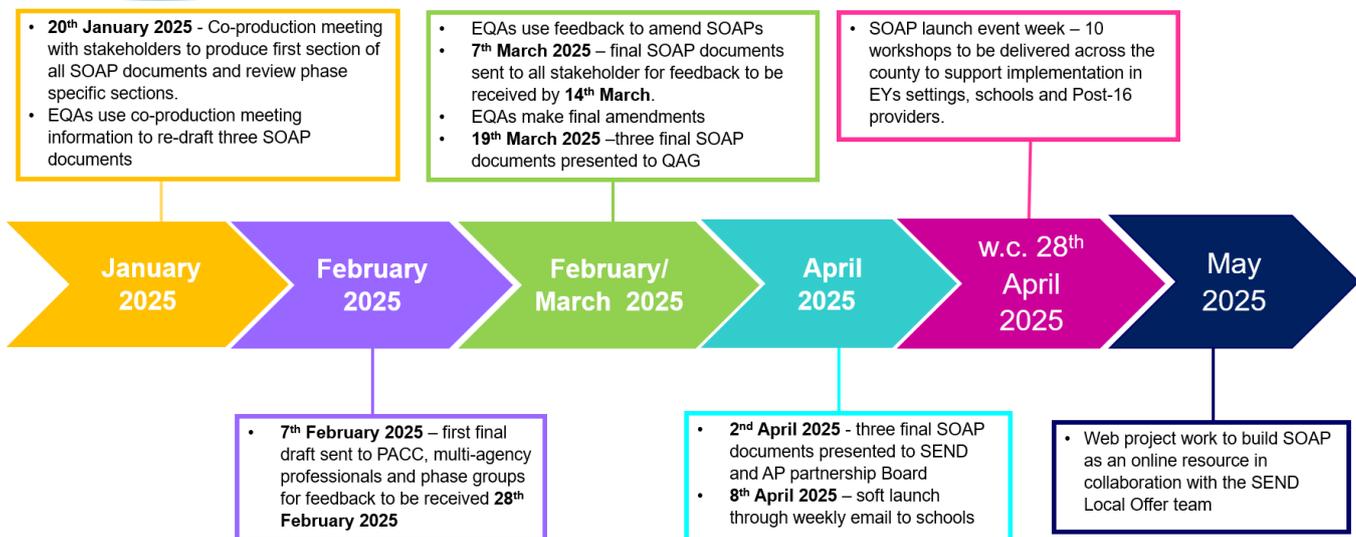


# Shropshire's Ordinarily Available Provision



Following feedback from the SEND and Inclusion network sessions, the EQAs have devised a project timeline to create and further develop inclusive practice models for settings.

If you would like to provide feedback or be part of the panels, please contact: [EQA@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:EQA@shropshire.gov.uk)



# School Nursing

The School Nursing Team provide health and wellbeing information, advice, support and guidance to children and young people, teachers, families, carers and the wider community across Shropshire. We are part of the 0-19 Public Health Nursing Service which contains Specialist Nurses (School Nurses and Health Visitors), Registered Nurses, Healthy Child Practitioners and Support Workers.

Every Local Authority funded school in Shropshire has a named School Nurse. We offer a broad range of services, workshops and events enabling schools to contribute to PSHE outcomes, as well as targeted one to one support for children and their families.

We offer support, advice and training for schools around managing health conditions. We undertake universal contacts such as the National Childhood Measurement Programme (NCMP) and Digital Health Assessments for certain cohorts. Data from these contacts provides our Local Authority with rich health profiling data as well as offering insight to schools around the health needs of their students.



**Here are some examples of the topics we cover in either one to one sessions or as group work:**

Oral/dental hygiene  
Toileting and constipation  
Handwashing

Development  
Relationships and Sexual health  
Puberty (including management of periods)

Sleep  
Transition and change  
Diet and restricted eating

Behaviour  
Risk taking behaviours  
(including vaping)

Other topics can be developed upon request

**Are you making the most of your School Nurse?**

Contact us to arrange:

CHAT (Confidential Health Advice for Teens)  
Drop-in sessions.

Digital Health Assessments

Health education sessions and workshops  
inline with your PSHE scheme of work.

Staff training  
(for Asthma and Anaphylaxis management)

School Nurse attendance at Parent's  
evenings/open days.

One to one referrals

Sexual health services including CDS  
(Condom Distribution service),  
pregnancy testing and STI testing.

Health education sessions for parents

Health promotion stands

We work closely with partner agencies to support the health and well-being of any child or family with a social worker, as well as supporting the Early Help process.

You can get further information, ask questions or simply contact your School Nurse for a chat by calling our

**Single Point of Access (SPOA) on**

**0333 358 3654**

**OR texting: 07507 330 346.**

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School readiness  
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(including vaping)

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**OR texting: 07507 330 346.**





# Early Years Updates



## Early Years Intervention Grant Funding

Please be aware that all requests for EIG funding still need to be completed through the online form found here: [Funding information for settings | Shropshire Council](#)

With an email and support documentation sent to the [NEF@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:NEF@shropshire.gov.uk) inbox. Schools with nurseries should also follow this process and **not send** requests through the SEND portal as this will not be received and subsequently processed.

## EIG Panel membership

During January and February we will be running a test and learn project to trial the new format of our Early Years Inclusion Advice and Funding Panel. Some settings will be asked to use our new paperwork and to come to our virtual panel and present their request. We are also looking for some experienced EY SENCOs to be panel members, if this is something you feel you can support us with then please do email our [EQA@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:EQA@shropshire.gov.uk) inbox with the subject heading EIAF panel.

