

Children's Reading for Pleasure: Progress, Problems and Practical Solutions

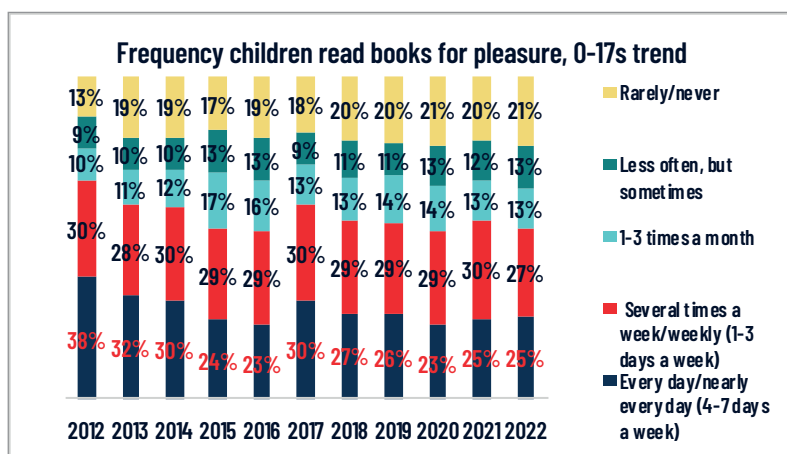
Headlines

- Year on year growth in reading for pleasure among 8-13s, driven more by girls than boys
- Year on year decline in reading for pleasure among 5-7s and 14-17s, driven more by boys than girls
- Reading to children at home remains low
- New data shows many parents unaware of the positive impact of their children reading for pleasure
- New data shows many parents unaware that reading aloud to children motivates them to read
- Low levels of reading to pre-schoolers, with boys being read to significantly less than girls
- Boys read for pleasure less than girls do
- Dads read to children less than mums do
- 'Dads Reading' research shows practical solutions to the problem

A mixed picture

At Farshore and HarperCollins Children's Books we are driven by our purpose 'to make every child a proud reader'. To that end, we invest in research to identify the barriers and the enablers to children's reading for pleasure and share what we know with organisations and individuals that can help make a difference.

The children's book market is buoyant and, perhaps reflecting this, we saw an increase in the proportion of 8-10-year-olds and 11-13-year-olds reading 'every day or nearly every day' in 2022 vs 2021. However, there was also a decline in reading among 5-7s and 14-17s, with a net result of no change year on year across the entire age span of 0-17s: just 25% read 'every day or nearly every day' for the pleasure of it (i.e., not for schoolwork), the same as in 2021 and down from 38% in 2012, when Farshore first started to track this data. Those who read infrequently (from '1-3 times a month' through to 'rarely or never') grew from 45% in 2021 to 47% in 2022, and up from 32% in 2012.



Source: Nielsen BookData's 'Understanding the Children's Book Consumer' 2012-2022

A large proportion of books are bought for a small proportion of children who are already engaged with reading. A fifth of children reportedly received 21 or more books and they accounted for two fifths of all books bought/received as gifts in 2022. Conversely, around half of children received 1-10 books and this accounted for a quarter of books bought/received as gifts in 2022.*



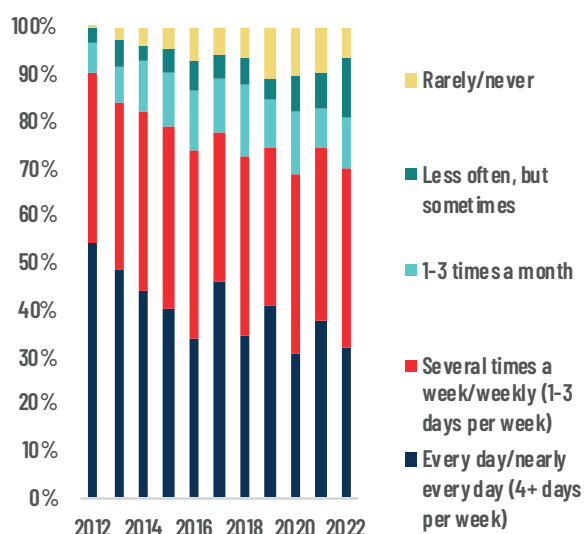
A book bought is not necessarily a book read. Farshore's research has found if a child is not a keen reader, simply receiving a book is not likely to be enough to prompt them to read it. In fact, we know from our 'Print Matters More' research project (2016-2017) that children are often put off by the books given to them if they haven't requested them – they are in part motivated to read by the opportunity to choose for themselves.

The community of children who are regular readers is small, despite the positive growth in reading among 8-13s, and we know multiple strategies are required to grow our audience and to increase reading. Key among them is reading aloud to children. Our research has consistently shown that children are enthused and motivated by being read to throughout childhood, well beyond the point at which they are capable of reading independently. Many children think of reading as little more than a lesson and homework, while reading aloud to them shows children that reading is a delight and something they can enjoy. Reading aloud changes the atmosphere around reading. This is true in both the home and school environments.

Reading for pleasure among specific age groups*

Among 5-17s, two age groups showed growth in reading in 2022 and two declined. Among all ages, boys read for enjoyment significantly less than girls do.

5-7s frequency read books for enjoyment



Among 5-7s: decline year on year

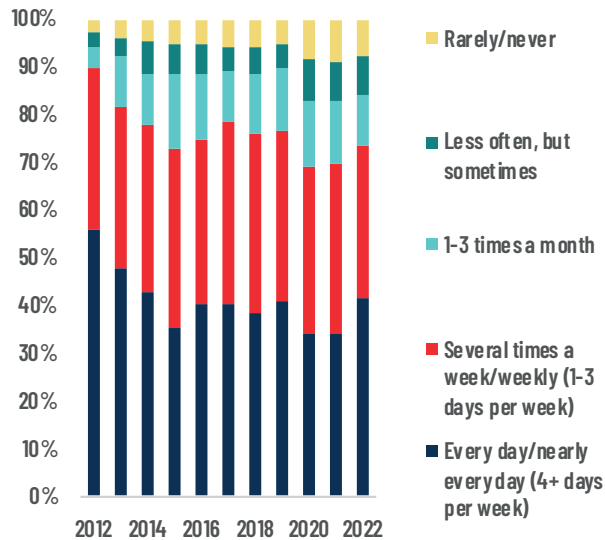
In 2022, 32% read 'every day or nearly every day', down from 38% the year before and 54% in 2012. The decline was steeper among boys than girls:

- In 2022, the 32% average comprised boys 29%/girls 34%
- In 2021, the 38% average comprised boys 37% /girls 39%

This is the age when children are learning to read. It can be difficult. Reading lessons and homework can put children off, so being read to for enjoyment matters; it shows children reading can be fun. However, fewer than half of 5-7-year-olds are read to 'every day or nearly every day' at home (46%).

