MIND & BALANCE

Mental Health & Wellbeing Newsletter

WEEK 7 EDITION

Welcome to Issue 7! *As autumn deepens and school breaks arrive, we turn our focus to mid-term resetting, low-stress parenting, and outdoor nature therapy around Exeter.*

NURTURING FAMILY WELLBEING IN MID-AUTUMN

Half-term breaks present a double-edged sword for many households. While offering a welcome pause from early morning school runs and rigid timetables, they can also disrupt routines, increase household strain, and create financial pressure around keeping children entertained.

Prioritising mental health during school breaks doesn't require expensive days out or elaborate schedules. In fact, child psychology research shows that unstructured "down time" and exposure to natural spaces are significantly more beneficial for a child's emotional regulation than high-sensory, paid attractions.

1. Lower the Pace

Resist the urge to fill every hour. Allow kids to experience mild boredom—it stimulates creativity, self-reliance, and emotional rest.

2. Green Therapy

Spending just 20 minutes in a natural park reduces cortisol (stress hormone) levels in both adults and children noticeably.

3. Predictable Anchors

Keep key anchors constant: keep bedtime and mealtimes relatively stable to avoid mood dysregulation and sleep disruptions.

4. Connection over Cost

Children remember shared presence, eye contact, and laughter far longer than money spent on commercial venues.

Parenting Tip: The "5-Minute Grounding" Practice

When family stress spikes during rainy afternoons, try the 5-4-3-2-1 sensory technique together: Name 5 things you can see around the room, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you hear, 2 things you smell, and take 1 deep breath together.

4 QUICK MICRO-HABITS FOR PARENTS THIS WEEK

- ✓ **Morning Light Exposure:** Step outside for 5 minutes within 30 minutes of waking to anchor your circadian rhythm.
- ✓ **Digital Sunset:** Turn off school/work group chats by 7:00 PM to protect evening family downtime.
- ✓ **Micro-Walks:** Leave the car behind for short trips; let children explore autumn leaves and fresh air.
- ✓ **Self-Compassion Check-In:** Acknowledge that a "good enough" half term is far better than a stressful, perfect one.

"Rest is not a reward for work completed. It is a necessary prerequisite for health and emotional resilience."

EXETER & BEYOND: FREE HALF-TERM ACTIVITIES

Keeping children active and engaged without stretching the family budget is vital for parental peace of mind. Below is a curated list of completely free, family-friendly activities in and around Exeter for this October half term.

Location	Activity Type	Highlights & Wellbeing Benefits
RAMM Exeter Queen Street, City Centre	INDOOR / CULTURE	**Free Admission & Beastie Bags.** Interactive galleries, drop-in activity trails, and family spaces ideal for wet weather days.
Exeter Red Coat Tours Departs Quay / Cathedral	GUIDED WALK	**Free Heritage Walks.** 90-minute historical walking tours exploring Roman walls and medieval history. Great gentle exercise.
Custom House & Quay Exeter Quayside	OUTDOORS & HISTORY	**Visitor Centre & River Walks.** Interactive history displays inside, followed by safe, flat cycling/walking trails along the canal.
Haldon Forest Park Kennford (8 miles out)	NATURE & TRAILS	**Woodland Walks & Cycling.** Miles of free walking trails, play areas, and stunning autumnal nature views (parking fees apply).
The Donkey Sanctuary Sidmouth (30 mins drive)	ANIMALS & OUTDOOR	**Free Admission & Trails.** Meet rescued donkeys, enjoy scenic valley walks, and complete the autumn activity trail.
Ludwell Valley Park Pinhoe / Burnthouse Lane	LOCAL GREEN SPACE	**Working Farm & Meadows.** A working farmland park within the city offering orchard trails, wildlife spotting, and fresh air.

BUDGET-FRIENDLY RAINY DAY IDEAS AT HOME

Indoor Nature Crafting

Collect fallen leaves, acorns, and pinecones from local parks like Heavitree Pleasure Ground, then spend an afternoon doing leaf rubbings or painting animals on smooth stones.

Exeter Library Explorers

Exeter Library in Castle Street offers free children's reading nooks, LEGO clubs, and story sessions. It provides a warm, calm, and quiet sanctuary on rainy afternoons.

COMMUNITY & CRISIS SUPPORT RESOURCES

If half-term stress feels overwhelming or you need confidential wellbeing guidance, reach out to local professional services:

Helpful Contacts & Services

- **TALKWORKS Devon (NHS):** Free confidential therapy for anxiety & stress • *0300 555 3344*
- **Exeter Family Action & Hubs:** Local peer support and early years groups • *devon.gov.uk/family-hubs*
- **Samaritans UK:** Free 24/7 mental health listening service • *Call 116 123*
- **Shout Crisis Text Line:** Free 24/7 confidential text support • *Text 'SHOUT' to 85258*