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# Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler

## Impact Report 2024-25





# Thank you

We would like to extend a huge thank you to all those who work with us on Bookstart Toddler and Preschooler – the many Bookstart Coordinators in local authorities and those working with families in the early years, as well as publishers, authors and illustrators – who all come together to inspire children and families on their reading journeys.



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And all those who wish to remain anonymous.



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# Introduction

## About Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler

Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler supports families with children aged 1-4 to have fun reading and share more stories together – because early shared reading provides a vital boost to children’s development and wellbeing.

**Reading is for all children** – that is the foundation of BookTrust’s mission. We focus on children and families in greater need of our support, who stand to benefit most. That’s why we designed Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler to meet the needs of families on low incomes<sup>1</sup>, because reading helps overcome inequalities before they deepen. We work with our national network of partners who provide the expertise needed to create pathways to reach these families where they are.

In 2024-25  
we reached  
**417,438**  
1-4-year-olds  
(including 313,079  
from families on  
low incomes)



We worked  
with over  
**17,000**  
early years partners  
across 7,000  
different settings  
and organisations  
to do this

We work with a range of settings and organisations to deliver Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler, including:

-  **Early years education<sup>2</sup>**
-  **Libraries**
-  **Multiagency settings that support families<sup>3</sup>**
-  **Early years health<sup>4</sup>**
-  **Charities and community organisations<sup>5</sup>**

### Bookstart Toddler

is designed for 1-2-year-olds and

### Bookstart Pre-schooler

for 3-4-year-olds. Each pack contains two books, plus activities and games, and tips to help make reading enjoyable. Additional activities and rhymes linked to the books are available on our website.



## Our learning approach

2024-25 was the third year of the programme and we continue to learn with partners and families to understand and improve our impact. This report draws on responses from two surveys:

- **Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler parent/carer survey** – an online survey of 314 families receiving the programme from England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Findings in this report are based on responses received between October 2024 and September 2025.
- **BookTrust Partner Survey 2025** – an online survey of 616 early years partners in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, carried out between February and May 2025. Findings in this report are based on 456 partners delivering Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler.

We received survey responses from a wide range of partners and families but cannot be certain they are fully representative of the diversity of our delivery partner network or the families we support. Our findings are supported by what we hear working closely with partners, as well as earlier mixed-methods research.



# Key findings





## Challenges in the early years landscape

Our Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler programme responds to the needs of families identified by our early years delivery partners. These partners highlight a number of concerns about the challenges families and young children are facing. More than 9 in 10 partners flag concerns about children's wellbeing, speech, language and social-emotional development, as well as the attainment gap between children from more and less affluent backgrounds.

At a time when many families face challenges, and the gaps in outcomes are growing between children from families with low incomes and their more affluent peers, reading is a way to make an immediate, and long-term, positive difference.

“ Bookstart is brilliant to show parents the enjoyment that their child gets out of books when showing them during the home visit. This boosts parents understanding and awareness to make sure reading is part of their routine.”  
**BookTrust delivery partner and Health Visitor, Cardiff, Wales**

### Reading supports children to:

-  overcome inequalities before they deepen
-  bond with their caregivers and experience better mental wellbeing
-  meet early development milestones and do better at school
-  develop empathy, creativity and imagination

A substantial body of research confirms that early reading is a key driver for children's development.<sup>6</sup> However, 95% of partners tell us they are concerned about a decline in children's reading for enjoyment. Childhood has transformed in the last decade and it's now harder than ever for families to read regularly together. Families know that reading is important, but some struggle to make it part of family life with young children: one in five children aged 0-4 have a book read to them less than once a month<sup>7</sup>, missing out on this powerful springboard for their future happiness and success.

Not only is it a challenging landscape for families with young children, but also for partners who offer critical support during these formative years. 90% of partners say they are concerned about a lack of engagement from families. Our work helps connect the services around these families and provides the tools to help engage them in sharing books and stories.

Our work is deeply woven into the wider support system for children and families, helping partners integrate reading support into their work - eight in ten partners say Bookstart Toddler (82%) and Pre-schooler (80%) are very important to their organisation. And 89% rate Toddler and Pre-schooler as effective programmes for getting families with young children reading together.

“ The packs have allowed our libraries to make links with their local Home-Start group [...] These relationships have led to families who would have previously not used their local library or felt comfortable in it, to coming regularly to early years activities with older siblings taking part in the summer reading challenge.”  
**BookTrust delivery partner based in the library service, Hertfordshire, England**

**95%**  
of partners tell us they are concerned about a decline in children's reading for enjoyment

“ I love this offer. The targeted nature means we are able to concentrate our work where it's needed the most and really focus our attention there. We work closely with the Family Hubs, which means that we can reach children who are not in pre-school, something that we didn't manage to do well with the former universal offer.”  
**BookTrust delivery partner and Health Visitor, Cardiff, Wales**



# Designed to make a difference

Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler were designed in collaboration with partners and families. They build on strengths and address challenges for families, partners and communities.



