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NEW RESEARCH FROM BOOKTRUST FINDS ALMOST A QUARTER OF CHILDREN FROM LOW-INCOME BACKGROUNDS ARE MISSING OUT ON THE BENEFITS OF READING IN THEIR FIRST YEAR.

- 20% of parents and carers say they don't read with their child due to lack of time; and
- 28% say they don't find reading with their child easy; but
- 95% see reading as important for their child.
- New findings underpin the importance of investment in early years reading but more needs to be done to ensure children's reading habits continue throughout childhood.

New research from BookTrust, the UK's largest children's reading charity finds that almost a quarter of parents and carers from low-income backgrounds (23%) are not sharing books with their children before their first birthday despite the majority (95%) seeing reading as an important thing to do¹.

Where families are regularly reading and sharing stories together, this reaches its peak when children are between two and four years old, but the frequency of children being read to daily after the age of four drastically reduces and continues to decline throughout childhood.

Sharing books, stories and rhymes as a basis for playing, talking, singing and exploring in their early years provides the biggest boost to children developmentally, enhancing cognitive, physical, social and emotional growth and development during a period of significant brain growth. Shared reading also supports bonding between children and their parents, carers or other family members; boosts parental positivity and improves children's sleep.

These lifechanging benefits of reading extend far beyond childhood and underpin why BookTrust places such an emphasis on working with communities and partners to support families to read and share stories and establish early reading habits through an extensive range of resources, books and support.

The charity's flagship Bookstart programme (established in 1992) provides a free book pack and top tips to every baby within their first year of life to kickstart families' reading habits. In 2023 over 600,000 packs will be distributed to families.

Over recent years, and to provide further support to children from low-income backgrounds, the charity has developed new initiatives including offering Bookstart Toddler and Preschooler packs for children aged 1-2 and 3-4 respectively with 425,000 families receiving packs and 4,000 storyteller resources provided to support those working closely with families. BookTrust Storytime also launched in 2021, in partnership with libraries to encourage families to make visiting their local public library a regular part of family life.

Diana Gerald, Chief Executive of BookTrust said:

“Reading has the potential to change lives and our aim at BookTrust is to get all children reading regularly and by choice. As this research shows, families recognise the importance of reading in their children’s early years. Much of this can be attributed to the hard work of early years practitioners, libraries, health visitors who we closely work with to inspire families to read and share books and stories together early on. Yet parents and carers tell us that a lack of time or confidence choosing books are the main barriers they face that prevent them from reading more.”

“Whilst this research will continue to shape and inform the support and resources that BookTrust provides for children and families across England, Wales and Northern Ireland; at a time when the disadvantage gap is growing between children from low income backgrounds and their more affluent peers, there must be a greater emphasis and focus on establishing children’s reading habits early on in life, especially for those children who stand to benefit the most from the lifechanging benefits of reading.”

Liz, a mum from Shropshire who received Bookstart Baby said:

“I feel like reading is helping my children develop who they are. My son had the most challenges with reading at first, so it was really important that we found things for him to read that interested him. When he was younger, he was majorly interested in like anything to do with the vehicles, so we found him loads of books about tractors.”

“Things have become so much easier for him. He’s been able to get loads more out of school because it’s not such a chore for him to read the things in front of him. Now, when he reads, he’s not doing it as a task that has been set by us or his teacher. He’s doing it because he enjoys doing it.”

Evidence shows that sharing stories and reading together provides children with life-changing benefits that can positively impact their wellbeing, health, creativity and educational attainment. Therefore, establishing a reading habit as early in life as possible, means that children from low-income backgrounds can especially benefit from the transformative benefits of reading.

For example, children from disadvantaged backgrounds who achieve highly at the end of primary school are twice as likely to have been read to at home in their early years, compared to their peers.

We also know that reading for pleasure in these crucial years has a four times more powerful impact on a child’s progress by age 16, than their parent’s education or socioeconomic status.²

Louise, a librarian from North Somerset said:

“I see how the outcomes for children who enjoy reading are different. They’re more engaged at school. They’re more engaged in jobs. Their emotional intelligence is stronger. The outcomes for kids who read are just startlingly different. Kids who genuinely enjoy reading and want to go out and explore and find the next book.”

“Anything we can do to make reading fun, to make it less of a chore or a tick box exercise – something children know they’ll be measured on at school – is so important. Anything that encourages kids to think about books as fun, as escapism. It’s just so good for everything.”

ENDS

Press contact

Please contact our press office: press@booktrust.org.uk for further information and interview requests.

Notes to editors

Research methodology

BookTrust conducted an online survey of 2,148 parents and carers of children aged 0-7 living in low-income households in England, Wales and Northern Ireland between April and June 2022.

The term low-income families indicates those living in relative poverty as defined by Department for Work and Pensions.

1. This is the first in a series of research briefings that BookTrust will be publishing in 2023.
2. The Benefits of Reading Evidence shows that sharing stories and reading together provides children with life-changing benefits that can positively impact their wellbeing, health, creativity and educational attainment.
These benefits can be found in an [interactive resource from BookTrust](#) which draws on extensive academic and peer-reviewed research.

About BookTrust

BookTrust is dedicated to getting children reading because we know that children who read are happier, healthier, more empathetic and more creative. Their early language development is supported and they also do better at school.

We are the UK's largest children's reading charity; each year we reach millions of children across the UK with books, resources and support to help develop a love of reading, because we know that reading can transform lives.

We work with a variety of partners to get children excited about books, rhymes and stories, because if reading is fun, children will want to do it. Our books are delivered via health, library, schools and early years practitioners, and are supported with guidance, advice and resources to encourage the reading habit. www.booktrust.org.uk.