

From babies to children in their early years and all the way through to early teens, reading brings profound and wide-ranging benefits that can have a lifelong positive impact on children's lives.

This interactive resource summarises the evidence of how reading benefits children. You can click through for headline findings or more detailed analysis and evidence.

The benefits of reading



Children who read

Are more likely to overcome disadvantage caused by inequalities



Are more likely to be happier, healthier and experience better mental wellbeing and self-esteem



Are more likely to do better at school and make more progress across the curriculum



Are more likely to develop empathy and creativity



Children who read

Are more likely
to overcome
disadvantage
caused by
inequalities



They will experience better educational mobility and social mobility



Those growing up in poverty are less likely to remain in poverty as adults



They are more likely to overcome the barriers disadvantage presents throughout school



Evidence from selected studies on this topic

Read More



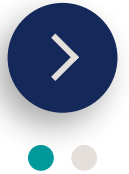
Children who read are more likely to overcome disadvantage caused by inequalities

They will experience better educational mobility and social mobility

- Reading for pleasure has the power to help mitigate socioeconomic inequalities¹ such as low family income and educational background.

Those growing up in poverty are less likely to remain in poverty as adults

- A child growing up in poverty who is read to at age five has a significantly higher chance of economic success in their 30s than their peers who are not read to.²



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Children who read are more likely to overcome disadvantage caused by inequalities

They are more likely to overcome the barriers disadvantage presents throughout school

- Shared reading has a unique and transformative impact on school attainment.³ Shared reading at home exerts a stronger influence on children's academic performance than parents' supervision, control of homework or attendance of school activities.⁴
- Disadvantaged children 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.⁵

A child who is an engaged reader provides themselves with self-generated learning opportunities that can be equivalent to several years of education.⁶

The impact of reading for pleasure is four times more powerful on progress in vocabulary, mathematics, and spelling at age 16, than that of parental education or parental socioeconomic status.⁷

Disadvantaged children aged 11-14 who read in their own time and take part in enriching activities at home are more likely to achieve three or more A-levels, compared to those not engaged in these activities.⁸



Reference Material >



Children who read

**Are more likely to
be happier, healthier
and experience
better mental
wellbeing and
self-esteem**



They feel more secure and develop deep bonds with parents and carers



They have better sleep and lead healthier lifestyles



They have a better foundation for healthy social-emotional development



They have better mental wellbeing and self esteem

**Evidence from selected
studies on this topic**

Read More



Children who read are more likely to be happier, healthier and experience better mental wellbeing and self-esteem

They feel more secure and develop deep bonds with parents/carers

- Shared reading in their early years supports the development of a child's attachment (how safe, secure and trusting they feel around their parent or carer). Attachment is essential to a child's future happiness, social competence, and ability to form meaningful connections.⁹
- Shared reading creates opportunities for joint attention and emotional closeness between a child and their parent or carer. The availability of the parent or carer¹⁰ during shared reading contributes to their sense of safety.¹¹

- Children with secure attachments are more likely to show enthusiasm and attention during shared reading, which motivates their parent/carer to read with them more frequently and reinforces their opportunity to feel safe, secure and protected.¹²
- It is the emotional aspects of shared reading (cuddling, smiling, singing, and laughing) that boosts a child's brain activities needed to forge secure attachment, not the parent or carer's reading skill.¹³



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Children who read are more likely to be happier, healthier and experience better mental wellbeing and self-esteem

They have better sleep and lead healthier lifestyles

- Children aged 3-5 who are read to at bedtime sleep longer.¹⁴ Sleep plays a crucial role in the development of children, impacting their growth¹⁵, motor skills¹⁶, attention, behavioural regulation, memory, mood, and resilience.¹⁷
- Children aged 11-14 who read for pleasure have healthier lifestyles. They are less likely to try cigarettes or alcohol and eat more fruit, irrespective of their family background.¹⁸

They have a better foundation for healthy social-emotional development

- Reading leads to children's improved social skills, attention, and fewer negative behaviours.¹⁹

- Shared reading increases parental warmth and reduces parental stress²⁰, enabling them to provide the sensitive and nurturing interactions their babies need to thrive.^{21, 22}

