



Welcome to December's issue of DSL & DT briefing. We hope that the countdown to Christmas allows everyone to stay healthy and well, ready to enjoy what hopefully will be, a normal Christmas holiday! Christmas can be one of the hardest periods for our vulnerable children so if there is any further support or advice you might need please do get in touch.

A few reminders for DTs:

- Academic data for the autumn term **must be added to ePEP**. If you need any assistance please contact your VS case worker and they will be only too happy to help.



On Tuesday 7th July 2026 we will be hosting our Annual Virtual School Conference at The Crowne Plaza Reading East (Wharfedale Road, Berkshire, South East, RG41 5TS). More details will be sent in future DSL & DT briefings but please make note of the date.

Whats On

- ★ Monday 1 December 2025 PEP/PP+ Deadline
- ★ Friday 19 December 2025 WBC Last day of term
- ★ Monday 5 January 2026 WBC Start of Spring Term
- ★ Thursday 15 January 2026 Primary/Junior School Application Deadline
- ★ Tuesday 3 February 2026 Wokingham DSL Meeting
- ★ Monday 23 February 2026 – Friday 27 February 2026 WBC Half Term
- ★ Tuesday 24 February 2026 Designated Person for Child Protection in Education Refresher Training



With the new framework now 'live' for inspections, we would like to remind you of the questions we asked you to ponder last month.

Whilst children with a social worker will be discussed within the safeguarding team in your setting, how is this reflected?

Would you be able to evidence academic support where children are not meeting ARE specifically for this cohort?

Would you be able to evidence interventions specific to the child due to the ACEs these children have suffered?

Does the child/young person have someone in school who champions them the same way our children in care do?

What is different for a child with a social worker in your setting compared to a child who does not have a social worker and would the child or young person be able to identify that these things are different?

The 'Expected Standard' Page 15 of the inspection toolkit states:

Leaders support pupils who are known (or previously known) to children's social care, including looked-after and previously looked-after children, well. Staff work effectively, including with the virtual school, so that pupils' personal education plans generally improve their learning opportunities and experiences.



Christmas is coming and for most children, young people and their families, this creates feelings of excitement and joyful anticipation as they recall their memories of Christmas past; family coming together, the magic, the surprise, the gifts, the food.... Unfortunately, Christmas isn't like that for everyone.

Children and young people with developmental trauma may recall Christmas as the time when the adults around them, who perhaps were always unpredictable, frightening and abusive, become even more so - for these children and young people, Christmas may be anticipated with terror.

(Acord Education and Care, 2020)

Research

Fundamental to supporting children and young people with developmental trauma is establishing a sense of safety.

Critical to this is known carers providing reliable, predictable daily routines and boundaries, a consistency of communication and response and clarity of expectations within containing and sensory balanced environments.

Christmas however, often means a complete change in the norm—the environment is decorated, the lighting is different, bedtimes and getting up times may vary, the bedtime routine may be different in preparation for Santa, meal times may happen at different times, there may be unknown visitors, secret whispers and hiding, lots of surprises, loud noises, singing and nativity practise, unstructured timetables and references to sought-after gifts.

It would seem then, at a time when a traumatised child or young person is in most need of feeling safe, a time when they are anticipating terror, everything that may bring that sense of safety, changes.

(Acorn Education, 2020)

Research shows that children and young people with developmental trauma are hypersensitive to danger and are thrown back into their primitive drive for survival, adopt states of 'Flight/Flight/Freeze' and within these present with many behaviours:

- * Not focused
- * Not listening
- * Clumsy
- * Daydreaming
- * Aggressive
- * Disruptive / loud
- * Hyperactive
- * Running away / hiding
- * Silly voices
- * Controlling

(Bowlby, 1969)



Strategies for Home

Try to make Christmas a predictable, planned event:

- * Talk about Christmas beforehand. Explore fears and hopes. Think about coping strategies.
- * Involve the children in the planning, allow them to have some control over the events.
- * Prepare a schedule for Christmas— who is around, what will happen and when.
- * Use the advent calendar as the countdown and schedule of events.
- * Prepare your children ready for the next school term— what will they be learning, why the classroom will look different (the decorations will be put away before they are at home, displays will change etc).