# Key features of our work

1

**We focus on making it fun and accessible for families to share stories.**

Partners support families to read in ways that suit them. With our carefully chosen books and resources – designed for interactivity and inclusivity – families can create rewarding moments which are so key to habit formation.

**Why is this important?**

Access to books is not universal, and not all parents/carers feel they have the time or may need more guidance in order to read and share stories with their children.

A quarter of parents/carers with children aged 0-7 don't find reading with their child easy.<sup>8</sup>

2

**We work with a diverse range of partners who support families at key moments.**

We provide flexible programmes and share learning across our network. We layer on support that is designed with partners in mind, to help unlock the full potential of what's already there.

**Why is this important?**

Working in the early years is demanding and time or resources for intensive training or new initiatives can be limited.

“ BookTrust resources offer an opportunity ... to model the joy of sharing books with children and demonstrate the benefits of learning, development and quality time. It's also a good tool to use when assessing children's language and understanding.”

**BookTrust delivery partner and Health Visitor, Barnsley, England**

3

**We help identify, connect and continuously adapt pathways to reach families who need reading support most.**

Our dedicated partnerships managers work with local services to plan and deliver effective reading behaviour change. Blending a core national offer with the evolving structures and systems of a local area.

**Why is this important?**

Every community has different needs, strengths and challenges - and these evolve over time.

“ We really enjoy our partnership with BookTrust. We have really developed the way we gift the packs and have some really key partners now gifting packs to families with fantastic events modelling storytelling and using the resources to maximise the impact.”

**Bookstart Coordinator, London, England**



# The difference we make

Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler encourages families to share books and stories more often.

- **76% of families** say that Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler prompted them to read or share books and stories more with their children
- **55% of families** say they tried to set up a reading routine at home as a result of the programme

“ The pack explains the importance of how books are read to build suspense and excitement, tone of voice and the bond it allows you to form with your child.”  
**Parent or carer on a medium or higher income receiving Bookstart Toddler, Derry City and Strabane, Northern Ireland**

“ I love getting these packs and so does my little one. Her speech and confidence has come on so much since we were introduced to Bookstart at Surestart and I’m happy that we went to the events. We use our finger puppet book almost every night before bed.”  
**Parent or carer on a lower-income receiving Bookstart Toddler, Derry City and Strabane, Northern Ireland**

## Enjoyment plays a pivotal role in families’ engagement with reading.

When both parents or carers and their children experience reading as enjoyable and developmentally beneficial, they are much more likely to incorporate it into their daily lives.

- **98% of parents and carers** say they enjoyed using the programme and 99% said their child enjoyed it too
- **73% of parents and carers** learnt something new about the benefits of reading
- **71% of parents and carers** say they believe more strongly in the benefits of reading for their child

“ Receiving the pack was a positive experience, as it felt like a helpful toolkit for making reading time more engaging and meaningful. I enjoyed using the various tips and materials provided... These tools made reading sessions more interactive, and I could see my child becoming more interested in stories.”  
**Parent or carer on a lower-income receiving Bookstart Pre-schooler, South West England**



Find out more about how our evidence-informed programmes work to create measurable change in families’ reading behaviours in our **Theory of Change**.



**Motivation is a key component, but for many of the families our partners work with, it must be paired with support to build capability – practical ideas, reassurance and the right tools.**

Our research shows that when partners explain what's included in the packs, demonstrate how to read the books, share tips and talk about what the benefits are, they have more impact. This helps families to believe in the benefits of reading, build confidence and set up reading routines.

- **For 35% of families** receiving Bookstart Toddler, the books they received were **some of the first they owned** for their children
- **76% of parents and carers** say they **learnt something new** about the different ways to read and share stories with their children
- **69% of parents and carers** say the programme made them **feel more confident** reading and sharing books and stories

“It is like the first book I am introducing to my baby and we are both excited to start this journey.”

**Parent or carer on a lower-income receiving Bookstart Toddler, South East England**

“It has encouraged me to get creative with how I share stories through books and songs with gestures. I use voice impressions and body movements and shadows, and he seems to really enjoy it. Thank you so much.”

**Parent or carer on a medium or higher income receiving Bookstart Toddler, London, England**

“I loved the activity cards it really helped us to get the most out of books we had great fun playing the games and we usually just read books from start to finish but we were thinking outside the box with these and coming up with all sorts of games connected to the colours etc.”

