

Learning to Read in the Early Years

A guide for parents and carers

Introduction

This guide will briefly explain *learning to read* and how you can further support your child with reading at home.

Learning to read is exciting and can be fun and enjoyable for you and your child

- It is an important stage in children's development
- It is a skill which helps children to learn and live their lives
- It helps them become lifelong readers

As with other aspects of their learning, children need to practise many of the skills they need to read over a long period of time. Some of these skills are needed before a child ever tries to make sense of printed words.

Practising the skills of learning to read is through a variety of activities, some of which might seem like they have little or nothing to do with books!

Reading regularly with your child can help them get ready for school.

If you are not feeling confident about reading aloud or sharing books, don't worry – there is no right or wrong way to enjoy stories together.

To become competent readers, children need to be good at having conversations. Simply talking with children plays a vital role in getting them ready for reading. As they try out new words, they build up a store of vocabulary which prepares them for many words they will meet later in print. By talking to lots of different people, they become familiar with the sounds and rules of language. You can help by talking with children as you go about everyday activities:

- tell them the words for unfamiliar objects
- use lots of describing words as you explore things together (e.g. outdoors)
- be happy to answer questions.



**Look out for some
top tips on how
you can support
your child at home**

It's never too early to start!

Tiny babies may not understand the words, but they will love cuddling up, hearing your voice, and looking at pictures with you.



So how can you help?

- ✓ Talk to your baby bump. Your baby can hear sounds as early as 18 weeks and talking regularly to your bump will help them recognise your voice and be comforted listening to you even before they're born.
- ✓ Black and white pattern books help tiny babies eyesight develop.
- ✓ Pick up free **Book start** packs from your health visitor or library in England and Wales. These include first books, tips, and advice to help you get started.
- ✓ Join your local library. Most libraries have great first picture books for babies and young children. Some Libraries organise rhyme or story time sessions.
- ✓ Attach a 'buggy book' to your child's buggy or car seat.
- ✓ Make a photo album of your family, pets, animals, and favourite book characters

Hearing books read aloud is important for all children, even those who are already able to read.

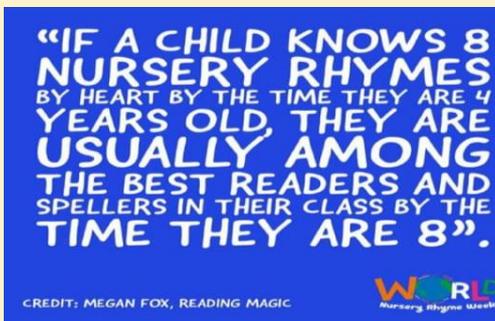
Bedtime stories are important for babies as well as older children

10 minutes a day makes all the difference!

- ✓ Make time for singing and sharing books together as part of your daily routine e.g. **Bath, Book, and Bedtime**
- ✓ Find somewhere quiet and away from noise and distractions (TV and mobile phones)
- ✓ Cuddle up together to look at books
- ✓ Get brothers, sisters, grandparents, and other family members to join in.
- ✓ Make animal noises, character voices or sound effects to make the story fun and help make bring it to life or make and use puppets or simple props.
- ✓ Make your child the main character in the story by using their own name.
- ✓ Ask questions when you are reading together such as what can you see on this page? How do you think the characters feel?
- ✓ Ask your child to retell the story or join in with noises or repetitive phrases. (they can read the pictures and talk to you about what is on the page.)
- ✓ Don't worry if your child wants to read the same book over and over again, familiar books are comforting and build confidence.

Nursery Rhymes and Songs

When children recite nursery rhymes, they learn new vocabulary, how to articulate words, modulate their voices and enunciate clearly. They are simultaneously practicing pitch volume and voice inflection while experiencing the rhythm of language.