- 33% of boys and 24% of girls spend 5-11+ hours a day on screens on a non-school day.
- A large proportion don't have the attention span for reading books: 49% of boys and 33% of girls. This jumped for boys year on year, up from 38% in 2021. For girls, the increase was smaller, up from 31%

8-10s frequency read books for enjoyment



Among 8-10s: growth year on year

In 2022 42% read 'every day or nearly every day', up from 34% in 2021. The growth was greater among girls:

- In 2022, the 42% average comprised boys 37%/girls 46%
- In 2021, the 34% average was the same for both genders

This is the age when children are becoming more competent, and most will be capable of reading alone. Many parents think of reading simply as a skill, so that once their child has mastered it little further attention is required. Thus, many parents cease reading to their child. Only 25% are read to 'every day or nearly every day' at home, and 43% are infrequently or never read to.

At this age and stage, the pull of social media and screen-based entertainment intensifies: 76% of boys and 65% of girls would rather watch TV, play video games or go online than read books.

Among 11-13s: growth year on year

In 2022 28% read 'every day or nearly every day', up from 24% in 2021. Girls read more than boys, but there was a similar rate of growth among boys and girls:

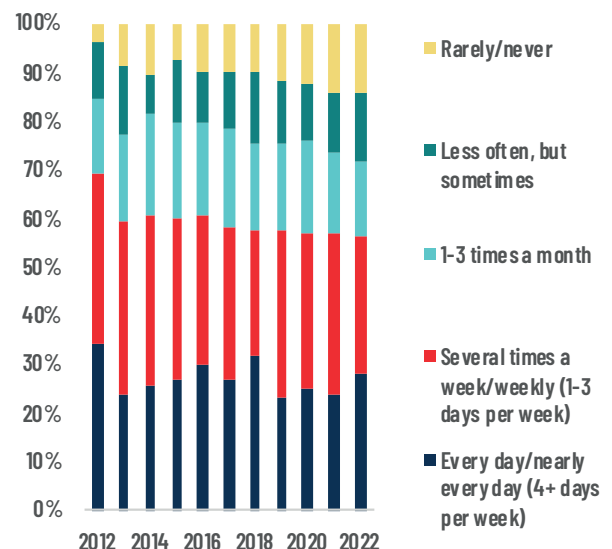
- In 2022, the 28% average comprised boys 24%/ girls 32%
- In 2021, the 24% average comprised boys 19% / girls 28%

At 11-13, more boys than girls 'rarely or never' read: the 15% average comprises 17% of boys and 12% of girls.

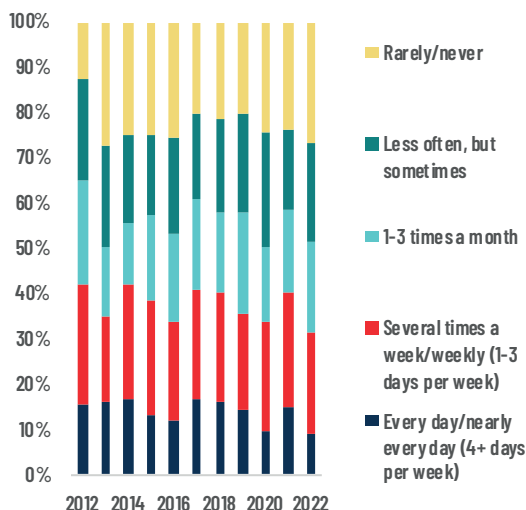
In these early secondary school years, just 10% of children are read to 'every day or nearly every day' at home, and 75% are infrequently or never read to.

On a non-school day, 46% use screens for 5 -11+ hours a day.

11-13s frequency read books for enjoyment



14-17s, frequency read books for enjoyment



Among 14-17s: decline year on year

In 2022, 9% read 'every day or nearly every day', down from 15% in 2021. The decline was steeper among boys than girls:

- In 2022, the 9% average comprised boys 5%/girls 14%
- In 2021, the 15% average comprised boys 13%/girls 17%

The 27% of 14-17s who say they 'rarely or never' read comprises 34% of boys and 19% of girls.

- 54% of boys and 59% of girls say they have too much homework to read books for fun.
- 81% of boys and 73% of girls say they would rather watch TV, play video games or go online than read books.

14-17s are the only age group who were reportedly bought fewer books as gifts in 2022 vs 2021.

Nielsen's 'Books and Consumers' 2022 shows 25% of readers of YA fiction were aged 13-17 years, 28% were aged 18-22 years and 14% were aged 23-27 years.

What is behind the latest reading data?

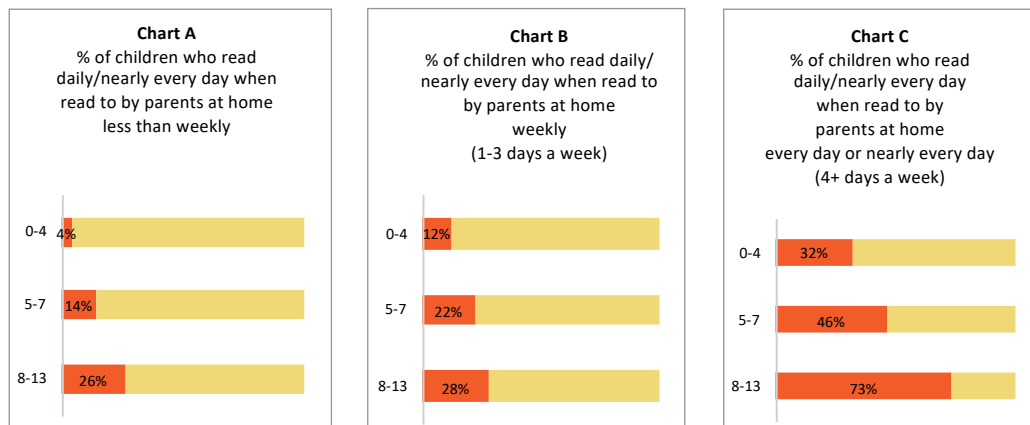
It is difficult to know precisely what is behind the findings. We know the enablers and the barriers to reading for pleasure and we know that the impact of reading aloud to children – or not – is incredibly significant. In our research with families, we have found the more often children are read to, the more likely they are to regularly read themselves, and vice versa. The charts below clearly show this relationship. Each chart shows the percentage of children, by age, who choose to read independently, ‘daily or nearly every day’ (for the 0-4s, ‘reading’ includes looking at and playing with books).

