

## What is F-TEC Open Minds?

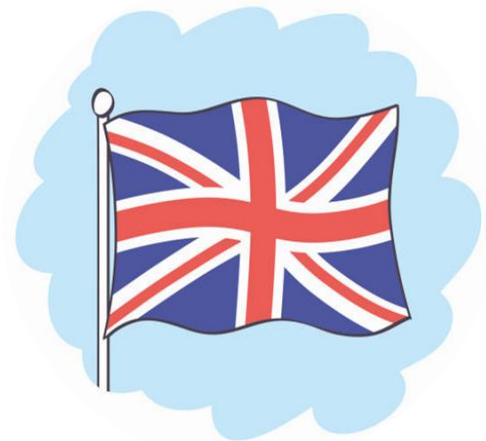
Welcome to Open Minds, a bimonthly newsletter from F-TEC that's all about promoting awareness, wellbeing, and shared values in our community. Each edition focuses on real-life topics that matter to you from mental health and social issues to safety tips and personal development. We also explore and celebrate the Fundamental British Values, helping to build a respectful, inclusive environment for everyone.

### Our aim is simple:

- To keep you informed
- To help you feel connected
- To celebrate diversity
- To support a safe, inclusive learning and working environment

## British Values: Why Do They Matter?

British Values are about more than tradition or flags. They're the foundation of how we treat each other and build strong communities at college, at work, and beyond.



### Here's what they mean in real life:

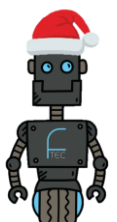
**Democracy** - Everyone should have a say. That means voting, speaking up, and listening to others. Whether it's in elections or everyday decisions, your voice matters.

**Rule of Law** - Rules and laws help keep things fair and safe. Knowing your rights and your responsibilities helps you protect yourself and others.

**Individual Liberty** - You have the right to be yourself. That includes your identity, your choices, your beliefs, and your voice as long as they don't harm others.

**Mutual Respect** - We don't have to agree with everyone, but we can still treat people with dignity and kindness. Mutual respect means recognising that other people's feelings, opinions, and boundaries matter just like yours do.

**Tolerance of Different Faiths and Beliefs** - Not everyone believes or lives the same way and that's okay. Tolerance is about accepting and learning from people with different cultures, religions, or backgrounds. It's not about changing your views it's about living peacefully alongside others.





## Supporting Wellbeing, Safety & Awareness This Festive Season

Christmas is often seen as a time of joy, warmth, and connection. But for many, the season can bring heightened pressure, emotional strain, and complex challenges. While there's plenty of magic to be found, we must also recognise and support those for whom this time of year may not feel so festive.



In this edition of Open Minds, we explore the realities behind the tinsel from family pressures and online safety to domestic abuse, gambling, and homelessness so that we can all stay safe and support one another this Christmas.

## Recognising Abuse at Christmas

The reality for many is that the Christmas season is not a time of comfort, but one of fear. Domestic abuse can worsen during this time, with victims feeling more isolated, and fewer services available due to closures. In the UK, domestic abuse reports often rise after the festive period, when victims are finally able to access help. Abuse isn't always physical. Emotional, financial, coercive, and controlling behaviours are all forms of abuse.

### If you or someone you know is affected:

- **Call 999 in an emergency**
- **Use the Silent Solution by pressing 55 when prompted if you can't speak**
- **Access help through local or national domestic abuse services**



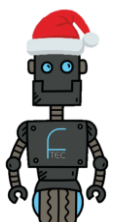
## Liam's Story: Behind Closed Doors at Christmas - Recognising Abuse

Over Christmas last year, 22-year-old Liam spent two weeks at home with his partner. What should have been a well-deserved break turned into something very different.

Arguments became constant. His partner checked his phone, stopped him seeing friends, and accused him of lying. Liam started keeping quiet to avoid making things worse, telling himself it was just stress, alcohol, or Christmas tension.

When he returned to work in January, a colleague noticed something was off. Liam opened up, and for the first time, someone called it what it was: coercive control. Emotional abuse. Abuse doesn't always leave bruises. If someone controls, isolates, or frightens you, that isn't love. It can happen to anyone.

