

# Reading Together

A Handbook for Foster Carers



CENTRE FOR  
EVIDENCE AND  
SOCIAL INNOVATION

Rees Centre





# 01 Introduction

## The Handbook

This handbook is aimed at foster carers and is designed to help you provide support for reading and writing development. We know it takes many hours of practice with support to become a skilled fluent reader. As a carer, you are with the children in your care every day and there are things which you can do to help children and young people to develop their reading skills and really start enjoying it!

## What Will You Be Doing?

You and the child in your care will soon begin to receive book parcels. They will receive three parcels in total over six months, one every six weeks.

There will be three books in the first parcel all aimed at their reading level as well as other items to welcome them to the intervention. The parcel will also contain an A4 sheet with blurbs about a selection of books which the child can use to select which books they would like to receive in parcel two. There will be a freepost envelope provided to return the sheet or you can let us know using the website.

After six weeks the child will receive their second book parcel with another A4 sheet and freepost envelope to choose their books for their final parcel. This process allows the children to add to their book collection and to have the opportunity to choose books for their own pleasure. Book parcels will contain both fiction and non-fiction books.

This handbook has been developed to help you support the child in your care as they develop their reading. It tells you about "Paired Reading" and how

to do it. It gives you hints and tips about supporting their reading development and using the parcels as a springboard for reading together. In particular, the handbook will reinforce that this should be enjoyable for your child and not become a chore for them.

As well as receiving the books in the parcels we would encourage you to make use of your local library. The librarians can talk you through how to use the library, and you can take books out on loan. There are often also events that you can attend. We also have a website <http://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/readingtogether/> which has lots of information, videos and resources for you to use.

## Contact Details

This project is being carried out by researchers and practitioners at the Centre for Evidence and Social Innovation, Queen's University Belfast and The Rees Centre, University of Oxford. Details on the research team and who to contact if you have any queries can be found on our website (see above).

Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions about the research.





## 02 The Importance of Reading

### Why it is important

We know that reading is one of the most important skills children can develop. Through reading children can make sense of the world around them, visit faraway and exciting places and understand the things they experience.

Reading helps children to develop their understanding, reasoning skills and empathy, as well as encouraging them to relate and communicate with others. Reading also helps to develop the understanding of language!

There are also long term benefits to being a fluent reader, including being more likely to succeed in tests and attend university as well as securing employment in adulthood. All these help build resilience and lead to good life chances.

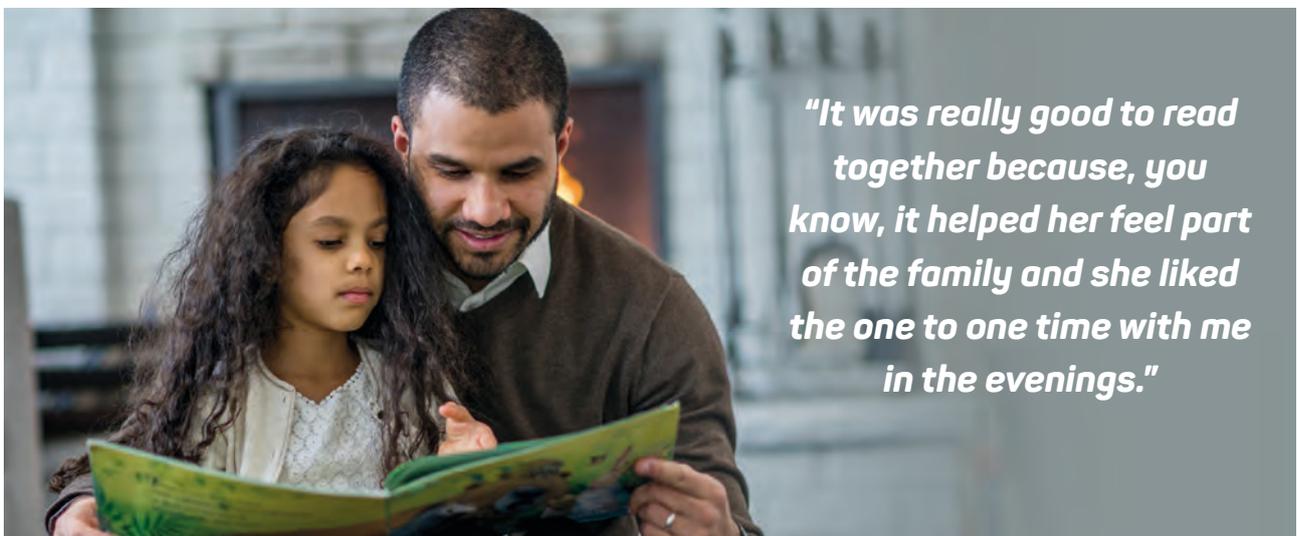
### Benefits of Reading Together

Reading together at the beginning of a placement can allow children and carers to develop their relationship. It allows children to discuss their thoughts, feelings and emotions in a non-threatening environment whilst getting to know their caregiver.