## Early Years Newsletter



Every week our Early Years team send out a newsletter focused on all things Early years. This can be found here: [Early Years Newsletter | Shropshire Learning Gateway](#) On this page you can also sign up to have it delivered directly to your inbox.

The Early Years newsletter does now contain a weekly Early Years SEND focus that is aimed at supporting settings develop their inclusive provision.



# Alternative Provisions



Alternative Provision (AP) can play an important role in supporting children and young people (CYP) in Shropshire.

The DfE's 2013 AP statutory guidance defines AP as:

- *education arranged by local authorities for children who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not otherwise receive suitable education*
- *education arranged by schools for children on a fixed-period exclusion*
- *off-site provision where schools direct children to improve their behaviour.*

In Shropshire, schools and the local authority can commission AP. The AP can either be full or part time and should include academic as well as other support and intervention for the CYP. At the heart of a commissioned AP placement is to ensure that a CYP receives the right support, at the right time in the right place (DfE, 2023). To ensure that this vision is met, Shropshire Council has developed a quality assurance framework to review AP providers.

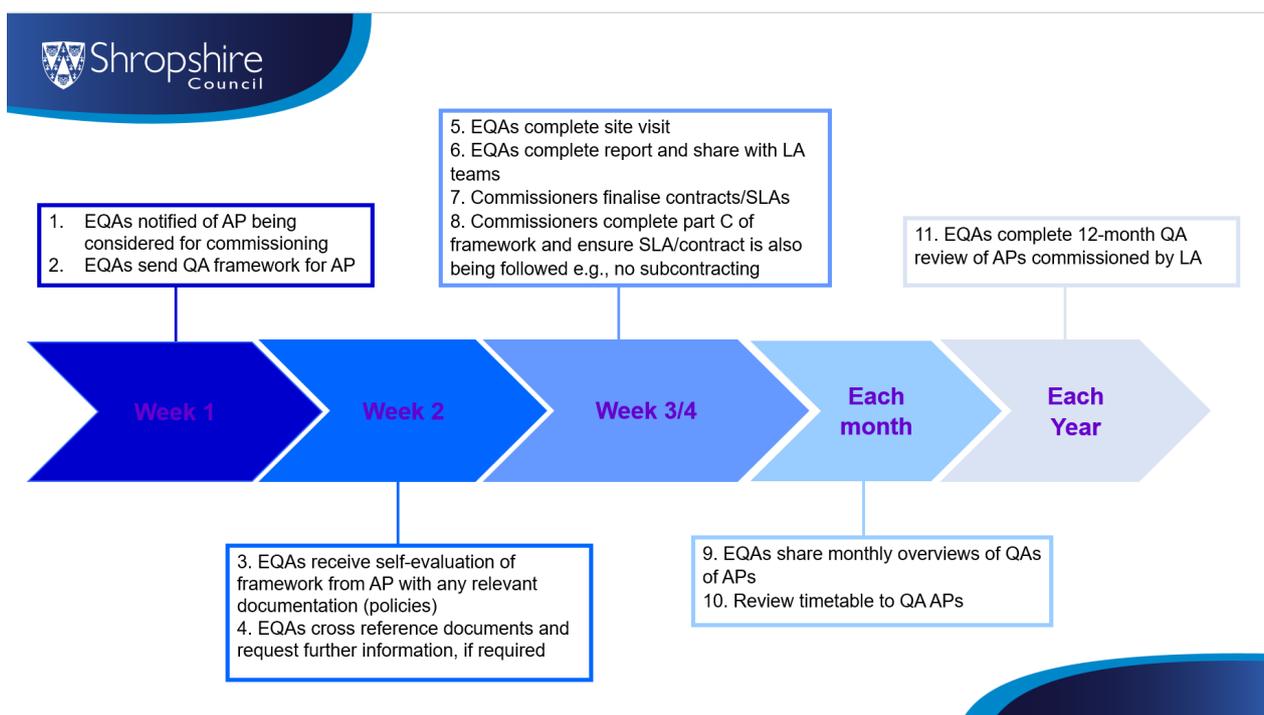
Before commissioning an AP placement, the commissioner must ensure that the quality of education and safeguarding is good within the provision. The DfE (2013) defines good AP as:

*that which appropriately meets the needs of pupils which required its use and enables them to achieve good educational attainment on par with their mainstream peers...there are some common elements that alternative provision should aim to achieve, including:*

- *good academic attainment on par with mainstream schools – particularly in English, maths and science (including IT) – with appropriate accreditation and qualifications;*
- *that the specific personal, social and academic needs of pupils are properly identified and met in order to help them to overcome any barriers to attainment;*
- *improved pupil motivation and self-confidence, attendance and engagement with education; and*
- *clearly defined objectives, including the next steps following the placement such as reintegration into mainstream education, further education, training or employment.*

Below is a proposed timeline on how the LA will quality assure provisions it has commissioned. Schools must complete their own quality assurance of provisions that are commissioned by the school. If you would like more information on the quality assurance process, please contact

[EQA@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:EQA@shropshire.gov.uk)



# Updates from the Speech and Language Service

ELSEC (Early Language Support for Every Child) continues to support the 8 Shropshire schools and Nursery settings in Wave 1. We trained staff in these settings in EY or KS1 Talk Boost and interventions are well underway. Currently, there are an amazing 63 children receiving EY Talk Boost in nursery settings and 148 children receiving KS1 Talk Boost in reception and Year 1. These are being jointly supported by the ELSEC team and school TAs. School TAs are receiving coaching and support from ELSEC to ensure that the groups are being run consistently across all settings.

