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IN THIS ISSUE

Finding fun in tough times

The power of networking

Mental health resolutions for 2021

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Hello from the Editor...

After a year we'll never forget, I think we're all keen to make 2021 memorable for the right reasons. With life still far from normal, we have replaced our what's on guide with some ideas for finding fun in the tough times – whether that be getting fit as a family, nurturing nature or even creating a time capsule to record an incredible period.

We also look at some of those places that are still open and offering COVID-safe family activities.

The pandemic has been tough on mental health. Our feature considers mental health resolutions you might like to make as a family to be kind to yourselves and be ready to face whatever the 'new normal' has in store.

The New Year is often a time that we have a fresh look at our careers. We spoke to the West Berkshire head of a women's-only networking group, and seven of the local members. They are all doing amazing things in their work life – from encouraging people to connect with nature through 'forest bathing', to helping divorcing parents to find amicable, non-confrontational solutions. All have grown their businesses through the power of networking. We hope they inspire you with their stories.

Rachel

The Families team...

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Next issue:

March / April 2021 – Easter & spring days out

Booking deadline: 1st February 2021



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- **DISCOUNT** off Mindful Butterfly mental first aid courses, see page 13
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Save the date – Wear A Hat Day is back!

Calling all families across the country: join us on Friday 26 March to take part in entertaining, hat-themed fundraising events to help find a cure for brain tumours.

After the very challenging year, we know that Wear A Hat Day 2021 is perfectly timed to become a huge event, bringing hope and inspiring the nation like never before!

Thanks to the brilliant charity partnership with Venture Studios, there are inspirational and uplifting portraits of key worker families who, despite having their own devastating brain tumour stories, are determined to show the joy and positivity that is being involved in Wear A Hat Day.

wearahatday.org

Acorns understands school-readiness

Preparing pre-schoolers for September is an important task over the next few months – particularly after more time spent at home and less mixing with peers. Acorns Nursery School in Calcot has 35 years' experience in building children's confidence to ensure they are ready for school. Staff include three former primary school teachers who understand first-hand what skills are required and how best to develop them.

Manager, Jane Mitchell-Baker, explains: "The pandemic has inevitably had an impact on children and particularly their ability to share and listen, which are important when they start school. We plan games that encourage children to cooperate and which build their social skills and language. To encourage turn-taking, we use sand timers to ensure that toys are shared fairly."

The Acorns team, which takes pride in providing a 'home from home' environment, also spends time each day on 'Write Dance', which develops core motor skills.

For any families interested in a place, there is a virtual tour on Facebook and individual visits are held on Friday afternoons, after which a weekly deep clean is carried out. The nursery has a large, enclosed garden, and is registered to accept funded 2-year olds, as well as both 15 and 30 hours funded places. More information – t: 0118 9420475 or e: acornsnursery@loveyourcommunity.net



Home from home with Chilly Powder

Do you prefer winter or summer in the Alps... or both? Francesca, Paul and their three children live in Morzine in France all year round and have a good knowledge of Alpine traditions and the Morzine people. Having adapted their chalet holiday style over the years to suit the tastes of their regular guests, they offer the perfect ski and summer holidays for either families, couples or mixed groups in relaxing luxury, with fantastic food and outstanding facilities, with unrivalled in-house childcare facilities. For many returning guests, Chilly Powder is considered a real home from home. For more about Chilly Powder chalets for summer and winter visit chillypowder.com



Courses to hone 11 Plus exam skills

Marie Redmond is bringing her unique recipe for 11 Plus exam success to the Reading area with her latest Ofsted registered tuition centre opening in Winnersh. Hundreds of Buckinghamshire and Slough children have already benefited from the courses run by Marie Redmond Tuition. Now Reading-based youngsters can enjoy the small class sizes and personalised tuition designed to help them fulfil their potential. The courses, which run on Saturdays and during school holidays, are led by experienced, qualified primary teachers. 11 Plus mock tests are available to Year 5 students and include access to Marie Redmond 11+ Intelligent Video Learning™, with explanations for every question answered incorrectly; an invaluable tool to ensure students are exam ready.

Marie Redmond MEd, who has 20 years of education experience, is passionate about instilling core skills in pupils and increasing their confidence. "We want their knowledge and skills to remain with them for life – not just for their 11 Plus exams," says Marie. "Our children are engaged, take an active role in their learning and enjoy tuition that is tailor-made to their learning styles and goals."

At the Reading Centre, teachers focus on preparing children for the CEM 11 Plus exam, taken at schools such as Kendrick and Reading School. Traditional teaching methods are used, along with educational games, activities, and motivational tools to ensure that children remain engaged throughout these challenging courses. The students have regular assessments and receive termly tuition plans. Homework is provided and the topics are reviewed during the following lesson. The centre offers flexible payment options and accepts Tax-Free Childcare. Marie adds: "With the small class sizes, our pupils benefit from one-to-one attention when they need it in a friendly and stress-free environment. The results speak for themselves – they approach their exams with confidence and the skills they learn stay with them."

marieredmond.co.uk

INDEPENDENT SCHOOL OPEN DAYS

Schools across the Thames Valley are still keen to show prospective families what they can offer. While normal open days are not possible right now, many schools are offering either small or private tours or virtual visits from the comfort of your home. At the time of going to press, the details in this feature were correct, but government guidelines continue to change so please make contact with each school to check the details and to book your place if required.

OXFORDSHIRE

MOULSFORD PREPARATORY SCHOOL

(independent boys day & boarding school 4-13yrs), 01491 651 438, moulfsford.com
Virtual open day: Sat 27 Feb 10am.

Prospective parents are also welcome to make an individual appointment to visit the school and meet the Head or to arrange a video call. admissions@moulfsford.com

SHIPLAKE COLLEGE (independent boarding and day school for boys 11-18 and girls 16-18) 0118 940 2455, shiplake.org.uk
Open event: Sat 16 Jan. Go to shiplake.org.uk/opendays to book your attendance.

THE ORATORY SCHOOL (independent day and boarding school for girls and boys aged 11-18), 01491 683 500, oratory.co.uk
Open morning: Sat 27 Feb. Please contact the Registrar, Natasha Pearce, to arrange an appointment: registrar@oratory.co.uk

THE ORATORY PREPARATORY SCHOOL (independent day and boarding school for girls and boys aged 2-13), 0118 984 4511, oratoryprep.co.uk

Virtual open day: 6 Feb, 10am. For more information or to arrange a private tour, please contact Mrs Atkinson: c.atkinson@oratoryprep.co.uk

CRANFORD HOUSE (a non-selective independent day school for girls aged 3 to 16 and boys aged 3 to 11) 01491 651218 cranfordhouse.net

For further information about open events, virtual tours or the admissions process, please contact the Registrar: admissions@cranfordhouse.net

READING

THE ABBEY (independent day school for girls aged 3-18), Junior School 0118 931 3111, Senior School 0118 987 2256, theabbey.co.uk
The Abbey is running a series of virtual and face to face events to allow you to sample the rich opportunities on offer, as well as hearing from key members of staff and the student body. Contact the admissions team for more details: admissions@theabbey.co.uk

LEIGHTON PARK SCHOOL (independent co-ed day and boarding 11-18yrs), 0118 987 9608, leightonpark.com

If you would like to speak to a member of staff about what Leighton Park can offer, please do get in touch on 0118 987 9608, email: admissions@leightonpark.com

ST JOSEPH'S COLLEGE (independent co-ed day school 3-18yrs), 0118 966 1000, sjcr.org.uk Virtual open mornings available on the following dates:

Early Years: Wed 10 Feb and Tues 9 Mar, 9.30-10.30am. Senior: Wed 10 Feb and Tues 9 Mar, 11am-12pm

QUEEN ANNE'S CAVERSHAM (independent girls day & boarding school 11-18yrs), 0118 918 7300, qas.org.uk

Open morning: Fri 5 Mar 9.30am. To book a place, visit qas.org.uk

DOLPHIN SCHOOL (independent day school and nursery for boys and girls 3-13 years), 0118 934 1277 dolphinschool.com

To arrange a telephone or video meeting with headmaster, Adam Hurst, please contact PA Kate Spooner: headspa@dolphinschool.com

SOUTH OF READING

CROSFIELDS SCHOOL (independent co-ed day school 3-16yrs), 0118 987 1810, crosfields.com

Families are warmly invited to attend a personal tour or a virtual meeting. Please contact the Registrar on 0118 987 9902 or email registrar@crosfields.com. You can pre-register for the next open event by visiting crosfields.com

WAVERLEY SCHOOL (independent prep school and day nursery for boys and girls 3 months-11yrs), 0118 973 1121, waverleyschool.co.uk
Prospective parents are invited to contact the Admissions team on admissions@waverleyschool.co.uk to arrange a 1-2-1 visit, or to access virtual tours.

