

Sharing Stories at Home:

Teacher guidance



A research-informed family workshop designed to support schools to build families' confidence and enjoyment in shared reading at home.

This guidance document has been designed to support you to facilitate the Sharing Stories at Home workshop effectively.

A key factor in the success of this workshop is engaging the families who are most likely to benefit from the support. **Schools report** that parental support for reading is one of the biggest challenges to developing children's reading for pleasure. While many families already enjoy sharing books at home, those who would benefit most from additional support may be the least likely to attend a workshop. Throughout this guidance, we therefore encourage schools to think carefully about how they identify, invite and encourage families to participate.

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What is shared reading?

Shared reading is when an adult or an older sibling looks at or reads a book with a child. It is about enjoying a book or a story together and doesn't rely on the child's functional reading skills.

In Reception, children will be learning to decode through phonics and will be bringing home decodable books to practise the sounds and words they have been taught in school. That practice is really important, but this workshop focuses on another important type of reading at home. It focuses on the value of shared reading and how families can enjoy sharing stories together.

What is special about shared reading?

BookTrust research highlights that while reading in general has an impact on outcomes, three important ingredients that are specific to shared reading stand out. When adults share picture books with children there are both immediate and long-term benefits:

Physical closeness and shared attention: Shared reading builds bonding and attention,¹ which can help children feel emotionally supported and focused.^{2,3,4}

Enjoyment: When adults show interest and bring stories to life, children enjoy reading too.^{5,6}

Interaction: Interactive reading supports relationships, language and cognitive development,⁷ with rich talk happening through books.⁸

You can read more about the [📖 benefits of reading here](#).

Why focus on shared reading in Reception?

📖 **New BookTrust research** shows that reading enjoyment drops between age 4 and 5, with **55% of parents and carers of 4-year-olds saying** they love reading, falling to 44% by age 5 - around the time children start school.

While most children are reported to enjoy reading in the early years, both reading frequency and enjoyment tend to decline as children get older. Starting school marks a critical inflection point for this decline.

We know that at this time reading experiences shift, routines come under pressure, and different types of reading need to be balanced. Shared reading at home plays a vital role, yet can become harder to sustain.

However, this is also a moment of opportunity:

Families are open to support:

Most families continue to value reading, and **64% of parents and carers of 5-year-olds** say they want more support to help their child spend time with books and stories (up from **57% at age 4**). As children start school, families increasingly look to teachers and schools for guidance.

Support can act as an equaliser:

While starting school is a shared milestone, families do not all start from the same place. Differences in time, confidence and access to books shape how easy it is to maintain shared reading at home. Accessible, practical and reassuring support can help level children's reading experiences and build strong foundations for lifelong reading.

A key moment to embed routines and relationships:

Starting school brings new routines and a chance to build early relationships with parents and carers and strengthen connections between home and school. This creates an opportunity to embed shared reading from the start.

Policy context

The UK Government's Best Start in Life agenda and guidance on supporting a smooth transition into Reception both highlight the importance of helping children feel safe, confident and ready to learn.

Building children's enjoyment of reading is a key part of this foundation. The home learning environment remains central. Experiences such as shared reading, storytelling, book talk and reading aloud are key to developing children's language and literacy, as well as their executive function, wellbeing and relationships - helping them to feel ready to engage in school life.

Read [BookTrust's evidence-informed guide](#) for more on why this is such a critical moment, and practical ways to support children and families.

Who is this support for?

[BookTrust research](#) indicates that children in low-income households are less likely to experience daily shared reading and this gap persists over time.

Schools should take a targeted approach to recruitment and prioritise families who are not yet sharing books regularly at home. This may include families with limited access to books or families who lack confidence in supporting reading at home.

Without careful targeting, there is a risk that support is taken up primarily by families who are already engaging in shared reading, which will widen existing inequalities rather than reducing them.

As the Education Endowment Foundation's

[guidance on working with parents and carers](#) reminds us:

Some form of targeting is usually required to use resources effectively and to avoid widening gaps, so an analysis of needs is a logical starting point. It is also important that targeting is done sensitively to avoid stigmatising, blaming, or discouraging parents and carers.

