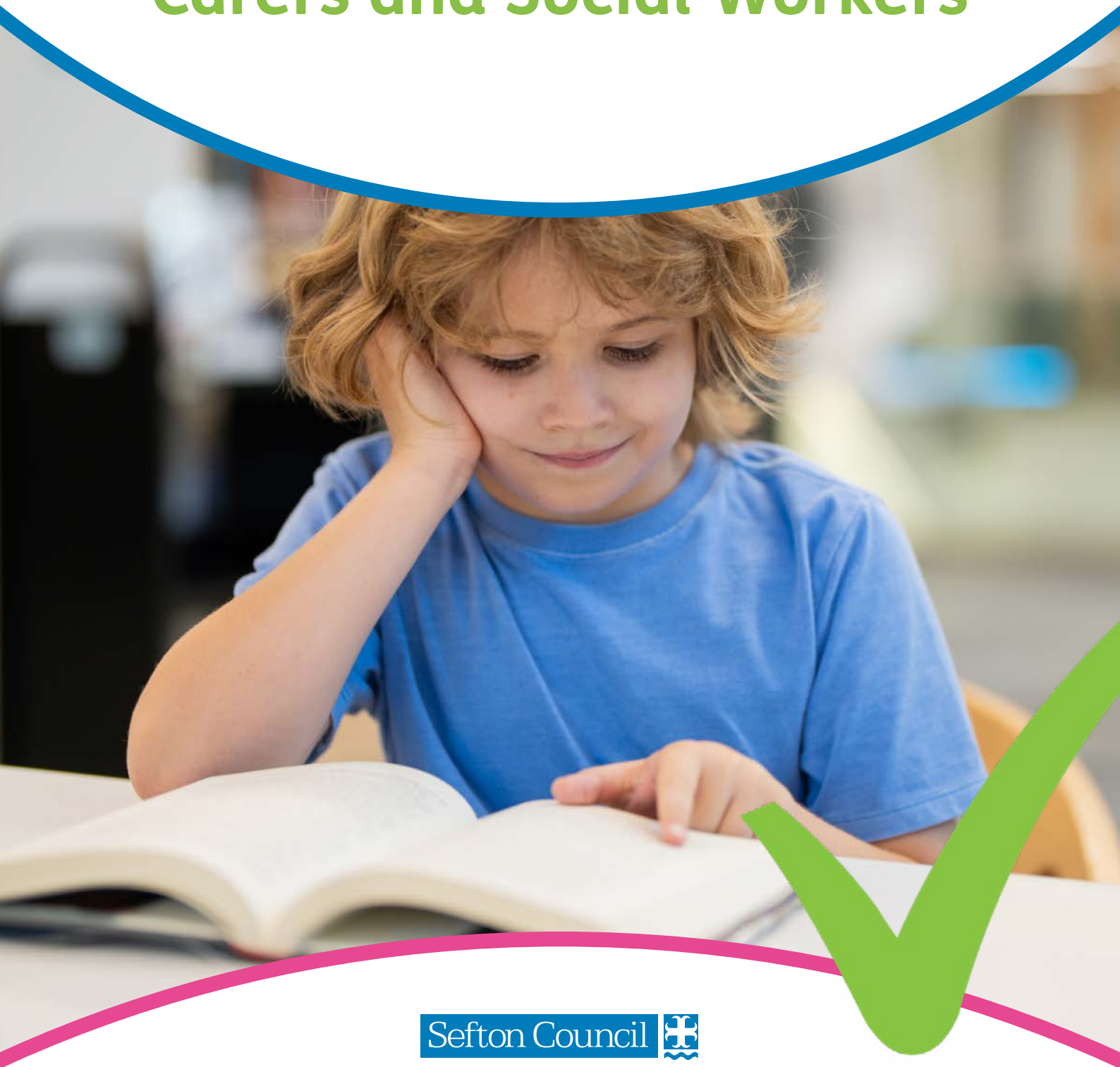


Reading ToolKit for Foster Carers and Social Workers



5 Minute Facts: Reading

Reading began so recently in the evolutionary history of our species that we have no innate biological process devoted specifically to reading.’ (Norton and Wolf, 2011) Humans have a biological process to move, to speak, to think, to see, to hear, to grip and therefore to mark make, but reading has to borrow from brain areas that have evolved for other purposes. The actual process of reading has been compared to rocket science and conducting an orchestra. It’s little wonder that some children find it so hard!