Communication audits have been completed in most school settings with feedback and targets agreed to support children. Good practice in these settings are being celebrated in the half termly ELSEC newsletter.

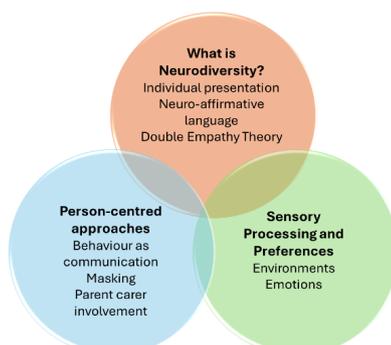
An information session for parents on Talk boost has been delivered in each of these settings and has included the importance of book sharing. Further parent groups will commence in the new year.



## Updates from the EP team



On November 7<sup>th</sup> 2024, Dr Kathryn Morgan (Specialist Senior Educational Psychologist), Hollie Jones and Helen Vincent (Neurodiversity Practitioners) delivered a full day of training for Future in Mind on the topic of Understanding and Supporting Neurodiverse Children in the Classroom. The Future in Mind family of schools was joined by representatives from the twenty schools who are being supported through the Partnerships for the Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS). The training took a holistic approach to explaining and exploring neurodiversity and neurodivergence, including: neuro-affirmative language and how our language impacts views of ourselves and others; behaviour as communication and masking; and sensory preferences and how they may help / hinder learning and emotional regulation. The day was filled with enthusiasm, rich discussion and inspiring plans, and it was an absolute pleasure for us to share psychological theory, information and ideas to be able to support and empower staff on their journeys of creating neuroinclusive learning environments for all.



Shropshire Educational Psychology Service  
APPLYING PSYCHOLOGY TO MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

**Key messages:**

- Describe the CYP's presentation in person-centred language.
- Your words matter.
- We all live in this world together, but we may not experience it in the same way.
- We can create neuro-inclusive learning environments for our children.

Neurodiversity & Neuroaffirming Practices

Respecting Neurodiversity  
Validating Differences  
Honouring Autistic Experiences  
Honouring All Forms of Communication

Autistic Power & Control  
Preserving Competence  
Honouring Self-Identity  
Honouring Experience

neuroinclusion.org



# The Local Offer



The [Shropshire SEND Local Offer](#) is a single place for information, services, and resources for children and young people aged 0-25 with special educational needs and / or disabilities, their families, and the practitioners who support them.

It's been designed with a family's needs at the heart of the process. We have a [video](#), an [easy read document](#) and [promotional materials](#) for you to share with families.

Please make sure your educational setting's social media pages are following the Shropshire SEND Local Offer [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) as we share lots of news, events and updates that you may wish to share with families!

## SEN Team Update

The SEN team in Shropshire has been undergoing some changes lately with staff moving areas and new team members being brought in to support the annual Review Recovery work.

You are able to find information on these interim changes on the recently updated SEND Local Offer pages here: [Special Educational Needs \(SEN\) Team | Shropshire Council](#)

## Parent Carer Newsletter

There is a parent carer SEND newsletter which is co-produced by Shropshire Council, Shropshire Integrated Care Board and Parent Carer Council (PACC). The newsletter aims to provide easy access to key information for SEND families, as well as an opportunity for parent carers to hear from each other about their experiences.

Please share [Shropshire SEND Newsletter - November 2024](#) with families.

## *And finally...*

**Thank you** for reading this issue of the SEND and Inclusion Newsletter for practitioners and professionals. We will continue to develop the content over the course of the year and welcome all ideas and feedback for future issues.

Please send feedback, questions or comments to: [EQA@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:EQA@shropshire.gov.uk)

 There will be lots more information shared regarding further developments in support for schools and settings in Shropshire at the SEND and Inclusion Network meetings and we hope to see you there. For anyone who is unable to attend, the slides and any handouts will be uploaded to the Local Offer after the final meeting and will be found on the practitioner pages: [Practitioners | Shropshire Council](#) 

*We wish you a happy and restful break and look forward to seeing you again in the New Year!*

## Christmas in School: trauma informed approach

During the Christmas period some children and young people can feel anxious and vulnerable, as well as excited. This will particularly apply to our vulnerable students including those who are spending Christmas away from their families. For some children Christmas may be a very lonely time, with very few presents or even none. Some children will experience Christmas as a time when adults are anxious, drinking more heavily and short of money. Christmas can also be a time when family arguments and instances of domestic violence increase. For those children in care who have experienced neglect and abuse it can be difficult to let go of unhappy memories and 'get into the Christmas spirit.'

They may be very aware of the excitement of their school friends on Christmas Day. This could make Christmas time a sad and miserable time, highlighting how different their birth family is compared to other families. If a child is living at home and experiencing neglect, they may only be looking forward to the start of the New Year, eager to get back to their friends and a familiar routine, or just wanting to have a hot meal every lunchtime. When a child is in foster care, it can feel overwhelming to be surrounded by so much food and drink, to be meeting relatives of the foster family — aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents... and more! A foster child may feel quite shy or anxious about meeting so many new people, all of whom seem to know each other so well!

The excitement and expectations surrounding these special events can build weeks and months in advance, leading to unexpected and unwanted reactions. If needing to control the environment is important for the child, they may become very unsettled by the plans for a celebration, the disruption to their routine and the possibility of surprises. Any special occasion that emphasises family times can cause conflict for a child who does not live with their birth family. They may have memories of Christmases that went wrong in the past or find it difficult to manage conflicting loyalties with their current carers and their previous ones. As celebrations approach, parents or carers of traumatised children will often find themselves managing difficult situations at home that can then spill over into school. Celebrations can also mean disruption to the usual school routine. Many schools will provide Christmas themed activities during class time, concert's, shows and nativity performances, fundraising and fun day events linked to the season including decorations in classrooms and corridors. Even if little reference is made in school it will be on TV, in the media, in shops and everywhere else for weeks in advance and the timing of Christmas at the end of the autumn term means that it coincides with the run up to a school holiday which can be unsettling in itself.