WEST BERKSHIRE

BROCKHURST & MARLSTON HOUSE

SCHOOL, Hermitage (independent boys (Brockhurst) and girls (Marlston House) day and boarding prep school 2-13yrs), 01635 200 293, brockmarl.org.uk

Please contact Rachel Harper, Head of Admissions (r.harper@brockmarl.org) for information or to arrange an individual tour.

PANGBOURNE COLLEGE (independent co-ed day and boarding school 11-18yrs), 0118 984 2101, pangbourne.com

To access the virtual open day – and for details of the next physical event in April –

please visit pangbourne.com/virtual-open-day. Headmasters' Breakfasts will restart when permitted. Email the admissions team for further information:

admissions@pangbourne.com

DOWNE HOUSE (independent day and boarding school for girls), 01635 200286, downehouse.net

Open morning: 16 Jan. Interactive virtual tours are also available including a meeting with the headmistress and key members of staff. Please contact the Registrar: registrar@downehouse.net

ELSTREE SCHOOL (independent day and boarding co-ed school 3-13yrs), 01189 713 302, elstreeschool.org.uk

Open mornings: Sat 6 Feb (pre-prep and prep), Sat 27 Feb (prep only) and Sat 6 Mar (pre-prep and prep), 10am-12pm. Individual visits also welcomed during term-time.

Contact the Registrar for more information: registrar@elstreeschool.org.uk

ST ANDREWS PANGBOURNE (independent co-ed day & boarding school 3-13yrs), 0118 974 4726, standrewspangbourne.co.uk
Open morning: Fri 5 Feb.

To register your interest, please contact Registrar Carolyn Reeves: registrar@standrewspangbourne.co.uk

WOKINGHAM

LUCKLEY HOUSE SCHOOL (independent co-ed day & boarding school 11-18yrs), 0118 978 4175, luckleyhouseschool.org

Individual visits can be arranged, adhering to the social distancing guidelines, on Tuesday and Thursday mornings. If these times are not suitable, please contact the Registrar to arrange an alternative: registrar@luckleyhouseschool.org



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Elstree crowned best for boarders

Elstree School was the best boarding school at the prestigious Independent Schools of the Year 2020 awards. From more than 300 nominations nationwide, Elstree – which recently became co-educational – was the only preparatory school to be shortlisted. It was also a finalist in the category of best Independent Pre-Prep School.

Boarding life at Elstree, which lies between Newbury and Reading in Berkshire, is jam-packed with fun for children from Year 4. There is the option to flexi or weekly board, and a huge variety of clubs to choose from, including film-making, mountain biking, chess, Hama Beads, torchlight games and ultimate frisbee. At the heart of the home-from-home atmosphere is a successful model of house-parents supported by housemasters/mistresses, cosy Sunday roasts, and homework help from an academic tutor.

The Year 6 class recently had a taste of boarding school life with their 'Big Weekend'. Pupils made catapults, played laser tag, kayaked, enjoyed an art lesson and more. The fun continued into the evening with marshmallows and hot chocolate by the campfire in the woodland.

Head of Boarding, Iain Hepburn, believes that the flexible boarding model has huge benefits for pupils: "It enables children to learn to live as part of a community and to build up their self-confidence, independence and organisational skills. Children leave Elstree having developed a strong set of values, friendships and good manners which they not only take to their senior schools, but also into adult life."

The Power of Gratitude

By Nisha Kaura, Head of the Abbey Junior School

No one needs a newsflash to be aware that times are unconventional. To say everything is different is an understatement.

We have been reflecting on how pertinent, probably now more than ever, it is to be grateful for even the most ordinary things we have previously taken for granted. We have considered the small things we always thought would be available, but have come to be in short supply – from popping to the shops to celebrating special events in person.

In morning assemblies, we have been grateful for generations and people who paved the way for the life we have. As hard as life is for us, to live in a first-world country offers a relatively charmed life. We have paused to think about those who struggled to make life easier, been glad, if we can for those who have challenged us to think differently. Both the progressive trailblazers we have never met – the ones who questioned the status quo – and the ones who challenge traditional thinking today, who will shape our tomorrow.

In the eye of a pandemic, it is easy to get sucked into negativity and its quick downward spiral. Psychologists remind us that having a growth mindset can make all the difference. In our year group bubbles, we have been celebrating all the times we've not had enough motivation, time, energy, money or something else altogether and smiled anyway. For every time we failed and found a way to overcome and celebrate on the other side for what we learned along the way.

So, by starting with things we usually don't notice, being glad for creature comforts, thanking people we have never met, gaining self-awareness and looking ahead with a smile, we can acknowledge gratitude as a life pillar to wellness.



St Joseph's Toy Museum

Year 1 pupils at St Joseph's College in Reading have been studying toys in their History lessons and concluded their topic by running their very own Toy Museum! The children set up exhibits featuring toys their grandparents may have had, toys their parents may have had and those from the present. They also created leaflets, worked in the café, gave guided tours, took entrance money and assisted in the interactive play area of the museum. The children were able to talk about and describe the toys at their exhibition to their visiting guests.

Visiting museums was not possible during lockdown, so it was a fun and exciting way for the children to have their own experience of a museum from the comfort of school.

Find out more about St Joseph's: sjcr.org.uk



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A sporting chance

Pangbourne College prides itself on adding breadth and depth to every individual through its impressive co-curriculum offering. The co-educational day and boarding school is particularly well-known for its sporting opportunities and professional coaching. In recent weeks, Year 11 pupil Connor Jacob qualified for The Junior European Open finals, which is considered the toughest test in junior golf across Europe. Meanwhile, Captain of the 1st XV rugby team, Calum Scott in Year 13, has been awarded England Academy Player status. Within the London Irish club, he is one of a small number with this status and it places him on the pathway towards professional rugby.

England Hockey recently showcased Pangbourne student, Megan Fergusson, in one of its 'inspiring story' videos. Megan, who was born without her lower left arm, plays in Pangbourne's 1st team as well as at county level for Basingstoke Ladies. Head coach, Dan Paynter, says: "She always gives 100 per cent in her training sessions. The ambition she has to play at the top level is so impressive and I do believe that her determination will get her there." Megan adds: "I've never let my disability hold me back in life and in hockey. I've adapted and come through stronger as a result and I believe that I can achieve whatever those with two hands can achieve."

Waverley prepares children for their digital future

All pupils at Waverley Preparatory School in Years 3 to 6 will be given their own individual Chromebook. The key stage 2 children will be able to use their personal device for homework, in a Prep session or whilst in lessons for their remaining time at Waverley. The Prep School is one of only a few primary settings that ensures all pupils have this level of digital access.

The roll-out of Chromebooks is being funded by the school. Mr Guy Shore, Head of Waverley, explained: "Reflecting on our experiences throughout 2020, and the increased adoption of Google Classroom, we have seen how digital learning can significantly enhance our pupils' education. This became particularly evident in our pupils' work ethic and engagement with technology during the period of remote learning this year."

