

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 F-TEC, 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.



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January Reset: Navigating a New Year

January is often seen as a month for fresh starts, new goals, new routines and new expectations. But for many, it can also be a challenging time. Shorter days, financial pressures, returning to work training or education, and the emotional drop after Christmas can all take a toll.

This edition of Open Minds explores real issues affecting people right now, including mental health, seasonal depression, money worries, vaping awareness, healthy relationships, and how to look after yourself in the winter months.



You're not alone — support is here.

Blue Monday & Seasonal Depression: Understanding the January Low

The third Monday in January is often labelled *Blue Monday* — supposedly “the most depressing day of the year.” While this idea isn’t scientific, many people do find January challenging.



Factors such as:

- Reduced daylight
- Cold weather
- Financial pressure after Christmas
- Expectations to “start the year right”
- Returning to school, training, or work can all contribute to low mood, fatigue, or symptoms of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

Signs You Might Be Struggling

- Feeling consistently low or hopeless
- Difficulty waking up or concentrating
- Withdrawing from friends or social activities
- Sleeping more than usual
- Losing interest in things you normally enjoy

Ways to Support Yourself

- Spend time outside during daylight hours when you can
- Keep a simple routine
- Eat regularly and stay hydrated
- Try gentle exercise or movement
- Reach out to someone you trust for support



It's okay not to feel motivated in January. You don't have to transform your life just because the calendar changed.

Callum's Story: Hidden Struggles

20-year-old Callum seemed fine on the outside he went to work, joked with friends, and kept up with his daily routine. But inside, he was struggling. He felt tired all the time, lost interest in things he used to enjoy, and often just sat quietly, feeling numb. He told himself he was just “stressed” or “lazy,” and pushed his feelings aside. But the heaviness didn't go away it quietly affected his concentration, motivation, and mood.

One day, a colleague noticed he seemed off and asked if he was okay. For the first time, Callum admitted that he had been feeling low for weeks. His colleague didn't judge him or tell him to “snap out of it,” they just listened and encouraged him to reach out for help.

Callum spoke to his GP and learnt that depression doesn't always look like sadness or crying sometimes it's exhaustion, numbness, or lack of interest in life. Bit by bit, with support, he began to feel less alone and started taking small steps to care for his mental health.

If you recognise any part of Callum's experience in yourself, know that you are not alone.

Asking for help is a sign of strength, and support is available.

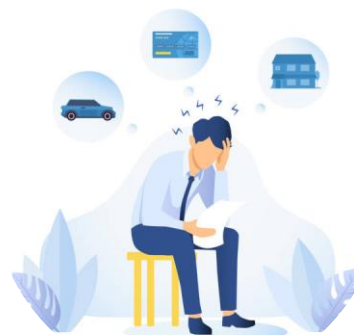
Financial Pressure After Christmas: Managing the January Squeeze

The cost-of-living crisis hasn't gone away, and January is often the toughest month financially.

If you're feeling the strain:

- Create a simple weekly budget
- Prioritise essential bills first
- Avoid comparing yourself to others online
- Talk to someone if things feel overwhelming

Many people struggle with finances at this time of year, you're not failing.



Back-to-Work/Training Anxiety: Easing into Routine Again

After weeks of disrupted routine, returning to study or work in January can feel overwhelming.

Tips to ease the transition

- Set small, realistic goals for the first weeks
- Plan the night before to reduce morning stress
- Break tasks into manageable steps
- Take regular breaks
- Remember that *everyone* adjusts at their own pace

Be kind to yourself — starting again is an achievement in itself.



Vaping: What You Need to Know in 2025

With new laws, health concerns, and rising addiction among young adults, vaping continues to be in the news. It's important to understand the risks, the latest guidance, and how to make informed choices about your health.

Key risks to be aware of

- Many vapes contain *more nicotine than cigarettes*
- “Zero nicotine” products can still contain harmful chemicals
- Unregulated vapes bought online may contain illegal substances
- Nicotine cravings can affect sleep, mood, and concentration

If you want to cut down

- Reduce use gradually
- Avoid vaping first thing in the morning
- Replace cravings with short habits (gum, water, quick walk)
- Seek support if stopping feels too hard



There's no shame in asking for help, nicotine dependence is real.

Healthy Relationships: Starting the Year with Clear Boundaries

January is a good time to reflect on the relationships around you friends, partners, or family. It's a chance to check in with yourself about what feels supportive and what might need to change. Setting clear boundaries early in the year can help you protect your wellbeing and build more respectful, balanced connections.

A healthy relationship includes:

- Respect for your boundaries
- Being able to speak openly
- Feeling supported, not controlled
- Equal decision-making
- Time apart without guilt



Warning signs of an unhealthy relationship

- Someone tracking your location or checking your phone
- Being pressured to “prove” love
- Guilt-tripping, jealousy, or emotional manipulation
- Feeling anxious around their reactions



If something doesn't feel right, trust yourself. Talk to someone you deserve to feel safe.

Winter Safety: Staying Safe in Cold & Dark Conditions

Winter brings increased risks, especially when travelling early or late.

Stay safe by:

- Wearing visible clothing when walking or cycling
- Allowing extra time for travel
- Checking weather alerts
- Keeping emergency phone charged
- Avoiding walking alone at night where possible



Small precautions can make a big difference.

Looking After Yourself in 2025: Realistic Goal setting

New Year's resolutions can create pressure. Instead of "big change", try focusing on *small*, sustainable habits.

Try:

- One new healthy routine
- A weekly check-in with yourself
- Reducing something instead of quitting cold-turkey
- Choosing goals based on what matters to you, not social media trends



Your worth is not measured by productivity.

You're Not Alone — Support Is Here

January can be tough for many different reasons. If you're feeling low, struggling with motivation, worried about money, or concerned about a relationship, please reach out.

Stay safe, stay supported, and remember every day you keep going is a victory.

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