1. **Chart A shows what happens when they are read to infrequently at home (less than weekly).**

1. **Chart B when they are read to weekly at home.**

1. **Chart C when they are read to often at home (daily).**

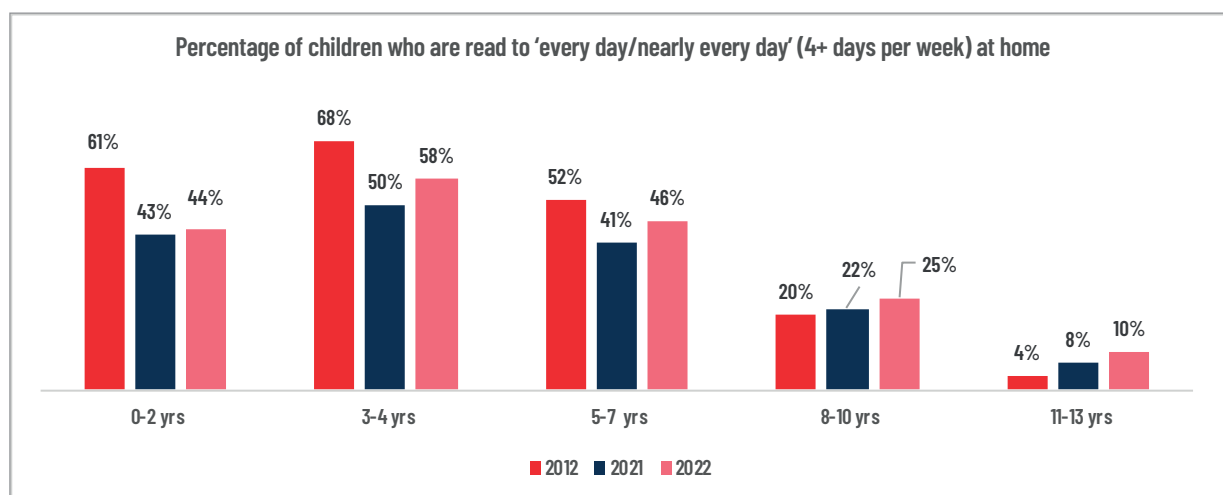
Few children in Chart A read daily themselves, whereas Chart C shows that children who are read to often are much more likely to read themselves on a daily basis – almost a half of 5-7s and almost three quarters of 8-13s.



Source: Nielsen BookData's 'Understanding the Children's Book Consumer' 2012 - 2022

In line with this, the two age groups that showed growth in reading for pleasure year-on-year did benefit from being read to more often at home over that time.

Chart D



Source: Nielsen BookData's 'Understanding the Children's Book Consumer' 2012 - 2022

- **8-10s who were read to ‘every day or nearly every day’ rose to 25% from 22% in 2021**
 - **Concurrently, ‘rarely or never’ read to dropped to 15% in 2022 from 23% in 2021**
- **11-13s who were read to ‘every day or nearly every day’ rose to 10% in 2022 from 8% in 2021.**
 - **Concurrently, ‘rarely or never’ read to dropped to 41% in 2022 from 45% in 2021**

This was not the pattern among 5-7s, who showed a decline in reading and yet were also read to more often at home. However, other significant factors do correlate with the decline in reading among boys 5-7: there was a striking increase in not having the attention span for reading books (up from 38% in 2021 to 49% in 2022); in not finding reading easy (up from 35% in 2021 to 45% in 2022); and in them spending 5-6 hours a day on all types of screens on a non-school day (up from 13% in 2021 to 18% in 2022).

One possible factor behind the improvements could be schools responding to the Department for Education’s 2021 ‘Reading Framework’, which focuses more on reading for pleasure, and to Ofsted looking for evidence of reading aloud to children. Encouraging reading for pleasure in the school environment requires something different from the conventional approach of delivering a subject lesson. Farshore’s Reading for Pleasure Awards, in collaboration with The Open University and the UK Literacy Association, recognise teachers who are encouraging reading for pleasure with their different, exciting and creative strategies in the school environment.

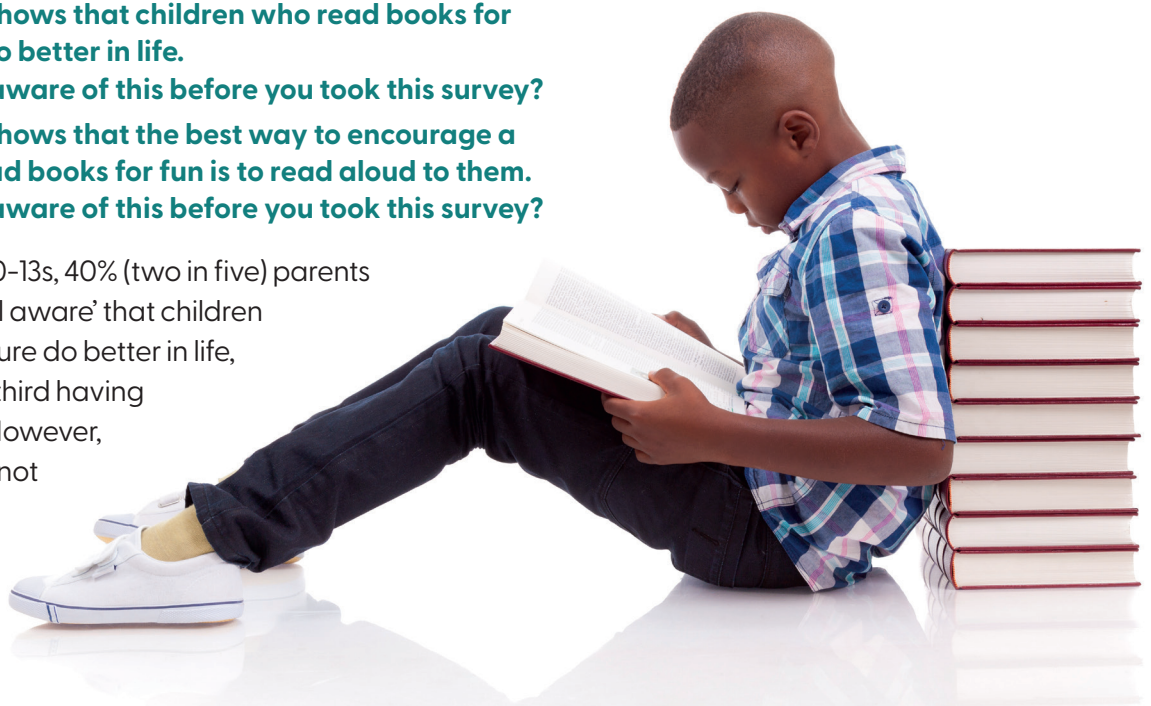
Reading for pleasure: there is a big problem with awareness

While there is high awareness among publishers, educators, charities and stakeholders associated with children’s books that reading for pleasure is a key to children’s attainment and wellbeing, it is highly significant that many parents are unaware. Parents are also widely unaware that reading aloud to children encourages them to choose to read for pleasure themselves.

