

Supporting reading in the early years

A National Literacy Trust resource

Developing early readers



Early experiences of reading will have significant influence on children's views and feelings about reading as they get older. **It is crucial for children to develop a love of early reading to enable them to learn the necessary skills to become successful readers themselves.** To fully prepare early years children for reading, the key skills of language comprehension and word reading must be embedded. However, prior to and alongside the technical aspects of

learning to read (including through the use of systematic synthetic phonics) it is essential that children develop an ongoing relationship and real connection to books and stories right from the start.

Adult interactions with babies and young children are crucial, even before they are able to handle a book for the first time. Through playful interactions, hands on experiences, engaging conversations, storytelling, singing and signing, children can build strong emotional connections to language, books and stories. This will support children to view reading and books as something that will give them pleasure. National Literacy Trust¹ research shows us that reading for pleasure can unlock greater learning and life opportunities.

To become confident and motivated readers, all children need to develop:

- **Speech, language and communication skills.** High quality back-and-forth interactions, (verbal and non-verbal), with adults and peers throughout the day in the setting, and at home, are essential to form the foundations for good language and cognitive development.
- **Listening skills.** Building listening skills takes careful, thoughtful planning and modelling by adults in a range of contexts. Ensure there are plenty of

¹ <https://literacytrust.org.uk/reading-for-pleasure/>

opportunities to experience repetition, think aloud, notice sounds around them, and be listened to. This will support children to learn how to listen and respond.

- **Strong emotional attachments to stories and books.** Emotional engagement makes a key contribution to children's development as readers. Time together sharing a book can support bonding and relationships with adults at the same time as building a love of books and reading.
- **An understanding and an interest in reading and writing as a form of communication.** Adults can help babies and young children become interested in books by exposing them to a wide variety of reading materials and encouraging them to make choices. Children also need opportunities to experience text being used for meaning, such as instructions and signs in both print and digital forms.



Planning for high-quality reading opportunities:



Prioritise opportunities for children to listen, talk and communicate. Responding to every sound and interaction from the very start; including babble, facial expressions, movements, and nonsense words, encourages communication. Ensure there are planned moments for children to communicate and engage in conversation about a broad range of topics. Children

relish the opportunity to verbalise their thoughts and feelings as they engage with books, it's crucial they have time to talk.

Embed familiar songs, rhymes and word play as an essential part of the day.

Rhymes and songs support children to attune to the sounds of language, and to hear individual words and sentences; this will support them to learn to read. Singing together is a fun, bonding experience. Remember, it's important that babies and children can see the facial movements and expressions of adults to support language development and interactions.

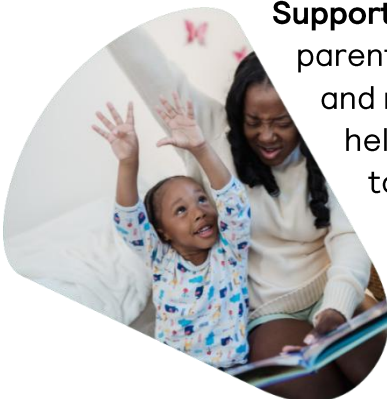
Ensure story time is a planned for, prioritised and valued time of the day. Model high quality language and book talk as you share and read a broad range of high- quality texts



together. All children must have the opportunity to hear texts read aloud throughout their childhood, even once they can read themselves. Give children the opportunity and time to become familiar with texts through repeated readings, and to be immersed in imaginary worlds. Plan opportunities for children to explore books of their choosing, with an adult, in small groups and on their own.

Provide high quality, diverse texts. Through the books they encounter; the authors, characters and situations they meet, children need to have the opportunity to see themselves and their community represented. Books also introduce children to new experiences, cultures, people and ideas. Choosing stories and non-fiction that explores such differences can begin to break down a sense of otherness.

Create a book and text rich space. Thoughtfully planned, high quality and developmentally appropriate reading materials will engage children's interests. Providing children with opportunities to explore a diverse range of reading materials, such as stories, poems, non-fiction texts, leaflets, signs, messages and instructions, including picture and dual language texts, will help them to develop a love of literature. Books should be specifically selected to meet the needs and interests of each individual child.



Support home learning. Ensure planning includes opportunities for parental involvement. Plan a range of methods to communicate and model activities and behaviours to parents and caregivers, helping them understand *why* it's important for their children to develop a love of reading. Explain the significant role they play, and *how* they can support their children. This could be sharing stories in their first language and building on what they are already doing at home (including in their use of digital technology).

Putting it into practice:



Prioritise reading aloud, it is essential! It facilitates modelling all aspects of reading, including expression and intonation, whilst allowing children to become immersed in the story. Sharing stories and reading texts can create positive memories, and opportunities for serve and return moments, whilst building a strong emotional connection to language.

Encourage storytelling through play. Provide opportunities for children to recreate and represent their ideas, using familiar words and phrases from books they have read. When they engage in play, children's imaginations develop, enabling them to create their own narratives, devise and tell stories. Remember, storytelling doesn't always need to be based on a book.

Model using non-fiction texts. Non-fiction books, digital sources and technology can help to support learning, retrieve information and answer questions.

Provide surprising provocations related to familiar or favourite stories. This will encourage storytelling play within the learning environment, for example, natural materials, a cardboard box, or a letter.

Encourage and model book related talk. Book talk introduces children to words and language they may not hear every day. Introducing and continually modelling words such as 'page', 'author' and 'illustrator' enables children to talk about books. Remember, early vocabulary gains are critically important.

Model reading for a range of purposes. For example, read stories in a cosy book corner, follow a recipe in the role play area, respond to a note sent from another member of staff, or a sign created to protect a model made by a child.

Make books about the children and their experiences in the setting. Children love to see themselves, people like them, and people they know represented in books.

Read children's favourite books again and again. Well-chosen books capture children's imaginations, support a love of stories and inspire them from an early age. When children become familiar with stories, they anticipate what will happen next, build connections with the characters and places, and remember new words.



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