



HIGHSTED GRAMMAR SCHOOL

SAFEGUARDING NEWSLETTER

Issue 0016 December 2021

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Safeguarding Mission Statement

In accordance with the Children's Acts of 1989 and 2004 and the Education Act 2002, and Working Together to Safeguard Children 2015 and Keeping Children Safe in Education 2021, Highsted Grammar School has a duty to assist local authority specialist children's services departments acting on behalf of children in need or enquiring into allegations of child abuse. Highsted Grammar School follows a child centred and coordinated approach to safeguarding. A 'Culture of Vigilance' has been fostered, where it is agreed by all that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

Highsted Grammar School firmly believes that it has a strong pastoral responsibility to promote the welfare of children and that children have a right to be protected from harm; this is consistent with our overall aims to educate the whole pupil and foster personal as well as academic development.

Safeguarding Responsibilities and Contacts

Designated Safeguarding Lead: Mrs Tiernan-Powell
Deputy Safeguarding Lead: Miss Anne Kelly
Telephone: 01795 424223
Email: safeguarding@highsted.kent.sch.uk
Website: www.highsted.kent.sch.uk/safeguarding

Safeguarding Calendar

Oct 2021: Black History Month
Nov 2021: Anti-bullying Week
Jan 2022: LGBT+ Awareness Week
Jan 2022: Holocaust Memorial Day
Feb 2022: Children's Mental Health Week
Feb 2022 NSPCC Numbers Day
Feb 2022: Safer Internet Day
Feb 2022: Online Safeguarding Evening
Mar 2022: Eating Disorders Awareness Week
Mar 2022: Child Sexual Exploitation Awareness Day
May 2022: Mental Health Week
June 2022: LGBTQ History Month

Safeguarding at Christmas

Children love the magic of Christmas but for some, it is not a happy holiday to look forward to at all. For some children and their families, there is no sparkle in the December festivities because it isn't filled with happiness, family and friends, joy and peace. The sad reality is, Christmas can be a time when children struggle to cope with being ignored, bullied and abused.

Great Expectations

Christmas can be a tough time for everyone because expectations are high and there is a phoney pressure to 'have a good time'. But as many people will know, family relationships can be fraught, distant and a source of pain. The idealised images of happy families around the dinner table that feature in Christmas advertising and the media at this time of year are just that: unrealistic. Life is complex, messy and picture-postcard perfection is just a John Lewis or M&S film-set. Spending more time with their family and sharing special moments together can be idyllic for lots of children but it can be hell for those who live in challenging circumstances around abusive adults with chaotic lives.

There is a darker side to the festive season that we must address and that is recognising that some children are having a miserable time. For schools, this is a time of year, along with other holiday periods when it is difficult to monitor their wellbeing. December sees a spike in safeguarding issues and every year the NSPCC report increasing numbers of children phoning them for help because relationship tensions among families tend to come to a head over the Christmas break.

As the Children's Rights Alliance for England notes in its 2018 report, high numbers of children are exposed to domestic abuse and it is also commonplace for children to be abused by a relative or close family friend as these are the people most likely to be visiting during the Christmas period and New Year.

What are the key issues?

Isolation

Children can be cut off from their usual support network of teachers and friends when school closes for the holiday and they have nowhere to escape to. Neglected or abused children can experience extreme loneliness because they are isolated from the outside world which can be made worse by the dark nights and freezing temperatures. They might not always be able to leave the house or their abuser, which can leave them feeling anxious and depressed.



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Overindulgence

Christmas is intense and a time of excess which can be so stressful that trauma and heart attacks in adults are more prevalent. Overeating, lack of sleep, emotional stress, excess alcohol, illegal drugs and anger can come together to create a perfect storm and children are often first in the firing line. Sometimes there is nowhere to hide from violent and aggressive family members who lose control. There is also the issue of parents allowing children to get drunk and take drugs.

Home Alone

Although many safeguarding issues come about by being around family members in the home this is also the time of year when many children are left by themselves for long periods and sometimes overnight. Not all children are blessed with home lives filled with responsible adults. Children who are unsupervised are potentially put at risk of suffering or injury and the festive period is often a time when adults seek entertainment outside of the home. This could be a respite for some children, but they are still at risk as they are left to feed and fend for themselves and also look after younger siblings. Some children also have additional needs and are unable to cope, especially in an emergency. Child neglect is the most common form of child abuse in the UK and robs children of their childhood. As Action for Children note, "When an adult doesn't support them it means they can be unsafe, unhealthy, unloved and uncared for."

Expense

Although schools try hard to poverty-proof, what happens beyond the school gates is impossible to control. Christmas places families under enormous pressure to spend money purchasing gifts, entertainment, and decorating. Sadly, many can't absorb the financial commitments without going into debt. With 'Dickensian levels of poverty' for some, children may not receive many presents and start comparing what they do have to others. This might make them feel like they have done something wrong and that they are on the 'naughty list'. Hearing about the fabulous gifts other children receive can make them feel inadequate and different.