In our new research we gave parents two statements to read and asked them to respond:

- **Research shows that children who read books for pleasure do better in life.**
Were you aware of this before you took this survey?
- **Research shows that the best way to encourage a child to read books for fun is to read aloud to them.**
Were you aware of this before you took this survey?

Among parents of 0-13s, 40% (two in five) parents said they were ‘well aware’ that children who read for pleasure do better in life, with an additional third having ‘some’ idea of this. However, 15% said they were not very aware and one in eight (12%) said they had no idea about this. When the data is



analysed according to the child's weight of reading, we can see that awareness levels are very different. For example, among parents of 5-10s who are light/non-readers, 41% were either not very aware or had no idea. (Chart E)

There is similar lack of awareness among parents of 0-13s that reading aloud to children encourages them to read for pleasure. Overall, 45% said they were 'well aware' with an additional third having 'some' idea. 13% were 'not very aware' and one in ten said they had 'no idea' about this. Again, there is significant difference according to the child's weight of reading. For example, among parents of light/non-reading 5-10s, 35% were 'well aware', much lower than parents of heavy/medium reading 5-10s (50%). (Chart F)

Chart E

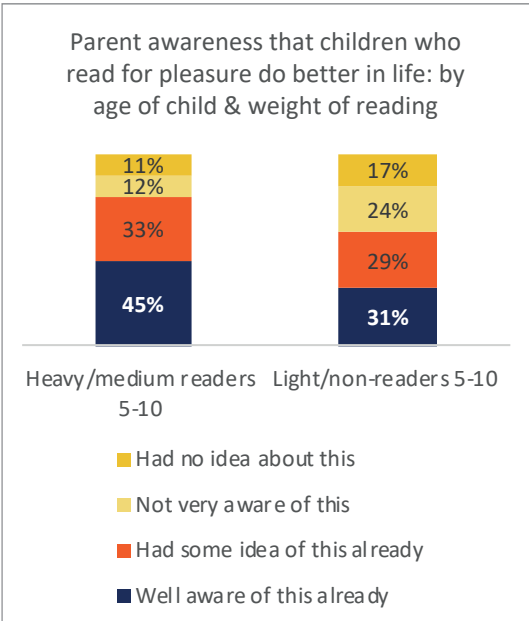
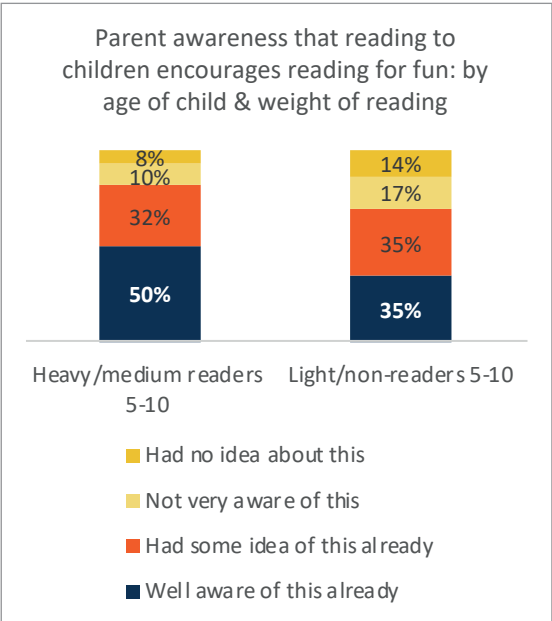


Chart F



Source: Farshore/Nielsen BookData's 'Understanding the Children's Book Consumer' 2022
Heavy/medium = read weekly, for at least 15 mins per day
Light/non = read less than weekly or for less than 15 mins per day

Parents of 0-10s who do not read to their child were asked why they don't: 19% said their child is too old to be read to and 22% said their child prefers to do other things before bed.

The implications of not reading aloud to children

We've seen that when children are read to they are much more likely to read themselves, and that many parents don't know this. Not enough parents read regularly to their child, and since 2012 the incidence of reading to children 0-7 is down a lot (as shown in Chart D). Fewer than half of 5-7s and a quarter of 8-10s are read to 'every day or nearly every day'. From the age of 5+ there is little difference in the incidence of parents reading to boys and to girls. However, at pre-school age boys are much less likely to be read to than girls. Our focus groups with parents have found that some believe boys are less interested in books and reading than girls.

Among 0-2s, the average of 44% being read to 'every day or nearly every day' in 2022 comprised:

- **Boys 39%**
- **Girls 50%**

Among 3-4s, the average of 58% being read to 'every day/nearly every day' in 2022 comprised:

- **Boys 49%**
- **Girls 69%**

There are serious implications arising from low levels of reading to pre-schoolers:

1. Reduced language development

- Reading to young children builds vocabulary and helps them process language.
- Language development in pre-school years is related to later reading skills and school success in general.
- At five years old, a child's language is the **single most important factor** in predicting literacy at the age of 11.

2. Reduced enthusiasm and engagement plays out as children grow up

- The desire and motivation to read independently is not fostered.
- Reading is not normalised and is not a significant part of home life.

3. Boys at disadvantage

- Pre-school boys are being read to less often than pre-school girls. Many boys are therefore starting school at a disadvantage.

4. Reduced life chances

- PISA data consistently shows that engagement in reading is strongly correlated with reading performance and is a mediator of gender or socio-economic status.

5. Risk of fewer future readers and book buyers

- Young children who are not raised to become readers may not read or buy books as adults.

Boys and dads: tracing the patterns

We have seen that boys read for enjoyment less than girls do. This tracks through to adulthood even among adults who do buy books: 77% of females describe themselves as passionate about books and reading vs 63% of males.[#] Our research has found that fewer dads than mums say they were brought

up with the idea that reading is a pleasure, and fewer were read to often as a child. Children are read to less often by their dads than by their mums. Significant proportions of both girls and boys miss out on being read to by their dads but, for boys, the lack of a male reading role model has a profound impact on their own interest in and motivation to read for pleasure.

In Chart G, below, we can trace the interplay between the reading experiences of parents and children, dads and boys. In the left column we can follow a route to children's low levels of reading for pleasure, while in the right column we can see data that goes some way in explanation.

