

Technical Appendices

Trends, drivers and inequalities in UK childhood reading

BookTrust's National Family Survey

May 2026

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Methodology

BookTrust Family Survey 2025 was conducted using a weighted, nationally representative sample of 3,508 parents and carers of children aged 0-8 across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, covering all income groups. Fieldwork took place in Autumn 2025.

Quotas were set on child age (within gender), and on parent or carer gender, region, working status, and household income. Weighting was applied to these variables, with additional weighting for child ethnicity and parental education, to reflect the offline population.

This report draws on the third wave of the BookTrust Family Survey. Comparable data for families of children aged 0-8 across all income groups are available from a survey conducted in Spring 2021. Trend comparisons are only shown where measures are comparable across waves. Not all questions were asked in the same way in each survey wave, so we only report change over time where the question wording has remained unchanged, or where the question structure has not changed substantially enough to affect interpretation.

Weighted bases for age groups and income groups: 2021 and 2025 surveys

Weighting was applied in 2021 and 2025 Family Surveys, which were nationally representative samples. Age bands reflect survey design and age coverage in each wave. Totals include a small number of cases where household income was not disclosed. As a result, subgroup counts may not always sum exactly to the total.

Bases are weighted and may not sum exactly due to rounding.

Survey wave	Age band	Low income (weighted base)	Non-low income (weighted base)	Total (weighted base)
2021	12 months or less	210	207	418
	13-23 months	195	224	419
	2 years	224	216	440
	3 years	203	233	436
	4 years	227	238	465
	5 years	230	238	468
	6 years	205	244	449
	7 years	184	235	418
	8 years	149	271	420
	Total	1826	2105	3932
2025	12 months or less	145	206	351
	13-23 months	165	221	386
	2 years	184	201	385
	3 years	145	241	386
	4 years	155	247	402
	5 years	158	247	405
	6 years	164	208	372
	7 years	182	218	400
	8 years	164	257	421
	Total	1462	2046	3508

Weighted bases for all subgroups: 2025 survey

Base: All respondents with a specific child aged 0-8 (weighted).

Total weighted base = **3,508** unless otherwise stated.

Subgroup	Categories (weighted N)	Weighted base used (N)	Notes on base/universe
Specific child age	12 months or less 351 ; 13-<24 months 386 ; Age 2 385 ; Age 3 386 ; Age 4 402 ; Age 5 405 ; Age 6 372 ; Age 7 400 ; Age 8 421	3,508	Full sample.
Specific child gender	Boy 1,778 ; Girl 1,728 ; Non-binary / not listed 2	3,508	Full sample.

Relationship to specific child	Birth child 3,352 ; Stepchild 33 ; Adopted child 32 ; Foster child 10 ; Kinship/connected care 59 ; Other 19	3,506	2 missing.
Living arrangement	All of the time 3,368 ; Some of the time 135	3,504	4 missing. (Children included live with respondent at least some of the time.)
Nation/region (Government Office Region including Wales/NI)	North East 152 ; North West 421 ; Yorkshire and Humberside 312 ; West Midlands 318 ; East Midlands 287 ; East of England 404 ; South West 291 ; South East 548 ; Greater London 505 ; Wales 154 ; Northern Ireland 116	3,508	Full sample.
Type of area	Urban 2,754 ; Rural 427	3,181	Postcode- derived; 327 missing.
Lives with partner	Yes 2,854 ; No 577 ; Partner some of the time/other living arrangement 54 ; Prefer not to answer 23	3,508	Full sample.
Household income (detailed)	£10k or less 137 ; £10,001–£14k 126 ; £14,001–£17k 89 ; £17,001–£19k 88 ; £19,001–£23k 157 ; £23,001–£26k 237 ; £26,001–£28k 148 ; £28,001– £33k 266 ; £33,001–£42k 381 ; £42,001–£50k 279 ; £50,001–£70k 608 ; More than £70k 968 ; Don't know 23	3,508	Full sample.
Household income (summarised)	£28,000 or below 989 ; £28,001– £42,000 652 ; Above £42,000 1,868	3,508	Full sample.