Christmas can be a challenging and tiring time for adults as well as children. It can raise uncomfortable emotions, and stress of Christmas shopping, preparing for the day itself, and managing lots of extra activities in school can weigh heavily on adults in school. It is important

for teachers and school staff to manage their own stress and emotional responses around Christmas, as well as being aware of children's responses.

Here are a few things to consider during the Christmas period:

1. Be mindful in the run-up to Christmas

A good starting point is to be mindful of difficulties in the lead up to Christmas and consider how they could be affecting students. If distressed behaviour increases or engagement reduces, it is important to remain curious. In school children may respond to expectations and changes around Christmas by increasing anxious and clingy behaviour, responding more emotionally to incidents than usual, refusing to participate in activities, and sabotaging celebratory events perhaps as a way to avoid participating in them. Some children might be able to voice their feelings about Christmas, but for others it will come out in the behaviour.

2. Positive relationships

Maintain positive/key worker relationships and allow plenty of time for talking and support. It may be that you need to adjust your expectations for time in lessons. De-escalation and positive behaviour management is key; it could be going for a walk, time out in a quiet room or engaging in art or music as an outlet. It can be helpful to plan alternative activities for children who are struggling and allow access to calm down zones. When 'wind down' activities are planned ensure that children who struggle with this have a selection of alternative structured activities available to them

3. Tailor content

RSE sessions could include topics such as managing stress and anxiety over Christmas and/or strategies to cope with social situations. Speak to the class as Christmas approaches acknowledging that this can be a stressful time. This gives permission for children to share difficult feelings and may allow you to identify children who are likely to struggle. Acknowledge the difficulty that big transitions can bring and assure the child you're aware of their big feelings and are there to support them

4. Prioritise support

Additional opportunities for parents/carers and students to share concerns may also be of benefit. Opportunities to be listened to and contained will be a great support to young people and parents/carers. For our most vulnerable students it can be of benefit to ensure they are provided with information on support for when you are not there over Christmas, such as [Childline](#) and [Shout](#). Be aware that if a child is talking incessantly about Christmas this might signify anxiety about the event more than excitement

5. Mind your language

Avoid asking questions such as "What do you want for Christmas?" – be aware that for some families money may be tight. When your students return from the Christmas break avoid questions such as "How was your Christmas?" and replace with "It's lovely to see you, welcome back." Many children may not want to think about their Christmas if it has been a stressful and/or difficult time and may also feel the need to provide a version of events that is similar to that of their peers.

#### 6. Routine and consistency

Children thrive on structure and routine and maintaining some of this will help children to cope. Provide visual timetables showing any changes to the routine, including rehearsals for shows, or special activities planned for the class. Be very clear about what will happen on celebration days and avoid surprises. Maintain procedural routines as far as possible, such as routines around the start and end of the day, lunchtime and taking the register

#### 7. Transitional objects

Allow the child to take home a transitional object from school for the holiday, for example class teddy bear, book from library, classroom game they like to play. This reassures them that they will be coming back

#### 8. Maintaining contact

It can be beneficial for Key Adults to try to maintain some indirect contact during the holiday period where possible. Even a short postcard saying that you are looking forward to seeing the child again at the start of the new term can reassure the child they are held in mind and their safe base is still there for them

#### 9. Preparing for return

Be prepared for some regression at the start of the new term. A child may revisit separation anxiety behaviours that were thought to be long overcome, for instance, and extra support may be required for the first days or weeks.

Dr Adele Thacker

Specialist Senior Educational Psychologist (Stepping Stones)

# Children and Young People's Neurodiversity Workstream

## Shropshire Telford and Wrekin



We are a group of professionals and practitioners who work together to improve services for neurodivergent children and young people aged 0-25.



There are a range of local support providers that can be accessed by children, young people and their families, the majority of which are needs-led and do not require formal diagnosis.



### TOGETHER, WE ARE WORKING TO:



**Advance understanding and acceptance of neurodivergent children and young people.**



**Review and monitor the services on offer.**



**Ensure everyone gets the right support when they need it.**



**Support the whole family.**



**Link services for the benefit of all.**



**Enhance the voice of neurodivergent children and young people.**



More Special Educational Needs Hubs are being opened and the first hub network meeting has taken place. The network of best practice is starting to come together and is being celebrated.

**The PINS project is going well. It was celebrated that PINS is developing and strengthening relationships between services, schools and parent carers. Explorations and plans to continue to change after PINS are underway.**

Opportunities are being discussed to further enhance training and CPD opportunities for schools and other settings as part of a comprehensive learning and support offer. We are planning on asking children and young people what topics they feel would be most helpful for adults to know



**OCT  
2024**



**The Healthier Together Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) page had been developed. The aim is to raise knowledge and awareness of FASD to enable readers to gain understanding and reporting of alcohol consumption during pregnancy.**

CPD = Continued Professional Development  
PINS = Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools

# A trauma informed Christmas

Christmas can bring up many emotions for children and young people and this can mean that they can struggle to manage their emotions and their behaviour can deteriorate.