Chart G: The interplay between boys' and dads' experiences of reading

FINDING	EVIDENCE
<p>There is a clear link between a parent's own reading experience as a child and their child's propensity to read.</p> <p>Fewer dads than mums grew up with the idea that reading is a pleasure, and fewer dads than mums grew up being read to often.</p>	<p>64% of children who are heavy readers have parents who were brought up with the idea that reading is a pleasure**</p> <p><i>It's very true that I was brought up with the idea that reading is a pleasure: dads 46%, mums 60%**</i></p> <p><i>It's very true that my parents often read to me as a child: dads 36%, mums 42%**</i></p>
<p>Low awareness among all parents of the importance of raising a reader on child's life outcomes.</p> <p>Dads much less aware than mums.</p>	<p><i>Research shows that children who read books for pleasure do better in life. Were you aware of this before you took this survey?</i></p> <p>Well aware: dads 35%, mums 42%**</p>
<p>Low awareness among all parents that the best way to encourage a child to read books for fun is to read aloud to them.</p> <p>Dads much less aware than mums</p>	<p><i>Research shows that the best way to encourage a child to read books for fun is to read aloud to them. Were you aware of this before you took this survey?</i></p> <p>Well aware: dads 36%, mums 48%**</p>
<p>Reading to children at home by their parents is in long term decline.</p> <p>Dads read aloud to their children less than mums do, in particular at pre-school age (trended since 2012)</p>	<p>35% of 0-13s were read to 'every day or nearly every day' (4+ days per week) by their parents (41% in 2012)*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 29% were read to 'every day or nearly every day' by their dads and 36% by their mums. • Among 0-4s, it was 35% and 54% respectively*
<p>In the pre-school years, boys are read to less than girls.</p> <p>Boys start their reading journey and school at a disadvantage.</p>	<p>Among 0-4s, 43% of boys and 57% of girls are read to every day/nearly every day*</p>
<p>Children's reading for pleasure is in long-term decline.</p>	<p>25% of 0-17s read books for pleasure 'every day or nearly every day' (4+ days per week) (38% in 2012)*</p> <p>21% of 0-17s 'rarely or never read' (13% in 2012)*</p> <p>Among children who never read books, 47% of their parents say they were not really read to as a child**</p>
<p>Boys read for pleasure less than girls do.</p>	<p>Among 0-13s, 27% of boys and 32% of girls read books for pleasure 'every day or nearly every day'*</p> <p>Among 14-17s, 26% of boys and 38% of girls read books for pleasure at least weekly*</p>

Dads Reading research

For several of Farshore's research projects we have used an intervention approach to great effect: we task parents with making a commitment to read to their child daily for a period of time. However, we have always had trouble recruiting dads to these studies. So, we decided to tackle this head on and recruit only dads for a 'Dads Reading' study, in collaboration with **dadsnet**, that ran in October-November 2022.



Dads are, typically, less likely to read to their children than mums are. If we could follow dads for six weeks and hear about their experience of reading daily to their children, what could we learn? How significant could the impact of a dad reading aloud be on his children's reading?

Who?

33 dads who did not read daily to their child
49 children aged between (27 boys, 22 girls)

- 2-4: 19 children
- 5-7: 15 children
- 8-12: 15 children

19 dads had one child in the study
12 dads had two children in the study
2 dads had three children in the study

When?

October/November 2022

Dads who did not currently read daily to their child were asked to read to their child every day for six weeks.

Their child chose twelve books from the Farshore website, which were posted to them weekly, two at a time. Dads were told that what they read to their child *must* be the child's choice, whether it be a favourite they already had or one of the new books.

Questions were asked at the beginning of the project and repeated at the end. Fourteen of the 33 dads had more than one child in the study, and they responded to the questions in relation to each of their children. Thus if they had 3 children they made a separate response for each child.

Dads were asked to keep a diary of the experience.

Six dads also kept a video diary. You can view video extracts at www.farshore.co.uk

Findings

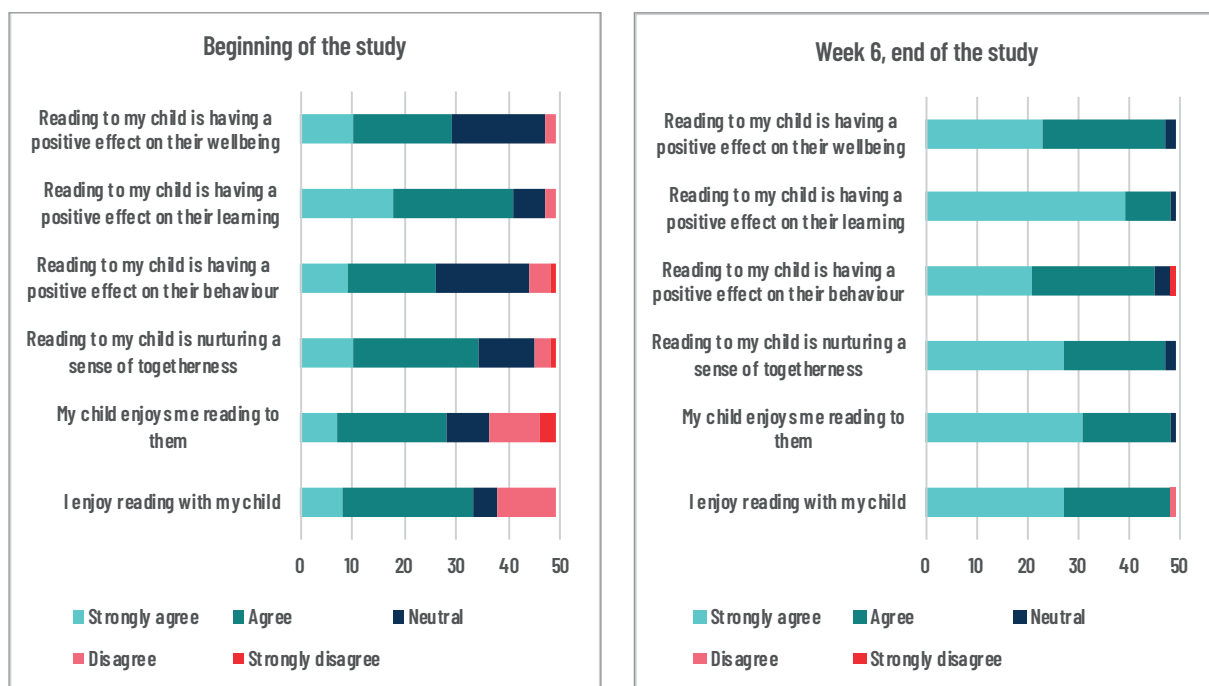
Dads reported that reading to their children over six weeks had positive outcomes, with increases in enjoyment, wellbeing, learning, feelings of togetherness and behaviour. The findings were consistent by age and gender of the child.