"A pupil's Chromebook will become as important as a pencil case", Mr Shore continued. Preparing our children for their digital future as independent learners has become vital. The Governing Board has recognised this by investing in a personal Chromebook for every child in Years 3 – 6, and an additional set of class Chromebooks for Reception to Year 2."

Waverley is a co-educational, independent Preparatory School and Nursery for children from 3 months to 11 years. It has been ranked 'Best in Berkshire' for the last ten years and is currently the top Primary and Preparatory school in the Wokingham and Reading area. waverleyschool.co.uk



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Peter Gale is the Principal of Mary Hare School near Newbury, which is the UK's largest school for the deaf, taking both day and boarding pupils. He joined in 1996 as Head of Sixth Form after a career in mainstream schools, including teaching languages at his own former school, and became Principal in 2014.

How would you define the Mary Hare ethos?

The school was set up to address the unique challenges that deafness brings, and create an environment in which young people succeed and feel a pride in

who they are. By having a peer group of other deaf people, our students do not feel different or embarrassed by their needs. If the circumstances are right, deaf people can achieve just as highly as their hearing peers. At Mary Hare,



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we use verbal communication, technology, lip reading and hearing aids to maximise the use of any residual hearing. We do not use British Sign Language in the classroom. We want our students to have good language skills, achieve better grades and enjoy more choices as they move into their futures. However, we recognise the role of sign language in the lives of many deaf people and pupils are not discouraged from signing in their leisure time.

Why do you feel Mary Hare works better for a deaf child than mainstream settings?

I meet a lot of young deaf people with low self-esteem because they do not feel clever in their mainstream school. Quite simply, they often cannot hear adequately, and they miss a great deal of learning as a result. Your average noisy classroom was not designed with a deaf person in mind. Pupils are often embarrassed by mishearing, by the one-on-one support they require and the equipment they wear. They typically do not have meaningful friendships and, while they may not be bullied, they are often not chosen for the play dates or parties. They come to us and, often for the first time, they feel included and a sense of self-worth.

How has Mary Hare evolved over the past five years and what have been the highlights?

One of my priorities upon becoming Head was to recruit a former colleague who provides us with mental health and wellbeing support. I am proud that we were ahead of the curve in that respect. Our vocational offer has grown considerably, which is ideal for those pupils for whom A Levels are not an option. We also introduced a 'set your sights high' programme, which incorporates weekly prizes in assembly and a dedicated notice board. The pupils have really taken it to heart and are owning their learning.

What more would you like to achieve over the next five years?

From a structural perspective, we are working on some ambitious projects. Our primary school is currently in Greenham, but we are relocating this to our main campus. We also need a new vocational centre and a sports hall. We are so



lucky to have an excellent fundraising team and the support of local and national grant-making trusts as well as our own Foundation. I see it as my role to continue the momentum of my predecessors and secure this vital school for generations to come.

How great are the challenges facing a deaf child in today's world?

In some respects, there has never been a better time to be a deaf child. The technology available to them is amazing, both specialist and mainstream. In a similar vein, we really saw the benefits during lockdown, with our pupils making great use of the remote learning available. But in other respects, it has never been harder. Self image, isolation, stress and anxiety are all dominating the landscape even younger. For deaf children, all this can be even more heightened. Public attitudes are improving, although there is still a perception that deaf people are unable to speak. I do firmly believe that through language, they can develop a better understanding of the world around them.

What is the most rewarding aspect of your work?

There cannot be anything more thrilling than when a Mary Hare parent tells me: "We've got our son/daughter back". Young people join us who have shut themselves away in their rooms and not been communicative. There is no greater privilege than seeing them flourish. A few weeks ago, I had a Sixth Former on the main interview panel for a senior role. To see her thrive in that environment was extremely rewarding.

What are the qualities of a great teacher?

I think humour goes a long way. It helps to have fun and to understand a young person's world, and the pressures they face. Having said that, they need space and do not want to be your best friend! Perhaps most importantly, be a source of stability in difficult times.

The Covid-19 pandemic has been hard for many individuals and groups, with working mums, particularly single working mums, being one of them.

But the picture is complex. Women dominate in many of the most risky frontline sectors such as health, social care and education and in some of the hardest hit sectors such as hospitality and retail. Part-time jobs, traditionally done by women, have seen a precipitous fall, BUT women are less likely to be unemployed than men and many have gone into full-time roles.

Then there is self-employment which has seen a big decline. A recent report from IPSE and Starling Bank showed women freelancers have been hardest hit financially by late payments of money owed to them and the associated mental impact and women-led businesses have suffered disproportionately.

What is clear is that the impact of childcare problems during the pandemic has been most keenly felt by women, with countless studies, including our own surveys, showing women have been carrying most of the childcare/home schooling burden, despite dads increasing their input generally.

Though schools and childcare are back, informal childcare bubbles are allowed and single parents/grandparents can extend their bubbles to another household, our latest survey shows there are still huge challenges, from lockdown restrictions to school or year group closures. Just 48% of mums said their childcare was back to normal after schools and nurseries reopened, with 14% lacking wraparound care and 10% lacking help with drop-offs. Others had children with special needs who were staying at home or had no access to school.

The practical as well as mental health impact of all this uncertainty and constant change is huge and, on the positive side, some employees have risen to the challenge, providing regular check-ins, communications, advice and support. The normalisation of flexible working and the groundswell of support for hybrid



The impact of COVID-19 on working mums

By Mandy Garner

working in the future are also a big positive for women and could help not only attract and retain more women in the workforce but, if senior jobs are routinely advertised with flexible working, could increase their chances of promotion too.

But there are provisos. Most importantly, the pandemic has underscored the central role of childcare in keeping women in the workplace and the necessity for childcare to be viewed not as a private issue for each family, but as a fundamental part of the economic infrastructure. Childcare providers need more investment. Many say they could close as a result of the pandemic and the ongoing issues around funding for

three and four year olds. Without affordable childcare, women will simply not be able to work.

Despite many employers increasing their engagement with staff during

the pandemic, a recent US study, Women in the Workplace (womenintheworkplace.com), published by McKinsey and Lean In, highlights that relatively few have taken steps to adjust the norms and expectations that are most likely responsible for employee stress and burnout.

Less than a third of companies have, for instance, adjusted their performance review criteria to account for the challenges created by the pandemic and only about half had updated employees on their plans for performance reviews or their productivity expectations during the pandemic. It says the result is more women dropping out of the workforce or not being promoted. COVID-19 has highlighted the yawning gap between good and bad employers which must be addressed, with claims of sex discrimination also likely to see a big rise.

So, while the impact of the pandemic on women is varied, we must go forward with our eyes open about the challenges ahead, continue to monitor what is happening on the ground and address the issues that are barriers to women's full and equal participation in the workforce. The Government's Build back better message has a focus on construction - one of the industries where women are least represented. We must rebuild the economy in a way that ensures that no one group gets left behind.

Mandy Garner is managing editor of Working Mums (workingmums.co.uk) where you will find the reports referenced in this article.



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 You can contact Sarah on 079 797 55667
 or e-mail sarah@brilliant-beings.com

Well connected...

With businesses of all sizes under huge strain right now and job losses spiralling, networking has come into its own as a valuable tool. By building relationships, you can not only boost your sales leads but also share ideas and best practice, and even identify new career opportunities.

The women's only Athena Network has successfully taken its sessions online for now and continues to offer opportunities to create connections and inspire success. It's a simple formula – monthly meetings with like-minded female executives and entrepreneurs. The agenda includes discussions in small groups, a minute to pitch your own

business, Business Development and Network training and sharing of referrals.

