



**Dechrau Da
Bookstart**
BookTrust Cymru



Introducing Bookstart

Notes for student Health Visitors



Ariennir gan
Lywodraeth Cymru
Funded by
Welsh Government



BookTrust Cymru
Getting children reading Ysgogi plant i ddarllen

Introducing Bookstart

About BookTrust

BookTrust is the UK's largest children's reading charity. Each year we reach 3.9 million children across the UK with books, resources and support. We are dedicated to getting children reading. Our priority is to get more children excited about books, rhymes and stories – because if reading is fun, children will want to do it.

Every year, we give out over 175,000 carefully chosen books to children in Wales and over 230,000 literacy and numeracy resources. This work is funded by the Welsh Government.

Our work supports every family in Wales, from their child's first year of life right through to the end of their Reception year in school, starting with the gift of two BookTrust books in the Bookstart Baby pack. Books, guidance and resources are delivered via Health, Library, school and early years practitioners.

Families are supported with advice and resources to encourage good reading habits. We want every child to have the best possible start in life. It's why we're so passionate about getting children reading.

About Bookstart

Bookstart is available to every child in Wales.

Bookstart encourages families to share and enjoy books, stories and rhymes from the first few months of life and throughout the early years.

Bookstart Baby packs are gifted at 6 months and Bookstart Early Years packs are designed to be gifted at 27 months. They are included in the Healthy Child Wales Programme scheduled contacts.

All 22 local authorities in Wales have a Bookstart Coordinator based in Library Services who work with Health Visitors to deliver packs to families across Wales.

The Bookstart programme in Wales aims to enable every mum, dad and carer to inspire a love of books, rhymes and stories in babies and young children, aged 0–3 years.

Health Visitors are ideally placed to help reach families who might otherwise not access messages about the benefits of reading together.

Outcomes of the programme

- To increase parents' and carers' understanding of the importance of sharing books, stories and rhymes.
- To make sharing books, rhymes and stories fun for families.
- To improve parents' and carers' confidence in sharing books with their baby/toddler.
- To expand parents' and carers' knowledge of ways to access and share books, stories and rhymes with their baby.
- To support parents and carers to develop a reading habit with their children from birth.
- To enable our partners to deliver high quality messaging to parents and carers around shared reading.
- To increase parents' and carers' confidence and willingness to share both English and Welsh books, stories and rhymes with their baby/toddler.



Bookstart is more than a physical pack

It's a programme that encourages social development, early language, pre-literacy and communication skills through the enjoyment of books, stories and rhymes.

With the help of Health Visitors, around 95% of children in Wales receive their Bookstart Baby and Early Years packs.

We want Health Visitors to use this training and these resources to ensure Bookstart key messages are given to parents and carers when they receive their packs. This encouragement from a respected professional will help increase families' ability to support their child's early development through the use of books, stories and rhymes.

Every Bookstart pack in Wales includes English and bilingual books. You can find out how to introduce Welsh from birth at <https://cymraeg.gov.wales>



Benefits of early shared reading

Bookstart aims to enable every mum, dad and carer in Wales to inspire a love of books, rhymes and stories in babies and toddlers.

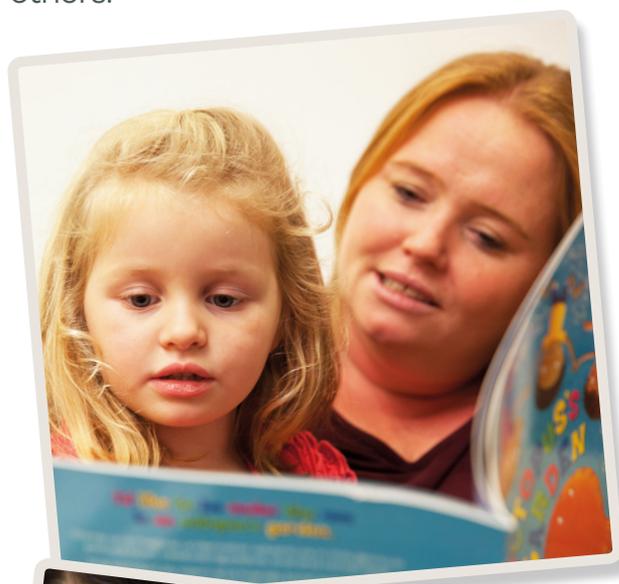
Why this matters

For more in-depth information and research on the benefits of shared reading, please see the **Additional guidance** and **Recommended reading** sections.