In line with previous Farshore research showing that wide and free choice of reading material promotes children's reading, the dads' diaries revealed the positive effect of children being able to select their own books: this gave the children a valued sense of agency and control and, hence, enjoyment.

With busy family life and technology often competing for adults' attention just as much as for children's attention, quality screen-free time can be in short supply. Research from Beano Brain 2021 found 70% of children wish their parents would spend less time on their mobile devices and 62% want to spend more time with their family. Our Dads Reading study shows how easy it is to achieve this through establishing a reading routine.

Comparison of dads' responses in relation to each child in the study (33 dads and 49 children)

Dads responded about individual children, so if they had two or three children, responses may be different for each



Wellbeing

After six weeks of reading aloud to the children, dads recorded a positive effect on wellbeing for 47 of the 49 children in the study. At the start, this stood at 29 children.

For a child being read to is deeply reassuring and loving experience. It's affirming, since the subliminal message is 'I'm giving you my time because you matter to me'. Being read to builds self-esteem. Stories about feelings help children understand their own feelings, even if they cannot express them.

It's amazing how reading together can improve both parent and child's mood.

Jim, dad to E (girl, 9) and S (boy, 5)

Reading is proving to be a great way to relax on long, tiring days. It gets him in the right frame of mind for sleep.

Jim, dad to S (boy, 5)

We were both tired and grouchy, so initially not keen to read. But when we did it was good and we both felt better afterwards. The reading together diffused some tension!

Chris, dad to L (boy, 5)

My daughter talked about events in her life by a comparison with a story from one of the books.

Henry, dad to O (girl, 10)

Behaviour

At the end of the project, 38 dads to 45 children felt it had had a positive impact on their child's behaviour, an increase from 21 dads to 26 children at the start. The change in children's behaviour may have been because of their enhanced sense of wellbeing, or of having more and regular attention from their dads.

His behaviour was challenging today, but 20 mins reading was a really good way for some positive time together.

Chris, dad to E (boy, 4)

Dad, Jack, wrote of how the behaviour of his son, J (4), had been challenging, but after he started reading regularly to him, this changed:

The arguing has stopped, or at least slowed right down, and he is just doing things when he is asked. I wonder if this is because we are committing the time to reading together, uninterrupted focus on quality time between him and his parents? J made his bed, got dressed and brushed his teeth this morning, all without being asked. A first?! Not sure if it's linked to reading per se, but his behaviour since we started this study has definitely improved, so it felt relevant to note it here.

At the end of the project, Jack looked back through his diary and reflected:

We started the next Flat Stanley book - we have so many ones he wants to read now, Charlotte's Web, Monster Hunting, etc. but this is the one he chose this time, so on we go! Love that he is involved in choosing them though, it really has become such a lovely part of the day now, and with his behaviour being so much nicer (little angel child now, worlds apart from where we started) it makes it easier to look forward to this time too - you know you won't have had an afternoon after school of battles. Flicking back through some of the entries here has been nice too, remembering books that we have read together... and now I'm looking forward to reading some of these to his brother, H (age 3) too when he is a little bit older.

Togetherness

By the end of the project, dads reported that reading nurtured a sense of togetherness for them and 47 of the children. Again there was a big jump in strong agreement, up from ten to 27 children. Dads said reading aloud was a way for them to share special moments and nurture their child. Bonding over a story strengthens family ties, as does laughing together. Funny books were often highlighted in the diaries. Some dads mentioned that their child's mummy bonds were very strong and that the dad-and-child shared reading time created a lovely and precious intimacy.

We read together a few nights this week. We enjoyed having a laugh over a funny book. It's nice to have a laugh together.

Iain, dad to J (boy, 12)

I feel that reading is bringing us closer as he can sometimes gravitate towards his mother over me.

Patrick, dad to O (boy, 2)

“We’ve enjoyed this. It brought us together, bonded us and gave us a world of things to talk about and debate.”

Jim, dad to S (boy, 5)

“It’s been a great study to be part of and we’ll definitely keep it up. Certainly feel closer to my daughter than before.”

Jim, dad to E (girl, 9)

“A lovely, calm reading session this evening, which felt more intimate, as we had snuggled up in bed. We only read for a bit, but G told me about his day and I told him about mine. We rarely get any time to do this, so it was very special.”

Gareth, dad to G (boy, 9)

“We read a joke book together as a family tonight, telling lots of jokes round the table. It was nice for the family to spend time together.”

Iain, dad to F (boy, 6)

“We moved onto another book tonight, which we both immediately enjoyed. She read some and then I took over. A real sense of togetherness and shared adventure.”

Robert, dad to J (girl, 8)

“My son is not especially cuddly, but reading is one time he will snuggle in, which I love!”

Chris, dad to L (boy, 5)

Child’s enjoyment

The children loved being read to. At the start of the project, 23 dads to 28 children reported agreement that their child enjoyed being read to. This had increased to 39 dads to 48 children at the end of the project. (Strong agreement moved from 7 to 31 children over the six weeks.) They enjoyed the attention, being close, the cuddles and the story. They loved being read to ‘in the moment’ and they also delighted in knowing reading would happen later that day, tomorrow and every day – they really enjoyed the anticipation. There was a thrill and real joy in expectation. Most children enjoy routine and predictability and the reading project embedded reading as ‘what we do together’, dad and child. It also gave children a sense of entitlement to reading time.

“I was short of time so could only do a short read. He was disappointed and made me promise extra time tomorrow!”

Chris, dad to L (boy, 5)

“After reading regularly for 4 weeks, books are now a very core part of his day and playing. He brings me or his mother books for us to read to him.”

Patrick, dad to O (boy, 2)

“We read 3 stories a night before bed – this trial has been really helpful for me seeing S enjoying new stories and I’ve noticed also he has started to ask more to go the library for more books.”

Simon, dad to S (boy, 3)

“My son is enjoying the regular reading each night and loves the attention he receives!”

Iain, dad to F (boy, 5)

“Read a small book through twice before he wanted to do something else. He is bringing me books on a regular basis now and they are in an accessible place for him to get them off the shelf. He will often carry books around the house!”

Patrick, dad to O (boy, 2)

“We enjoy spending the time together, sharing the stories and having fun.”

Peter, dad to T (boy, 9) and P (girl, 6)

“A bit of a discussion tonight about how many books we were going to read and we settled on four, then she instead chose the Winnie-the-Pooh collection instead, so we agreed on 12 pages. She was much better with this book this time and perhaps with all the reading practice I have had I was more confident with it.”