Reading together can also help children progress with their everyday reading needed to get by. This type of reading happens when they read the words they find in their everyday environment, such as labels, signs, newspapers and magazines.

Some carers find that reading together creates a special protected time between them and the child which helps children to open up and discuss issues in a non-threatening way, using characters from the stories they are reading to break the ice. We also know that reading can allow children to open up and discuss thoughts and feelings. Books and stories can help children express their feelings, thoughts and worries in a non-threatening way. If a child is having a particular issue or worry, books can be a great resource.

“Paired Reading” is one way to introduce reading time to the daily routine. Paired Reading has been shown to help improve reading and help children to enjoy reading. This handbook outlines a Paired Reading approach and some of the ways you can help to develop reading skills in your home to help you get started. Remember, you can use our website for further information, videos, tips and advice on Paired Reading <http://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/readingtogether/ResourcesforFosterCarers/>



*“It was really good to read together because, you know, it helped her feel part of the family and she liked the one to one time with me in the evenings.”*



## 03 What to Read

Reading together is important and there are a number of things you can do to help children with reading, regardless of their ability. Some people love to read, some will read at a push and some hate it and need a lot of encouragement. When using a paired reading approach you should help the child to choose a book which is slightly too difficult for them to read alone so you can help to improve their reading. Any book can be used for this approach and it is really good to include a range of books and other reading materials as you move through the programme.

### Fiction and non-fiction

The parcels the children will receive will contain both fiction and non-fiction books. When reading non-fiction books, children may not be reading long chapters and paragraphs. Instead they may read captions and shorter descriptions. It is important to encourage the child to look at the pictures used, to discuss what they are reading and to use the books to find out information.

#### Fiction

- Not real
- Stories
- Read to enjoy
- Beginning, middle, end
- Illustrations/ pictures
- Must be read in order



#### Non-fiction

- Real
- Facts
- Read to learn and enjoy
- Table of contents
- Photographs/ graphs/ diagrams
- Can normally be read in any order



The sections below guide you through the Paired Reading approach and give you an idea of some of the things you can do at each stage of the reading process. There is also a flow chart on how to do Paired Reading that you can use to remind yourself of the steps.

## 04 A Paired Reading Approach

This handbook encourages you to adopt a Paired Reading approach to reading together. This is where you and your child will read out-loud together (and at the same speed) until your child signals they would like to read alone. If your child does not pronounce a word correctly, or hesitates for more than five seconds, you return to reading out-loud together until your child wants to read alone again.

This technique has been shown to improve reading skills for children but it is not a test, or an examination of their reading skills - it is simply for fun! However, this idea may seem strange to you or your child at first so you may want to introduce it to them. You can use the sample introduction below:

***“We are going to read a book from your parcel together and it may be something you have not done before. We are going to read out-loud together for a bit. When you would like to read out-loud by yourself you can tap the book and I will know to stop reading. Do not worry if you do not know a word or make a mistake – this is just for fun and not a test! If that happens we will start reading out-loud together again until you tap the book to read by yourself again”.***

It is good practice to build a **reading routine**. This could be **after school**, in the **morning** or **before bed**. A reading routine will normally last for **5-20 minutes** at a time depending on the child and how they feel on a particular day! Paired reading should take place at least **three times a week** and can be done with any book which is at an appropriate level for the child.

The next page demonstrates how to do Paired Reading using five steps. You can also watch a video demonstrating this at

**[http://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/readingtogether/  
ResourcesforFosterCarers/](http://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/readingtogether/ResourcesforFosterCarers/)**

## 04 A Paired Reading Approach

Please read the steps below, alongside watching the video clips online at <http://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/readingtogether/ResourcesforFosterCarers/>

### Step 1

- Sit with your child in a quiet location.
- Make sure you can both see the book to follow the text.