- ✓ Share illustrated nursery rhyme books. Some are available as compilations of well-known favourites and new rhymes
- ✓ Build up your own collections of favourite rhymes and songs. (There are lots of rhymes and songs on BBC Tiny Happy People website)
- ✓ Listen to nursery rhymes on the radio, music channels or the internet
- ✓ Make up your own rhymes and simple songs for everyday activities and routines.
- ✓ Try using your own child's name or that of family members in songs and rhymes
- ✓ Make up your own words to nursery rhymes tunes for example, Baa Baa yellow sheep etc
- ✓ Make your own scrap books of favourite rhymes and illustrate them with your own or cut out pictures

Nursery rhymes introduce the idea of a beginning and an end which helps children when making up their own stories

Phonics

To become readers, children need to remember: the letters of the alphabet and the sounds they represent. They must remember the meanings of words and the sense of what they have just read.

Phonics is learning about the sounds and letters which make up the words we speak, read and write.

A phoneme is the smallest part of a sound in a word for example 'm'. There are 44 phonemes in the English language.

Talk to your child's school or pre-school about how they teach phonics, reading and writing.

- ✓ Sing **nursery rhymes** and songs
- ✓ Clapping games
- ✓ Play musical instruments (maybe make your own shakers and drums)
- ✓ Play memory games such as '**I went to market and I bought**' taking it in turns to add to the list. Play pairs games, where you turn over two cards to see if they match.
- ✓ Play **I spy** and rhyming and simple action games (There are lots of rhymes and songs on BBC Tiny Happy People website)
- ✓ Point out the **child's own name** and simple words such as **mum, dad, and family names**
- ✓ Make sure you model the correct pronunciation of a sound for example, short '**m**' not '**muh**'
- ✓ Play games with **letter flash cards**, or **lotto**
- ✓ Play games where you blend sounds to read words such as **c-a-t cat** or, chop words up **cat** into **c-a-t**
- ✓ Build words with **magnetic letters** on the fridge or metal tray
- ✓ Play phonics games on websites and apps such as Alphablocks or Phonics Play

Choosing Books and Stories

- ✓ Encourage babies and young children to handle and explore board or fabric books
- ✓ Read well known children's story books and authors such as 'The Gruffalo' by Julia Donaldson, The Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle and The Owl Babies by Martin Waddell as well as newer favourites such as Supertato by Sue Hendra
- ✓ Choose books with patterns or illustrations which you can talk about
- ✓ Choose books which reflect your child's experiences as well as their interests
- ✓ Choose books with stories and characters that represent cultural diversity, including difference in ethnicity, income, families, gender, class, mental and physical differences. Avoid books which reinforce stereotypes of any kind
- ✓ Accurate information about cultures, race, religion, language, and traditions that offer children new ways to connect with our rich and diverse world.
- ✓ Avoid books which portray violence or which are likely to frighten your children
- ✓ Include stories which have obvious rhyming patterns or repeated phrases that your child can join in with for example, 'We're going on a Bear Hunt' by Michael Rosen
- ✓ Read number, shape and counting books such as How many legs? By Kes Gray and Jim Field or Ten Little Aliens by Mike Brownlow
- ✓ Let your child choose their own books and read them together
- ✓ Do not be afraid to read aloud longer story books which children would not otherwise be able to read themselves.
- ✓ Visit your local library or book shop and ask about suitable books your child might enjoy.

If English is not your first language:

Celebrate your home language with stories and rhymes

Reading together everyday helps children to

Hear, learn and say new words

Learn about their own family's culture

Gain confidence in a second language

Many favourite stories are available in dual languages

Visit your local library and ask about books for children in home or dual languages. Ask your Health visitor about Bookstart packs in dual or languages other than English.



bookstart

For children with sensory impairment

Sharing books and stories is still important for children who have sensory or development needs

- ✓ Choose books with textured pages or raised illustrations
- ✓ Many children's favourites are available in large print, braille, and audio formats
- ✓ Make your own sensory stories and books using fabrics etc
- ✓ Use books with audio books which you can follow while listening to the story.
- ✓ Look for rhymes and stories which are accompanied with Makaton or Sign language

Ask at your local library, services for the sensory impaired for accessible books or Health Visitor Book start packs for children with sensory impairment.