There are Athena groups right across the country – including several within the Thames Valley. Caroline Snowdon is the new West Berkshire Regional Director for three groups in Newbury and Hungerford – with a fourth planned for March 2021. "The most successful of our members are those that give by offering ideas, advice and contacts," says Caroline. "Inevitably, they receive more back too. We strongly encourage members to have individual dialogues with one another outside of the group meetings. It's the best way to really get to know one another and collaborate at a

deeper level. The impact of the last few months on businesses has been huge, and we provide a forum to support each other and share in the highs and lows."

The Athena Network is particularly well known for its development opportunities. Beyond the regular meetings, there are opportunities to interact with others across the network through more informal drop-in coffees, and

special seasonal events.

Caroline is inviting enquiries from new members across a range of business disciplines, with a particular focus on IT and social media, tradespeople and complementary therapies like osteopathy, acupuncture or reflexology.

Here, we take a closer look at just a few of the members in the Newbury area and their businesses.

To find out more about The West Berks Athena Network in Newbury and Hungerford, contact caroline.snowdon@theathenanetwork.com.

For enquiries about joining the Athena Network in Reading and Henley, contact debbie.atkins@theathenanetwork.com.

For the Wokingham and Bracknell groups, please email karen.fowler@theathenanetwork.com.

A balanced approach to nutrition

Flick Lucas is a registered Sport and Exercise Nutritionist, passionate in her belief that healthy eating doesn't have to mean denial and that fitness goals can be reached in a balanced and healthy way. She runs Ridgeway Nutrition, specialising in creating bespoke plans for female and youth athletes that help them to avoid injury and reach their performance potential. Many have gastric and autoimmune disorders such as Coeliac Disease or IBS.

Her assessment starts with a medical history, a seven-day food diary, understanding diets they have tried previously and their food likes and dislikes. Foods are broken down into constituents to assess which is being over-consumed and any essentials that are lacking. Flick then builds tasty meal plans around managing the individual's condition and reaching their goals, whether that be building up muscle mass, increasing time to exhaustion, losing weight sensibly or improving gut symptoms.

West Berkshire-based Mum-of-two Flick says: "There are so many misconceptions around nutrition and exercise, with many athletes not consuming the right foods at the right times, or buying dangerous shakes and supplements online. But the stark fact is that if you don't make time for your health now, you will have to make time for your illnesses later. I develop fully personalised and balanced nutrition plans that work for sportsmen and women, and make them better performing players." ridgewaynutrition.co.uk



Clear the clutter

"Spending so much time at home during lockdowns has made us super-critical of the environment we live in," says Fiona Jones, Founder of Berkshire Lifestyle Concierge. She works with her clients to clear the clutter and make spaces attractive and organised. "Decluttering can be overwhelming; you need to be in the right frame of mind. If you're not careful, it can feel like trying to eat an

elephant! I like to break it down into bite-sized chunks, tackling the smallest room or a really messy area first."

Fiona's passion for organising stems from trying to create order when her children were small. "It's important to teach children that things have a place, so you can find them next time you need them!" She started Berkshire Lifestyle Concierge five years ago to help people bring order to their personal lives.

Organising paperwork is her speciality, and she loves to help you get on top of your household admin. She is also experienced in house moves, from decluttering in preparation for sale or downsizing to packing and unpacking. "Moving is a stressful process, particularly when there are children involved. I aim to take the load off your shoulders, so you can focus on what's important." berkslifestyle.co.uk

Making family memories

Capturing family interaction against a backdrop of the beautiful Berkshire countryside is at the heart of Jennie Colbourne's photography. Gone are posed studio shoots, and in their place a natural style of photography that conveys the laughter and dynamics between family members as they enjoy the great outdoors.

Thatcham-based Jennie is not averse to early starts and late finishes.

She often makes the most of dawn or dusk in locations such as Snelsmore or Greenham Common. "The light is so flattering at that time of day," explains Jennie. "It creates a stunning background, whether that be the soft early evening sky, or a crisp morning shrouded in mist. It's important to me that families enjoy their photo shoots, which means I can capture them interacting and having fun. Ensuring the children are happy and relaxed is my main priority – they

often see our session as a great adventure."

Jennie turned to photography when her own two children were young. She quickly learned how to take beautiful, natural photos of them, and demand for her services grew. She now also offers newborn sessions and, more recently, doorstep photography to capture families during lockdown. jennicolbourne.co.uk



Adore your outdoors

Never have the benefits of connecting with nature been more prominent than during recent lockdowns. GPs are increasingly offering 'green prescriptions' where patients are encouraged to spend time outside to strengthen their immune system, lower blood pressure, reduce anxiety and improve sleep.

Sonya Dibbin has seen first-hand the huge benefits to physiological and mental health. She set up Adore your Outdoors 18 months ago after a very 'clean and indoorsy' childhood and a career in IT. After being made redundant, she retrained as a therapeutic counsellor and Forest Therapy Guide. She uses the clinically proven Japanese mindfulness practice of Shinrin-Yoku or 'Forest Bathing' to help small groups or families to slow down and reconnect with the natural world.

Winchester-based Mum of one, Sonya, explains: "Mindfulness in nature is the perfect antidote to spending so much time indoors, constantly connected to technology with stress at an all-time high. Step off the merry-go-round, declutter your mind and detox your soul."

During 2-3 hour sessions – which take place in ancient woodlands in Hampshire and Berkshire – Sonya facilitates a series of activities that focus on immersing yourself in the present moment and silencing the chatter in the mind. She adds:

"Participants feel safe to be vulnerable, process blocked emotions, and achieve clarity of mind. Following an experience, you feel deeply relaxed yet rejuvenated and the effects are long-lasting."

adoreyouroutdoors.co.uk



Calm in the storm

There are few life events more stressful for a family than divorce and separation, but solicitors Horsey Lightly bring calm and sensitivity to the most emotional of times. Alison Whistler is the firm's family law and dispute resolution specialist. Her naturally collaborative nature enables Alison to find solutions for even the most high-conflict cases of family breakdown, including negotiating children's arrangements and financial disputes.

Alison is a member of Resolution, which promotes finding amicable, non-confrontational solutions for marital disputes. This can be especially helpful if there are children involved, and it helps to keep costs down.

She is also a trained Collaborative lawyer, encouraging divorcing clients to sit down around the table with their lawyers, to find a less confrontational, more respectful way to settle.

"My focus is always on finding solutions that will resolve matters as amicably as possible, and minimise distress to the families involved," says Alison. "As well as divorce and separation, I deal with prenuptial agreements, cohabitation arrangements, adoption and more. Over lockdown, we have sadly seen the cases of marital breakdown increase, as well as incidents of domestic violence. I like to think I can bring some peace and resolution during the most challenging times in people's lives."

horseylightly.com



A wise way to travel

Fare Wise Travel has been a familiar sight on the Hungerford High Street for 27 years. While the travel industry has been hit hard by the pandemic, the bespoke travel specialist is starting to see confidence re-building.

Villas with private pools are proving particularly popular in places within our travel corridors, such as Portugal, the Canaries and Greece. Staycations also continue to be in demand, particularly to the Channel Islands and Shetlands – the beautiful beaches and historical interest more than make up for the cooler weather.

The industry has needed to respond to an ever-changing landscape with greater flexibility, explains Fare Wise Travel Director, Veronica Bailey: "Holidaymakers want the confidence that they can cancel if necessary and secure a refund. That is one of the benefits of booking with a company like ours. You have someone fighting your corner with the airlines or accommodation providers, and we can sort all the paperwork. We also have a wealth of experience so can offer advice on Visas or travel and health insurance, for example, which are more important than ever right now."

