

How libraries can support families with children starting Reception.

Libraries play a key role in helping young children get ready to start school.

Introduction

This guide, created by Libraries Rising and Starting Reception, will help you to:

- Be informed about the skills children should be able to practise before starting Reception.
- Consider how your library spaces, services and stock could be used to support children who are starting Reception.
- Work with parents, carers and other organisations within the community.
- Build a cohesive message with local partners on what 'school readiness' means.
- Signpost parents and carers to places where they can learn more.



Libraries
RISING

Creating libraries of tomorrow with
children and young people today

Libraries Rising

Libraries Rising is the national network for leaders in children's public, and Schools Library Services. We believe children and young people need safe, welcoming spaces and real-life connections to support the demands of modern life. Together, we're creating libraries for today's world, where children and young people feel understood, empowered, and inspired. Libraries Rising is the working name of Association of Senior Children's and Education Librarians (formerly known as ASCEL). You can find out more about Libraries Rising at www.librariesrising.org.uk.

Starting Reception

Starting Reception is an exciting milestone for families and children. The Starting Reception guide is a free, practical online resource designed to support parents and care givers in preparing their child for school. It offers simple activities, helpful advice and clear guidance on the key skills and routines that help children feel confident and ready for their first day. There are also free Potty Training and Children's Toothbrushing Guides available through Starting Reception. We encourage you to share these with families.

*With thanks to BookTrust, The Reading Agency and library services for their input and resources they shared for inclusion in this document.

What is Starting Reception?

The Starting Reception definition was created by the early years sector. The definition outlines the skills children need when starting Reception (some people call this school readiness).

The definition can be accessed online: www.startingreception.co.uk.

The definition is welcomed by Government and sign-posted from the Best Start in Life website. It is already being used by thousands of schools and early years settings across the UK.

Your library

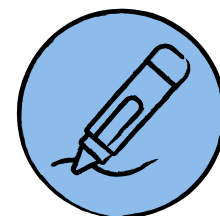
Supporting young children with starting Reception

Your library helps young children to:

- Develop independence
- Build relationships and practise social skills
- Encourage physical development
- Develop healthy routines



Growing independence



This pillar includes supporting children to take care of themselves and encouraging play, creativity and curiosity.

Taking care of themselves

In your Rhymetime and Bounce & Rhyme sessions, you can encourage young children to:

- Take off their coats at the start of the session
- Help tidy toys and books away after the session
- Set personal boundaries, by highlighting it's okay to express if they're not feeling comfortable in a situation

Encouraging play, creativity and curiosity

- Model curiosity when reading books to young children. For example, you can ask them: 'I wonder how that character felt?' or 'I wonder what will happen next?' Keep questions open and 'within the story', rather than asking anything personal.
- Craft activities, such as drawing, painting and colouring, enable young children to explore their creativity.
- Imaginative play (e.g. role play) – you could ask the children to act out a scene from their favourite book.
- 'Treasure hunting' in the library encourages young children to explore their environment and gather information.
- If you have any books about creative activities, put them on display and encourage parents and carers to take them home.
- Encourage parents to share books with their children, giving them the opportunity to explore and be curious.



Starting Reception

Signpost parents to the BookTrust's [website](#) for more information:

School transition practice guide

BookTrust's school transition practice guide identifies some key ways librarians and other professionals can make shared reading easier for families to sustain when children start school. Encourage parents and carers to take them home.

Starting school booklist

BookTrust has recommendations of children's books that explore starting school, helping families to get ready and find out more about what they can expect.



Building relationships and communicating



Your library offers the perfect environment for young children to interact with people their own age, and with adults outside their own home.

- When running sessions for young children, build in time for social engagement. Some examples are playing a game as a group or exploring sensory toys together.
- Talk to the young child directly, rather than just to the parent or carer. This helps them to develop confidence in expressing their thoughts and feelings. Keep your language simple and speak slowly and clearly. It's important to remain patient and allow space for the child to respond. If the young child doesn't feel comfortable talking, don't worry! It takes time to become a 'trusted adult' in a child's life.
- Encourage parents and carers to support with building relationships where possible. For example, they can model relationship-building through chatting with library staff and other parents and carers after a session.
- Encourage taking turns and sharing (a great way to do this is model it yourself).
- Identify and label emotions. Stories are useful for developing understanding of emotions. While reading a story to young children, ask questions such as: "I wonder how Peter Rabbit feels after running away from the farmer?" or "Look at this picture of Barbara; how do you think she's feeling?".
- Singing is a good way to be social – something libraries do well in Rhymetime and Bounce & Rhyme sessions. Young children can also practise listening and giving their attention during Storytime sessions.

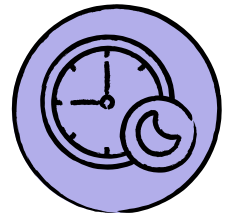


Physical development



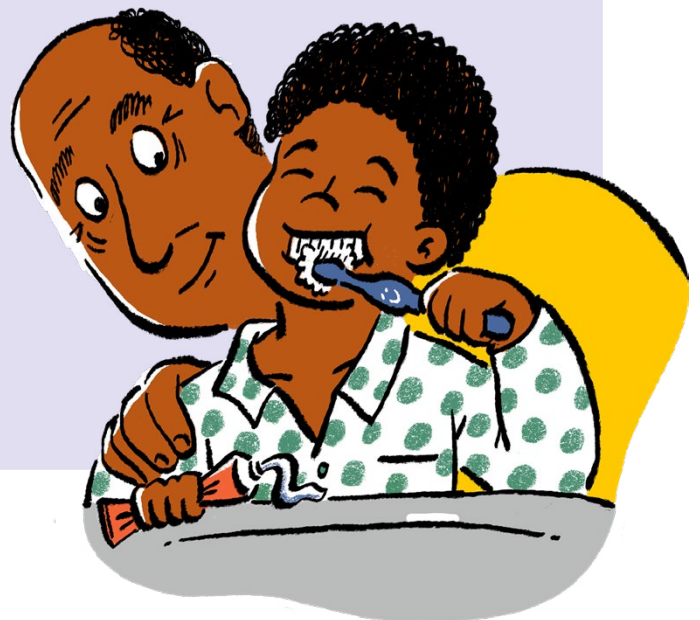
- During Rhymetime, Bounce & Rhyme and Storytime sessions, encourage lively songs such as the Grand Old Duke Of York for example.
- Doing simple puzzles and craft activities with children and strengthening their grip with cutting and sticking.