Sole/dual income household	One adult 1,102 ; Two or more adults 2,364 ; Don't know 18 ; Prefer not to answer 24	3,508	Full sample.
Low-income group	Low-income household 1,462 ; Non-low-income household 2,046	3,508	Derived grouping.
Lowest-income group	Lowest-income household (up to £17k) 353 ; Non-lowest-income household 3132 ; Don't know 23	3,508	Derived grouping.
School year group (England/Wales routing)	Not in school/nursery 668 ; In nursery 852 ; In Reception 374 ; Year 1 388 ; Year 2 370 ; Year 3 400 ; Year 4 325 ; Don't know 15	3,392	Asked/routed for England/Wales.
School year group (Northern Ireland routing)	Not in school/pre-school 32 ; In pre-school 24 ; Year 1 11 ; Year 2 14 ; Year 3 20 ; Year 4 9 ; Year 5 7	116	Asked/routed for Northern Ireland.
Child ethnicity	White 2,593 ; Mixed/multiple 224 ; Asian/Asian British 176 ; Black/African/Caribbean/Black British 342 ; Other 16 ; Prefer not to answer 156	3,508	Full sample.
English as first language	Yes 3,313 ; No 183 ; Prefer not to answer 13	3,508	Full sample.
Welsh language use (Wales only)	Fluent 13 ; Fair amount 17 ; Little 23 ; A few words 42 ; Can't speak/read Welsh 58 ; Don't know 1	154	Asked/routed for Wales
Parent/carer relationship to child	Mother 1,853 ; Father 1,523 ; Stepmother 10 ; Stepfather 21 ; Adoptive mother 9 ; Adoptive father 13 ; Foster carer 9 ; Kinship/connected carer 49 ; Other 21	3,508	Full sample.
Respondent gender identity	Man 1,604 ; Woman 1,904 ; Non-binary 0 ; Not listed 0 ; Prefer not to answer 0	3,508	Full sample.

Special Educational Needs (SEND) / disabilities long-term health condition (child)	Confirmed 332 ; Concerned not confirmed 354 ; No 2,651 ; Don't know 124 ; Prefer not to answer 47	3,508	Full sample.
Speech, communication and language concerns	Yes 539 ; No 2,809 ; Don't know 123 ; Prefer not to answer 37	3,508	Full sample.
Working status (detailed, all respondents)	Employed full-time 2,068 ; Employed part-time 658 ; Self-employed 160 ; Unemployed looking for a job 109 ; Unemployed not looking for a job/long-term sick/disabled 105 ; Full-time parent/homemaker 369 ; Retired 7 ; Student/pupil 32	3,508	Full sample.
Working/not working	Any working 2,886 ; Not working 622	3,508	Derived grouping.
Working status (working respondents only)	Full-time 2,068 ; Part-time 658 ; Self-employed 160	2,886	Working-only universe; not working excluded by design.
Working pattern: traditional office hours (working respondents only)	Yes 1,912 ; No 974	2,886	Working-only universe.
Working pattern: regular daytime shifts (working respondents only)	Yes 609 ; No 2,277	2,886	Working-only universe.
Working pattern: evening/night shifts	Yes 256 ; No 2,629	2,886	Working-only universe.

(working respondents only)			
Working pattern: irregular hours (working respondents only)	Yes 316 ; No 2,570	2,886	Working-only universe.
Working pattern: seasonal hours (working respondents only)	Yes 90 ; No 2,796	2,886	Working-only universe.
Maternity/paternity leave (working respondents only)	Yes 342 ; No 2,497 ; Don't know 20 ; Prefer not to answer 27	2,886	Working-only universe.
Unpaid care	Yes 579 ; No 2,808 ; Don't know 80 ; Prefer not to answer 42	3,508	Full sample.
Carer hours (among carers)	35+ hrs/week 186 ; 15–<35 hrs/week 146 ; <15 hrs/week 211 ; Don't know 23 ; Prefer not to answer 11	579	Carers-only universe.
Highest qualification (detailed)	Primary 97 ; Secondary under 15 185 ; GCSE/GNVQ etc. 466 ; NVQ1–2 335 ; NVQ3/A-level equiv. 734 ; NVQ4/HNC/HND/DipHE etc. 985 ; NVQ5/Masters/Doctorate etc. 705	3,508	Full sample.
Education (summary)	GCSE/O-Level/CSE/NVQ1–2 802 ; A-level or equiv. 734 ; Degree/Masters/PhD 1,691 ; No formal quals 282	3,508	Derived grouping.
Graduate status	Graduates 1,691 ; Non-graduates 1,817	3,508	Derived grouping.
Respondent age band	16–24 169 ; 25–34 1,137 ; 35–44 1,738 ; 45–54 399 ; 55–75 65	3,508	Derived grouping (based on month and year of birth).

Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintile	Bottom (1) 811 ; 2 705 ; 3 579 ; 4 586 ; Top (5) 499	3,181	Postcode-derived; 327 missing .
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Glossary

This glossary includes both survey measures and derived variables used in analysis. Some terms reflect direct questionnaire items, while others refer to grouped or composite measures created for reporting.

Term	Definition
Specific child	One child aged 0-8 is selected per household for detailed questions. Selection follows a structured process to balance representation by age and care status. Only children who live with the respondent at least some of the time are included in the survey. All child-level questions in the survey refer to this specific child.
Child age	The age of the specific child, reported in months for babies and in years for older children. Age is used to tailor question wording, response options, and to group children into age bands for analysis.
Parent or carer	Parents and carers responding to the survey include birth parents, stepparents, adoptive parents, foster parents/carers and kinship or connected carers.
Working pattern	For respondents who are working, the typical pattern of their working hours, including standard daytime hours, shift work, evening or night work, and irregular or seasonal schedules.
Household income	The combined total annual household income before tax, reported by the respondent. This includes income from all household members and all income sources, such as salaries, scholarships, pensions and Social Security benefits, dividends, rental income, child support and alimony.

Household composition	Whether household income comes from one adult or from two or more adults, and whether the respondent lives with a partner who also cares for the child.
Household income band	A grouped version of reported household income used to distinguish income levels. For analysis, low income refers to families with an annual income of £28,000 or below where income comes from one adult, or £42,000 or below where income comes from two or more adults. Lowest income refers to families with an annual income of £17,000 or below. Thresholds are informed by ONS Household Below Average Income data.
Child ethnicity	The ethnic group of the specific child, reported using standard high-level UK census categories: White; Mixed or multiple ethnic groups; Asian or Asian British; Black, African, Caribbean or Black British; other ethnic group. Respondents are first asked to consent to providing this information and may choose not to answer.
English as an additional language (EAL)	Whether English is the respondent's first language. If not, respondents are asked to state their first language.
Special educational needs/additional learning needs (SEN/ALN). disabilities, or long-term health conditions	Whether the specific child has special educational needs/additional learning needs, disabilities or long-term health conditions that affect their learning or daily activities based on parent or carer report, including both formally identified needs and concerns not yet diagnosed.
Speech, communication and language concerns	Whether the respondent has concerns about the child's speech, communication or language development.
Family life and support statements	Respondents' views on aspects of family life, measured through agreement with a set of statements using a five-point scale, from "not at all" (1) to "very much" (5), with a 'don't know/not applicable' option. These statements cover areas such as time, routines, screen use, parenting priorities and support networks.

	<p>In analysis, responses are grouped to reflect different levels of agreement. For example:</p> <p>Limited time and worry about screen use are reported as the proportion selecting the two highest points on the scale (4–5).</p> <p>Lack of a strong support network is reported as the proportion selecting lower or neutral responses (1–3), indicating weaker agreement that support is available</p>
Out-of-home activities	<p>How often the respondent has taken the specific child to a range of places or activities in the past 12 months, measured using a frequency scale (from “more than once a week” to “never”, plus “don’t know”). Activities include visiting libraries, children’s or family centres (including Family Hubs), attending baby or toddler groups, visiting arts or music venues, taking part in sports or physical activities, and outdoor play or nature exploration.</p> <p>The report focuses in particular on library visits, which are grouped into weekly, monthly, less than monthly and never, and are reported regardless of whether the family holds a library membership.</p>
Bedtime routine	<p>Whether the specific child has a regular pattern of going to bed at roughly the same time and doing a similar set of activities each night and how consistently the family sticks to the child’s bedtime routine.</p>
Bedtime activities	<p>The specific activities a child does as part of their bedtime routine. These include care and hygiene, conversational, rhyme-, story-, book-, and screen-based activities. Asked only of parents/carers who report the child has a bedtime routine.</p>
Parental reading enjoyment	<p>How much the respondent enjoys reading themselves.</p>
Child reading enjoyment	<p>How much the respondent thinks the specific child enjoys reading or sharing books, rated from “they don’t like it at all” to “they love it”. Question wording adapts to the child’s age:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ages 0–2: sharing, looking at or playing with books (including story books) • Ages 3–5: sharing, looking at or reading books • Ages 6–8: reading or sharing a book
Age first read with	<p>The age at which the specific child was first ever read to or shared a book or story with by any adult, based on a single-response item. Response options range from “before birth (during pregnancy)” through age in months and years, and include “they have never been read with” and “don’t know”.</p> <p>This variable is used both as a categorical measure of when shared reading first began and to derive key analytical groups. In particular, it identifies whether the child has ever been read with, which determines inclusion in subsequent questions on shared reading frequency, practices, feelings, and benefits. Respondents selecting “they have never been read with” are excluded from these follow-up questions.</p> <p>In analysis, “first read with in the first year” refers to children first read with before age 12 months (including during pregnancy, 0–6 months, and 7–11 months).</p>
Reading frequency	<p>How often the specific child reads with any adult, and how often they read specifically with the respondent, based on a single-response frequency scale ranging from “several times a day” to “never”. For children aged 4–8, this refers to reading outside school lessons. This question is asked only of respondents who report that the child has ever been read with and excludes children who have never been read with, based on routing from the ‘age first read with’ question.</p>