The excitement and expectations surrounding Christmas can build weeks and months in advance, leading to unexpected and unwanted reactions. If needing to control the environment is important for the child, they may become very unsettled by the plans for a celebration, the disruption to their routine and the possibility of surprises. Any special occasion that emphasises family times can cause conflict for a child who does not live with their birth family. They may have memories of Christmases that went wrong in the past or find it difficult to manage conflicting loyalties with current carers and birth families.

Christmas can be a challenging and tiring time for adults as well as children. It can raise uncomfortable emotions, and stress of Christmas shopping, preparing for the day itself, and managing lots of extra activities can weigh heavily on adults. It is important for adults to manage their own stress and emotional responses around Christmas, as well as being aware of children's responses.

There are some simple things that foster carers can do to try and help looked after children cope during this traditional family time. In turn, this will also help to create a happier Christmas for all...

## 1. Talk about Christmas

A child in care may have never had their own Christmas stocking or a tree or gifts. They may have never had a Christmas like your own and it's important for them to understand what is going to happen. Be ready to hear about their Christmases and encourage them to share good memories of Christmases past. Let them know that their way of doing Christmas can be integrated into yours.

## 2. Write a letter to Santa

This will help a child to confirm that Santa knows where they are going to be if this is their first Christmas with you.

## 3. Expect this time of year to be emotional

Consider this time of year to be emotional for the children and young people you support especially for some children who may not be able to see their family. The emphasis on Christmas might make some children feel like outsiders in their foster home. It's a delicate situation and a real effort should be made to ensure that the child feels treated on a par with the other children in the household.

Children come into care for all sorts of reasons, through no fault of their own. They may have come from a background of neglect or abuse, or both. As such, their experience could be very different to most peoples' Christmas. Some children may have spent Christmas alone, with little to celebrate and having no presents of their own. They may be very aware of the excitement of

their school friends which could make Christmas a sad and miserable time, highlighting how different their birth family is compared to other families.

#### **4. Maintain routine where possible**

Children thrive on routine and maintaining this will help children to cope. If a routine cannot be maintained, organise, and arrange a Christmas calendar to help the young people to prepare. Talk through any worries and coping strategies for those circumstances which you know young people struggle. It's always important to ask them what they may like to do and who they would like to see.

#### **5. Lots of visitors can be overwhelming**

Until you know your young person well and how they cope it can be better to limit visitors to manageable levels. If you include friends in your festivities, talk about them to the children you support. A foster child may feel quite shy or anxious about meeting so many new people, all of whom seem to know each other so well! The more they know about who will be visiting, the less difficult it will be for them to relax amongst strangers.

#### **6. Alcohol can seem scary**

Think about children who have witnessed the misuse of alcohol and drugs. This could cause anxieties for children if they are aware people will be drinking at home. To avoid children from getting scared prepare them with the concept that people may drink alcohol, and this will be done in a respectful and responsible manner.

#### **7. Children might not feel comfortable receiving gifts**

Children who have not had much experience of Christmas and presents may find lots of presents and attention too much pressure for them. It can result in a level of attention that can often leave fostered children feeling awkward and under the spotlight for being 'fostered', rather than just for being part of a family. To help, spread out present giving. It doesn't matter if presents are still being opened over the Christmas holiday.

Avoid putting pressure on children to react in the 'right' way. Children in care often have feelings of being unworthy and undeserving this makes it really hard for them to accept praise, gifts and rewards.

Fostered children may also receive Christmas presents from members of their immediate and extended birth family, and foster carers should take this into account when buying gifts. Birth parents may also feel a need to 'compensate' for their children being in care, overwhelming a child with presents, or sadly empty promises. Foster carers may want to talk to your Supervising Social Workers to get a sense of what to expect so that they can be prepared and help the child manage expectations and potentially difficult situations for the child and foster carer.

It may also be worthwhile to have additional supplies and gifts for any guests who pop over during Christmas, who may overlook buying a gift for any additional children you might be looking after.

#### **8. Visits for the child to see their family**

A lack of contact over Christmas might cause a child in care to worry about their parents, grandparents or siblings. By working closely with a child's social worker, a phone call on Christmas day might be arranged, and the child's birth family can support a child to enjoy Christmas, without worrying about them or feeling guilty.

Foster children may feel quite a big difference between the atmosphere in your home and the home of their birth family. They may feel under pressure to show 'loyalty' to their birth family or the foster family, torn between them and not wanting to let anyone down.

Foster carers can help ease these feelings of anxiety and conflict by asking fostered children how they're feeling about Christmas and reassuring them that they don't have to do anything that makes them feel uncomfortable. It's often wise to think ahead about any areas of potential conflict and ensure support is available to help smooth things out if unhappy feelings rise to the surface.

### **9. Think about diversity and a child's own tradition**

Respect a child's culture and diversity. Celebrate their customs and religions as well as your own. Try to include something from the foster child's own 'Christmas traditions'. There is likely to be something they did at home that is important to them. It might be as simple as helping them to make a card for mum.

### **10. Encourage a child to feel part of the family celebrations**

Small things such as having their names on their own Christmas stockings and making it clear that these are their stockings to keep for next Christmas increases the message that they are a part of the festivities. It helps to make a point of doing something special with each child in the house. Each child can have a special Christmas related duty. This gives you some one-on-one with each child and allows them to feel involved and somewhat special.

### **11. Involve the children in shopping for groceries**

Some children may have concerns about whether there will be enough food. Let them help you shop for groceries for the Christmas meals. This will give them the opportunity to tell you what they like or don't like or never ate.

