

Reading Well for families FAQs – for library staff

Who is Reading Well for families for?

Reading Well for families supports the mental health and wellbeing of families during the first 1,001 days from conception to aged two. There are books to support expectant and new parents, carers and wider support networks. The scheme includes books on wellbeing, perinatal mental health and coping with loss. Some of the recommended books provide information and advice; there are also personal stories and poetry. Alongside the books, there is a selection of digital resources providing additional information and support.

What topics does the scheme cover?

The scheme includes books to support parents, carers and wider support networks during the first 1,001 days from conception to aged two. Topics on the list include supporting your wellbeing when becoming a family, perinatal mental health including anxiety, depression, obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) and birth trauma, and coping with loss including miscarriage, stillbirth and neonatal death.

How are the books selected?

The Reading Agency follows an established evidence led process for developing all our reading lists as outlined in our [book selection protocol](#). The topics included on the new scheme have been identified following a thorough evidence review, including reviewing National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines and relevant policies and priorities, consultation with the health sector, library staff and an expert roundtable. This work informed the creation of a book selection framework, which provides evidence-based recommendations for the scope of the list. People with lived experience with perinatal mental health conditions have also been involved in choosing the books on the list.

Were people with lived experience involved in selecting the books?

All Reading Well schemes are co-produced with people with lived experience. For Reading Well for families, we worked with our commissioned co-production partner, [Maternal Mental Health Alliance](#), and a diverse panel of parents from across England and Wales.

Why have you focused on the first 1,001 days?

Maternal and parental mental health is a key public health priority with an identified need for more evidence-based information and resources. At least 1 in 5 women experience a mental health problem during pregnancy and after birth¹ with anxiety and depression being the most common of all the serious maternity mental health considerations² affecting

¹ Maternal Mental Health Alliance (2024) [Maternal Mental Health in the UK](#)

² Care Policy and Evaluation Centre (2022) [A sound investment: Increasing access to treatment for women with common maternal mental health problems](#)

around 10-15% of women^{3 4}. In England, referrals for perinatal services for mothers have risen by 23% a year since 2016, from around 1,400 a month in 2016 to more than 7,600 a month in 2024⁵. In Wales, almost 9,000 new mums will experience perinatal mental health problems each year⁶. If parents experience mental health problems during pregnancy or the first year of a baby's life, this can impact the child's intellectual, emotional, social and psychological development^{7 8}.

The first 1,001 days from conception to age two, provide the foundations for a baby's cognitive, emotional and physical development and for a healthy life⁹. Poor parent mental health can also impact on the ability to bond with their baby. It is important that parents and carers have their own mental health needs met so they can meet the needs of their baby and provide them with the best start for life¹⁰.

Why have you included books on coping with loss?

All the books included in the collection have been selected by our book selection panel and co-production group using our evidence-based book selection framework. Coping with loss including miscarriage, baby loss, stillbirth and neonatal death was identified as a priority area for expectant and new parents following a thorough evidence review. Evidence shows that around 1 in 4 pregnancies end in loss during pregnancy or birth¹¹, and it is estimated that there are 250,000 miscarriages in the UK every year¹². In 2022, around 1 in every 250 pregnancies ended in stillbirth¹³, and the overall neonatal mortality rate in England and Wales was 2.9 deaths per 1,000 live births¹⁴.

Research also suggests that 1 in 3 women have symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) one month after a miscarriage or ectopic pregnancy and 1 in 4 have symptoms of moderate or severe anxiety¹⁵. Women who have experienced perinatal baby loss (the loss of a child from conception to 28 days post birth) are also more than twice as likely to experience depression and more than one and half times as likely to experience anxiety than those who have not lost a baby before, during, or shortly after birth¹⁶.

³ Dennis, C-L., et al. (2018) [Prevalence of antenatal and postnatal anxiety](#)

⁴ Shorey, S., et al. (2018) [Prevalence and incidence of postpartum depression among healthy mothers](#)

⁵ Lord Darzi (2024) [Independent Investigation of the National Health Service in England](#)

⁶ NSPCC Cymru (2018) [From bumps to babies: perinatal mental health care in Wales](#)

⁷ Gajos, J.M. & Beaver, K.M. (2015) [Maternal depression and risk for antisocial behaviour in children](#)

⁸ Hogg, S. (2013) [Prevention in mind: All babies count: Spotlight on perinatal mental health](#)

⁹ HM Government (2021) [The Best Start for Life: A Vision for the 1,001 Critical Days. The Early Years Healthy Development Review Report](#)

¹⁰ O'Higgins, M., et al. (2013) [Mother-child bonding at 1 year: associations with symptoms of postnatal depression and bonding in the first few weeks](#)

¹¹ World Health Organization (no date) [The unacceptable stigma and shame women face after baby loss must end](#)

¹² Clarke-Coates, Z. and Collinge, S. (2023) [The Independent Pregnancy Loss Review – Care and support when baby loss occurs before 24 weeks gestation](#)

¹³ Tommy's (2024) [Stillbirth statistics](#)

¹⁴ Office for National Statistics (2024) [Child and infant mortality in England and Wales: 2022](#)

¹⁵ Tommy's (no date) [Understanding the psychological impact of miscarriage](#)

¹⁶ Herbert, D., et al. (2022) [The mental health impact of perinatal loss: A systematic review and meta-analysis](#)

In addition, the NICE guideline on [Antenatal and Postnatal mental health \[CG192\]](#) recommends offering advice and support to women who have had a traumatic birth or miscarriage as well as considering the effect of a traumatic birth or miscarriage on the partner.

Why have you not included books for children?

The scheme is targeted at supporting adults. Following consultation and in line with the book selection framework, children's titles were considered out of scope for this scheme.

How does Reading Well for families support accessibility and respond to the needs of different audiences?

The Reading Agency works to ensure that all Reading Well lists are accessible, inclusive and suitable for as wide a range of audiences. Along with the general evidence of need, there is evidence that certain populations are more likely to experience poor mental health outcomes related to the perinatal period. Reading Well for families includes content relevant to parents with a learning disability, single mums, parents of multiple births, LGBTQ+ parents and Black mothers.

Reading Well for families includes a diverse range of formats and types of books supporting a range of reading levels and those for whom English is an additional language. The range of books chosen for the list includes self-help titles, picture stories, personal stories and poetry.

To support accessibility, titles are available in a range of different formats including eBooks and eAudio books along with the provision of digital resources.

Is Reading Well for families available in other languages?

Reading Well schemes are available bilingually in Wales with support from Welsh Government and Books Council of Wales. This ensures the schemes are accessible to Welsh language readers in their preferred language and enables access to health information in Welsh. To ensure maximum accessibility many of the titles on the Reading Well for families booklist will be translated into Welsh. The scheme also includes an original Welsh language title for audiences in Wales.

How do we purchase promotional materials for Reading Well for families?

To support the delivery of Reading Well for families, library authorities purchasing book collections have been offered free promotional materials. If you have purchased a book collection but not claimed your free materials and would like to, please contact readingwell@readingagency.org.uk

Additional materials can be purchased from The Reading Agency's [online shop](#). Orders placed after 22 April will be fulfilled as quickly as possible but are not guaranteed to arrive in time for the launch on 10 June.

A range of digital resources will also be available to download from The Reading Agency's website in time for the launch in June 2025. To access these digital resources on The Reading Agency's website, libraries will need to register/log in with a passport account to download.