Keep to the house routines:

- * Try to maintain the daily routines; particularly the child or young person's individualised routines for getting up, washing, dressing, bedtimes and meal times, even Christmas dinner.

Keep to the house rules:

- * Stick to the house or individual rules about time on social media or gaming consoles.
- * Maintain the usual boundaries and behavioural expectations.

Provide opportunities for emotional regulation:

- * Build in quiet times to the festive days, after each exciting point providing time to calm, regulate and touch base.
- * Make time to get some fresh air or take some physical exercise.
- * Be thoughtful about noise levels, allocating a 'quiet room' where noisy games and activities are kept away from.

Strategies for School

Routines and Structure:

(Beacon House, 2021)

- * Do more of what works (rather than less): Children may need more of your presence, more supervision, more scaffolding and more support than usual. How can time for this be built in? How can you build up your emotional reserves to give you the energy you need?
- * KNOWLEDGE is empowerment: Making the Christmas schedule explicit and predictable lowers stress for all. Draw it out, write it out, repeat it lots, keep as much as you can as the same as usual. Share the timetable with parents who can support their children with their daily routines.
- * Provide opportunities for emotional regulation: Build in quiet times to the festive days, after each exciting point providing time to calm, regulate and touch base.

Zones of Regulation and Emotional Check-ins:

- * EXPLORE the anticipation of Christmas: "Christmas is coming, what's that like for you?" "Where do you think you are today?"
- * EXCITEMENT is just the other side of the coin: Anticipate that excitement can often feel the same as stress for traumatised children. It's okay to keep things low key and by reducing excitement you are reducing stress.
- * CONNECT then REFLECT: "I can have a hard time when Christmas is over too—especially when I was a kid.... Here's what we could do together to get back into a routine we enjoy..."

Naughty or Nice list:

- * Help the child to know that giving and receiving presents is not dependent on them being good. They are loved and worthy regardless of their behaviour. Similarly, you are thinking of them over the break, perhaps give them some colouring to bring back in January that you are very much looking forward to seeing!
- * Elf Cams and Santa's watching—be mindful that this can be stressful for children who feel shame and rejection.



Resources

Useful Websites:

- [Issue-4-Christmas.pdf \(acorneducationandcare.co.uk\)](#)
- [Coping with Christmas | Adoption UK Charity](#)
- [5 Ways To Have A Trauma Informed Christmas - Lisa Cherry](#)
- [Xmas storm \(beaconhouse.org.uk\)](#)
- [PACE at Christmas \(beaconhouse.org.uk\)](#)
- [Surviving Christmas with Trauma - The Trauma Practice](#)
- [Surviving the Holidays with C-PTSD / DID — Beauty After Bruises](#)
- [50+ Christmas Crafts for Kids - The Best Ideas for Kids](#)
- [Christmas Sensory Survival Kit \(sensoryintegrationeducation.com\)](#)
- [Sensory Gift Guide for All Ages \(sensoryintegrationeducation.com\)](#)

Books:

[11 Christmas Books For Adoptive Families | Adoption.com](#)

[The Very Wobbly Christmas: A story to help children who feel anxious about Christmas: Amazon.co.uk: Naish, Sarah, Jefferies, Rosie: 9781726626729: Books](#)



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."



Beacon House is passionate about developing freely available resources so that knowledge about the repair of trauma and adversity is in the hands of those who need it.

Please visit their website for the whole range of resources available:

[Resources \(beaconhouse.org.uk\)](https://www.beaconhouse.org.uk)

Virtual Schools

A Virtual School acts as a local authority champion to promote the progress and educational attainment of children and young people who are or who have been in care and those who have had social services involvement, so that they achieve educational outcomes comparable to their peers. Ensuring that they receive a high-quality education is the foundation for improving their lives.



Don't forget the virtual school are here to assist you should you require any support. You can email us at the following addresses and we promise we will respond within 24 hours.

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Here's how to
CONTACT US!

Useful contact information