The video below from the National Fostering Network outlines Christmas time in the words of a foster child

<https://youtu.be/COmlfkGaTzs>

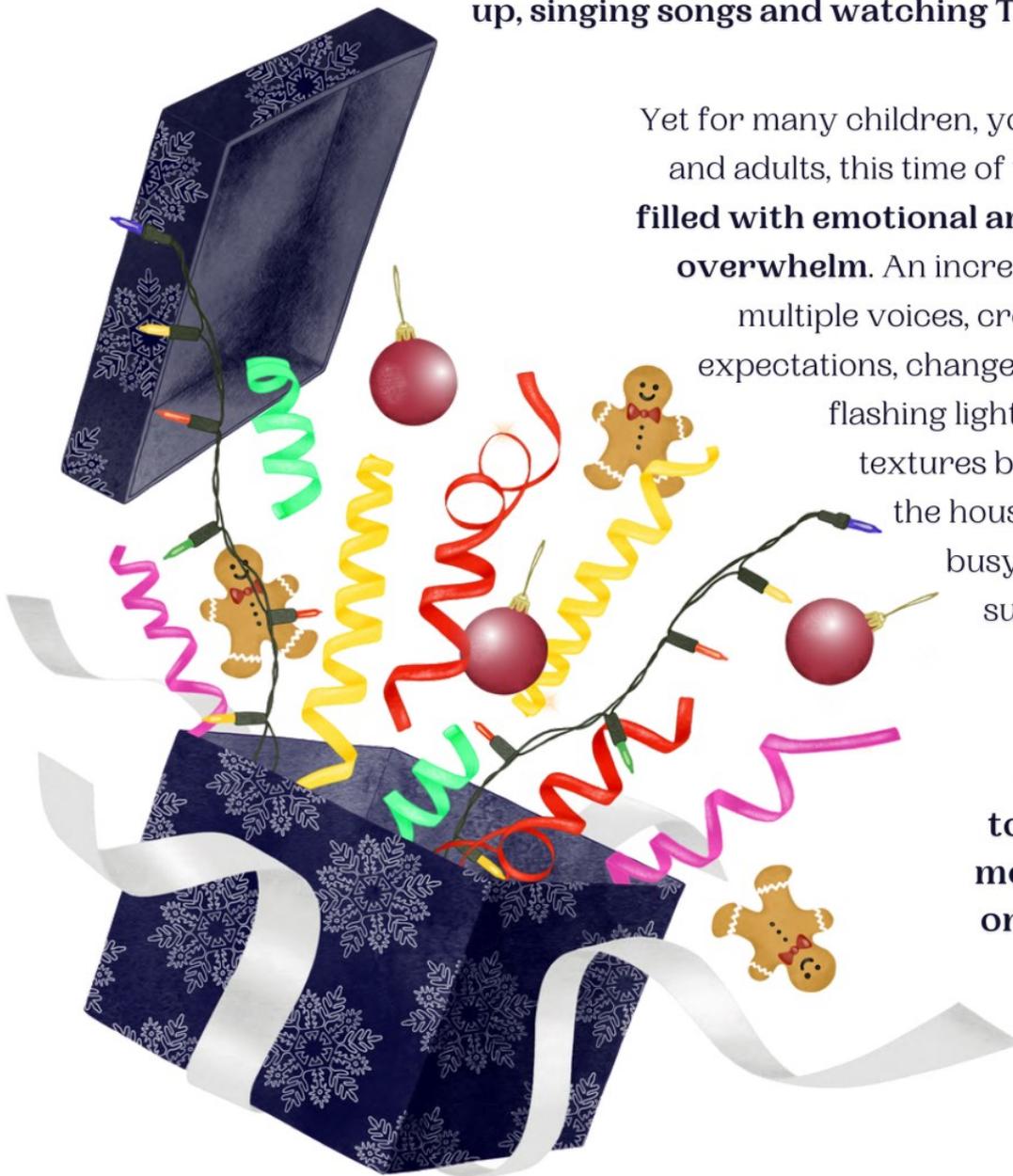
*Dr Adele Thacker – Specialist Senior Educational Psychologist for Stepping Stones*

*Acknowledgements to AFA fostering and the National Fostering Network*



# Managing The Christmas Sensory Overload!

It's that time of year which for some of us is exciting: meeting and catching up with friends and family, putting up glittery decorations and sparkly lights, giving and receiving shiny gifts, parties, dressing up, singing songs and watching TV specials!



Yet for many children, young people and adults, this time of year can be **filled with emotional and sensory overwhelm**. An increase in noise, multiple voices, crowds, social expectations, changes in routine, flashing lights, different textures brought into the house, loud and busy music and surprise gifts.

**So, what can we do to ensure a more joyful, or tolerable time for ALL the family?**

# PREPARING FOR CHANGE IN ROUTINE

December

Many of us have all just settled back into the new school year. This means new routines, work, schools, peers, colleagues, teachers and classrooms. **Then, enter Christmas!** Often packed with lots of off-timetable, off-schedule changes, increased shopping trips, parties, dressing up days, nativities and carol services and trips to see Father Christmas!

## Talk and think about what changes there might be:

Use the senses as guidance if it's helpful. What might you see, smell, hear, taste and touch that is different than usual?

## What might help body and emotional regulation (adults too!)?

A favourite soft toy or blanket, a scent on a sleeve or tissue, an attachment symbol like a heart drawn on the hand by a loved one, crunchy snacks, noise cancelling headphones, a weighted lap pad.

## STICK TO NORMAL ROUTINE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN:

Routine doesn't mean 'boring'. It can be filled with nurturing and reliable rituals that make people feel safe and regulated.

