



# Christmas for Children and Young People who have Experienced Trauma

## Resources for Parents, Kinship Carers and Schools

Christmas is coming and for most children and young people 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.

(Acorn Education and Care, 2020)

Virtual School Kent is a Local Authority Champion for four groups of children and young people; Kent's Children in Care (CiC), Previously Looked After Children (PLAC), Ever6 Children with a Social Worker (ever6CWSW) and Children in Formal Kinship Care Arrangements. These children are more likely to have faced Adverse Childhood Experiences, and have difficulties associated with trauma and attachment. We hope you will use the resources, activities and suggestions in this guide to provide additional support to these children and their families as well as other vulnerable groups.



If you have any Kent children in care who you would like advice for, please speak to your VSK Lead Officer.





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)

For those children who do not celebrate Christmas, it can still be a time of difficulty. Lack of familiar routines at school, feeling confused and not feeling included can all lead to increased anxiety and a lack of feeling safe.

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 'Fight/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)





## 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 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, what the classroom will look different (the decorations will be put away, displays will change)



## 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 and bedtime and meals, 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.
- Remind children and young people of their coping strategies, their calming and regulating activities.

## Routines and Structure:

(Beacon House, 2021)

- ◆ Do more of what works (rather than less): Your child needs more of your presence, more supervision, more scaffolding and more support than usual. 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 the same as usual.
- ◆ 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 dependant 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.





## Useful Resources:

### General websites:

[Resources \(beaconhouse.org.uk\)](https://beaconhouse.org.uk) - see Christmas Resources

[50+ Christmas Crafts for Kids - The Best Ideas for Kids](#)

[Issue-4-Christmas.pdf \(acorneducationandcare.co.uk\)](#)

### Attachment:

[PACE at Christmas \(beaconhouse.org.uk\)](https://beaconhouse.org.uk)

### Adoption:

[Navigating Christmas in School | Adoption UK Charity](#)

[Navigating the Christmas Party season | Adoption UK Charity](#)

### Trauma:

[Surviving Christmas with Trauma - The Trauma Practice](#)

[Christmas can be a tough time for children who have experienced trauma \(jkp.com\)](#)

[A Trauma Informed Approach to Christmas \(worcestershire.gov.uk\)](https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk)

[Surviving the Holidays with C-PTSD / DID — Beauty After Bruises](#)

### Sensory:

[10 Tips for Managing Social Pressures and Sensory Challenges During the Festive Season](#)

[Sensory Gift Guide for Children 2024](#)

[Christmas Sensory Survival Kit \(ck.page\)](#) – sign up for a free Survival Christmas guide

### Neurodivergence:

[Free Christmas Social Stories | And Next Comes L - Hyperlexia Resources](#)

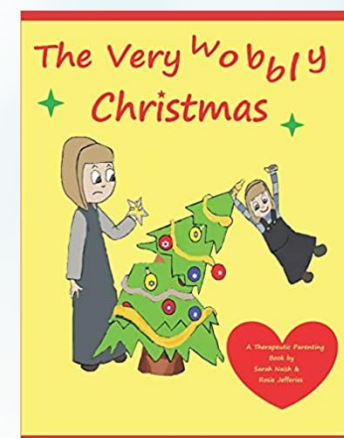
### For Parents, Guardians and Adults:

[Xmas storm \(beaconhouse.org.uk\)](https://beaconhouse.org.uk)

### Books:

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

[11 Great Adoption Books You Should Read | Adoption.com](#)



## Virtual School Kent:

The Virtual School Kent Advisory Team act as a local authority strategic leader in championing the educational attendance, attainment, wellbeing, and progress of Previously Looked After Children, Ever6 Children with a Social Worker and Children in Formal Kinship Care Arrangements within Kent education provisions; so that these young people can achieve their full potential.



Visit the VSK Website : [virtualschool.lea.kent.sch.uk](https://virtualschool.lea.kent.sch.uk)

[Contact the VSK Advisory Team](#)

For queries regarding Children in Care please contact [VSK@kent.gov.uk](mailto:VSK@kent.gov.uk)

***We would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a fun, calm and nurturing Christmas and New Year.***

