

Reading Partners

Building confidence and skills in reading
for 7 to 11 year olds

Volunteer Handbook

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Purpose of the programme

The old adage that 'practice makes perfect' is true of any activity, but it's also true that most people will make more progress, more rapidly, if there's someone there to encourage and help them.

This is the foundation of the Reading Partners programme.

To help primary school children aged between 7 and 11 (Key Stage 2 in the National Curriculum) improve literacy skills by giving them time to practice their reading on a one to one basis with a volunteer adult.

That doesn't mean you are substituting for the role of teacher or parent. Rather that you are complementing both of them through your time, life experiences and objectivity.

What makes a good Reading Partner?

If you relate well to children, care about their education, are a good listener, have patience and are willing to commit one lunch hour of your time per week on a **regular** basis, you already have what it takes.

There is no single right way to teach reading; nor do all children learn in the same way. It's because children's needs are so varied that the Reading Partners programme can make such a difference.

For most children aged between 7 and 11, their only real experience of personal relationships with adults will have been with family members and their teachers.

Demonstrating that an adult who is unconnected to family or formal teaching is interested in them and their learning, within the safe environment of school, can give a huge boost to a child's confidence and self-esteem, quite apart from the benefits of reading practice.

You will also be helping to develop your partner's communication skills by engaging in real conversations together, not just about the books you are reading, but also sharing information as your friendship grows.

It will be your time and commitment that counts, but following the simple techniques and guidelines of this programme will help you to build a positive relationship with your partner, based on shared enjoyment.

Naturally, all volunteers who will work with children must undergo a CRB check before commencement.

Before you start



Before you begin working with a partner, you will have a familiarisation meeting with your school's Head Teacher and/or the appropriate Class Teacher.

This will be your opportunity to find out more about the school, the child you will be working with and of course, to ask questions.

You should also have a tour of the premises, an explanation of the security and emergency procedures in place for visitors and a copy of the school's Child Protection policy.

Here are a few Do's and Don'ts for you to bear in mind when you begin working in the programme.

DO

- ✓ carry or wear required identification at all times
- ✓ sign in according to the school's systems on each visit
- ✓ give feedback to the Class Teacher and your fellow volunteers
- ✓ try to let the school know if you cannot attend a session unexpectedly

DON'T

- ✗ give gifts or sweets, but do send a postcard via school if on holiday
- ✗ have physical contact with your partner child – sit side by side
- ✗ attempt to enforce discipline – advise the teacher of any problems

You and your partner will be taking part in the programme because you **want** to and it should be an enjoyable experience for both of you. If something isn't working for either of you, don't hesitate to talk to the Class Teacher.

Meeting your new partner



When you first meet your new partner, the initial session will be as much about getting to know each other as actual reading.

The Class Teacher should already have been able to tell you about your child's reading ability and the basic teaching strategy used in the classroom.

Introductions

Remember that in school, children are generally expected to address adults formally by title and surname. You should follow whatever convention is in place when introducing yourself and in the future sessions with your partner.

Sharing information

Finding out a little about each other will help you and your partner to feel more comfortable together and make it easier to establish your relationship.

Asking some simple questions about any brothers and sisters, favourite lessons at school and what they enjoy doing outside of school time will demonstrate your interest and give you a good start towards building a rapport.

Based on what you will have learned about your partner, tell them a bit about yourself **at their age**, particularly relating your experiences to theirs, so they can see that even though you are a 'grown up', there is common ground.

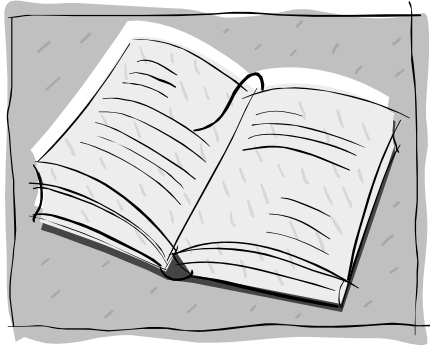
Setting the scene

Explain that you are not a teacher but you are very interested in reading and are looking forward to hearing your partner reading their own school books.

Try to find out about the kind of stories your partner really likes and ask what they particularly enjoy about that type of story.

For your first session at least, encourage your partner to choose a book they are already familiar with so they will be at ease when reading to you.

The first reading session



Make sure that you and your partner are sitting side by side in a quiet area with as few distracting views or happenings as possible.

Ideally your partner will already know the book they have chosen reasonably well, so encourage them to talk about it before starting to read.

How to begin

Ask them to show you their book and see if they can tell you who the characters are in each of the pictures and what is happening.

Find out how much of the book your partner would like to read in this session. Remember that although you are there to give encouragement, it's important that the child should not feel under pressure while you are still getting to know each other.

Interested listening

Allow your partner to read at his or her own pace and show your interest in the story through your expression and appropriate comments about the events unfolding.

Mistakes

If the child gets a word wrong, don't correct them immediately. Wait until the end of the sentence then point to the word in question and ask if they could read it again for you.

In the event they still get it wrong, tell them that wasn't quite right and see if they can work it out for themselves. If not, give them the correct word and ask if they could re-read the whole sentence.

Similarly, if the child gets stuck on a word and cannot get it by sounding it out or through the context of the sentence, give it to them yourself, check they have understood and again, ask them to re-read the whole sentence.