## REMEMBER THE AFTER!

Holding it together all day means potentially coming home overloaded. Favourite regulatory activities are essential here! A snuggle on the sofa wrapped up in a soft fluffy blanket, a walk in nature, a bath, hot chocolate, lying in bed having a cuddle and a story, listening to music or maybe wrapped up in a duvet in silence! Regulation is for parents too so if you are trying to support sensory overload in a child then you will need to safely off-load your feelings of being overwhelmed too!

January

February

March

April

May



**Some events, activities and get-togethers may:**

- Go on for a long time
- Be big in location and/or excitement levels
- Be loud or have lots of different noise levels
- Have many people, both known and strangers
- Have multiple activities
- Be very bright and/or visually busy

If you have any family, friends, teachers and colleagues who want to offer sensitive, understanding and loving relationships, then they are amazing allies, especially at Christmas time!

**Think together about any possible adaptations. Can any of the above factors be adjusted to support sensory overwhelm? Are there any compromises to make it more tolerable?**

- Can you arrive at the start or at the end of an event or activity, when the music and the flashing lights are off?
- Can the music be turned down and the lights set to be on constantly, rather than flashing?
- Can participation time be shortened, e.g. a child does one song in a carol service and can then leave feeling successful rather than overwhelmed or can you leave a party after an hour, without it being announced?
- Is there a space where there is minimal sensory input so regulation breaks can be taken?
- Is there any way to have less people, or a time when you know less people will be there?
- Could the venue be your own house or somewhere familiar?
- Can you bring things with you that are helpful, e.g. your own food, a blanket, a pair of small discreet noise-cancelling headphones

**Remember it is also ok to say no!** If there is just one trip out too many, then don't go. It doesn't make you a bad parent/friend/family member to say "I/we need to take a break". Communicate with a child's school. Do they have to take part in EVERYTHING?

The festive time brings with it many traditions, particularly around the food. It often involves lots of different textures and tastes. Party buffets, chocolates, sweets and socialising may mean some people may:

- Struggle to recognise when they are full
- Over-eat
- Hoard and hide food away
- Be pre-occupied by the food and unable to leave the area alone

**Food can be a complex and emotive topic so keep it simple:**

- Offer small and regular portions of food and treats interspersed throughout the day
- Add regulating crunchy and chewy food.
- Encouragement to move away from food after eating
- Avoid labelling food as having to be eaten 'because it's Christmas'. It's perfectly acceptable to stick to your normal food routine.





**This time of year is generally busier with more people going out, shops are busier, lights are flashing and reflecting off of decorations, loud music and Christmas songs are played everywhere!**

**Some practical ideas might be:**

- Wearing a hoodie so ears can be subtly covered
- Listening to your own music with headphones
- Using noise-cancelling headphones
- Avoid having multiple devices playing at the same time
- Switching fairy lights to not flash
- Use less decorations on the tree

**To help regulation it may be helpful to incorporate some heavy work based-activities into the routine such as:**

- Incorporate more walks outside in nature into the daily routine
- Do jobs in the garden or park: carrying logs, raking leaves
- Carrying the Hoover upstairs or downstairs
- Hoovering, cleaning

**Or add some organising activities which help with the body and mind:**

- Going for scavenger hunts – can you find something shiny, round, prickly, red?...
- Setting the table, sorting out cutlery, arranging dishes
- Sorting out gifts by size, colour or family members
- Do some mindful colouring, word searches, spot the difference or jigsaws



**Gifts can be a very exciting part of the festive period AND it can be a turbulent body and mind experience.**

★Excitement alone can be overwhelming, just experiencing that erupting, bubbly feeling in the body can make the body feel unsafe and lead to dysregulation – it can feel like an explosion comes from nowhere right in the middle of a joyful moment!

★Anticipation of presents and who might be giving you what can trigger overwhelm and be especially hard for those who have experienced neglect, trauma, and loss in their early years as gifts can be linked to rejection, manipulation and hurt.

★Receiving unexpected gifts or surprise gifts can also evoke negative responses which appear ungrateful the giver.

**Gift giving and receiving can be a collaborative experience:**

★Manage the gift givers expectations if you know there are struggles around receiving gifts. Let them know the reason behind a potential response and how best they can accept this.

★Provide 'wish lists' to family and friends especially if the child has specific sensory sensitivities around fabrics or tastes.

★Practice gift giving with your child and how they might respond if they don't like a present, so they have a 'script' in their head. This scaffolds the experience for them so they are able to cope better with the feeling of disappointment in their body.

★Spread gifts across the festive period rather than just on Christmas Day or only have a couple of gifts visible at a time so it is less overwhelming

★Consider if it would be appropriate to tell a child what presents they will get. It may create calmer present opening if there was no anxiety around 'Will I/Won't I get something?'

★Think about the sensory experience of gifts. How does the wrapping paper feel? Is it easy or hard to unwrap the present? Is the tape too sticky? Is it noisy paper? Could you use a bag, tissue paper or even fabric as an alternative? How about paper tape?