Our world and society is so structured around a person’s ability to read, it is therefore a basic life skill which all children and young people have a right to. Understanding what has an impact on reading development can really empower adults who are caring for and parenting children, so they know how and why certain approaches are most impactful.

Ultimately to be a good reader means being able to comprehend what you are reading. Outlined on this page are what research and practice reports as being age-appropriate expectations in development, which are directly linked to later academic achievement and automaticity in reading. All of which encourage a positive rather than a ‘toxic’ relationship with reading. (Nicolson, 2015)

0-2

From birth until they turn 2, children are in what famous developmental researcher Jean Piaget calls the sensorimotor period. During this time, children use their senses and actions to learn and grow. This period begins with basic reflexes and advances through a series of “stages” to complex sensory and motor skills, and early symbolic thought. Giving a baby a toy book and showing them **how to turn a page** they are learning one of the first physical stages of reading.

Recent research into the development and acquisition of early literacy skills has conclusively shown that **rhythm and rhyme** play a hugely important role. This is because children’s early literacy skills are about **listening and speaking** rather than reading and writing. These first two skills are the bedrock foundation for the latter, and create much stronger ability in the latter if ingrained deeply and early on.

By singing and re-telling familiar rhymes and rhyming stories we teach our children: – auditory discrimination – listening skills – a rich range of language – concentration skills – oral storytelling / poetry skills – **phonemic awareness**.

Pre-school

Human beings are biologically endowed to process the spoken word; processing the written word, however, is a culturally determined skill that has to be taught and learned. **Preschool language development has a significant impact** on later reading success. **Narrating activities, talking about what a child can see**, the list is endless, the more we talk to children the more their biological process designed for spoken language are enhanced and strengthened in preparation to learn to read.

Similarly, to be able to read children need to be able to make the connection between the grapheme – visual form of letters and a sound. Having puzzles with letters of the alphabet, friezes on a bedroom wall with letters and numbers, normalises graphemes and the connections are starting to form in a child's brain. Saving time for them later as this has become normalised and automatic.

Normalising reading and parenting practices such as reading to children, using complex language, responsiveness, and warmth in interactions are all associated with better developmental outcomes. (Bradley, 2002) Instilling reading as a common activity helps enhance independent reading as something to strive to achieve – even when it is a challenge in the early stages at around age 5-7 when the process of decoding should be developing to a fluency.

Age 3-4 neural circuits of executive functions are normally developing in children – this is now thought to have an impact on being ready to learn to read. Executive Function (EF) is a set of cognitive processes that help an individual regulate and adapt their behaviour. The ability to focus, hold, and work with information in mind, filter distractions, and switch gears are part of this regulation and adaptation (Zelazo et al., 2016). Strong EF is like having an air traffic control system at a busy airport to manage the arrivals and departures of dozens of planes on multiple runways (Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, 2021). Also, remember that repetition is a great way of enhancing a child's understanding, if you think that each time they have an experience a different sense is responding to it – that's why little children repeat and say the same thing multiple times – they are hearing, forming the word with their mouths, gauging the response and understanding, so many different things are happening at the same time, doing it multiple times means they are fully learning. It's the same with all aspects of learning.

5-7 (Continued on the next page)



5-7

When formal schooling steps in. This is when there is a focus on 'phonics'. At this point if a child's neural pathways and predetermined biological instincts have not developed as set out above they will find 'formal' teaching challenging. If we remember that reading is a 'man-made' skill, it has to borrow from other biological processes, these processes need to be primed and ready to learn.

Children are taught the 'decode' stage of reading as they start school – being able to link the grapheme to the phoneme it represents. There are 26 letters in the English language, they make up 250 graphemes (letters or letter groups that correspond to a single sound) and 44 phonemes (sounds). This is because every phoneme (sound) corresponds to more than one grapheme (letter or letter groups) across different words.

7+

Some children at this stage despite having been primed with all the support in their preschool years may still not be ready, they may have a phonological weakness, speech and language difficulties, working memory difficulties or other executive function delay. There is the potential that they may have a specific learning difficulty.*

Likewise, children who have not been primed with the home learning outlined above may not have the capacity, desire and therefore resilience to get through the challenge that is decoding.