Compliments

Always find something to praise and don't hesitate to give compliments as often as possible. Tell your partner how much you have enjoyed meeting them and hearing them read and that you are looking forward to your next session together.

Developing the partnership



Although some aspects of your relationship will be governed by your partner's age and reading ability, the basic principles will be the same for all children.

The key is to establish a routine for your sessions together so you both know what to expect, and stick to it as far as possible.

If you know in advance you will have to miss a session, make sure you let your partner know you can't be there and explain why.

Exchanging news

Finding out what has been happening in your partner's life, either in or out of school since you last met, and telling them about something you have done is a good way to start each session.

However, set a time limit on the initial chat before beginning to read. If there's lots to tell you can always carry on by taking a break in the reading later.

Choosing the books

The books that your partner will be reading to you may be either:

- part of a Reading Scheme (specifically designed for a systematic approach to sentence structure and vocabulary and graded to reading level) or;
- 'real books' in which the content is for enjoyment or information without any additional learning objective.

Both are valuable provided they are appropriate for your partner's current reading level and the Class Teacher can give guidance if he or she is uncertain about making a choice.

Previewing a book

Check whether your partner is familiar with the chosen book. Children may want to stick to books they know and like, especially if they are younger or at a lower level of reading ability. It's OK to go with that until you feel they have enough confidence for you to suggest trying something different.

If the book is new, or fairly new to the child, go through it together encouraging them to talk about what is happening in the pictures so they will have an idea of what the story is about before starting to read.

Make a mental note of any words you think they may have difficulty with.

Developing the partnership (Cont'd)

Reading together

Depending on your partner's age, level of reading ability and their familiarity with the book, it may be a good idea to initially read it together.

If the child is reasonably confident, get them to track the print (point to the words as they say them) and make sure you are reading at their pace. Otherwise, track the print yourself but ensure your partner is able to keep up. In either case, take some time to talk about any words that were a particular problem for them.

The child reads alone

In all sessions, find out how much your partner would like to read before they start. If they manage their initial selection easily, you can always encourage them to do a little more if they are willing to.

Give them the time and opportunity to tackle words they haven't encountered before, or which you already know they have had difficulty with. You will find some tips on how you might help in the next section.

Ensure you are demonstrating 'interested listening' even if it's the second or third time you have heard the same book!

Reviewing the book

Unless this has been a repeat reading, discuss what has happened in the story.

There should be plenty of opportunities to increase your partner's involvement and interest by asking for their opinion on what the main characters were doing. What was good or bad about what someone did? How might somebody have done something differently? Has anything similar happened to you?etc.

If only part of the book has been read, also ask what your partner thinks might happen next.

You might also review any new or problem words that were encountered and check that they have been understood and remembered.

Giving praise

Always find something you are able to praise in every session, both during the reading – making a good effort at new words etc. - and as reinforcement before you leave.

Helping with reading problems



Children are taught a variety of strategies to work out words they cannot read instantly. That makes for effective learning.

We've outlined those used most commonly in the classroom so that you can help your partner in ways they should be familiar with.

The Class Teacher can tell you more about the main strategies in use.

Phonics

The sounds of letters and letter combinations are the building blocks for decoding a word. Since September 2006, all schools have been legally required to use 'synthetic phonics' for teaching 4 and 5 year olds. That means the sound of each letter or combination of letters is pronounced in isolation and blended together to create the word.

However, because of the peculiarities of the English language, that doesn't work for every word so other strategies are needed, mainly based on context – what word would make sense in relation to the rest of the sentence?

Re-reading

If the child reads a word incorrectly, do not say anything until the end of the sentence. He/she may well hear that the sentence doesn't make sense and re-read it him/herself. In the event that they don't hear the mistake, ask whether that made sense and suggest reading the sentence again.

Should there still be a problem highlight the word and provided it is likely to be within the child's experience, see whether they can work it out by sounding the letters. If it's too difficult for them, read it yourself and discuss the meaning.

Reading on

If the child gets stuck on a word and can't work it out by sounding the letters, leave it out and ask them to read on to the end of the sentence. Ask them to go back and re-read the whole sentence because the context plus the initial letters may well be enough to identify the word.

As previously, if the word is too difficult, read it yourself and discuss the meaning.

Helping with reading problems (Cont'd)

Punctuation

Sometimes a child may simply read on and on without taking any notice of punctuation.

That's often because he or she is concentrating on reading the individual words without listening to what they are saying – missing the context.

Wait until they do pause and tell them that they read the words very well but part of the story didn't quite make sense. Ask them to look at that section again without reading it out loud and see if they can work out what might have been wrong.

If they realise that they missed a full stop or stops, give praise and suggest they try that part again.

Should they still not spot the mistake, try reading it to them without punctuation and ask again whether it made sense. Hopefully they will realise that it didn't and you can discuss why not.

As a last resort if the child still has difficulty in getting the punctuation right, make it fun by suggesting they try 'reading' the full stops by making a sound, like 'BEEP' for example, whenever they come to one.

Summary of key points

Here's a brief summary to serve as an aide memoire and help you get started in building a successful and satisfying Reading Partnership.



- Your friendship and interest are as important as the reading
- Establish a routine for your sessions and try to stick to it
- Preview a new book together before starting to read
- Let your partner know it's OK to make mistakes
- Encourage them to find their own solutions if they can
- Use helping strategies your partner is familiar with
- Review what you have done together after each session
- Give praise at every opportunity
- Talk to the Class Teacher if the relationship isn't working