

Home School Link Worker Weekly Bulletin

Winter Mini Reading Challenge

The Winter Mini Challenge is a free online-only, digital challenge which encourages children to keep up their reading habits over the winter months including the Christmas holidays. Participants sign up from 1 December through The Reading Agency's free-to-access website featuring rewards for reading and reviewing books.

[Click here](#) to be directed.

To take part, children simply read three or more books of their own choice and add them to their Challenge website profile. Reaching their online reading goal will unlock a limited-edition virtual badge and a special Winter Mini Challenge certificate to print off and keep. There are also lots of videos, fun games and activities children can play when they join the online Challenge.

You can also visit your Surrey Library to pick up a free Winter Mini Challenge bookmark - This includes a Quick Response (QR) code which can be scanned on a smartphone or tablet for instant access to the Winter Mini Challenge sign-up page.



Woking Foodbank

Woking Foodbank will again be providing some additional support at Christmas, as always this will be targeted at those in short-term, emergency need.

*As our resources are limited, priority will be given to those who have **not** previously received extra help at Christmas.*

All recipients will be contacted directly by the foodbank, by phone.

If you require a Foodbank voucher, please do contact Laura (hslw2@stmarys-byfleet.surrey.sch.uk) who can issue you a voucher. Our nearest Foodbank collection point is at Byfleet Methodist Church and is open every Wednesday between 12:00- 2:30pm.



APPEER's Wellbeing bulletin – Christmas 2024



"I know I know, it's early. But, let's talk about Christmas. For those who celebrate it, Christmas is a time of great excitement. I'm a huge Christmas fan!

For autistic young people, Christmas can be really difficult, not just the day, but the weeks preceding it. The school day is changing, nativity rehearsals, decorations are up around school, Christmas parties, relaxed timetable, Christmas Jumper day, the classroom is getting louder as excitement builds - all things which heighten their sensory experience and ability to regulate. The routine at home is changing, new smells, decorations, new foods, different activities, increased stress and excitement, shops are busier.....

For many, anxiety can come from the overwhelm of expectation - "I should be having a fun time", "I should be going to see Santa", "I should know what presents I would like" and so on. The pressure can be huge even before the day.

The more that you can do leading up to December to plan for these changes, the more regulated you, and they are likely to be. So here are some suggestions:

- ❖ *Change your expectations, Christmas may not be like next door's or the Christmas you had as a child. It's different but not necessarily worse.*
- ❖ *Chicken nuggets for Christmas dinner? So be it!*
- ❖ *If they want to stay in their PJs - let them!*
- ❖ *Limit demands at home - I love Christmas decorations, my daughter couldn't care less. So, whereas as a child putting them up was an exciting family tradition, now I just do it myself with no expectations she will join in or even comment on them!*
- ❖ *Consider letting them know what their presents are in advance - surprises can be really stressful, or consider not wrapping them or allowing them to open them in their own time wherever they might like to. Opening presents in front of family/guests can be really difficult.*
- ❖ *Consider leaving their presents all in one pile rather than exchanging one by one.*
- ❖ *Maybe spread out the opening of presents so it's not so overwhelming.*
- ❖ *Try to keep some structure to Christmas day, allow downtime (e.g. playing online with friends, watching tv), try to get outside for a walk/run/jump about.*
- ❖ *Involve them in planning the day and let them know what the day will look like - what time shall we aim to eat? What veg should we have? Can you help me choose the puddings? Who is coming, how long will they stay, Do I have to be there?*
- ❖ *It may be that you need to let family members/guests know of the adjustments you have made to your day before they come so that they understand that you are keeping it low key or that your child may be in their room for some of the day. This avoids conflict and disappointment on the day.*
- ❖ *Talk to the school so that they can be mindful of the impact of Christmas activities and can build in alternatives or increase downtime in the school day for your child.*
- ❖ *Avoid back to back social events, try and include downtime days.*
- ❖ *Keep a calendar somewhere visible so they can see what day of the week it is (not so obvious over Christmas!) and what the plan is for each day. Talk them through each day ahead of each day.*
- ❖ *Think back to last December, what was difficult? What was helpful?*

Happy Christmas!

Paula Stables, Designated Safeguarding Lead

p.s. a lot of these suggestions also apply to birthdays!"

Fun activity of the week: Threading decorations

If you want something to keep their hands busy, without too much input, then these threading decorations are the answer. They can be as simple or as complicated as you like. Simply cut out a circle from some scrap cardboard. Make some notches around the sides. Get some lengths of wool and then let them be creative.



Recipe of the week: Christmas biscuits

Ingredients:

- 100g/3½oz unsalted butter, softened at room temperature
- 100g/3½oz caster sugar
- 1 free-range egg, lightly beaten
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 275g/10oz plain flour

To decorate

- 400g/14oz icing sugar
- 3-4 tbsp water
- 2-3 drops food colourings
- Edible glitter

Method:

1. Preheat the oven to 190C/375F/Gas 5. Line a baking tray with baking paper.
2. Cream the butter and sugar together in a bowl until pale, light and fluffy.
3. Beat in the egg and vanilla extract, a little at a time, until well combined.
4. Stir in the flour until the mixture comes together as a dough.
5. Roll the dough out on a lightly floured work surface to a thickness of 1cm/½in.
6. Using biscuit cutters or a glass, cut biscuits out of the dough and carefully place onto the baking tray. To make into Christmas tree decorations, carefully make a hole in the top of the biscuit using a straw.
7. Bake the biscuits for 8-10 minutes, or until pale golden-brown. Set aside to harden for 5 minutes, then cool on a wire rack.
8. For the icing, sift the icing sugar into a large mixing bowl and stir in enough water to create a smooth mixture. Stir in the food colouring.
9. Carefully spread the icing onto the biscuits using a knife and sprinkle over the glitter. Set aside until the icing hardens.



If you would like any further help, guidance or support for you or your family, please contact **Laura Merrick** (Home School Link Worker) hslw2@stmarys-byfleet.surrey.sch.uk (Working hours: Tuesday 8:30am - 3:30pm, Wednesday 8:30am - 1:00pm, Thursday 8:30am - 3:30pm).

Life is easier when
you don't concern
yourself with what
everybody else is doing.