	<p>In analysis, this variable is used to derive key measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daily shared reading: the child reads or shares books with an adult once a day or more • Frequent shared reading: the child reads or shares books with an adult four or more days a week
People who read with the child	Which adults have regularly read or shared books and stories with the specific child in the past six months, including parents or carers, extended family, childcare providers and school staff. Asked only of respondents who report that the child has ever been read with.
Shared reading practices	What typically happens when the respondent reads or shares books with the child. Asked only of respondents who report that the child has ever been read with.
Expressive/playful practices	A derived measure used in this report to capture the use of performative or sensory techniques during shared reading. Respondents are classified as using expressive/playful practices where they report engaging in at least one of the following: using different voices, tones or actions, acting out stories with puppets or toys, or encouraging the child to explore the book's textures and features.
Dialogic practices	A derived measure used in this report to capture the use of conversational and participatory techniques during shared reading. Respondents are classified as using dialogic practices where they report engaging in at least one of the following: talking about pictures or the story, asking questions, encouraging prediction or recall, or connecting the story to the child's experiences.
Instructional practices	A derived measure used in this report to capture the use of teaching-focused techniques. Respondents are classified as using instructional practices where they report engaging in at least one of the following: pointing to words on the page or explaining sounds, letters or words.

<p>Interactive practices</p>	<p>A derived measure used in this report to capture participatory shared reading. It combines playful/expressive and dialogic techniques. Respondents are classified as using interactive shared reading practices where they report engaging in two or more practices from this combined set.</p>
<p>Feelings about shared reading</p>	<p>How reading or sharing books with the child feels for the respondent, measured using single-item five-point scales with opposing anchors (e.g., from “don’t like it at all” to “love it”, “easy” to “difficult”, “something I put off” to “something I look forward to”, and “rewarding” to “unrewarding”). Asked only of respondents who report that the child has ever been read with.</p> <p>In analysis, “high levels” of positive feeling (e.g., enjoyment) refer to respondents selecting one of the two most positive points on the scale (4 or 5, including “love it”).</p>
<p>Attitudes and beliefs about reading</p>	<p>Respondents’ views on reading in family life, measured through agreement with a series of statements using a five-point scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree). These statements include the role of reading in the current family, aspirations for the child’s reading, the respondent’s perceived role in supporting reading, their own experiences of reading growing up, whether they feel clear on how to support their child to enjoy reading, and their desire for additional support.</p>
<p>Experiences of the benefits of shared reading</p>	<p>Benefits respondents feel they or their child have experienced as a result of reading or sharing books and stories together, measured by selecting all that apply from a list of possible outcomes. These cover a range of domains, including relational (e.g., feeling closer or more connected), socio-emotional (e.g., wellbeing, confidence, empathy), developmental (e.g., communication and</p>

	language, learning, imagination and creativity), and everyday experience (e.g., helping the child relax or supporting routines). Asked only of respondents who report that the child has ever been read with.
Challenges in shared reading	Factors respondents say make it harder to read or share books and stories with the child as often as they would like, measured by selecting all that apply from a list of potential challenges. These include constraints on time and capacity (e.g., work, caring responsibilities, competing parenting demands), challenges related to the child (e.g., keeping the child interested or engaged), and competing activities (e.g., time spent on digital devices).
Book ownership	The number of books at home that are suitable for the specific child's age.
Library registration	Whether the respondent and/or the specific child are registered with a library.