Develop healthy routines



Your library is a space where parents come for advice and information. Display guidance clearly to support parents foster healthy routines with their children.

- Local partners (such as those providing health services) are often happy to come into libraries to run sessions on health-related skills, such as tooth-brushing.
- If your library has books on developing healthy routines, create a display for young children and their families to browse. Topics include: washing, eating healthily, exercising and staying active, or promoting mental wellbeing.
- Make sure to signpost parents and carers to any local services that can support their young children with developing healthy routines.
- Encourage parents to read with their children before bed and limit screen time to the recommended daily amounts (see advice).
- Set a reading challenge for children and parents where they are encouraged to read regularly.



How to make your library an inviting space for children

Make your library a 'safe space' for young people to engage with you and your team and encourage questions about the things that excite and interest them.

This includes:

-  Ensuring that sessions aren't interrupted or overly observed by other library users.
-  Creating a calm, relaxing environment, away from other distracting noises or activities.
-  Offering plenty of comfortable seating and good lighting. Soft cushions and bean bags create a more relaxing, informal setting than rows of plastic chairs.
-  Displaying books in a way that is easy for children to pick up and access themselves.
-  Modelling how questions are asked – be curious yourself! Ask young children how their day has been, what fun things they've done recently, or what they enjoy doing most. Keep the questions general, as some children may not feel comfortable sharing personal information.

The Reading Agency's Reading Well for families

The Reading Agency's Reading Well for families collection recommends reading to support parents and carers to look after their wellbeing in pregnancy and the early years (from conception to aged two). The books provide information on wellbeing, mental health and coping with loss. All of the books are recommended by health professionals and parents with lived experience of perinatal mental health problems and are free to borrow from public libraries.

www.readingagency.org.uk/reading-well/families

The Reading Agency's Summer Reading Challenge

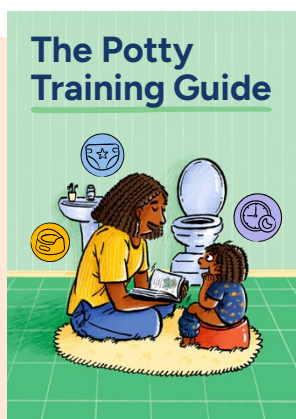
The Reading Agency's Summer Reading Challenge encourages children to develop the habit of reading for fun. Children set themselves a reading goal, and collect special rewards and incentives along the way. It's FREE to join, and families can take part at their [local library](#) or [online](#). Encourage parents and caregivers to pop into their [local library](#) to ask about signing up their child for the Challenge. Many libraries provide dedicated Mini Challenge materials for pre-schoolers; others encourage pre-school children to take part using the main Summer Reading Challenge materials.

<https://summerreadingchallenge.org.uk/preschool-zone>

Working with parents and carers

We all have an idea of what being starting Reception looks like, but our ideas might be different to someone else's.

A good start is to have a single definition to refer to. Refer to the 'Starting Reception' definition that is free and can be downloaded, printed and shared with parents and carers, providing a useful guide for the key skills their child should have before starting school.



Encourage families to work towards their child being toilet trained ahead of starting school in September, as this can help them feel confident and comfortable in their new environment. Direct families to The Potty Training Guide for practical tips and advice to support them with getting their child school ready.



Scan the QR code to view the guide online.
<https://pottytrainingguide.co.uk>



Share The Children's Toothbrushing Guide that was created by the early years sector, including the British Society of Paediatric Dentistry and the Oral Health Foundation. The Guide helps settings support children's oral health from the earliest years.



Scan the QR code to view the guide online.
<https://toothbrushingguide.co.uk>

Let parents and carers know what your library has to offer their young children. Promoting your Rhymetime, Bounce & Rhyme and Storytime sessions via local Family Hubs, early years education settings and cafes or indoor play facilities. These are great ways to raise awareness. Wherever possible, also use social media to highlight what's on offer and the benefits of attending.

You could also work co-creatively with families and young children, designing your services and spaces with them. They'll feel more involved and invested in the library if they feel their ideas and opinions are heard and acted on.



Working with local partners

It's important that all local partners share the same messaging with parents and carers about the skills children need when they start Reception. Conflicting messages can cause confusion and frustration. All local partners should signpost to the same information, organisations and resources.

A good way to align messaging with local partners is to speak in person or online. The 'Starting Reception' definition is designed to be shared widely and can be helpful in identifying how libraries and other organisations can work together to support young children in their communities. For example, it might make sense for some organisations to focus more on promoting healthy routines, whereas others (such as libraries) may want to focus on promoting social skills.

Remember to signpost to local organisations and encourage them to do the same in return. A shared events calendar can be useful in enabling everyone to promote community events more widely.

Where to signpost:

- The Starting Reception website
<https://www.startingreception.co.uk>
- The Potty Training Guide
<https://startingreception.co.uk/potty-training>
- The Children's Toothbrushing Guide website
<https://startingreception.co.uk/toothbrushing>