Socio-emotional development

- Early shared reading supports child development by providing bonding opportunities. Babies love to be held close and to hear a parent or carer's voice.
- Having routines and a rhythm to the day can help children to gain confidence and independence.
- If a parent or carer seems to be struggling with routines, the Bookstart pack offers an opportunity to start a conversation about introducing regular events into their baby's day.
- Establishing a reading routine helps a young child understand their day and what to expect from their environment, and can help make them feel more confident and secure. This can support self-esteem and wellbeing.
- Sharing a book or story at night is an ideal way to settle a child. Bookstart's Social Return on Investment (2010) found that many parents reported that reading with their child had a calming effect.

- Shared reading can increase the quality time that children and parents/carers spend together.
- Stories and talking about books can help children to develop empathy and encourages them to recognise and talk about their feelings and the feelings of others.



Cognitive development

- Sitting quietly together supports listening, concentration and attention.
- Babies and children will begin to anticipate their favourite illustration/ character/part of the story and will use their memory to recall what happens next.
- Talking around a book, looking at pictures, characters and storylines can support toddlers' imagination and thinking.
- Exposure to stories helps to enrich the imagination and provide knowledge of a range of experiences that a child can draw on to give them confidence.
- Stories can provide children with a framework within which behaviours can be interpreted and given meaning.
- Providing a learning-friendly environment at home helps children test and learn about the world around them, and to develop and maintain strong language, literacy and numeracy skills.

Language development

- Encouraging parents and carers to share books, stories and rhymes can improve a child's language and communication skills.
- Using funny voices and animal sounds brings a story to life and helps children sound-out words from an early age.
- Hearing a story read aloud, learning songs and nursery rhymes can encourage children to have a good vocabulary.
- Shared reading can encourage turn-taking and develops listening skills.



Physical development

- Sharing books from birth supports the development of physical coordination through page turning, lifting flaps and pointing at images.
- Babies like to physically explore books, using and developing their sensorimotor skills by sucking, patting, stroking or scratching books. Handling skills develop rapidly through a baby's first year.



Advice for gifting the Bookstart Baby pack

Discuss the books with the parent or carer. Ask if they currently read or sing rhymes and songs to their baby.

If they do, discuss what they do and what works for them. You might want to encourage them to read regularly and develop reading/rhyming routines. Or if they don't, that's OK! Now's the time to start.

Explain how reading aloud and sharing a book can contribute to bonding, socio-emotional development and speech and language development.

Model how a book can be shared with the baby so parents/carers can see the baby's reaction. **Engaging the baby with the pack during your visit is one of the most useful things you can do!**

Suggest how to establish a reading routine – even just 10 minutes a day after a bath and before bed, or while dinner is cooking, or finding any quiet time to cuddle up to share a book is beneficial to both baby and parents/carers. Help them identify what might work for them.



Gifting tips

If you don't have much time, make sure you:

- give a high quality, warm and encouraging message about the joy and benefits of sharing books
- show the contents of the pack
- encourage families to use their local Library
- let them know about any local events, such as rhymetimes, or relevant family learning opportunities.

Remember DEMS:

Discuss
Explain
Model
Suggest

Advice for gifting the Bookstart Early Years pack

Discuss the family's reading routine – ask the parent or carer when they read, and what their child's favourite book is. If families don't have books at home, you can ask how the child enjoyed their Bookstart Baby books, and signpost them to their local Library as a great place for them to choose books to enjoy together.

Explain that stories, books and rhymes can help a child's development – including them in everyday routines can help their child develop the skills they need to enjoy school.

Model how to choose a book and demonstrate how they could read it together – ask the parent or carer to sit down with the child and discuss the pictures and colours. Make animal noises or use funny voices to bring the story to life and make the child laugh.

Suggest that parents or carers encourage their child to tell the story: What's happening in the pictures? What do they think will happen next?



