

**book**trust

# Family Reading Activity Survey

**Executive Summary**

Prepared for Booktrust  
by the Fatherhood Institute  
and ICM Research



**September 2010**



## Executive Summary

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This executive summary presents the key findings of a study among 503 mothers, fathers and other carers of babies aged under 12 months in England to measure levels of reading activity and opportunities for early literacy amongst families. The research was conducted in September 2010 by the Fatherhood Institute and ICM on behalf of Booktrust.

### Key findings

- **Stated awareness of Bookstart** among parents and carers is high with the overwhelming majority (84%) having heard of the programme. However, stated *knowledge* about the work of the organisation is more mixed. Men are less likely to be aware than women and, while two fifths (40%) of parents/carers say they know either a great deal or a fair amount about Bookstart, a further quarter (26%) admit to knowing just a little while close to a fifth (18%) know nothing at all despite having heard of it.
- A third (32%) of parents and carers of babies aged under 12 months in England **recall receiving a Bookstart pack** for their child. However, this figure masks huge disparities across the population.
- **Receiving a Bookstart pack for their baby has a positive effect** on most parents and carers. It is most likely to have made a mark in terms of encouraging parents to share books with their baby and to sing with their child. Encouragingly, approximately three in ten (28%) parents have visited a library because of Bookstart while a fifth (20%) have joined a library.
- **The most popular family time activities parents/carers carry out with their baby** are talking and listening, visiting family/friends and going for walks and visiting parks (all mentioned by four fifths). A further three quarters sing songs or nursery rhymes to their baby. Looking specifically at reading related activities half (51%) of parents/carers tell baby stories, two fifths (39%) share books, three in ten (28%) visit the library and 16 per cent attend a rhymetime or storytime session. Likelihood of participation in these reading based activities is higher in families who have received a Bookstart pack. Most notably, the proportion of young families sharing books jumps from a third (34%) among parents who have not received a Bookstart pack to half (49%) amongst those who have.
- **Activities which can be undertaken in the home environment are carried out most frequently.** Parents and carers talk or listen to their baby more than any other activity: three quarters do this on a daily basis, higher than sharing books (58%) and telling baby stories (54%). Recreational pursuits such as visits to swimming pools and baby signing classes are carried out much less regularly. Two fifths of parents and carers visit a library with their baby at least once a week.
- **In understanding readership habits** among young families it is important to reflect on the widespread disparities between different groups of parents and carers. Parents engage in more literacy-related activities than carers. Mothers, are more likely than fathers to read with their baby. However, that gender divide may be explained by working hours: those who are not working (mainly mothers) are more likely than those in employment to share books and to tell baby stories. There is no gender divide in the literacy activities of non-parent carers. Interestingly, household income is not a significant factor in terms of the reading activities which are carried out. But baby girls are more likely to be involved in reading activities by parents and carers than boys.

- Parents and carers were presented with a list of **nine popular toys and were asked to identify those their baby has**. A baby gym/baby bouncer is the most popular plaything with seven in ten parents and carers of babies having one of these, while over half of parents/carers say their baby has a mobile, shape sorter, picture books and nursery rhyme CDs. Around half have board books (51%) and bath books (45%).

### **Key themes**

The research provides a fascinating insight into the reading habits and other playtime activities of parents/carers and their babies. It is clear that parents/carers carry out a wide range of recreational pursuits and that reading as well as attendance at libraries, while by no means as widely and frequently undertaken as other activities such as walks in the park, are enjoyed by many families. Parents and particularly full time mothers are more likely to be engaged in these pastimes than non parents and non resident carers.

It is against this backdrop that an opportunity exists for Booktrust to take stock of the Bookstart initiative in terms of measuring its success thus far and establishing where the service can progress in the future. From a brand perspective Bookstart is widely known but there remains huge scope to increase parents' and carers' knowledge about the work of Bookstart, possibly via a heightened communications campaign.

The principal objective, however, will be to grow the proportion of mothers, fathers and other carers who *recall* receiving a Bookstart pack. This aim is vital not least because stated recall varies considerably across the population – it is higher among parents/carers with a baby aged over 40 weeks, among mothers, among full time parents and among those aged 25-34 years. It is lower among single parents/carers and non-parent carers.

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