"Our favourite projects are building tailor-made holidays for our clients, and adding all the extras that make it really special," adds Veronica. "We also have a new member of staff who specialises in customised tours to Sri Lanka and Peru. After a year of uncertainty, it's wonderful to get back to what we love doing – creating dream breaks and lasting memories."

farewise.com

Mental health: spotting the signs

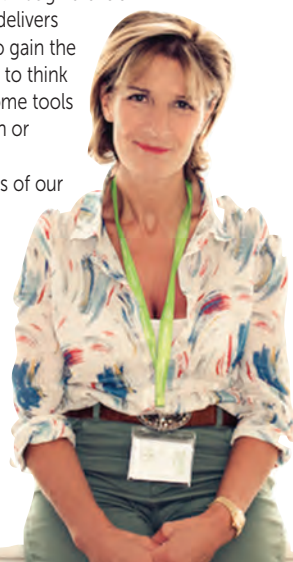
One in four of us will experience mental health issues at some point. So why, when physical first aid courses are training 150,000 people a year, is society less adept at equipping us for this other huge health crisis?

Debs Sheppard argues that it is now crucial that we tackle the alarming rise in mental ill health and suicide with training that gets us through a crisis.

Marlborough-based Debs runs Mindful Butterfly, which delivers courses to businesses and individuals who are looking to gain the skills and knowledge. She explains: "This isn't something to think about when a problem arises. All parents should have some tools in the medicine cabinet to spot the signs in their children or teenagers, and to assist recovery."

Young people are particularly vulnerable to new issues of our time such as cyber bullying, and lockdown has made it harder to seek help. "My own daughter suffered with mental ill health and I just wish I had had the knowledge at the time to support her properly," says Debs. "If you attend one of my courses, you can expect full-on, professional training delivered with a large helping of humour, candour and compassion."

Mindful Butterfly runs half-day or two-day courses in small groups, including refreshers. Our readers have been offered an exclusive £75 discount on courses booked before 30th March 2021. Use CODE TVF75. mindfulbutterfly.co.uk





Finding fun in tough

Entertaining the kids through the colder months can be a challenge at the best of times. Throw in a global pandemic and it starts to look pretty impossible, with many events cancelled or running at reduced capacity. On top of that, the family and friends support network we all rely upon is limited.

At the time of writing, it is unclear whether the new year will bring further full lockdowns, or whether mass vaccinations might mean greater freedoms. No wonder many of us are finding our morale and inspiration running low.

So we've put together some ideas to help you keep your children amused – indoors, outdoors or by visiting some sure-fire venues that are likely to be open for business (subject to which tier we find ourselves in). It goes without saying that life is changing rapidly, so do check out individual websites before you visit.

Get fit as a family

Enjoying being physically active as a family helps your children prioritise their physical health and mental wellbeing. Use a Wii Fit or do an exercise class. PE with Joe Wicks was the hit of 2020 and there are loads of child-friendly workouts on his YouTube channel. The Baby Exercise App has great classes for you and your baby. Or combine dance and yoga with Disco Yoga with Cosmic Kids on YouTube. Also check out our clubs and classes directory on pages 20-21 with its range of local sports and hobbies to try.

Nurture nature

We're not the only ones to struggle during winter. It can be a very difficult time for wildlife, with plummeting temperatures and scarce supplies. Feed garden birds regularly with food with a high fat content to help keep them warm. You could try making your own fat block or peanut cakes. Making an insect or bug hotel is great fun and especially appreciated by overwintering ladybirds and lacewings. Get the children to help sow some seeds indoors for early crops (try lettuce, cauliflowers or sweet peas) – gardenersworld.com has some great projects for gardeners-in-training.

Make a walk fun

Adults like to walk for the sake of it, but that can sometimes be lost on children. Jazz it up by hunting for a geocache, or challenging the kids to photograph the most beautiful bird, tallest tree or stunning view. A scavenger hunt – where they're tasked to find various natural materials – also adds a 'purpose' and you can use the items to make a collage when you get home. Shake up your usual route with some new places – why not try some National Trust grounds like Basildon Park near Reading or Grey's Court in Henley-on-Thames? Dinton Pastures and California Country Park near Wokingham, and The Nature Discovery Centre in Thatcham, have a network of footpaths around a glorious lake, with fantastic wildlife to see all year around.

Create a time capsule

The start of a new year is the perfect time to make a time capsule – a collection of treasures and memories that your children can hide away for their future self. Get your children to record facts about themselves (friends, favourite things, hobbies etc) and to trace around their hand. You could also include today's newspaper, some photos of your house and street, mementos from the year and a letter about their lives right now. Another great project for older children is to use online software to design a calendar for the year, full of family photos and important birthdays.

Prioritise your mental health

Mental health has been challenged by the pandemic. So let's use our 2021 resolutions to focus on being kinder to ourselves, which will make us happier, more energised, and ready to face whatever the 'new normal' has in store. Marlborough-based Mindful Butterfly (mindfulbutterfly.co.uk) runs mental health first aid courses for parents and has various dates for January. Forest bathing with Adore your Outdoors is a fantastic way to reconnect with nature and practice mindfulness. Look out for the latest dates at adoreyouroutdoors.co.uk. Brilliant Beings also runs some children's mindfulness and creativity sessions at Wasing Park at Aldermaston, near Reading. brilliant-beings.co.uk



Get your bake-on

Cooking with the kids is a great way to fill an hour – the trade-off for the chaos is something delicious to eat afterwards. You'll also be instilling skills that means one day you can sit back while tea is cooked for you! A new year is often a time we resolve to eat healthier, and BBC Good Food has some nutritious and simple recipe ideas that will keep the whole family happy – from homemade fish fingers to pasta with tomato and hidden veg sauce. Or hand over responsibility to the experts. South Oxfordshire's Mrs Bun the Baker has been running cookery classes via Facebook – including some free drop-in sessions (mrsbunthebaker.net), and Smart Raspberry also offers both online sessions and face-to-face classes in Henley-on-Thames (smartraspberry.com).

Show some love

With Valentine's Day around the corner, it's a great time spread some love. Encourage the kids to draw pictures for an elderly relative, or to choose some groceries for a food bank. Celebrate February 14th at home by creating a themed

dinner party as a family, complete with heart-shaped pizzas, a chocolate fondue and a beautifully decorated table.

Support local

Your local theatres, farm parks, soft plays and museums have had a really tough year. Sadly, some have shut down, but many are still running some shows or smaller-scale events. Check out their social media pages or websites for full details.

Here are some of our favourites for families:

Theatres: Newbury's Corn Exchange, Learning Centre and The Base; The Watermill near Newbury; The Hexagon in Reading and South Hill Park in Bracknell

Country parks: Beale Wildlife Park, Bucklebury Farm Park and Wellington Country Park – all not far from Reading; and Odds Farm Park near High Wycombe. Please note that some venues are annually shut for parts of the Winter season

Museums: The River & Rowing Museum, Henley-on-Thames; the Reading Museum; and The Museum of English Rural Life, Reading.



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New Year's mental health resolutions for your family

By Helen Spiers

On 1 January 2020, many of us were making resolutions about healthy eating, exercise or giving up bad habits, with no idea that a global catastrophe was on its way. The impact of the pandemic is huge, with mental health suffering particularly. So let's use our 2021 resolutions to focus on being kinder to ourselves. By prioritising our family's mental health, we'll be happier, more energised, and ready to face whatever the 'new normal' has in store.

Resolution 1: Be more open

As a counsellor, young people tell me things that they couldn't say to their parents. They may be worried about hurting their feelings or about their reaction. In other households, talking about feelings may be seen as shameful. But by hiding our own mental health difficulties, we're not protecting our children, we're promoting shame and secrecy. Open up about your own emotions and let your children know that we all get scared, sad and angry at times.

Resolution 2: Spend more time together

Screens and social media played a big part in the lockdown narrative, and many bad habits were formed. While it may offer short-term respite, excessive screen-time and social media negatively impact on so many areas of a child's health and development. Resolutions that restrict or deprive children, however, will be met with frustration and resentment. Instead, resolve to spend more time together - be it a weekly games night or long Sunday walks. You'll reduce screen-time, improve your relationships, and support your child's development, communication skills and emotional well-being.

