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New research from the Reading Agency shows that enjoyment of reading in childhood is linked to the likelihood of being a reader in adulthood, as well as several wellbeing measures, including happiness and ability to relax easily.

The importance of childhood reading

The importance of childhood reading is well documented. Reading for pleasure is more important for children's cognitive development than their parents' level of education ([Sullivan and Brown, 2013](#)). Children who read books often at age 10 and more than once a week at age 16 gain higher results in maths, vocabulary and spelling tests at age 16 than those who read less regularly ([Sullivan and Brown, 2015](#)), and 16-year-olds who choose to read books for pleasure outside of school are more likely to secure managerial or professional jobs in later life ([Taylor, 2011](#)).

Reading's impact on educational outcomes for children itself can impact potential lifetime earnings. In 2024, the National Literacy Trust found that children and young people who enjoyed reading had higher average (mean) standardised reading scores than children and young people who didn't enjoy reading ([Clark, et al., 2024](#)).

The lasting impact of childhood reading

Exclusive findings from The Reading Agency's 2025 State of the Nation's Adult Reading research found that adults who enjoyed reading as a child were over twice as likely to be regular readers as adults than those who did not (61% vs 29%). Adults who did not enjoy reading as a child were over five times as likely to be non-readers than those who did (38% vs 6%).

Men were twice as likely as women to report that they had not enjoyed reading as a child (12% vs 6%). This pattern appears to continue into adulthood: 15% of men identified as non-readers compared to 10% of women.

Adults who did not enjoy reading as a child were 21% more likely to say they struggle to focus on reading for more than a few minutes, and 23% more likely to say they found it hard to finish what they were reading. This suggests that building a love of reading in childhood may have an impact on reading habits and concentration in adulthood.



Reading for pleasure in early childhood has also been linked to mental wellbeing in adolescence ([Sun, et al., 2023](#)). These links appear to continue into adulthood. The Reading Agency found that 67% of adults who enjoyed reading as a child report feeling generally happy compared to only 46% of those who did not. Similarly, 59% of those who enjoyed reading as a child reported being able to relax easily compared to 45% of those who disliked reading as a child.

What can we do to encourage childhood reading?

Programmes like the Summer Reading Challenge incentivise and reward children to discover reading for pleasure. By taking part in the 2024 Summer Reading Challenge, approximately three in four children read more for pleasure (75%) and nearly two-thirds increased their enjoyment of reading (61%).

The Summer Reading Challenge has a huge reach and impact: a third of all UK adults – 18.4 million – have heard of the Summer Reading Challenge (33%). This rises to 58% for adults who are parents or guardians of a child under 11, and 54% for those with an older child aged 12-17.

Nearly 9 million UK adults have participated, either themselves or with a young family member, in the Summer Reading Challenge (16%). This rises to 35% for adults who are parents or guardians of a child under 11, and is 34% for those with an older child aged 12-17.

Encouraging childhood and family reading

- Encourage friends and family to take part in the Summer Reading Challenge at their local library
- Continue to [book in campaigns with your membership](#) with The Reading Agency Connects to help libraries and schools run year-round reading opportunities for children and their families
- Share book sets for book clubs on the Book Club Hubs so that book clubs of all ages can apply to experience your books and help inspire their next reads
- [Reading Families](#) is a fun reading programme, building skills, confidence and connections through shared reading between adults and younger family members. Reading Families is an annual programme that can be delivered throughout the year in prisons, colleges, schools, libraries and across many other learning community settings