Gifting tips

If you don't have much time, make sure you:

- give the bag to the child and help them choose a book to look at
- demonstrate reading to the child – talk about what's happening in the book, the colours, the characters, guess what happens next, use funny voices and sounds
- encourage parents and carers to have a regular reading routine – 10 minutes a day if possible
- encourage parents and carers to use their local Library.



Practice activity

This activity gives you a chance to try gifting a Bookstart pack, consider the messages you will use and how you will gift the pack.

1. Split into groups of 3 and decide who is A, B and C.
2. For the first round A is the parent or carer, B is the Health Visitor and C is the observer who also keeps an eye on time. The observer should have the student handouts **The Bookstart Baby pack** and **The Bookstart Early Years pack** to hand so they can see what points the Health Visitor could cover.
3. You can choose one of the following scenarios:
 - the age of the baby – could be 6 months or 27 months or close to these ages
 - a teenage mother who is living alone with no wider family support
 - a mother who is not a Welsh speaker, but her husband and his family speak Welsh at home and to the children
 - a parent who is a secondary school teacher and this is their first child
 - a carer from a family with complex needs
 - a carer whose first language is neither Welsh nor English
 - a mother who you suspect might not be able to read very well
 - a parent with a child who has three older siblings
 - or make up your own example.
4. Take about 5 minutes to plan your practice activity. Think about what you will say, how will you say it, how would you behave around the child and parent, how will the parent/carer feel?
5. Role play gifting the pack using either the Baby or Early Years pack.
6. Some questions to reflect on:
 - Did you say everything you wanted to?
 - Did you cover 3 key messages appropriate to the pack you were gifting? How appropriate was your language and tone?
 - How would you do it differently next time?
 - Agree on what you've learned and feed back to the group. If there's time, switch roles and have another go.



Quick quiz

Test your knowledge of Bookstart in Wales.

[Click here](#)

Working together

- BookTrust Cymru works in partnership with Library Services and Health Visitors to deliver the Bookstart programme across Wales.
- The programme is universal: all 6-month-old babies and 27-month-old children in Wales are entitled to Bookstart packs.
- Bookstart Coordinators work closely with Health Visitors to ensure that clinics and hospitals have enough stock.
- Every year, we conduct a stocktake of all packs in local authorities (Health Visiting services and Libraries).
- This is an essential part of our stock management process and we use this stocktake to plan how many packs need to be ordered and delivered so that every child can receive one.
- The stocktake is also a key part of our monitoring and reporting process for our funder, the Welsh Government.
- Bookstart is managed slightly differently in every local authority. However, Libraries work closely with key contacts in Health Visiting to manage Bookstart pack stock.
- Most Libraries offer free rhymetime and storytime events suitable for babies and small children. It doesn't matter if a baby or child is noisy and there are no fines on children's books. Choosing new books regularly is a fun way to establish a reading routine.



Why it matters

- Libraries are a great place for new parents to go to find resources, meet up and make friends. Research has shown that attending rhymetime sessions can be beneficial to maternal mental health and provide social and emotional support for new parents.



Additional resources

Baby's First Shapes

This booklet contains black-and-white images to engage new-born babies and additional tips for parents and carers. These can be gifted at 8 weeks.

Booklets can be given out by Health Visitors, Midwives or Registrars.

Encourage parents and carers to:

- cuddle up with their baby and look out for their reaction to different pages in the booklet
- keep sharing the booklet with their baby again and again so they start to recognise the images
- not worry if their baby tires easily when looking at the booklet.

Speak to your lead practice teacher about whether your local authority is part of the Baby's First Shapes gifting programme.



Dual language books

BookTrust is dedicated to encouraging families of all cultures to engage with books. We want to ensure that every child has access to books and the opportunity to enjoy reading. We offer dual language (DL) books and guidance to families that have English as an additional language so that they can access the same important Bookstart messages as others.

Why it matters

Research recommends that families talk and share books in their home language as well as in the dominant languages of their area (i.e. English and Welsh).

Offering DL books as part of the Bookstart programme is a great way to introduce sharing books to parents and carers who may not feel confident in doing so entirely in English. It also gives practitioners the opportunity to signpost to where parents and carers can find more DL titles, such as at their local Library.

What Bookstart offers

Our Bookstart programme offers a limited number of DL books in over 30 community languages which can be inserted into the Bookstart Baby or Bookstart Early Years packs.