Resolution 3: Build on strengths

Diets fail and gym memberships gather dust because things we don't find fun are hard to sustain. It's the same for children. Encourage your child to set positive resolutions. Maybe they're going to take on their most ambitious Lego project yet or become an even better dancer. Focussing on strengths will build their resilience and give them more faith in their own abilities, making them more able to cope with adversity.

With such busy lives it's hard to prioritise our well-being - it's often ignored until something goes wrong. This New Year, be proactive and instigate long-term changes for your family's health and happiness.

Build resilience with a 'growth mindset'

In recent years there's been a surge in schools adopting a 'growth mindset' approach in order to build resilience in children. It's a welcome shift towards promoting mental health as it encourages children to embrace challenges

and persevere when things get tough. For those who find learning easy, they're encouraged to push themselves out of their comfort zone, and for those who struggle it celebrates effort over achievement.

By making 2021 the start of your family's growth mindset approach, you'll be helping to improve your child's coping skills and self-esteem. If they believe that getting top marks makes them a successful person, they'll seek constant validation and avoid any situations where they may fail. Messages such as "wouldn't it be boring if we got everything right first time?" and "I love how hard you're trying with this" will arm them with the resilience and self-esteem needed to face new challenges.

Helen Spiers is Head of Child and Adolescent Counselling at Mable Therapy which works with schools and private individuals through a bespoke online platform.

For more information, visit mabletherapy.com

Body image issues...

Many of the children I work with suffer from low self-esteem for a whole host of reasons. Academic pressures, difficult friendship or the desire to 'fit in' can all lead to self-criticism and feelings of worthlessness.

As children enter the final years of primary and move into secondary school, body image becomes another huge concern for many young people. Images online and in the media often give children unrealistic expectations of themselves and can lead to eating disorders, body dysmorphia, or anxiety and depression.

Telling our children that we think they're beautiful rarely has the power we want it to, but by directing them towards people or websites that promote healthy body image, the message may get through. Echoing Virgie Tovar's mantra that 'all bodies are good bodies' and promoting health over beauty will help. Resist references to diets or weight loss and instead focus on eating well and doing fun physical activities. Using positive language and avoiding comments on your child's appearance will also help them to feel more comfortable with who they are.

ANAGRAM

Can you unscramble the letters to spell out the names of five things you might see in Winter?

1. W M O A S N N

2. I R O N B

3. D P D U E L

4. C I E K E T A S S

5. S F T O R

When you've finished, unscramble the circled letters to spell a special message!



Answers: 1. Snowman 2. Robin 3. Puddle 4. Ice Skates 5. Frost. Message is: Keep Warm.

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A guide to decluttering

After the influx of Christmas presents, you suddenly realise that there's no room in the cupboards for any more 'stuff'! When you're busy, clutter can build up until it's taking over your life. Evidence points towards the importance of a less cluttered living space for both mental and physiological health, so the New Year is the perfect time to get organised. Here are my top tips for decluttering your home (and mind):

1. View your home as if you were a first-time visitor. Write down your first impression on how clean and organised the home is and make changes.
2. Take before and after photos and post on social media – your friends will encourage you and you will have a permanent record of how great your home can look.
3. Start with the area that is worst or that drives you mad the most.
4. Try and get someone to help you who can offer a different (and honest!) opinion.
5. Put aside a chunk of time where you can work through the mess without distractions.
6. Get four boxes or bin bags ready: bin, recycle (check with your local council), charity and sell (try eBay, local Facebook pages or car boots). Anything else, you keep.

7. If you haven't used it in a year and won't use it in the next year, it has to go, unless it has sentimental value.

8. Buy some new storage to stop you going back to your old ways.

9. When it's done, you'll feel a great sense of reward and relief. You will enjoy the extra space and the money from the sale of unwanted items.

But remember that piles of stuff are the thin end of the wedge. Ultimately you have to change your behaviour and put stuff away as you go, or it will all creep back....!

Berkshire Lifestyle Concierge has lots of experience at decluttering and can help you get your life in order. They'll help you sort through your belongings and get rid of anything you don't want or need. Organising paperwork is their speciality and they love to help you get on top of your household admin. They are also experienced in helping people move home, from decluttering in preparation for sale or downsizing, to packing and unpacking. Get in touch with Fiona Jones for a free consultation: 07587 170707.

berkslifestyle.co.uk



Life-saving skills every child should know

How many young children would know what to do if a parent collapsed at home or a friend choked on a sweet? They'd know that an ambulance was needed, but would they know how to go about calling one? Every time I read an article about a child who has called 999 for a parent that has collapsed at home, I am very impressed. Someone has taught them how to do that, and until now, it has not been their school's responsibility. After much lobbying, basic first aid is finally on the PHSE curriculum, so all primary school leavers will now know how to call the emergency services and how to deal with common injuries.

However, if your child has some years left at primary school, then why not teach them now? As long as they can recognise the number 9, then they can potentially save a life. The key points to cover are:

- how to call 999 from a mobile phone without using the pin code – swipe until you find the emergency button and press it so a keypad appears
- say the word ambulance to the call operator
- know your house name or number, street name and postcode.

You obviously hope that they never have to use this knowledge, but surely it is better for them to know it and not need it, than the alternative? Most young children love role-play, and practicing with various scenarios will embed the knowledge deeper, which will enable it to be recalled even in a panic. So ask someone to pretend to fall unconscious and then you play the role of the emergency call handler and see how they get on. However, please ensure that they understand never to actually call 999 unless it is an emergency!

Teaching first aid to your children is one new year's resolution that might just save your life.

There are many other life-saving skills that young children should learn, such as placing someone into the recovery position, applying pressure and a bandage to a wound and helping someone who is choking, but these are better taught by a first aid trainer. Louise Worsley, from Worsley Training, is a professional teacher who is passionate about bringing first aid to life for children in schools, in an engaging, practical and memorable way, and covers the Thames Valley. For the time being, she is able to adapt sessions to ensure COVID-19 compliance, including using manikins and appropriate PPE for the practical sessions.

worsleytraining.co.uk



Photo: Mel Wilde Photography

"Let's race!" "Who's going to win snakes and ladders?" The language of winning resonates from early childhood - it seems natural to compare and compete with others. But, historically, what actually marked us out from our ancestors was our ability to co-operate in large numbers, communicate and connect through ideas and stories. This is how we learn.



Whether young or old, rich or poor, first or last, we can always learn.

And learning sits at the heart of the latest thinking on innovating, resilience and leadership.

There are three key areas in which we can help instil a learning habit in our children: co-operation over competition, embracing 'why' questions and teaching that it's not necessary to know all the answers.

Let's start with **co-operation**. It's sadly overlooked, or underplayed. Games are often set up to determine winners and losers. In the classroom, children compete to be the first one to put their hands up with the right answer. They learn that the way to look good is to have that answer, that they are being compared with their peers, and that they look better when others get things wrong. These competitive experiences block them from learning with and from their peers. Teaching, supporting and challenging each other is the most effective way to learn; co-operation between children is also an essential ingredient for mental health.

Next, let's **embrace those 'why' questions** that drive parents with toddlers crazy – they are the most brilliant basis of a learning mindset. A relentless focus on simply acquiring knowledge and skills without knowing why they matter or what impact they could have, reduces the motivation to keep learning. The 'why' helps us to master the 'what' and work out the 'how.'

Why and how to encourage a constant learning mindset

Dr Cath Bishop

Finally, we need to **consider how we answer those questions** – or not. We want to be clear. But it's really not necessary to know the finer details of how planes stay up in the sky, or how long it takes to get to the moon. It's much more useful to explore the questioner's potential thoughts on it and maybe find more questions.

There are no right answers any more, 2020 has proven that. The future is uncertain – and always has been. Asking questions, developing them and exploring different perspectives is the best way to foster a learning mindset, ready to discover new possibilities. Learning offers the best way to find success in our lives.