**Parent or carer on a medium or higher income receiving Bookstart Pre-schooler, South East England**

Feedback indicates the greatest difference is for families on low incomes:

- **82% of families** on low incomes say they read or shared stories more – compared to 68% of families on medium or higher incomes
- **64% of families** on low incomes tried to set up a reading routine – compared to 43% of families on medium or higher incomes

## Building capability

Families who received Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler told us the programme helped them to learn about:



**Engaging reading strategies** – practical tips and ideas to make reading interactive (expressive reading, using different voices and gestures), that help to capture their child's attention, enhance understanding and make reading more fun.



**Interactive story sharing** – making reading more of a two-way experience and learning new ways to actively involve children during reading through pointing and spotting, asking questions, games, and imaginative storytelling.



**Taking stories beyond books** – learning how to connect story content to real-life contexts and encouraging imaginative thinking. Linking stories to everyday experiences adds relevance and shows parents/carers practical ways to embed reading naturally into daily routines.



**Selecting the right books for their child** – some parents/carers appreciated guidance on choosing age-appropriate and developmentally suitable books that their children might enjoy.



**Seeking more support** – some families found the information in the programme helpful as a reminder to use the library or explore further resources online.

“The programme felt like a helpful toolkit for making reading time more engaging and meaningful. I enjoyed using the various tips and materials provided, such as suggestions for expressive reading and ideas for involving my child in the storytelling process. These tools made reading sessions more interactive, and I could see my child becoming more interested in stories.”

**Parent or carer on a lower-income receiving Bookstart Pre-schooler, South West England**



By supporting our partners to engage families in reading, we can create more of these moments, for more of the families who need them.

- **96% of partners** using Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler in the last year agree the programme helped them engage families in reading

“ Without BookTrust we wouldn't have been able to provide books to children of low-income families and encourage them to begin reading. BookTrust are essential for this and their provisions are quite literally life changing. We support families who don't have money to buy clothes for their children, what hope do they have of buying books for them to read otherwise?”

**BookTrust delivery partner working at a charity, Lisburn and Castlereagh, Northern Ireland**

“ BookTrust resources have had major impact on the children who attend our setting, as well as their families and staff. The packs have enabled us to bring families together to encourage reading with children and also provide opportunity for parents to build confidence and connect.”

**BookTrust delivery partner working at an early years education charity, Belfast, Northern Ireland**

The flexibility of our programmes means our diverse range of partners can use reading support to enhance their own provision and meet local priorities.

- **89% of partners** using Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler in the last year agree we've supported their organisation's objectives

**96%**  
of partners agree the programme helped them engage families in reading



**89%**  
of partners agree we've supported their organisation's objectives



**What next?**

Over the last three years, we've embedded Bookstart Toddler and Pre-schooler into communities across three nations, reaching hundreds of thousands of families. But we recognise there are many more who still need our support. Our new strategy – **Reading for a Brighter Future** – sets out our commitment to use what we've learned about the key drivers of impact to develop and do more of what we know works. We will strengthen support for our delivery partners: so they know what's most effective to embed in their practice, have access to a flexible set of tools, and continue to feel inspired to help more families to read and share stories.



# References

1

We define families with low incomes as households in relative poverty, i.e. a household income of 60% below the national median. Visit gov.uk for more information on **households below average income (HBAI) statistics**.

2

Including private, voluntary and independent settings, maintained nursery schools, playgroups and childminders

3

Including Family Hubs, children's centres, SureStart centres, Home-Start, Early Help teams, and Flying Start

4

Including Health Visitors, Family Nurse Partnerships, and speech and language support

5

Including food banks, women's refuge centres, educational or parenting support organisations and many more.

6

BookTrust (2025) **"The benefits of reading"** Leeds: BookTrust

7

BookTrust and Nielsen BookData (2024) *Understanding the Children's Book Consumer 2024*. Online survey of parents/carers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, conducted in December 2024. Unpublished data. Figures based on responses from 576 parents/carers of children aged 0-4

8

YouGov online survey, January 2024, survey of 1,036 UK parents/carers with children aged 0-7



# About BookTrust

BookTrust is the UK's largest children's reading charity. Each year we reach over 1.4 million children and families across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We work with every local authority and council, delivering evidence-informed programmes that make a measurable difference to children's reading behaviours. Our work is rooted in the belief that every child, especially those from low-income or vulnerable family backgrounds, deserves the chance to enjoy reading and all the lifelong benefits it brings.

## Research at BookTrust

Our learning is guided by our **Theory of Change** and supported by our **Learning Oversight Group**. You can find more information on research, innovation and impact at BookTrust on our website, including our early years research series:

- **Why starting shared reading early matters**
- **Children's reading habits in the early years**
- **Supporting generational cycles of readers**

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