Speak to your Bookstart Coordinator for more information about how to order DL books.

Additional guidance for gifting the Bookstart packs

Bookstart Baby pack

It's important to open the pack and take out the contents with the parent or carer.

It's ideal to show at least one of the books to the child – for parents and carers who haven't thought about sharing stories, seeing a child's eyes light up sends a very powerful message.

For parents or carers who may have low levels of literacy or lack confidence, explain how they can use the books to look at the pictures and talk with their children about what they can see.

Let families know where their nearest Library is and when rhymetime or storytime sessions are held – they are ideal social occasions for parents/carers and their children. Libraries will also have parenting books with advice about feeding and sleeping, and information about local support groups.

Using the Baby books at the 6-month developmental check

Engage the child directly with the book and encourage the parent/carer to watch how they respond socially or with use of language.

Watch their facial expressions for reactions – do they smile/show pleasure/laugh?

Observe how they use their manipulation skills to handle the book and check for fine motor skills. Board books can be tactile and encourage babies to interact and develop their motor skills.

Good maternal and child mental health can be encouraged through the shared positive experiences of looking at a book together.

Share your observations with the parent/carer – point out how their child smiles, engages with the book, etc.

Additional messages to share with parents/carers:

Sharing a book with your baby will help you to feel close and encourage bonding.

Babies can be soothed by the melodic sound of your voice when you read aloud.

Older babies can be excited by bright pictures and the anticipation of the next page.

Babies love to hear your voice. Don't worry if you can't sing: babies enjoy the rhythm and sounds in nursery rhymes.

Books can open up new conversations and help you to interact with your baby. Try using funny voices, noises, facial expressions and gestures.

If babies begin to associate books with a warm and loving experience, it can support them to want to read and enjoy books as they grow older.

Bookstart Early Years pack

At this age you can give the pack to the child to open and explore.

If parents or carers haven't established a reading routine already or don't have books at home, signpost them to their local Library where they can borrow lots of free books to enjoy together.

Encourage parents/carers to ask their child questions when sharing a book: What can they see on the page? What colours? How many? What are the names of animals/characters? What do they think will happen next?

Demonstrate how to use the Bookstart bear finger puppets.

Using the Early Years pack at the 27-month development check

Books can be used to assess manipulation skills, such as turning pages of the book.

Ask the child questions about what's happening in the book to demonstrate their comprehension and understanding of the world around them – can they recognise colours and objects, have they seen them in the real world?

Does the child smile/laugh and show emotional responses?

Can the child tell you what's going to happen next? Do they know some of the words in the books or the names for objects?

Additional messages to share with parents/carers

Use books to help develop your child's language and communication skills. Ask your child to join in with the words and actions in a book. Ask questions about what you can see in the pictures.

Encourage your child to choose what they want to read next. This will help increase their enjoyment.

Don't worry if your child wants to read the same book again and again! This can be comforting, and will help them learn the language in the story.

Using books and rhymes to support development at 27 months

Books and rhymes can support sleep routines. Try using a rhyme like 'Twinkle, Twinkle' to signal that it's nap time or bedtime – this can be a cue to help your child cope with transition from wakefulness to rest and sleep. Cuddling up with a book can soothe your child and help them sleep.

Use books and rhymes as a reward or reinforcement, e.g. while potty training, have a potty/toilet rhyme or find a fun book about potty training.

Books and rhymes can help distract your child when they're weaning.

Brushing your teeth: use the Bookstart bear finger puppets to demonstrate brushing their teeth and to support and reinforce actions.

Use rhymes and songs to include your child in household routines, e.g. tidying up, going shopping, getting into the car or any period of change/transition.

Favourite books and rhymes can help distract or entertain your child when they're waiting or anxious, e.g. at the doctor's surgery, on a bus or long journey.

Most nursery/day care settings will share lots of books and rhymes. If your child is already familiar with these things and enjoys them, it will help them transition from home to nursery and school settings.

Frequently asked questions

Do I have to gift the Bookstart packs at 6 months and 27 months or is there flexibility?

The content of the packs has been developed to be age-appropriate, so it's recommended that you gift the packs as close to 6 and 27 months as possible.