Creating co-operative environments

To do this, it's important to avoid pitting children against each other as competitors in an endless game. The original meaning of competition comes from the Latin 'competere' which means 'striving together' – that's a great approach for learning. Not working against or trying to beat others, but learning, exploring and creating new possibilities together.

At home, try and create games that involve co-operation rather than competition. This keeps children open to supporting and challenging each other, rather than feeling threatened and seeing each other as opponents. A simple way that I changed the game of Scrabble with my child, was to aim for the joint highest score. We helped each other find better words when we could, learnt more and had more fun. It's also okay not to finish games, or end them without a clear winner. That sets children up to enjoy the playing process, shared social experience and learning, rather than the outcomes, which are often determined by luck and factors beyond your control – a bit like real life!

Dr Cath Bishop is an Olympic medallist, International Diplomat and Cambridge University Business Coach.

Her new book *The Long Win: The search for a better way to succeed* is out now, published by Practical Inspiration Publishing, priced £12.99.

For more information, visit cathbishop.com

How a constant learning mindset is encouraged in Years 3 and 4 at Crosfields School:

"Encouraging pupils to work together to achieve collaborative success is one of the many things that contributes to positive learning at Crosfields School. At Crosfields, we encourage pupils to have a growth mindset, and our expert teaching staff ensure that children connect, question and reflect throughout their day. Often working together in groups to make discoveries or solve a problem, children will learn from each other as they, for example, build a den together in Forest School, join forces on the School Council or perform a song on stage in the theatre. In the Junior School, pupils worked together to build electrical circuits in their science lessons recently, learning to take risks within a safe and controlled environment. This is another example of how a constant learning mindset is fostered at our school. Teamwork and collaboration, whilst at the same time supporting personal development, is balanced with academic learning."

John Ireland, Head of Junior School

Clubs and classes directory

Regular clubs, classes and out of school activities give your child a chance to shine and for you to have fun together, and there really is plenty of variety to choose from. Here are a few of our favourites, for babies, toddlers and school-aged children. Do check latest details directly with each provider as some elements may have changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. For more clubs and classes in your area, check out familiesonline.co.uk

Developmental classes



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Portuguese Language Club – offering tuition to help you talk fluently in Portuguese, but we don't stop there. For us, it's all about you and ensuring that you enjoy your stay with us whilst also making sure that your Portuguese language skills are vastly improved. We offer a range of services to suit all needs; including one-to-one and group lessons, in-school clubs, holiday Portuguese and GCSE and A Level tuition. Based in Tilehurst, Berkshire. Contact Maria on 07427630331, 0118 942 4591, info@portugueselanguageclub.co.uk, portugueselanguageclub.co.uk



Love Learning Languages

BilinguaSing Wokingham – award-winning bilingual sensory music & movement classes with Spanish or French singing for babies (from 1 month), toddlers and pre-school children.

BilinguaSing is a unique class for parents and little ones to learn Spanish or French together in a fun and engaging way. Familiar nursery rhymes and songs are learned in both English and Spanish or French and are accompanied by a variety of fun movements and lovely props.

Classes suitable for complete beginners to native speakers in Wokingham, Winnersh, Bracknell & surrounding areas. Taster classes available. Private sessions also held in nurseries, pre-schools and primary schools to support the EYFS, KS1 and KS2 learning objectives.

Call Kate on 07810 751645,
kate@bilinguasing.com,
bilinguasing.com

Gym, sport and swimming

Bulmershe Gymnastics Club – based at a purpose-built gym in Woodley, run gymnastics classes for all ages including Leap Frogs for walkers to five years lead by qualified coaches. bulmershegymnastics.co.uk

GR Swimming Schools – children's swimming lessons from 3yrs in Newbury, Thatcham, & Pangbourne. Places for non-swimmers through to advanced academy levels. Also holiday crash courses in swimming, diving and coming soon SYNCHRO!! Uniquely structured lessons, following Swim England Award Scheme. 01635 34862 swimlessons.co.uk

SwimKidz – runs small group classes within warm pools to provide a swimming program which starts from birth through to approximately ten years. The structured plans are fun and progressive ensuring children enjoy learning to swim. With each instructor teaching within the water, children learn to swim independently from a young age. As an accredited Swim England and Swim Teachers Association swim school, you can be confident that we provide children an aquatic journey in a safe, caring and nurturing environment. Contact us at E:havefun@swimkidz.co.uk T:01635 777888 M:0750 005 6623 or visit our website for more information swimkidz.co.uk



baby and toddler swimming lessons in Reading and Wokingham. The programme is gentle and progressive, offering a fantastic opportunity for some special bonding time with your little one.

Classes are baby-led, focus on the health and wellbeing of babies and children alike, and use songs and nursery rhymes to create a relaxed atmosphere.

Contact littleturtle@turtletots.com or 07810 864810

Music & dance

diddi dance – funky pre-school dance classes for girls and boys. Award winning, high energy sessions explore 16 different styles set to original, age-appropriate music. Classes improve gross motor skills, rhythm, co-ordination, confidence, creativity and social skills with dancing games, fun exercises, action songs and a host of props. Lessons are aligned to the EYFS and are structured yet relaxed. Nursery workshops and parties too! Free trial available. Classes run every day throughout Reading & Wokingham. Call Andrea on 07719 878789, or email andrea.bickford@diddidance.com

Starmaker Stage School – a Saturday stage school based in Woodley that offers drama, dance and singing tuition, allowing younger children to explore their creative side without pressure. The experience of performance aids with public speaking, presentation skills and self-discipline. Saturday sessions run from 9.30-11.45am (Mini Stars for 4-6 years) and 11.45am-3pm (Young Stars for 7-12 years). To book a free trial, please email Sue at stageschool@starmaker.org.uk and quote this advert.

Berkshire Maestros – fun, lively music classes for children from birth to seven years led by professional musicians and using a wide range of inspiring resources and real instruments. Lots of singing, dancing, games and playing instruments, building confidence and friendships, as well as developing creative, intellectual, physical, social and emotional skills. Classes in Lambourn (Tue), Hampstead Norreys (Wed), Arborfield (Thu), Woolhampton (Fri), Reading (Thu/Sat), Emmer Green (Fri) and Newbury (Sat).

Session times and more details at: berkshiremaestros.org.uk/mini_maestros_main.html or email admin@berkshiremaestros.org.uk

To advertise here please call 07968 711937

RABBLE theatre – Reading's leading professional theatre company. Runs LAMDA classes in Public speaking, Verse & Prose and Acting. Classes run at Kendrick school 5-6pm on Tuesdays for 6-18yrs.

RABBLE also runs private lessons online and in person.

Contact dani@rabbletheatre.com



Drama and theatre arts

Steppin Out Stars of Tomorrow – COVID secure, fun, energetic theatre classes for 3½ to 18yrs. Dance, drama, singing, tap, street dance, pop styles and musical theatre. Regular award-winning classes in Wokingham and Woodley, plus summer schools. Call Shelley on 07970 034 488, or email shelley@steppinoutstars.co.uk, steppinoutstars.co.uk

Perform weekly drama, dance and singing classes – confidence-building fun for 4-12s. A unique mix of drama games, dance and singing specially designed to boost confidence, communication, concentration and coordination. Classes are delivered in line with government COVID-19 guidelines. Visit perform.org.uk/try to book a FREE class. Venues: Newbury, Twyford, Reading, Wokingham, Crowthorne, Henley-on-Thames and Goring. Contact: 020 7255 9120, enquiries@perform.org.uk, perform.org.uk

Award-winning after-school drama classes for kids who love to ACT! Burghfield, Tilehurst, Lower Earley, Mortimer and Wokingham. High-energy classes mean that students never get bored, can't wait to get to class and develop confidence, creativity and focus.