If something feels wrong, talk to someone. You'll be believed. You're not alone.





## Social Media: Protecting Your Digital Presence

Christmas posts may seem harmless but oversharing can pose real risks.

### Keep your accounts safe:

- Review and update your privacy settings regularly
- Avoid posting travel plans, gift receipts, or anything with sensitive personal information.
- Be sceptical of giveaways or friend requests from unknown or suspicious people



## Staying Safe Online Over Christmas

Devices are top of many wish lists phones, tablets, and gaming consoles, but with digital freedom comes risk. It's important to stay aware of what you are doing online.

### Top Tips for Online Safety

- Set controls and privacy settings
- Talk openly about online risks and how to report them
- Encourage breaks from screen time and promote face-to-face interaction



## Christmas Scams: Don't Get Caught Out

Cyber criminals love Christmas. With more people shopping, travelling, and communicating online, the risk of scams increases.

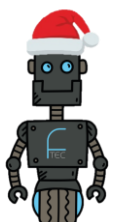


### Watch out for:

- Phishing emails pretending to be from delivery services (e.g., Royal Mail)
- Fake shopping sites with incredible deals
- Malware links in festive e-cards or offers
- Scam giveaways on social media

### Protect yourself:

- Don't click suspicious links
- Check the website's URL before buying
- Use secure payment methods
- Report scams to Action Fraud





## Looking After Your Mental Health at Christmas

Christmas can feel like a time when everyone else is happy but that's not always the case. For some, it can bring up feelings of sadness, stress, anxiety, or loneliness, even when surrounded by people. Social media, family pressures, or financial worries can make it worse.



It's okay if you're not feeling festive. You don't need to put on a smile to please others or push your feelings aside. Being honest with yourself is a first step toward coping.

## The Pressure to Have a 'Perfect' Christmas

Christmas is often filled with high expectations whether that's hosting the perfect gathering, affording presents, or simply keeping everyone happy. These expectations can build emotional strain, especially when combined with longer periods at home, alcohol consumption, or past family tensions.

Children may also carry idealised views of what Christmas should look like, which can lead to disappointment or frustration if things don't match up.

### Remember:

- **Prioritise people, not perfection**
- **Keep communication open and honest**
- **Set realistic expectations for yourself and others**



A healthy Christmas environment is not about the fanciest gifts or the best-cooked dinner, it's about creating a space where everyone feels safe, heard, and valued.

## Homelessness: The Other Side of Christmas

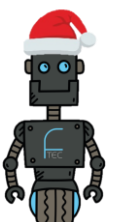
For those facing homelessness, Christmas can highlight everything they've lost: family, warmth, stability, and safety. And it's not just rough sleepers many people are living in temporary or unsafe housing, or sofa-surfing with no fixed address.

### How You Can Help:

- **Check in with friends, neighbours, and colleagues who may be struggling**
- **Acknowledge people a smile or "hello" can go a long way**
- **Donate to local or national homelessness charities who provide food, shelter, and support**



No one should feel invisible at Christmas.



## Know Your Gambling Triggers This Christmas

Triggers are the people, places, emotions, or situations that spark the urge to gamble. With financial pressure, emotional strain, and more free time, the festive period can be especially tough for those managing gambling issues. Below are some common triggers and coping strategies.

### Financial Stress

- **Set budgets in advance**
- **Limit spending and talk openly with loved ones**

### Family Conflict

- **Set boundaries ahead of time**
- **Have an exit strategy if things become overwhelming**

### Alcohol & Substance Use

- **Avoid gambling when drinking**
- **Request not to receive alcohol as gifts**

### Loneliness & Free Time

- **Stay connected with supportive people**
- **Engage in hobbies and healthy distractions**
- **Avoid comparing your Christmas to others on social media**



If you or someone you know is struggling, help is available. You are not alone.

## Stay Safe, Stay Supported

From all of us at F-TEC, we wish you a peaceful and safe festive season. However, you're spending Christmas this year, know that support is available. Look out for one another, and please reach out if you need help. If you need any further information or support, please refer to our Open Minds – Keeping Safe at Christmas guide, which includes a range of helpful links and resources.

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