Remember that reading is all around us!

Talking about the letters and shapes that children might see in their environment (for example) well known shop and restaurant logos, street names and road signs.



Consider all kinds of daily activities as reading opportunities!

The journey to school

- ✓ Sing songs and rhymes and the alphabet
- ✓ Play I spy with my little eye – colours, letters, words, shops etc
- ✓ Point out house names, road signs and street names
- ✓ Look for letters and words and logos on buildings and vehicles

BE A READING ROLE MODEL!

Let your child see you reading, books, newspapers, magazines maps and recipes etc.

- ✓ Read simple recipes together to make biscuits or playdoh
- ✓ Write a shopping list together to read at the shops
- ✓ Look and follow maps and trails on walks
- ✓ Pick up leaflets on favourite visits to zoos and other days out
- ✓ Choose a first dictionary – which will help your child develop reading and vocabulary skills
- ✓ Write, letters and cards and to family and friends and encourage them to reply so that you can read them together
- ✓ Write and leave messages and letters from pets, book characters or imaginary characters such as Aliens, Sleeping Beauty, Tooth Fairy or Father Christmas.

Using technology

Websites and Apps can provide good opportunities for children with diverse needs or experiences.

When choosing websites and apps for your child it consider:

- ✓ Is it age appropriate and suits their abilities?
- ✓ Is it enjoyable?
- ✓ Does it reflect what your child sees around them or is interested in?
- ✓ Check out the apps yourself before sharing with your child. Watch gameplay footage of the app on 'YouTube' so you know what your children will be doing.
- ✓ Make sure children are also spending time offline and involved in physical exercise and outdoor opportunities
- ✓ Avoid any with violence, gender, or racial stereotyping, pop up adverts and sales promotions
- ✓ **Avoid using apps or screen time at bedtime.**

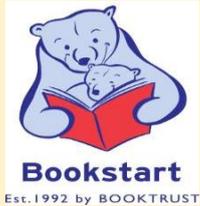
Useful links and resources

Information for Parents and carers

Happy Tiny People <https://www.bbc.co.uk/tiny-happy-people>

Small talk (hand in hand with Hungry Little Minds) is the National Literacy Trust website supporting parents to play, talk and read to their children <https://small-talk.org.uk/>

Words for Life is the National Literacy Trusts website for parents and carers: www.wordsforlife.org.uk



The Book Trust Information for parents including tips for reading and links to download information in languages other than English. www.booktrust.org.uk

Book Start for Families <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/programmes-and-campaigns/bookstart/families/>

Learn to Read with Phonics – Information for parents about phonics and the sounds (phonemes) in the English language <https://home.oxfordowl.co.uk/reading/learn-to-read-phonics/>

Makaton – stories and rhymes with Signing www.makaton.org.uk

What to Expect When – A guide to your child's learning and development in the Early Years Foundation Stage. https://www.foundationyears.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/what-to-expect-when-1.pdf?utm_campaign=836415_Foundation%20Years%20Newsletter%20December&utm_medium=email&utm_source=dotmailer&dm_i=3WYE,HXDR,4VYS18,1XX02,1

Online Reading Books and Activities

The Oxford Reading Owl – **free** online library of popular E-books including those typically used in readings schemes, such as Biff and Kipper www.oxfordowl.co.uk

Pickatale UK 1000s of online story books for children (free trial subscription) <https://pickatale.co.uk/>

Alphablocks <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b01cz258/alphablocks-series-2-1-taps>

Literacy Apps for Children

See <http://literacyapps.literacytrust.org.uk/>

Also:

Phonics Play

Phonics Bloom

Teach your Monster to Read

Reading Eggs