Free trial class and a Pay-As-You-Go option for infants. Ages 5+. Full listing of available classes, prices and venues at: <https://stageability.class4kids.co.uk>

Come and join the fun! E: jackie@berkshire.stageability.co.uk M: 07721 565898 T: 0118 933 3791

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Clubs and classes directory



Boost your child's confidence in 2021 with a FREE Perform class

After such a disrupted and unsettling year, Perform is looking forward to getting 2021 off to a brilliant start with weekly classes packed with high energy confidence-boosting fun. Classes are designed around developing the 4 Cs – confidence, communication, coordination and concentration – and use a mix of drama, dance and singing to bring out every child's potential.

The curriculum ensures plenty of fun, with drama games, catchy songs and funky dances. All class materials are written by Perform, with apps, downloads and videos for the children to play at home. Small class sizes – run by two professional actors – ensure plenty of individual attention, plus each child receives a progress report every ten weeks. Classes are available for ages 4-7 and 7-12 with a new creative theme each term.

To book a no-obligation FREE trial at Newbury, Twyford, Reading, Wokingham, Crowthorne, Henley-on-Thames and Goring, visit perform.org.uk/try. T: 020 7255 9120 enquiries@perform.org.uk

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The low down on potty training

By Andrew Campbell

If you think your child is ready to begin potty training, the next step to consider is what style of potty training is the best fit for your family. There is no one right method and each comes with advantages and disadvantages.

There are many types of methods, varying from the super-intensive to almost hands-off. Here we provide a brief overview of some of the more common methods.

Fast track – 3 days

This 'fast track' method may be attractive to parents who want to get their child toilet-trained quickly. It requires focussing 100% on potty training for a full three days at home. Your child goes naked and is taken to the potty regularly - or in a hurry if they start going - until they begin to go on their own. Although research supports a good success rate for this method, especially with children over 24 months, accidents will almost certainly continue for some time after.

Get the job done – 1 week

Made popular in a book by Gina Ford, this method is more flexible but is still quite regimented and relies on rewards to make it work. The first stage consists of getting your child to practise sitting on the potty for 5-10 minutes at regular intervals a few days before the potty training week begins. During the week of potty training, toddlers switch to pants and visit the potty starting at short intervals of every 15 minutes with the intervals gradually increasing. This can be labour-intensive!

Infant training – start early

This method, also called Elimination Communication, introduces the potty to your baby at a very early age – usually between birth and 4 months. Instead of using nappies, babies are placed on a potty after a meal or when they show signs of wanting to go. It works through two way communication between the parent and the baby. Parents follow the baby's cues and can also signal to the baby to eliminate.

Child-oriented method – gentle but slow

The child-oriented method seeks to create a positive and stress-free potty-training experience for the parent and child. It is regarded as gentle because it respects the child's readiness for each new step, and because the child sets the pace; parents do not force new steps if the child pushes back. This method may work well if you stay home with your child, you have a laid-back personality, or your child is headstrong.



Is my child ready?

There are a number of signs that your child is starting to develop bladder control:

- they know when they've got a wet or dirty nappy;
- they get to know when they're peeing and may tell you they're doing it;
- the gap between wetting is at least an hour (if it's less, potty training may fail, and at the very least will be extremely hard work for you);
- they show they need to pee by fidgeting or going somewhere quiet or hidden;
- they know when they need to pee and may say so in advance.

Potty training is usually fastest if your child is at the last stage before you start the training. If you start earlier, be prepared for a lot of accidents as your child learns.

Your child also needs to be able to sit on the potty, get up from it when they're done and follow your instructions.

More info:

[nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby)

What age is best?

Children are able to control their bladder and bowels when they're physically ready and when they want to be dry and clean. Every child is different, so it's best not to compare your child with others.

Bear in mind that most children can control their bowels before their bladder.

- by age 1, most babies have stopped doing poos at night;
- by age 2, some children will be dry during the day, but this is still quite early;

- by age 3, 9 out of 10 children are dry most days – even then, all children have the odd accident, especially when they're excited, upset or absorbed in something else;
- by age 4, most children are reliably dry during the day.

It usually takes a little longer for children to learn to stay dry throughout the night. Although most children learn this between the ages of 3 and 5, one in five children aged 5 sometimes wet the bed.

More info: [nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/pregnancy-and-baby)

Family fitness

By Claire Winter



Activities such as walking, running, climbing, swinging on bars in the playground and skipping with a rope, as well as sporting activities, also strengthen children's muscles and bones.

Get the kids involved

Enjoying being physically active as a family helps your children prioritise their physical health and mental wellbeing.

Use a Wii Fit or do an exercise class. PE with Joe Wicks was the hit of 2020 and there are loads of child friendly workouts on his YouTube channel. The Baby Exercise App has great classes for you and your baby. Or combine dance and yoga with Disco Yoga with Cosmic Kids on YouTube.

Encourage your child to sign up for school sports or local teams. If they can't train right now, encourage them to connect virtually with their sports clubs to keep up their training.

Make the ordinary interesting. Activity like gardening can be made interesting by counting different types of bugs, birds, or flowers. Check out gardening projects for kids at gardenersworld.com

Include exercise in your routine. Walk or cycle to school or schedule a dance off in the kitchen. Put your kids in charge of the playlist! Exercise can be fun, no matter your age, so give it a try!

Exercise inspiration for adults/older children

In bad weather.... exercise indoors! Invest in a rowing or running machine or even a cross trainer. If the equipment isn't practical, try improvising – walking up and down stairs at home is a great form of exercise.

Participate in challenges. Like the Couch to 5k plan. Use it as an app or download a podcast and it gives you a 9 week plan to help you start running. You choose your coach and run along with encouragement from celebs, like Sarah Millican and Jo Whiley. Just google Couch to 5k.

Download apps. Like Strava (strava.com). This records your moving time and has a reward system that shows improvements in times (e.g your 5km time or a particular area on a route). Using this motivates you to continuously improve. Track your times against other family members or friends.

Free online classes. Yoga with Adriene offers more than 500 free yoga classes from 10 minutes to an hour long. She has millions of followers and you'll find her on YouTube.

Motivating ourselves to exercise can be tricky. It's easy to use excuses such as 'being too tired' or 'too busy.'

Exercising through the pandemic, with gyms and sports clubs often closed, is also proving challenging. But we shouldn't ignore the fact that exercising on a regular basis helps to boost our immune system. It also promotes healthy growth in our muscles and bones, reduces the risk of heart disease and diabetes and improves our overall physical and mental health.

The NHS suggests that adults should aim for 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week or 75 minutes of vigorous activity – or a combination of both. For adults, moderate activity entails brisk walks or chores like gardening. Vigorous activity includes exercises like running, cycling, aerobics or games such as football or basketball.

The advice is to include different types of exercise in your routine, as follows:

Aerobic: This includes activity which works your cardiovascular system, such as walking, cycling, running, or swimming.

Strength: Core exercises such as weights, abdominal exercises (sit ups, press-ups, planks), as well as yoga or Pilates help to build and strengthen muscles.

Flexibility: Stretching, Pilates and yoga are all great examples of exercises that improve your flexibility. Improving your flexibility helps to reduce the risk of injury, strengthens muscles, improves joint movement, and increases your balance.

For children, the amount of exercise required varies depending on their age:

Under 1 year

The NHS recommends that children under one should be encouraged to have 'tummy time' of 30 minutes per day. This helps develop the muscles that they need to sit/ crawl. When they are able to crawl/walk, they need plenty of space to move around, whether this is at home or outside.

Ages 1 to 4 years

It is advised that toddlers and pre-schoolers should be active for at least 3 hours a day.

Ages 5+

This age group should aim for 60 minutes per day of moderate intensity exercise.

For children, things like walking to school, playing in the playground, skateboarding, roller blading, scooting, and bike riding gently on flat surfaces counts as moderate exercise. Other activity like running, dancing, swimming, gymnastics, and sports games like football and basketball count as vigorous activity.

When I grow up,
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on T: 01635 503155
E: Fostering@westberks.gov.uk