Christopher, dad to E (girl, 4)

“My son loves that we have a set time put aside to read together every night before he goes to bed. It has helped reduce his screen time and increased his appreciation for books and stories.”

Ryan, dad to Z (boy, 2)

“Found the boys reading books about space together, completely independent of me or my wife. Really lovely to see them engage with books over their toys or various screens or anything. They were even telling each other all about what they found in their books which was very sweet.”

Jack, dad to J and H (boys 4 and 3)

“T has really enjoyed the Lemony Snicket book and we have been reading a bit together and then he has also been reading it to himself. I am pleasantly surprised that he has got into this book as I wasn't too sure if he would.”

Liam, dad to T (boy, 7)

Learning

Learning was the area of greatest increase to 'strongly agree'. At the start, 11 dads to 18 children strongly agreed reading to their child was having a positive effect on their learning. By the end of six weeks, 26 dads to 39 of the children felt this. Reading aloud to children is a painless way for them to learn because they experience it as enjoyment. When there is no pressure, children often choose to share the reading and enjoy taking it in turns with their parent. Almost by stealth, children's own reading improved, as did their attainment at school.

“Big praise from school today for her joining in with reading. She told the class that she's been reading with Daddy and Grandad, it's impressed her teachers. -and- Ended [sic] the week on a high with reading award at school, shows that something is working right!”

Joe, dad to D (girl, 6)

“V has really progressed in her reading and is a keen reader. She takes great pride in her reading and getting the word right. Bedtimes are definitely calmer when we read vs. not reading.”

Gareth, dad to V (girl, 6)

“J read to me again. Her reading out loud has become really good – I wish I'd recorded some of her earlier efforts for comparison.”

Robert, dad to J (girl, 8)

“She has really enjoyed the different stories. She's been improving in her word memory and spelling tests at school have had really good marks. I've really enjoyed watching her development.”

Simon, dad to E (girl, 7)

“I think reading with her is helping her with her spelling/vocab as when she reads alone, there is no one to help with tricky words. Here, we can discuss them and it makes learning them easier.”

Jim, dad to E (girl, 9)

“G has read to me this evening, which I have found very calming, and I nearly fell asleep whilst listening to him. He is taking great pride in his reading and his fluency has improved over the course of the past 6 weeks.”

Gareth, dad to G (boy, 9)

“H has a new favourite book type – educational lift the flap books. He is choosing one most nights, alongside a more story based one. They are longer than the others, but the fact that he is engaged, it’s informative, and we are doing it together make the length a bit of a non-factor. I enjoy seeing what he remembers or teaching him new things (we don’t always do ALL of the flaps as there are quite a lot lol, but it means there’s normally a new bit of info for him).”

Jack, dad to H (boy, 3)

“Asked for a new book as soon as she got home from school! She’s become book-obsessed. Apparently she has been making up stories at school too, and drawing pictures.”

Jamie, dad to F (girl, 3)

Dads’ enjoyment

The experience created much enjoyment for dads, too. By the end of six weeks, all, bar one, of the dads, said they enjoyed reading to their children. It gave them the opportunity to be close, to have a cuddle, relax and enjoy their children. Dads loved feeling appreciated, seeing how happy it made their children and how positively it affected them.

“Kids read to me. Just closed my eyes and took it all in. Was fantastic.”

Peter, dad to T (boy, 9) and P (girl, 6)

“I love that every night the boys always ask me “are you reading to us tonight?””

Brad, dad to boys L (11) and C (8)

“My daughter is really enjoying Amari and we are getting to the end. She’s excited to start a new story, too. It’s really enjoyable to see how engaged she is.”

Simon, dad to E (girl, 7)

“My daughter is getting very used to the scheduled “daddy” reading time. Great stuff!”

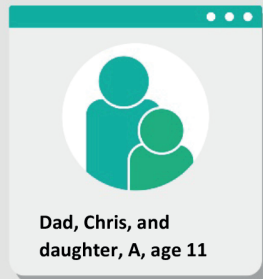
Henry, dad to O (girl, 10)

Case studies

Below are two detailed case studies revealing some of the ways in which the project impacted families:



Case study. This dad and daughter experience shows the positive impact of sharing time reading and of the daughter having wide and free choice of books. The dad read to his daughter (age 11), and they also read independently while together. The daughter responded very enthusiastically and was motivated to read independently.



Week 1

Day 1 A loved choosing her own books - she was really engaged when we sat with the iPad and went through what the options were. It felt like she had a sense of ownership over what she reads and choosing from the school library makes her feel restricted.

Day 5 She was remarkably excited when the first delivery arrived. For someone who can read but doesn't do a lot of it off her own accord, getting the 2 books through the post made a big impact on her desire to pick up a book and read it. She started reading straight away!

Week 2

Day 1 She's finished one of the new books, apparently reading it at school in free reading which is great because she's never talked about free reading at school before.

Day 3 Tonight was great. I read to A for over 20 minutes which for us is a long time! I read most of it which I enjoyed but we stopped every now and again to try and guess what was going to happen or laugh at the funny moments etc.

She definitely responds well to choosing her own book, waiting for it to be delivered and then get stuck in. She's found a new author she really likes, Nat Luurtsema. She has been reading Opie Jones & the hero slug all week, on her own, every night.

Week 4

Day 2 I grabbed my own book and just sat with her, so we read together but different books

Day 7 Well... she finished Opie Jones



Week 5

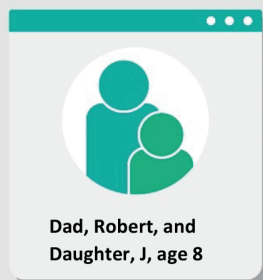
Day 7 We have read more together this week. I've enjoyed it but I've worked hard with expression, voices etc to keep her interested.

Week 6

Day 3 This is the last week of the study and I must say that the experience has been very positive. We've raised the profile of reading with A. She's devoured 3 books entirely herself from the 12 we had delivered and found 2 new authors that she really likes. She's asked for more for Xmas. There's no doubt in my mind that the time we read together is good for our bonding, it's great for her learning. Her term at school has been very positive.



Case study. These diary entries, from the second half of the project, show the impact of dad and daughter (age 8) reading together daily. There were significant improvements in the daughter's reading ability. Other benefits included a sense of togetherness, shared interests and conversations, and the daughter's comfort in being read to. They agreed to continue reading together after the project ended.



Week 4

Day 1 J read to me today. Her reading aloud is way more fluent now. Some words stop her in her tracks but it's a good chance to discuss them and learn.

Day 2 I read this time. She was way more interested in the ceremony of it than the content tonight!