A targeted approach is particularly important for shared reading as [schools have identified](#) literacy as one of the biggest challenges to the attainment of children from underserved backgrounds.

Use information from home visits and from feeder nurseries to identify children and families who might benefit from attending.

Objectives of the workshop

1

Encourage positive, home-school engagement and facilitate open sharing between school and home

2

Promote the relational, enjoyable practice of shared reading between carers/parents and children – from all backgrounds – at home

3

Build on families' existing literacy practices, meeting families where they are in a non-judgemental way

4

Broaden families' knowledge of shared reading practices by offering suggestions for how to approach this in the home

5

Address inequities in children's experiences of shared reading at home



Workshop content

The workshop has been framed around supporting families with four key challenges families face around shared reading, as identified by focus groups and BookTrust research.

Challenge	Key messages
Family life is busy and finding the time for sharing stories can be tricky	There's no wrong time to share stories with your child. Find a time that works for you and your family routines. Reading can be done at anytime and anywhere. You might like to dip in and out of books with your child. This can sometimes feel more natural. Your child might also enjoy hearing stories from other people too, maybe their siblings or grandparents.
Children sometimes get distracted or find it tricky to concentrate when we're reading with them. They might be feeling tired after a long day at school.	Keep reading fun by following your child's lead. We can keep reading together fun and engaging by: Following their interests and talking about the things that catch their attention. Using the pictures to spark conversation. Making connections to your child's own experiences. Bringing the story to life with funny voices, actions and expressions. Letting them lead the way.

We might not always have the books our child is interested in at our fingertips

Your school and local library are excellent places to discover and borrow books.

Not sure what to read next? BookTrust provides brilliant recommendations

Autumn:

🔗 <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/book-recommendations/booklists/suggested-reading-for-reception-autumn-term/>

Spring:

🔗 <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/book-recommendations/booklists/suggested-reading-for-reception-spring-term/>

Summer:

🔗 <https://www.booktrust.org.uk/book-recommendations/booklists/suggested-reading-for-reception-summer-term/>

We might not feel confident sharing stories

There's no wrong way to share stories with your child.

When sharing stories, you might want to:

Chat about what you can see in the pictures.

Chat about things the book reminds you of.

Read in your home language.

Have fun!

Preparing to facilitate the workshops

Each slide has suggested wording to support you. You don't need to read this word for word, but it is there to help.

You might like to organise the session so parents and carers attend, with their child joining for the last part of the session.

Curate a selection of high-quality, age-appropriate books for families to enjoy together during the final shared reading activity. Provide a range of books to ensure children have plenty of choice. Families should be invited to take their chosen book home at the end of the session.

Edit the slides to include details about borrowing books from school and the local library.

Provide information about joining the local public library. Print off the membership form and support families to complete it, if needed.



Encouraging families to attend

Offer refreshments

and advertise this in communications with parents and carers.

Repeat the same session at different points of the day

e.g. before school/after school.

Combine the workshop with existing (popular) school events.

Attaching workshop sessions to the start of assemblies, Christmas performances, etc. can increase attendance. You might want to consider combining this with a workshop about phonics and early reading, so you can share with parents and carers the importance of both reading with their decodable book while also enjoying shared reading at home.

Allow/encourage parents and carers to bring younger siblings,

so that childcare isn't a barrier to their attendance.

Ask families which days of the week/times work best.

Focus on finding time slots which will enable the children and families who would most benefit from attending.

Use a range of communication methods to advertise the event

e.g. school newsletter, text message, email, social media, WhatsApp group, poster in the school office or outside the classroom.



Encouraging families to attend

Tailor communication.

Consider the most effective ways to communicate with the families who would benefit most from attending. You know your community best, so think about which approaches are most likely to encourage attendance. For example, a personal conversation at home time, a phone call from a trusted member of staff or an invitation through an existing parent or carer group may be more effective than a general newsletter or email.



Ensure communication is accessible.

Consider translations and plain language.

Use key members of staff to target/invite families personally.

A quick conversation with a trusted member of staff can be very effective.

Consider social spheres of influence.

Who are the key parents and carers that could be targeted to spread the word to others?

Consider where you host the event.

Encourage a relaxed, informal atmosphere. Avoid chairs in rows.

References

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