### Step 2

- Begin reading aloud together with your child.
- If your child misreads a word, point to the word and say it.
- Ask your child to repeat it. Continue reading aloud together.

### Step 3

- When the child delivers the signal (i.e. a tap on the book), you follow along silently as your child continues reading aloud.

### Step 4

- If, while reading alone, your child either makes a mistake or hesitates for longer than five seconds, point to the word and pronounce it.
- Ask your child to repeat it.
- When they have repeated it correctly, begin reading aloud again together.

### Step 5

- Continue reading aloud with your child until they signal again that they want to read alone.
- If they make a mistake, return to Step 4.



## 05 Tips for a Paired Reading Approach

### Before Reading

Look at the book they have chosen and discuss why they chose it.

Read the blurb (the description at the back of the book) and think about what the book might be about.

Look at the cover art and what it shows.

If your child is reluctant to read aloud, read some of the story to them. Remember to make it a fun activity!

When you are sitting together remember to take your lead from what your child feels comfortable with. If you can sit close together that is great but this will not work for all children.

Questions you may want to ask:

- What do you think this book will be about?
- What type of book do you think it will be?
- What other books has the person who wrote this written?
- What do you think of the cover?
- Do you know anything about this topic?

### During Reading

If your child does not want to read independently that is okay, just encourage them to do so but there is no rush.

Some children will want to stop and ask questions during reading while others will want to keep going – either way is fine as long as they are reading and understanding what they are reading.

Allow them to move at their own pace. Some children naturally read more slowly. It is important that they understand what they are reading instead of just reading the words.

It is great if the child asks questions. Encourage them to think carefully about what they think the answer is, or use the internet to find an answer together.

Allow children time to work through the story in their head.

During reading, give them time to read the words and make sense of it in their head.

## 05 Tips for a Paired Reading Approach

### After Reading

Ask them for their opinion on what they have read.

Discuss the characters in the story and why they acted the way they did.

Think about what might have happened after the story ended.

Use the book as a springboard to stimulate discussions around feelings and emotions- why characters behaved or felt a certain way.

Questions to ask:

- How did you feel about the main character?
- What would you have done in that situation?
- How do you think the character felt at that time?
- How do you feel about the book?
- Would you recommend the book to a friend?
- What new information did you learn from this book?

### What if a child is reluctant to discuss the book?

- Encourage them to give the book a 'score' or to describe the book.
- Ask them simple questions and work up to more difficult questions which require them to give an opinion.
- Encourage children to use drawings and pictures to express how they feel about what they have read.
- Don't force them to discuss what they have read – allow them to read just for pleasure!
- Ask children to fill out a reading log with stickers for all the times they have read that week to show to their teachers or important people in their lives. This positive attention for reading is very reinforcing!
- Fill out the reading log provided for you alongside this handbook every week in order to track your progress.

## 05 Tips for a Paired Reading Approach

### Please remember...

It is often harder for adults to learn new things than it is for children! With Paired Reading, the hardest things for adults to get used to are:

- When your child gets a word **wrong**, you just tell them what the word says. Then your child says it after you. You don't make the child struggle and struggle, or 'break it up' or 'sound it out'.
- Being sure to **praise** your child throughout the session!
- If a child is not a confident reader, encourage them to read a **small section**, or allow them to read for a **shorter period** of time. Read some of the story to them to start off with.

Make it a **fun** and **nurturing** activity! Sitting together on the sofa with a drink will make reading a **special** time. While some children may wish to keep some **physical space** between yourselves whilst they read, others will want to feel **close** to you. Go with whatever your child feels **comfortable** with, what works for one child may not work for another. As you read together more and more you may find that things change in one way or another.

*While this handbook provides sources of support, and advice in terms of what to do if you experience difficulties, please seek and use your preferred source of support if you need it. Talking to someone, for example, a trusted friend or a family member can be a valuable source of support.*

### The Paired Reading Log

In order to keep track of what you have been reading please fill out the Paired Reading log at the end of every session. There is one for your child and one for you along with this handbook. Your child can use stickers (provided in their first parcel) to show which days they did Paired Reading and you can write about the book (or books) you read, how long the sessions were and the time of the reading. You can also write any comments about that day's reading.