Day 3 The story is engaging and provoking conversation between us - both during storytime and at other points during the day.

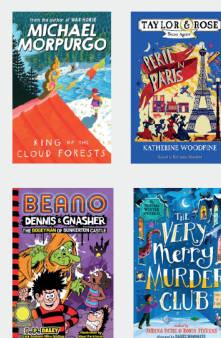
Week 5

Day 5 The book we are now on is more of a comic book, which J loves. It's interesting reading something that's a totally different style of writing. It makes her reading aloud much more expressive, probably because comics are often more 'active' in their stories.

Day 6 J was tired so I read to her. This seems to be the pattern - she is comforted by the act and sometimes doesn't seem to necessarily need to follow the story.

Day 7 Quick read to J whilst she was in the bath.

Some books chosen by J



Week 6

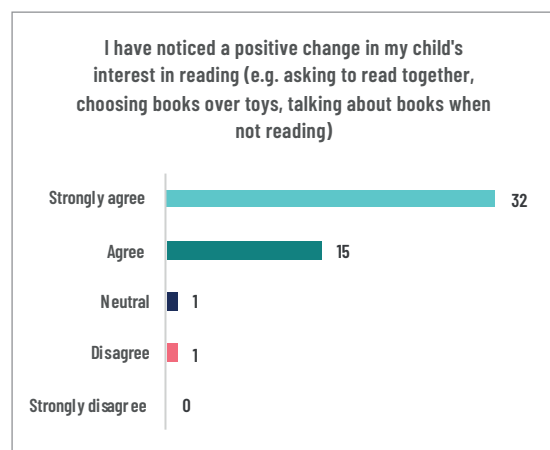
Day 1 Reading together now feels very 'normal'. It's been over 5 weeks now. I think we have spent more 1 on 1 time together as a result of this study.

Day 4 J read to me again. Her reading out loud has become really good - I wish I'd recorded some of her earlier efforts for comparison.

Day 5 We moved onto another book tonight, which we both immediately enjoyed. She read some and then I took over. A real sense of togetherness and shared adventure.

Day 7 J read to me for a good 15 minutes today. Her reading was so good. I told her it was the last day of the study and we both agreed we should carry it on.

At the end of the study, 35 dads to 47 of the 49 children in the study said that there had been a positive change in the child's interest in reading.



Source: Farshore 'Dads Reading' study, October/November 2022

“It was nice to have a focussed reading time each day with J through the study. Too often before I would be straight into the routine of bedtime and this didn't always include reading time. We now make sure that we have this time as we both enjoy it and it is a great part of our relationship!!”

Marco, dad to J (boy, 8)

“It has become a time of calmness, of bonding & a time when they both tell me about their day.”

Gareth, dad to G (boy, 9) and V (girl, 6)

“It really has brought us closer together, we are now in a good routine of reading with each other. My child's reading skills have improved significantly since the start of this study.”

Frank, dad to H (girl, 8)

“Love it. Such an amazing bonding moment between myself and the boys. We all love it and it's a tradition I hope they take forward with them when / if they become fathers.”

Brad, dad to boys L (11) and C (8)

“My kids are SO into reading now, we have been reading loads of Roald Dahl and it's captured their imaginations no end. It's fantastic to have this activity we all like doing together!”

Jack, dad to J (boy, 4) and H (boy, 3)

Conclusion

The project's key success factor was gaining the dads' commitment to read aloud every day. Occasionally, they missed it but the intent was there; this meant they would do it the next day if they could not fit it in. So, their children experienced a reading routine and loved it. They expected to be read to and reminded their dad to do it. It became a virtuous circle, a recurring cycle, better each time. It was a joint activity loved by dads and children.

“As has become normal he is keen to read with me. I have lots to do today, but I am also enjoying this, and his insistence was the prompt I needed to make the time! It was lovely.”

Chris, dad to L (boy, 5)

Practical solutions

There is a serious problem around reading for pleasure, notwithstanding the increases in reading ‘every day or nearly every day’ among 8-11s (on average up to 35% in 2022, from 29% in 2021). Even with the increase, just over one third read for enjoyment on 4+ days per week. This means, quite obviously, that around two thirds read less than that or not at all.*

Data shows many parents were not brought up with the idea that reading is a pleasure and were not read to a great deal themselves. Consequently, they are less likely to read to their own children. Data also shows an enormous lack of knowledge among parents about children’s reading for pleasure: its impact on life chances and the importance that children are read to.

Home environment

If parents didn’t have a positive experience of reading as a child, it’s very clear that generational cycles need to be broken. Farshore has proved that the simplest of solutions works incredibly well:

- **Engage parents in a trial period of reading to their child.**
- **It is important to make it a daily commitment.**
- **Ensure the child has free choice of what is read to them.**

Knowledge gap

Getting the attention of parents can be challenging. With something as fundamental as reading, we’ve found most parents already have their position on it. The opportunity is to show them a different way.

- **We have launched a dads’ reading campaign in collaboration with Booktrust, called ‘Dads Make Stories Magic’.**
- **With the support of our authors and celebrities, we hope to gain the attention of dads and father figures with a challenge and advice.**



School environment

Many children think of reading as little more than a lesson and homework and so the school environment is key for dismantling this barrier. Reading for pleasure is not a subject, it can’t be taught in a conventional sense because pleasure in reading is an outcome. Thus, engaging children with the joys of reading is not the same as ‘delivering’ a lesson. Farshore’s Reading for Pleasure Awards, in association with The Open University and The UK Literacy Association, seeks to raise the profile of best practice in encouraging children to read for enjoyment.

Wide and free choice of books is a key motivator for children, and the importance of a well-stocked school library is essential if we are to engage children with reading for pleasure.

Reading aloud to children shows them that reading is a delight and something they can enjoy. Reading aloud changes the atmosphere around reading. We believe that schools can, in part, plug the gap where parents are not reading regularly to their children.

- **Our pilot study ‘Stories and Choices’ in 2018, where in one school 120 children experienced being read to for enjoyment, made a great impact on children’s reading, motivation and enthusiasm, as well as their comprehension.**
(Details of this study can be found at www.farshore.co.uk)

- During the spring term 2023 we ran a new research project “Storytime in School” at 20 primary schools with circa 3000 children to further test the impact of reading to children daily. We will be releasing findings in Autumn 2023. Interest in hearing the findings can be registered at: farshoreinsight@harpercollins.co.uk

Data sources

*Nielsen Bookdata's 'Understanding the Children's Book Consumer' 2022

**Farshore/Nielsen BookData 2022 (Farshore's proprietary data)

Nielsen BookData's 'Books and Consumers' 2022