This means that there is a risk of their developing a 'toxic reading failure':

- + Embedding 'failure' as associated with reading.
- + Decoding becomes habitual, and the transition to fluency and all the positives associated with this aspect of reading development are lost.
- + Reading is exhausting and there is no brain space left for the comprehension and interpretation.

7+

Fluent reading becomes automatic, now a child doesn't have to use this aspect of their brain function to think about reading and they can focus on the understanding, empathy, interpretation... all the fun parts and the parts that allow them to learn all their other subjects. These are where innate human instincts and biology are called upon and the child's brain is no longer having to develop new skills using other biological instincts.

It is no coincidence that there is a correlation between children with challenging behaviours having low reading ability.



In this country when children reach KS2 (Y3) they are expected to be able to decode automatically to be able to move to the next stage of learning. There is limited time in a school day for children to be offered intervention which will fill the gaps which they have lost earlier in life. Inevitably they are going to miss out on other learning so that teachers can attempt to plug these gaps.

From KS2 foundation learning is no longer the norm in a classroom as children are maturing and move away from nursery rhymes, if these skills have not already been embedded it becomes harder to incorporate this into a school day.

*A child with a specific learning difficulty but who has had ideal home learning conditions outlined in this document, may need targeted intervention and a carefully structured package to help them progress to the next stage, but they will be **bolstered by the way reading has become a cultural norm to them.**

If your child is struggling to read and over 7, look at the elements they may have missed and work with them to **foster a joy of reading** which will bolster their resilience and determination.

Reading Flowchart

Use the Reading Flowchart to support your understanding of your child's reading ability.



Find out what the child's reading ability is:

Ask school – all schools should have the capacity to identify a reading age.

The year-on-year average growth in reading ability is much higher at younger ages (e.g. between ages 7 and 8 years). For older students the year-on-year growth is much smaller over ages 13 years (e.g. between ages 14 to 15 years). Therefore, a reading age of 17 years is unlikely to be that much different from a Reading age of 14 years.

If a child is 14 and has a reading age of 12, this is less of a concern than if they are 12 and have a reading age 10. A reading age of 7 or below is a concern for any child who is older than 8 – in its simplest terms reading at age 7 or below means that it is highly likely decoding is not automatic. Therefore reading is hard and effortful.

Some schools may report with a Standardised Score (85-115 is in the average range, below 85 is significantly below average and above 115 is significantly above average).

ARE THEY READING IN LINE WITH THEIR CHRONOLOGICAL AGE?

No

Ask what have school been doing to support reading?

- If the child's reading age is below 8, some phonics based intervention should be in place – this may have been tried repeatedly, if so have school considered alternative Specialist Assessment?
- If the reading age is below the chronological age and above 8 are their reading comprehension interventions in place?

ARE THERE SPECIFIC INTERVENTIONS IN PLACE?

No

Ask why not...

'Young adults who received custodial sentences had lower levels of educational attainment, with 36.9% achieving the expected level of English and maths by the end of key stage 2 compared with 53.0% of their peers with non-custodial sentences or cautions, and 72.4% of those without criminal convictions.'

Yes

Ask school about what the impact has been – has there been progress?

If not what has been changed? What else has been done?

In all meetings with school address current reading.

Yes (or nearly)

Ask them what they like reading.

IS THE CHILD READING REGULARLY?

No

Consider sharing time reading as part of any visits/ meetings. What are you reading – talk about why you enjoy it.

Audiobooks are a great alternative to sitting with a book.

Exposure to a broad vocabulary, new ideas and topics, more complex layers of meaning in language will improve reading skills into the higher reading ages and enhance overall learning.

Encourage reading **comics and graphic novels** – understanding a story and characters, develops children's empathy skills and cultural capital.

Yes

When you meet them talk to them about what they are reading. Share what you are reading. Use mutual reading experiences as an into conversation.

0-2

- Talk about everything; describe the environment; sing nursery rhymes;
- Normalise reading – have books around, turn pages, talk about the pictures, allow babies to chew them.
- Go to the library – there are regularly activities and just being there is creating a relationship with books
- Watch the CBEBIES Bedtime Story
- Have a book as part of a bedtime routine – children who are read only one book a day will hear about 290,000 more words by age 5 than those who don't regularly read books with a parent or carer.