## 06 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### What if my child doesn't want to read a certain book?

- Use your judgement when choosing books and asking questions. Some children may find it difficult to read books about certain things or on certain topics and some may not want to answer questions which relate to difficult times in their life. This is fine. You can help them choose books they will enjoy or have discussions which don't relate to topics difficult for them.
- When you are reading together some children will instinctively want to sit close and will enjoy the closeness reading together brings. However, some children may not feel comfortable with this. Take your cues from the child and ensure you are doing what is comfortable for them using a Safer Caring approach.
- Allow children to choose books on their own and build upon their natural curiosity. They should have choices in the process and should have an input into the books they choose and read.

### What if I do not notice any improvement?

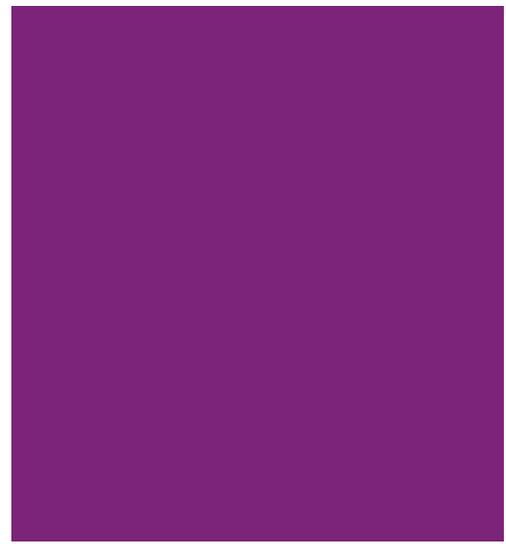
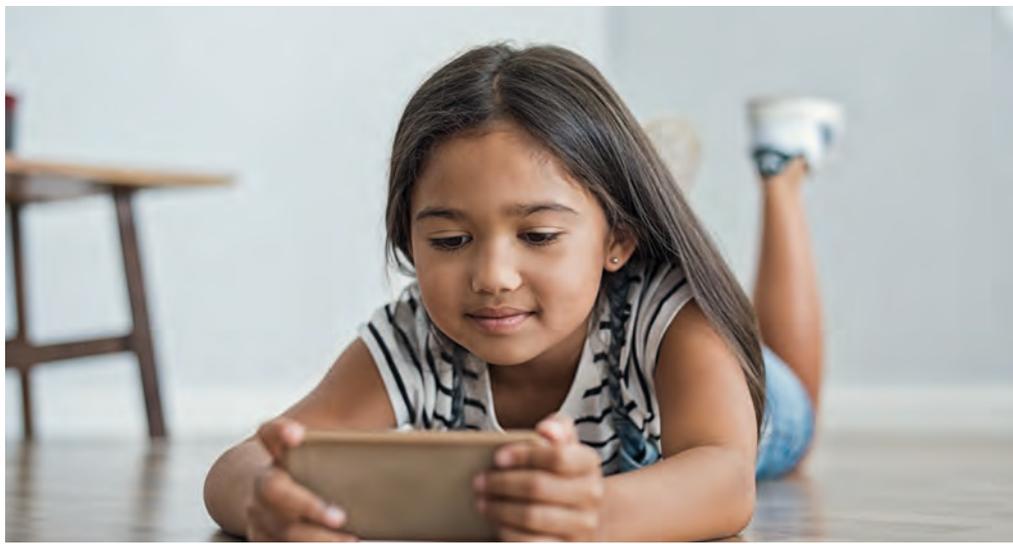
- Reading improves slowly - do not expect big changes overnight. However, Paired Reading has been found to improve reading more quickly than other reading programmes for children in care.
- Support development by recapping what has already happened.

### What if I am not a confident reader?

- Do not worry if you are not a natural reader or lack confidence. You do not need to be a regular reader to help children improve.
- Encourage children to read to other children.
- Be enthusiastic and try to model good reading practices.

### What if my child lacks confidence?

- Follow the stages above and encourage children to take part fully.
- Do not panic if children do not want to read every day. Setting up a routine and encouraging reading for pleasure will help children feel comfortable.
- Let children take ownership of the book parcels. The parcels are addressed to the children so they know the books are for them and their enjoyment.



Images: Cover: © iStock.com/skynesher  
P2, 5 and back cover (middle): © iStock.com/FatCamera  
P3: © iStock.com/millann  
P4: © iStock.com/alvarez  
P6, 14: © iStock.com/monkeybusinessimages  
P10: © iStock.com/Solovyova  
Back cover (top): © iStock.com/Ridofranz  
Back cover (bottom): © iStock.com/Tom Merton  
Design: Catherine Charnock Creative