Late gifting of the Baby pack can result in a missed opportunity to talk about how reading books on a daily basis can contribute towards a child's development. It may also mean that parents/carers are not signposted to rhymetimes and other sessions in Libraries, where they can make friends and find a network of support.

However, the most important thing is that children receive their pack, so if you can only gift early/late please make sure that you do gift rather than the child missing their pack.

Note: The packs and their contents have passed safety testing for children aged 6 and 27 months. If you're giving a pack before 6 or 27 months it's essential that you check with and get approval from your lead Health Visitor to ensure that the pack is appropriate.



How do I get Bookstart packs for the families I work with?

We allocate resources to local authorities based on their birth rates and information about available stock (this is one reason why the Bookstart stocktake is so important!).

BookTrust delivers packs to every local authority, usually four times a year and usually to Library Services. Library and Health Visiting teams then work together to arrange how packs will be distributed in the area.

You should have Bookstart packs available in clinics/Health Visiting bases. Ask your team leader where the Bookstart packs are stored and how you can order more if needed. You can also contact your local Bookstart Coordinator (usually based in Libraries).

To find out who your Bookstart Coordinator is, or who your lead Health Visitor is for Bookstart, contact booktrustcymru@booktrust.org.uk



How does BookTrust choose the books that go into packs?

The books are chosen by a Bookstart book panel made up of book experts, librarians, health professionals and early years professionals. BookTrust does not publish books. Publishers in the UK are invited to submit books to be considered for inclusion in the packs.

Why do the packs I have look different to the ones on the website?

You may receive slightly older packs if your local Bookstart scheme has remaining stock. Don't worry, though – whichever packs you get, you can be sure that they'll contain two great free books (from a selection chosen by an independent panel) for families to share.

Where can I find out more about supporting families with Welsh?

You can find audio recordings of the Welsh language Bookstart packs at www.booktrust.org.uk/cymru, and for more information about supporting families with Welsh you can visit www.meithrin.cymru/cymraeg-for-kids



The family I work with has older children too; is there any information I can give them?

In Wales, children in Nursery and Reception can take part in our Pori Drwy Stori programme, which supports literacy, oracy, numeracy and parental engagement in learning. All schools receive free resources for every child in Reception. Approximately one-third of children in nurseries take part in the programme. To find out more visit www.booktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/programmes-and-campaigns/poridrwystori/

How do I find out about my local Library?

You can find out where your local Library is at <https://libraries.wales>. If you pop in or give them a call they can provide you with information about the events they run for families.

How do I order dual language books?

In the first instance you should speak to your Bookstart Coordinator who'll be able to order them for you, or you can email booktrustcymru@booktrust.org.uk

Recommended reading

Key research

Krishnan & Johnson (2014), A review of behavioural and brain development in the early years: the “toolkit” for later book-related skills,

This BookTrust review, outlining the evidence on brain development in the first three years of life, helps to inform the recommended optimum age for parents/carers to start sharing books, stories and rhymes with their children:

www.booktrust.org.uk/globalassets/resources/research/krishnan--johnson-2014-full-report-a-review-of-behavioural-and-brain-development-in-the-early-years-the-toolkit-for-later-book-related-skills-.pdf

Krishnan & Johnson (2015), Bookstart and health: Strengthening partnerships and knowledge,

This study reviews current evidence on human brain and behavioural development over the early years, specifically in relation to the sensory and cognitive abilities relevant to book use and enjoyment.

www.booktrust.org.uk/globalassets/resources/research/booktrust-bookstart-health-stakeholder-leaflet-march2015.pdf



Canterbury Christ Church University (2016), The role of the Bookstart Baby gifting process in supporting shared reading,

This qualitative research project aimed to discover the detail of the Bookstart Baby gifting process. In particular, the project sought to gain understanding of the mechanisms of gifting, across professional services, and to gather information about the effectiveness of gifting in influencing families to share books with babies.

www.booktrust.org.uk/globalassets/resources/research/bookstart-baby-report-final-21.7.16.pdf

Find out more about BookTrust’s work, read testimonials from families and practitioners, and view research relating to our programmes and activities here:

www.booktrust.org.uk/what-we-do/impact-and-research/

Additional information

www.facebook.com/beginsathome

<https://libraries.wales>

<https://cymraeg.gov.wales>



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