They have better mental wellbeing and self-esteem

- By providing escapism and relaxation, reading can act as a protective factor against the adversity some children face.²³
- Children who regularly read for pleasure have better self-esteem and lower levels of emotional problems (such as hyperactivity and inattention) than those who don't.²⁴
- Children who read have higher levels of mental wellbeing and happiness.²⁵



Children who read



They have better brain development, attention, and cognitive ability



They have better language development and literacy skills



They have better knowledge about the world and are more ready for learning



They make more progress across the curriculum

Are more likely to do better at school and make more progress across the curriculum



Evidence from selected studies on this topic

Read More 



Children who read are more likely to do better at school and make more progress across the curriculum

They have better brain development, attention and cognitive ability

- Children's brains experience the most growth in their first five years, when their brains are most responsive to their environment.²⁶ Stimulation from reading books, playing, talking, and singing with a parent/carer serves an important neurological function, enhancing cognitive, physical, social, and emotional growth.²⁷
- Shared reading among children from low-income backgrounds enhances healthy brain activation in language, attention, memory, self-control, and adjustment.²⁸
- Reading has a long-lasting positive benefit on brain development. An enriching learning environment in their early years can have an impact on a child four decades later.²⁹

They have better knowledge about the world and are more ready for learning

- Children who start reading early and continue reading throughout childhood have greater general knowledge. Reading helps to kickstart and sustain a child's ongoing learning journey.³⁰
- Reading enhances educational attainment. By feeding into cognitive skill development, developing forms of reasoning, complex concepts and imaginative richness, reading supports children to develop problem solving and their intellectual capacities.³¹



Children who read are more likely to do better at school and make more progress across the curriculum

They have better language development and literacy skills

- Shared reading provides unparalleled opportunities for a child's verbal interactions with their parent or carer. This cannot be replicated by other activities such as playing with toys, mealtimes or arts and crafts.³²
- Shared reading offers children exposure to rich and novel vocabulary in meaningful contexts.³³
- Shared reading facilitates children's word learning. Because the focus is entirely on the story, children do not have to extract new words from the stream of ongoing activities like they would in a free-play setting.³⁴
- There are profound benefits of shared reading for a child's language and literacy outcomes at the start of and throughout school. These include vocabulary size, oral language skills, print awareness, word identification and comprehension skills. These benefits are often found to be independent of family background.³⁵

- The impact of shared reading on literacy is unique. Among home learning activities such as parental help with reading and writing, playing music or learning the alphabet, only shared reading has a positive influence on literacy assessment at the end of Reception.³⁶
- The impact of shared reading on literacy is long lasting. Children who are read to frequently at age five are over half a school year ahead in reading performance at age 15, compared to those who are read to infrequently or not read to at all.³⁷

They make more progress across the curriculum

- Reading for pleasure unlocks academic success across the curriculum. A child who is read to at age 1-2 scores higher in reading, spelling, grammar, and numeracy skills at age 8-11.³⁸
- Reading for pleasure at the ages of 10 and 16 has a substantial effect on a child's cognitive scores in vocabulary, spelling, and mathematics at age 16.³⁹



Reference Material >



Children who read



They have more empathy



They are more creative and imaginative



Evidence from selected studies on this topic

Read More 

Are more likely to develop empathy and creativity



Children who read are more likely to develop empathy and creativity

They have more empathy

- Empathy refers to the ability to value, feel, understand and respect other people's experiences. Stories can offer children a realistic and authentic 'mirror' of their own lives and experiences and a 'window' to view the experiences of others.⁴⁰
- When children are emotionally involved in a story, they feel connected to and see their lives as part of the wider human experience.⁴¹ This can be transformative when it comes to developing their empathy.⁴²
- Children who read books that offer opportunities to empathise with the characters have increased levels of empathy, especially towards stigmatised groups.⁴³

They are more creative and imaginative

- Engagement with stories nurtures the disposition and skillset that are fundamental to a child's creativity throughout childhood. Stories with imaginative and magical elements enable children's minds to transcend their immediate context, freeing them from a fixed way of thinking.⁴⁴
- By constantly formulating and reformulating their expectations of what might happen in a story, young readers practice mental flexibility, an openness to new situations and interpretations and problem-solving.⁴⁵
- A story can also invite dramatisation, opening up children's imagination to give shape to, voice or the opportunity to act it out.⁴⁶
- Children who are read to at age three make greater progress in creative development at the end of Reception than those who are not.⁴⁷



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