



Training Guide

Book Talk

Created by



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Introduction

Book Talk

Talking to children is rewarding and inspiring, and chatting about books gives greater focus to those conversations.

Through books, children can explore their thoughts and opinions and develop skills in self-expression and analysis. They can develop empathy and understanding of the world around them as they consider characters and situations. Informal chats about books are also fun and improve mental wellbeing.

Libraries Rising - supporting Book Talk

We recognise the value of book talk and the importance of your role, promoting a love of reading in children's libraries.

This guide, created by Empathy Lab, provides guidance and practical tips to help you engage children and young people in book talk in your library.

We invite you to read this free training guide and put the suggested activities and conversation starters into practice. Keep records of your progress using the Book Talk Journal and if you have any questions, thoughts or feedback, let us know. We're here to support you.





Book Talk Guidance

In this guide, you'll find out:



Talking about books builds connections between adults and children.

As children describe their feelings about books with a trusted adult, they learn to articulate their ideas and feelings. Through gentle questioning, adults can deepen children's understanding.



Talking about books can also help extend children's vocabulary, especially their language for emotions and feelings.

Find a relaxed place and time to talk about books - this is not about testing children but having an equal discussion with a child who has read and knows about the book. You don't have to read the books, but you should listen wholeheartedly.



Keep all conversations 'within the book'. For example, rather than asking: "have you experienced a situation like that?", ask, "I wonder how the character felt when that happened to them?". This creates a safe space for children to explore and express their thoughts.

How to deepen children's engagement with books



- Listen actively and leave silence for children to think.
- Ask about characters and their feelings.
- Build a language for emotions.
- Model new language and words for children.
- Follow the child's interest.
- Ask open questions. Use phrases like:
 - I wonder about...
 - I'm thinking about...
 - Tell me about...
 - What do you think...
- Praise and encourage the child's participation.
- Keep discussion safely in the story, so children don't have to expose their own lives if they don't want to.
- Have a go at these sample questions. For example:
 - What attracted you to the book?
 - Was it what you expected?
 - Did you think the cover matched the book?
 - Would you recommend this book?
- Look at illustrations in the book and discuss together what's happening.

Sample questions



- I wonder how it would feel to stand in the character's shoes?
- If you only had three words, which would you use to describe the character?
- Were there any characters you empathised with... or didn't empathise with?
- I noticed when you talked about that character you looked X (eg., a bit puzzled)?
- I'd be interested to hear what you thought of the character at the very start?... and by the end?
- Were you surprised by anything the character did?
- I'm wondering how the different characters felt about the same situation?
- Was there a character in the book who solved a problem?
- Which character stuck in your mind most?
- Was there a character you felt sorry for / Proud of / Worried about?
- I'd love to hear what questions you might ask the character.



Book Talk Activities



Create drama activities based on a story you have shared. Get children into groups to re-enact stories.



Create a prop box so children can dress as characters.



Read a story and in groups decide what will happen to the characters after the story has finished.



Ask fun questions – what would different characters keep in their fridge? Where would they go on holiday?



Use shoe boxes to design a favourite character's bedroom.



Create a window display based on a favourite book.



Hold book awards - read stories every day and at the end of the sessions, vote for favourite books and have an 'Oscars' celebration.



Play a circle game –ask everyone to choose a book that interests them, then sit in a circle. Everyone has a minute or 30 seconds (use a timer) to talk about why it interests them.

What next?



Test it out

The best way to become a Book Talk expert is to practice. Test out your book-talking skills with a colleague or with friends and family. Ask them to engage you in book talk, so you can experience how it feels from a child's perspective.



Build your skills

If you've never 'book talked' with children and young people before, start by asking a question or two. You can develop your skills as your confidence grows. Share your knowledge and experience with other colleagues, and encourage them to have a go too.



Record your progress

It's a good idea to keep a record of your learning progress. Libraries Rising's Book Talk Journal will help you to outline the book talk activities you tested out, how it felt, and how the child or young person responded.

We hope you enjoy trying out book talk in your library.

It's an invaluable skill, which offers children and young people a wealth of benefits.

We'd love to hear about your experiences. Contact us to share them.

Contact us:

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