£125

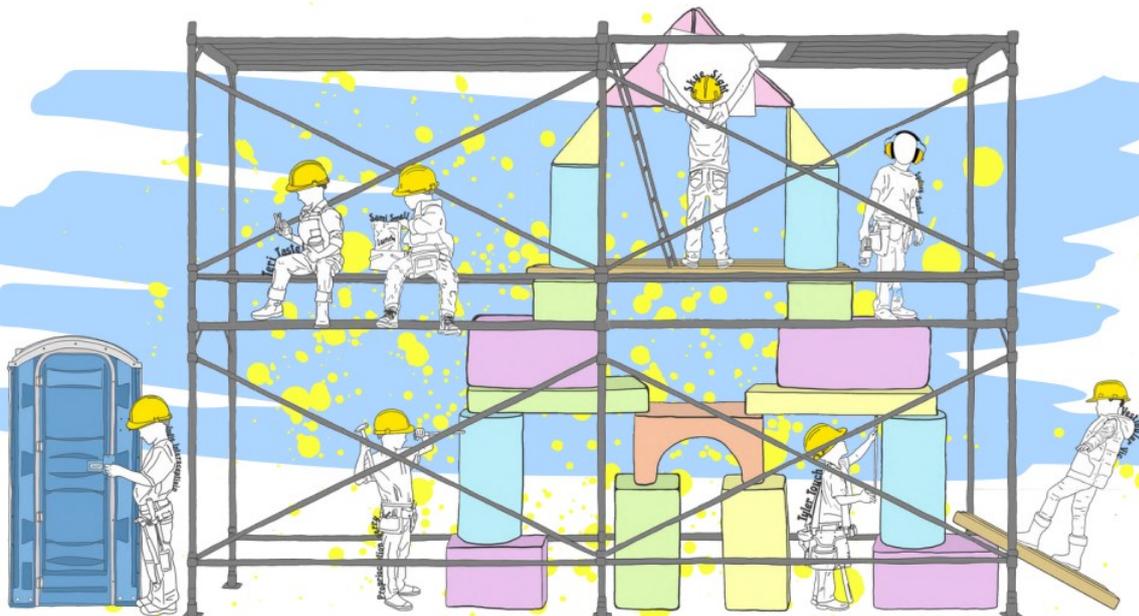
GROUP LICENSES  
AVAILABLE

## THE POWER OF THE SENSES TRAINING COURSE INFORMATION

RE-BUILDING SENSORY SYSTEMS & SUPPORTING REGULATION IN CHILDREN IMPACTED BY EARLY TRAUMA

Children's sensory systems are impacted when they survive extreme loss, trauma or attachment disruption. They can become 'stuck' over-experiencing or under-experiencing their senses. This affects how they move, play, communicate... in fact all aspects of their everyday lives.

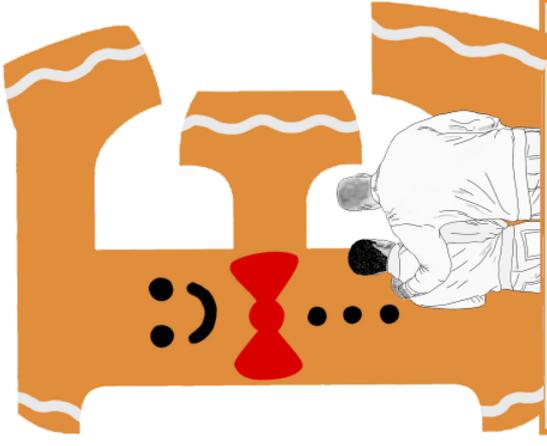
This creative live remote training will introduce participants to the eight sensory systems; giving an overview of what they are, how they develop and what happens when there is early disruption. It will explore what happens in the sensory systems when children are responding to their environment from the survival (fight, flight, freeze or collapse) part of their brain. Participants will be offered a range of hands-on ideas and practical tools to support children at home, in the classroom and in other settings. This is a real 'how to' training which will help any adult supporting a child with sensory disruption to regulate and settle their brain and body.



BOOK ONLINE AT [WWW.BEACONHOUSE.ORG.UK/TRAINING](http://WWW.BEACONHOUSE.ORG.UK/TRAINING)

# The Power of PACE at Christmas Time

There are a lot of feelings flying around at Christmas time for children and adults alike. Finding the right balance for YOU is something to work towards. PACE can help. PACE - Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity, Empathy



**Playfulness** isn't the same as playing but is enjoying time with someone else or yourself in an unconditional way.

This can look like a 5 minute sofa snuggle with someone, walking hand in hand, swapping cringey cracker joke or even taking yourself off for a cry on your own if that's where you're at and trying to leave behind any guilt about it.

It's about showing a real interest in someone, or yourself, and finding something you really enjoy about them - or you. Even if that's 2 minutes alone with yourself outside the front door!

**Acceptance** means sitting with strong emotions or perspective of another and knowing that you might not be able to take these away. There may be no words of advice to give, strategies to implement or thoughts to share, only comfort by offering your safe presence.

It is allowing uncomfortable sensations and emotions to be in your own body without judgement. Accepting their existence.

For an example of this and Empathy, watch the YouTube clip called 'Brené Brown on Empathy' or find inspiration from the song 'Hold Space' by Ward Thomas.

**Curiosity** isn't about asking "why?" even when this is exactly what we want to know! It's about wondering what is going on inside for someone or ourself.

It's about taking the risk of being wrong "*Can I share my ideas with you... I wonder if... I might be wrong, so tell me if I am, but here are my thoughts...*"

A way of letting someone know that your mind is on their mind and genuinely interested in anything at all that's going on in there without judgement.

It is practising this same non-judgemental curiosity within ourselves.

**Empathy** can take a lot of energy at Christmas. Sitting with the disappointment of a child who hasn't got the gift they hoped for "*I can see the sadness in your eyes that it's not what you wanted*" or accepting our own disappointment that the time hasn't felt very festive "*I am where I am and things are how they are and I'm going to do my best to feel okay with that*".

A top tip is try to move away from reassurance or denial of feelings - others or your own. Naming what is happening for ourselves or another helps us in our offering of empathy.

**To PACE oneself: "To do something at a speed that is steady and that allows one to continue without becoming too tired."**