We also encourage parents not to tell their Santa aged children that their expensive gifts were from Santa; otherwise, children may wonder why their friends received Ipad's and phones from Santa but they only received clothing or shoes.

Children's Arrangements and Access

Children can get caught in the thick of things when families have split apart and this can be distressing. Separated parents can argue with each other about making Christmas arrangements and there can be disagreements about setting ground rules. Some may spend more on their child than the other and there are also concerns about controlling step-parents and abusive step-siblings when children spend time away from their usual environment.

Outside Influences

Children may be vulnerable to abuse or exploitation from people outside their families as a result of the relationships they have in their neighbourhoods, schools and online. Child sexual exploitation, exploitation by criminal gangs, involvement in organised crime groups, trafficking and radicalisation can all be more prevalent during holiday periods when children aren't safeguarded by their schools.

Technology

Staying safe over the festive period is a concern for every family and digital safeguarding is an important part of keeping children and young people protected. Gifts such as Tablets, Gaming Consoles or Smartphones can all be used to go online so it is important to think ahead about what safety features are available and set them up in advance.

[The Safer Internet Centre](#) also has some excellent advice in their Parents' Guide to Technology and includes device-specific settings for different models. Explore more about parental controls here. Families may want to think about setting up a Family Agreement as suggested by Childnet International. You are also able to sign up to a Parent membership free of charge as a Highsted Parent at the [National Online Safety](#) network by using the attached [code](#).

Mental Health

Young people with adverse childhood experiences (ACE) have been part of households with problems such as substance and alcohol misuse, child protection issues, domestic violence and mental health difficulties. Many still are. Research by mental health charity Mind has shown that people with mental health problems struggle with self-harm and suicidal feelings due to the pressure of Christmas and this places children and young people in extremely vulnerable situations.

The most wonderful time of the year?

The traditional image of Christmas is incredibly optimistic and it can be wonderful, but we must remember that it certainly isn't a given for vulnerable children. It is, however, a foundational celebration that adds meaning to life and can deepen family bonds.

Safeguarding is the responsibility of everyone and at this time of year, we have to be extra-vigilant and offer support where we can and be proactive where we suspect or see the signs of abuse and neglect and seek the help of the police and social services. The rights of the child come first and all children have a right to protection from violence, exploitation, abuse and neglect.

Children have a right to feel safe and secure wherever they are spending their Christmas and, as Article 3 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child says, their best



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interests should always be kept as our central consideration. All children should have the love, support and opportunity they need to reach their potential.

Parental Support

As part of our work with the [Place2Be](#), the Mental Health Charity, we would like to offer parents the opportunity to explore a range of resources to help navigate through their child's transformation into adulthood.

Free School Meals

Your child may be able to get free school meals if you get any of the following:

- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- the guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
- Working Tax Credit run-on - paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit - if you apply on or after 1 April 2018 your household income must be less than £7,400 a year (after tax and not including any benefits you get)

Children who get paid these benefits directly, instead of through a parent or guardian, can also get free school meals. Your child may also get free school meals if you get any of these benefits and your child is both:

- younger than the [compulsory age for starting school](#)
- in full-time education

If your child is eligible for free school meals, they'll remain eligible until they finish the phase of schooling (primary or secondary) they're in on 31 March 2022.

To apply, please visit <https://www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals>

Kent Community Foundation Grants

Please find a link for the Kent Community Foundation grants which are available to disadvantaged individuals and families in Kent that meet the criteria, along with details of how they can be nominated. The individual or family being nominated must be a resident of Kent or Medway and there must be a demonstrable financial disadvantage underlying the request (e.g. the family are reliant on benefits or out of work for whatever reason). <https://kentcf.org.uk/>

Useful Links

NSPCC:

Call: 0808 800 5000 (24-hour free helpline)

Text: 88858

Email: help@nspcc.org.uk

Web: www.nspcc.org.uk

Samaritans:

Call: 116 123

Email: jo@samaritans.org

Web: www.samaritans.org

National Self-harm Network:

Call: 0800 622 600 (7pm-11pm)

Web: www.selfharm.co.uk

Stop Hate Crime:

Call: 0800 138 1625 (24-hour helpline)

Web: www.stophateuk.org

Stop LGBTQ Hate Crime:

Call: 0808 801 0661 (24-hour helpline)

Web: www.stophateuk.org

National Domestic Violence Helpline/ Women's Aid:

Call: 0808 2000 247 (24-hour free helpline)

Email: helpline@womensaid.org.uk

Web: www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk

Web: www.womensaid.org.uk

NWG Network (Stop CSE):

Call: 01332 585371

Email: jointhefight@stop-cse.org

Web: www.nwgnetwork.org

FGM/HBV Helpline:

Call: 0800 028 3550 (24-hour free helpline)

Email: fgmhelp@nspcc.org.uk

Web: www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect/female-genital-mutilation-fgm

EACH:

EACH has a Freephone Actionline for children experiencing homophobic bullying

Call: 0808 1000 143 (Monday to Friday 10am-5.00pm)

Web: <http://www.eachaction.org.uk/>