Some early children's books have a broad and challenging vocabulary – if you struggle with some of the words yourself listen to them online – rhyming patterns and repetition will help you remember them. If you aren't a fluent reader your child will not mind, they just like your voice. It's about connection and joy, not getting every word right.



0-2

- Have letters and number toys/friezes on walls/puzzles/shapes in the bath – develop associations with fun;
- Cuddle and read – associating reading with warmth and physical contact helps enhance a love of the process of reading;
- Be silly when reading – use different voices, make mistakes and muddle things up, laugh while reading.

By the time they were 5 years old: Never read to, 4,662 words; 1-2 times per week, 63,570 words; 3-5 times per week, 169,520 words; daily, 296,660 words; and five books a day, 1,483,300 words.



Age 5-7 (Reception and Infants)

Decoding happens in school – good school attendance and being on time is essential

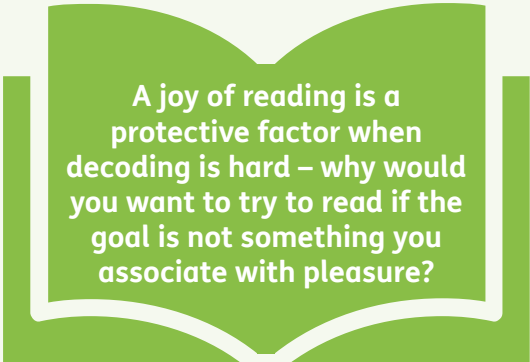
At home support with the school's reading strategy – all schools will have one, books coming home that are pictures only to start with and then most likely just behind where the school judges the child is able to read.

- At home talk about what they have been reading what stories have they enjoyed.
- Read together – non schoolbooks, picture books and familiar books from when they were younger.
- Encourage siblings to read to each other.
- Snuggle up with a book together – read to your child, they may well be exhausted at the end of the day and being made to read becomes a chore. Keep reading a fun experience, allow moments of affection and connection when you are reading to them. (5 minutes a day is better than nothing. This helps with sleep – there's another toolkit on this!)



Age 7-11 (Juniors)

(Continued on the next page)



A joy of reading is a protective factor when decoding is hard – why would you want to try to read if the goal is not something you associate with pleasure?

Age 7-11 (Juniors)

At home support with the school's reading strategy – all schools will have one, books will come home as homework. At home talk about what they have been reading what stories have they enjoyed.

- Read together – non schoolbooks.
- Encourage siblings to read to each other.
- **Snuggle up with a book together** – read to your child, they may well be exhausted at the end of the day and being made to read becomes a chore. Keep reading a fun experience, allow moments of affection and connection when you are reading to them. (5 minutes a day is better than nothing. This helps with sleep – there's another toolkit on this!).
- Remove devices and have bedrooms as device free zones – read a book before bed.
- Ask questions like:
 - What do you think the character feels? What makes you think that?
 - What might happen next? Why?
 - Would you behave like that?

SATs have a significant focus on grammar and understanding the way we write, the rules. At home the priority is to enhance the joy of reading – parents/carers do not need to teach them for SATs.



Age 11-16 (Secondary)

At home support with the school's reading strategy – all schools will have one. At home talk about what they have been reading what stories have they enjoyed. All schools have the curriculum online, find out what they are covering.

- Read together – non schoolbooks.
- Talk about what they are reading in school – are there films you can watch which will reinforce the plot – developing the schema so that the knowledge learnt in reading can connect in the brain.
- Audio books – Spotify/Amazon Prime/YouTube – the curriculum in secondary schools is very challenging (Oliver Twist Y7) encourage the use of audiobooks to become familiar with the plot and language.
- Encourage siblings to read to each other. If your teenager has a younger sibling get them to read the younger books (vocabulary can be really challenging).
- Remove devices and have bedrooms as device free zones – read a book before bed.

TOP TIP – If a child is self-conscious about reading out, you can prepare reading (if you never read out then you don't actually know how a word sounds) search the pronunciation online!

EXAMS – children who struggle to read or write fluently may qualify for access arrangements in exams, they need to be assessed in Y9 by the school assessor and an application is made to the JCQ. Any support needs to reflect their **normal way of working** so last-minute applications are rare and not always helpful or accepted.



**Being able to read is
a protective factor!**